

19 September 1951

163, Engadine Street, London S.W.18.

[1/1] My Beloved Friend! Through what I read in the *Annals* I came to the conclusion that you work at the Un. of W., [1/2] and through Rubel I got your address. I've been planning on letting you know [1/3] that I ended up on this side of the Curtain and that I'm staying in London, teaching math [1/4] and statistics to Polish students at the Department of Economics in the Polish Un. College. The College [1/5] was founded by the English, the students get stipends and pass exams [1/6] for the Univ. of London, and so we're merely something like tutors. [1/7] Out of the mathematicians, Zaremba is here, recently Borgen (who from July on works as an [1/8] actuary in Johannesburg in South Africa), Ada Halpern-Kopciowa, who also left [1/9] recently and a few other younger ones. Our department models itself after the London School of Economics, [1/10] I talked my friends into manufacturing economists-statisticians and during our first 3 [1/11] years we released about 18 youngsters, who after 2 [1/12] years of analysis and probabilities know fairly well the elements of statistical mathematics and are finding [1/13] jobs in this, planned until death¹, new world. I would very much like to know [1/14] how your life turned out, how the University job looks, and if you have totally [1/15] absorbed the American "pattern for life", because here we're constantly thinking about Poland [1/16], but I'm worried that the English "way of life", solidified by a very successful [1/17] socialist experiment, has left such a stigma that we're alienated [1/18] not only from a legal standpoint, but also independent of whatever else might happen [1/19] later on.² I had a stormy life: I didn't like the Bolsheviks [1/20] in Lwow, through Hungary (a wonderful autumn hike through the Carpathians) [1/21] I left for France, with my armaments I defended Norway near Narvik³, [1/22] after the Podhale brigade⁴ was disbanded from France I sneaked into England, via Madrid, [1/23] Lisbon, but I got bored sitting around in a uniform in Scotland, and as the British like to say, [1/24] I left for the Middle East, until the end I stayed with the Operational Division [1/25] of Anders's⁵ Corps in Italy. In any case I

¹ This might be also translated as "deadly/deathly planned".

² The meaning of this sentence was also very vague in the Polish.

³ This Arctic Circle location was the scene of intense fighting during April and May 1940. Allied forces, headed by Great Britain, and Axis forces, headed by Germany, clashed fiercely to secure Narvik, which was a main shipping port for high-grade Swedish iron ore. The ore was a key element for the production of high-quality steel, and therefore critical to the armaments industries of both Great Britain and Germany. On May 13, at Bjerkevik, north of Narvik, the Allies mounted the war's first combined operations, involving shelling from warships, infantry and armored vehicles landed by specially built landing craft and air support from aircraft carriers. British, French, Polish and Norwegian troops moved in on the Germans and captured Narvik on May 28, 1940.

⁴ Podhale was the name of the Polish independent rifle brigade that fought at Narvik. The name comes from the Podhale highland region in the Carpathians.

⁵ Wladyslaw Anders, (1892-1970), was captured by the Soviets after the partition of Poland in 1939. Anders was released from the Lubianka prison in 1941 to lead the Polish POWs from Russia into Persia, where the British had offered to arm and equip them to fight against the Germans in the Western Desert. The resulting corps, Polish II Corps, became one of the most redoubtable military formations of the war. Its principal achievement was the capture of Monte Cassino, 17-18 May 1944, after three attempts by others

fared better thanks to this than [1/26] those friends who believed in the possibility of living under the Bolsheviks and who either [1/27] got killed by the Germans (like the mathematicians from Lwow), or they were transported out [1/28] to Russia, which left its indelible imprint even on those who survived it.

