



From the Train to Auschwitz-Birkenau- Hannah-Helene Goldberg's Last Letters

Hanna-Helene Goldberg of Paris was caught while trying to cross the border in her attempt to escape to Vichy France in 1942. She was deported to the camps of Drancy and Poitiers, from where she wrote to her mother in Paris. Drancy and Poitiers were transit camps for Jews deported from France to death-camps, mainly Auschwitz. The letters were written in French. Her last letter, written on the way to Auschwitz, was probably dropped from the train.

The letters were transmitted to Yad Vashem by Hanna's cousin, Mr. Chaim Herzog, President of the State of Israel.

Tuesday, 18 August 1942

My dear Mother,

I received your letter this morning and it worried me very much because of the matter of the furniture. If you must pay 1,000 francs monthly out of what you receive, this is going to be very difficult. I suppose that you have had no news from Isi, as you do not mention this, and, on the other hand, according to what you have told me about Lea (here, there is also much talk about this), I am afraid there could be difficulties in receiving news from Isi in the Future.

My dear Mother, you must not be sad, you must not lose courage. I, for one, am not afraid of what will happen to me, because I am sure I will get out of this, and then I don't think that it will last for more than a few months, and I probably will not be deported. I repeat to you: what makes me feel miserable is the certitude that you are more unhappy there at home than I ever will be in the worst conditions – because I am in the middle of it, so I can react, while you are suffering for me and you can do nothing except think of me. I do not want you to despair all day long, to get exhausted, to get ill. You must be confident. I am strong enough to endure what happens to me, the more so as I will surely be released soon and join you again in a



few months. Do hope. You cannot imagine how sad I feel when I read certain things that you recount to me, like how you did not want to change your dress, etc. As for me, when I think of you, I see you in that blue dress which you had made not long ago, with that collar, pocket and belt, with a good hair-do, fresh, as you look when you pay a little attention to yourself, and I fear to find you different when I come back. If I were a boy, I would have gone to fight in the war, which would have been much worse. Here nothing bad can happen to me. I will return soon, and we will trace Rosette, and we will go to see Dadoun, and everything will be fine, and we will be happy again.

But when I imagine that you are crying, that you are sad that whole day – this hurts me so much, more than all that might happen to me. Thus, Mother, I would like you to make an effort, to bear in mind that I am young, in good health, that I will get myself out of this, and that everything will turn out well after all.

I do not need a spirit-stove here, as there is wood to be found around, and, if someone wants to cook something, there is a stove in each room. What's more, if I am later in Drancy, there are limitations as to the weight of the parcels, and I would not be able to get any spirit [there], let alone the fact that spirit is not available anywhere.

As to the parcels: I do not know exactly when we are going to leave here, so should you dispatch a parcel to me, and should it arrive after my departure (you will know if this happens, because on the day of our departure I will send you a postcard, which will mean that I have not received anything), please write immediately to the camp and ask them to return it. Presumably, when there is a request to return a package to the sender, they comply.

Tell Na's mother that all those who belonged to her group have experienced the same fate. As to the packages, send what you can. I already have eaten the first and have not yet received the second. I will see tomorrow or Thursday if something arrives.

You have done well in snubbing Mrs. Kn., she really considers us to be idiots. Now perhaps she will understand.

It is no use pondering over the problem of why or how things happened. This is a question of luck or rather bad luck, that is all. Do not send me any bread, better send biscuits, which keep longer.

There are a gentleman and a lady here, Alsations, about sixty years old, very fine people whose family name is Herzog. I have talked with them and they were delighted



– he told me that he was not a relative of ours, but was slightly acquainted with grandfather. They live near Ternes. He is Rabbi Metzgers cousin.

There is also Mrs. Lew. [inski] of Joinville here. She is very nice.

I have not yet written to Rosette. I regret that you have written to her, there was no need to distress her. It is true, however, that should she remain without news about me for several months, she would worry. There is a kind of rabbi here, his name is Pomeranz and he has set up a minyan. He is not particularly nice.

I kiss you affectionately, dear Mother, and please don't worry yourself sick.

Nana

* * *

Friday, September 18 [1942]

My dear Mother,

I left Drancy yesterday and at this moment I am in the train. We are moving in the direction of Metz, but I don't know whether we will stop there, since they say that the journey will last for three days. I have much courage. This is a bad period to go through. I am absolutely sure that I will see you again, my dear Mother, in a few months. You must stay very brave, you must not be sad. At this moment I am with friends from Poitiers. I will always manage one way or another. I am always thinking of you. Don't abandon yourself to distress. My morale is very strong. I have plenty of courage and hope.

I embrace you affectionately. Too bad that your and St's joint effort did not work, please transmit the news to him. I hope to see you soon, don't despair.

Nana

You must all take care of yourselves. Perhaps it would be good for you, Mother, to work at the Bienf. [aisance]



There are thousands in my situation. I will return soon. Wait for me patiently, dear Mother.

1000 kisses

Nana

P.S. I was lucky to receive the parcel yesterday evening. Thank you so much. N.

Addressed to: Mme E. Goldberg,
64 Bd. Menilmontant,
Paris 20-e .

Source: Yehudit Kleinman, Reuven Dafni (Eds.), *Final Letters – From the Yad Vashem Archive*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1991, pp. 33-37.