

Dr. Jakob Berger

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24.XI.1939

[1/1] Dear Willy!

[1/2] You've probably already received my telegram sent on the 22nd, regarding the fact that the whole family [1/3] is doing well. The day before last I got a letter from my mother [1/4] with a fragment from Nusia.¹ I am attaching it. The Borek mentioned is Mr. Boris Schreier [1/5] and Mrs. Anna Schreier, uncle and aunt of Rita. He was the vice-director [1/6] of the company "Silwinia" a lumber-mill in Wygoda. The Both family is living with him. [1/7] Apparently he lost his post. "Renate and her husband" relates to Rudzia.

[1/8] We are satisfied. There is nothing else to add. Apparently, [1/9] it's not all that bad under the Muscovites. Under the Germans in the other part of Poland [1/10] things are much worse.

[1/11] Uncle Bronio wrote to Dr. Ludwik Rubel², who is [1/12] in some camp in France and he got a letter back from him, whose copy I enclose. [1/13] So far we have only good news.

[1/14] Rita's cousin, Engineer Grunspan who lives here, who also has his family in [1/15] Lwow (specifically, the Lwow-based lawyer Dr. Wasser, whom you probably [1/16] don't know) got a letter from his family saying that they are doing well. And so, [1/17] we have some telegraphic communication. I immediately went to the post-office and [1/18] sent two telegrams, one to the Schreier's in Wygoda and the [1/19] second to the Birnbaums. An hour later I was notified that you cannot [1/20] send a telegram there. "No service to Poland, messages cancelled." [1/21] I wrote about this to the assistant Head-Postmaster in Richmond and I explained to him that [1/22] it's a neutral country and I asked him to try to send telegrams to [1/23] Russia, to Moscow for example. I haven't had any answers and I don't know if he [1/24] did it. The text of the telegram goes like this: "Jakob, Rita, William alright cable whole [1/25] family's health new address 35 Michleham Gadens, Strawberry Hill Twickenham, [1/26] Kisses Jakob Rita Berger" I took advantage of the cheaper rate for 25 words. This [1/27] was still before I got the letter from mom. (Apropos the letter from mom was [1/28] sent from Bucharest on the 14th of the previous month—I don't know by whom. Apparently somebody left [1/29] from Lwow to Romania and took the letter with him.) Maybe you should try something like that [1/30] once and telegraph the Birnbaums something similar? Ask for an answer to my [1/31]

¹ This letter is also translated, and within the Berger translations folder. The letter was written by Mr. Berger's mother, who was in Lwow, and probably staying with the Birnbaums. From other documents in the collection it seems that just like the Birnbaums she perished in either Bergen-Belsen or Auschwitz.

² Ludwik Rubel, the newspaper editor who helped Dr. Birnbaum come to the United States.

address, so that the telegram won't cost them much and while you're at it give them [1/32] my address, which they still don't know.

[1/33] From the Russian Consulate, to which I wrote asking [1/34] whether it is possible to correspond with Russian Poland—I got an answer that I should [1/35] report to their offices. I'll go there. Maybe it really is possible to get something done through them.

[1/36] Have you written anything through the Esperanto Association?³

[1/37] As you can see, it's very hard to make contact with my parents.

[1/38] Nothing new with us. Write often.

I send you sincere wishes and a kiss, Kubus⁴

17.XI

[2/1] Dearly Respected Doctor!⁵

[2/2] I'm sorry about the form of the letter, however here we don't have better [2/3] paper. I should let you know that when leaving Poland I was in Lwow, [2/4] where I left my wife and child.⁶ I saw Ignatius⁷ and he was feeling well and [2/5] I'm certain that he stayed with the family in Lwow.

[2/6] From my wife I had indirect information right after the occupation. [2/7] About other members of my family, among them the Birnbaums I know nothing, but I'm under the impression [2/8] that in general peace reigns in Lwow.

[2/9] I implore you to give Willy my sincere [2/10] greetings.

[2/11] I attach my deepest gratitude

[2/12] Dr. Rubel

³ In 1936 the organization Esperantista Interhelpo (Esperantists Aid) was formed in the countries of Central Europe to aid victims of the Nazi terror. When the Second World War broke out this organization extended its services to Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland and the other countries occupied by the Nazis. Its main purpose was to help civilians who had had to flee from their homes and had reached neutral countries. It cooperated with the International Red Cross and the Swiss government in sending mail and food to concentration camp inmates. The Nazis' iron grip on the postal services and the isolation of the Swiss government unfortunately cut off this lifeline in 1942.

⁴ This is Jakob Berger's nickname.

⁵ The Polish salutation is loaded with superlatives that do not translate literally into English. This is the letter mentioned earlier, written to Jakob Berger by Rubel.

⁶ It is not clear whether Rubel reunited with his family after the war. Other letters show that his wife and daughter were jailed by the Polish government after the war and that their internment was probably motivated by the fact that Dr. Rubel was in England after fighting for the Allied forces.

⁷ This might be Ignacy Birnbaum, father of Z.W. Birnbaum. The Birnbaum family helped Jakob Berger after he and his wife left Vienna after the Anschluss. Jakob and his family stayed with them while preparing all the necessary paperwork to leave for England. He spent most of the Second World War in England. He then settled in New York with his family.