[1/29] Will you ever set for this cradle of statistical mathematics, for i.e., for your [1/30] sabbatical year? I would, with great pleasure, like to talk with you about this and that, [1/31] but especially about statistics. Neyman⁶ was here on a visit to Pearson Jr. [1/32] and gave a series of public lectures. Zaremba and I greeted him, but he did not betray [1/33] any enthusiasm for talking with us, because then (two years ago) he was planning [1/34] on going to Poland. Tarski⁷ was also here then, whom, London Mathematics [1/35] touted as the pope of modern logic; we went to dinner with him and [1/36] with Zaremba we came to the conclusion that he's a very nice person. Do you know anything [1/37] interesting about Ulam⁸, what is he engaged in and what's his address? What about Kac?⁹ [1/38] Did you meet up with Steinhaus¹⁰ when he was in America? I got from him [1/39] a very pleasant, but only one, letter. I was deeply moved by his story [1/40] of hiding out under an assumed name in some mountain village. He commemorated his [1/41] stay there by leaving behind a sundial by a church on [1/42] which he wrote: "made by Francis Kamienny, Sundial Clockmaker." [1/43] I can imagine how hard it must be for that Sundial Clockmaker, [1/44] a liberal right down to his bone and marrow, and an exemplary European, to live there in Breslau [1/45] under the watch of the Monomaniac¹¹.

[1/46] I have something to ask of you. During my vacation I wrote a short note: [1/47] nothing serious, only a short cut and correction of someone else's complex thoughts. [1/48] I imagine that you're very busy, but if you could take a look at it, [1/49] check it, and tell me, what you think of it, I'd be very indebted to

had failed. Anders subsequently led it in the battles up the Adriatic Coast and in the clearance of the Po Valley. Most of II Corps chose exile at the end of the war, and Anders remained leader of their community in England until his death.

⁶ Jerzy Neyman, (1894-1981), his work on hypothesis testing, confidence intervals and survey sampling revolutionized statistics.

⁷ Alfred Tarski, (1902-1983), is recognized as one of the four greatest logicians of all time, the other three being Aristotle, Frege, and Gödel. Of these Tarski was the most prolific as a logician and his collected works, excluding his books, runs to 2500 pages. Tarski made important contributions in many areas of mathematics: set theory, measure theory, topology, geometry, classical and universal algebra, algebraic logic, various branches of formal logic and metamathematics.

⁸ Stanislaw Ulam, (1909-1984), student of Banach, solved the problem of how to initiate fusion in the hydrogen bomb. He also devised the 'Monte-Carlo method' widely used in solving mathematical problems using statistical sampling.

⁹ Mark Kac, (1914-1984), a student of Steinhaus, friend of Professor Birnbaum, held many posts in universities in the United States. He pioneered the modern development of mathematical probability in particular its applications to statistical physics. The method of quantization now in use involves the Feynman-Kac path integral, named after Richard Feynman and Mark Kac. The Birnbaum collection contains some correspondence between Kac and Birnbaum.

¹⁰ Hugo Steinhaus, (1887-1972), former professor of Z.W. Birnbaum, did important work on functional analysis, orthogonal series, probability theory, real functions and their applications, wrote the famous *Mathematical Snapshots* and the highly acclaimed *One Hundred Problems*.

¹¹ Probably Stalin.

you. [1/50] I lost so many years as an actuary and the war, that only with much effort do I exercise the ability to [1/51] follow out the material covered by statistics these days. I am interested in “order statistics” [1/52] which WILKS¹² talked about here. I’ve also had troubles with “sampling on repeated [1/53] occasions” and would like to know what you know about it.

[2/1] If you’ll agree to look at my notes, I’ll send them to you [2/2] immediately. We’re experiencing a shortage of paper, so I’ve put the brakes on printing trifles [2/3] maybe things are easier for you guys.

[2/4] From a friend, who has a friend that works in some bank in Seattle [2/5] (a Pole) I heard that it’s a very nice corner of the world. So when [2/6] and if you’ll get the urge to write me, don’t limit yourself to studies and [2/7] teaching, but also write something about yourself and about your life over there. I got married [2/8] a second time, with a Scotswoman, who is a painter and teaches in a middle [2/9] school here. We live in the house of my brother Adam (a lawyer) [2/10] not far from the famed Wimbledon courts, but not as you might [2/11] think, not on the side of the tracks where the millionaires are, but on the “bad” [2/12] side of the train tracks in a neighborhood of the “better” workers. The economic revolution [2/13] in England, hasn’t yet managed to erase their incredibly [2/14] complicated divisions into classes and social cliques. But this will probably [2/15] pass.

[2/16] I enclose many sincere wishes and a handshake,
Zbigniew Lomnicki

¹² It is not clear whether this is a proper name or an acronym.

