

[1/1] My Beloved Ones!

[1/2] Ever since leaving I haven't written anything other than a short postcard to [1/3] Lwow. Now I'll try to make up for it. I would like to [1/4] confirm that I received a postcard from home on 18.VIII and an air-mail card from London [1/5] from 25.VIII, which caught up with me through [1/6] "general delivery".

[1/7] I left New York on Friday 25.VIII, at night. [1/8] I only made it as far as Newark, where a party was thrown at the home of [1/9] my friend's son. I spent the night there and the next [1/10] day I visited the coastal town of Long Branch, [1/11] to say goodbye to the Issermans, who are [1/12] spending their summer vacation there—Isserman is the elder gentleman from Newark, [1/13] who was introduced to me by Strich. This took up Saturday. [1/14] Late in the evening on Saturday, I set out again, drove a [1/15] few² miles and went to sleep. Here roadside, everywhere, you [1/16] find "tourist cabins", colonies of little one-room houses [1/17] that are rented to travelers at a price of one dollar per person. To be honest [1/18] I started to put a lot of effort into driving only by Sunday morning. Until now I have [1/19] crossed New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and [1/20] I currently am in Illinois State. For now it seems to me that I wouldn't [1/21] change my car for any other means of locomotion. It makes a person [1/22] feel totally independent. When one sees something one likes, [1/23] he stops, when he's had enough, he keeps going. On Sunday the weather was [1/24] iffy, however on Monday and Tuesday I [1/25] took a break and went to the nearest beach. Especially on Tuesday, when I [1/26] drove to one of the "State Parks" in Indiana, on a [1/27] gorgeous lake, I spent several hours sunning and [1/28] swimming there. People, in general, are pleasant, calm, cheerful, and [1/29] talkative. I have talks with gas station attendants, roadside [1/30] restaurateurs, the people whose places I rent, people at the [1/31] lake, and whoever else might come along.

[1/32] On Tuesday night I reached Chicago. I visited the [1/33] hospital where Wisia and Tusiek Selzer work. I spent some time [1/34] at their place. Then I rented a room at the YMCA and that's where I am right now [1/35]. I'm planning on leaving tomorrow, Thursday, as early in the morning as possible.

[1/36] It's hard to describe the details of the drive. The countryside often changes so much [1/37] within a day that it's hard to recognize. First there was industrial, [1/38] uninteresting, New Jersey. Then the road led me through the green [1/39] mountains of Pennsylvania; the road was winding, not easy to

¹ This letter was written only a week after the Nazi-Soviet Pact, five days after the Mutual Assistance pact between the Poles and the British, and only two days before the Blitzkrieg of Poland. While writing this letter, Bill Birnbaum was on his way to Seattle where he was appointed professor of mathematics.

² The original reads, "kilkadziesiąt", which means any number between 1 and 99. Just as one can say in English "several hundred" it is possible to use that word, which literally means, "several tens".

navigate, but yet [1/40] beautiful. Then the flatlands began. There were several, polluted, and [1/41] dirty towns of heavy industry, like Youngstown, [1/42] Akron, through which I passed without stopping. Then [1/43] came the fields from horizon to horizon. There began the ideally straight [1/44] highways, so straight, that you can see them for many [1/45] miles ahead. It's not very arresting, but gives an impression of vastness. [1/46] One drives through a road like that, straight as a line, for hundreds of miles between [1/47] fields of corn.

[1/48] Surrounded by all of this, I forgot about Hitler and Europe. [1/49] Unfortunately, that scoundrel exists. Today's news [1/50] seems like a slight ease in the tension, but who can say what that [1/51] madman will do.³

[1/52] My addresses are: Until 10.IX c/o Mrs. I.E. Bories, 1115 Post Streets, [1/53] San Francisco California, then Dept. of Mathematics, University [1/54] of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

[2/1] That's it for today. I'm going to visit the Selzers, and then [2/2] I'm going to sleep early.

[2/3] Kisses and many sincere greetings,
[2/4] Yours

³ This small portion of the letter suggests how much of a surprise the Blitzkrieg probably was: no one trusted Hitler—his unpredictability was the only certainty.