

After the War

Beginnings are always bitter, and there is much that you will find hard and even painful.

THESE WORDS, WRITTEN IN 1939 in Arnold's own hand, cast a long shadow. In 1945, the words are poignant, prescient, and painful beyond belief.

There is no easy bridge between his last letter dated March 10, 1941 and his first letter from Prague after Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945. This time, it was Arnold's turn to make a new beginning. I cannot imagine how bitter, how hard, or how unbearably painful that beginning must have been. Auschwitz, where Arnold spent the final years of the war, was liberated on January 27, 1945, but it is almost six months before he takes pen in hand.

FIRST LETTER

Prague, July 10, 1945

My Dear Ones,

Dearest Edmund and Gretl, my most beloved little Helen, dear Anny and Ludwig, I embrace you and kiss you all with heart and soul as one of the unfortunately few who have stood at the precipice of death and have suffered the torments of the Underworld and yet who, at God's decree, have returned alive to the old homeland.

Often when in my loneliness, I think back to the recent years with their gruesomeness that surpasses all human measure, indeed surpasses all human imaginings, when I think back to the hundredfold dangers and superhuman deprivations, the countless ravaging diseases and the hundreds of other possibilities for death, when I think of the thousands of my fallen, or rather, my shamefully slaughtered comrades, and the millions of my co-religionists who went to ground in equally obscene ways, when I hold before my eyes the gruesome images of need and desperation that I passed through, then it seems even to me to be unfathomable that a person can endure all this, can withstand all this, and I can do no other than to attribute it to God's will and to God's wonder, and not just a wonder, but a chain of wonders whose links reach into one another according to God's wish and will.

But then again, when I think of my aloneness, of my dear, so inexpressibly good Vera, without whom I do not wish to live and cannot live, when I think that with each passing day, the chances dwindle for her blessed return, then desperation seizes me and I wrestle with God and ask myself and Him why, of all the many millions, it is precisely me that He chose to rescue and for what purpose I may have been selected according to His will. What task is still incumbent upon me and still hangs over my head on this earth?

My dear ones, aside from the fact of my fortunate return from those believed-to-be-dead, you will experience little joy from me.

What I can and will report to you is anything but joyful. I myself am long and far from being the old Arnold. Such years and such experiences do not pass over a person without leaving their mark. I have become tender-hearted and sad in my demeanour and in my soul, and I have aged beyond my years. Perhaps here too, time will work its healing wonders. That remains to be seen.

There are hundreds and thousands of questions I'd like to ask you, each one of you: how you spent all the years since our last written connection, how you have fared, what joys and sorrows you have experienced, how your farm and your domestic life have developed and expanded, and thousands of other questions. You must answer all of them even if I do not ask them, and preferably in the form of a thorough description of all your accomplishments and impressions during this time. I will try to do the same, although I do not know whether I will succeed, or whether all that I have experienced and suffered can even be portrayed in words.

First, I want to give you as accurate as possible but unfortunately an excessively sad accounting of the state of our immediate and extended family. However, I must acknowledge that nothing is final. Due to the precarious conditions in Germany, one or another of the missing may yet return. Still, the likelihood is slim.

Our dear, good parents are no longer alive. Sadly, it was not granted to them to witness the victory of the forces of justice and the fall of Hitler and his Reich. It is a victory that from the beginning we all were convinced would happen.

Our dear, good mother died of the devastating diarrhoea that raged in Theresienstadt and led to total loss of weight and strength. She died an easy death, and at least she died like a human being in a sickbed in the presence of Papa, Vera, and myself on October 29, 1942. A short time before, she was still able to say goodbye to Elsa who stopped for a few hours in Theresienstadt while en route to the East.

Dear Mama Resl likewise succumbed in Theresienstadt in August 1942, so that she was spared all the tortures and adversities

of the later period, and above all, the inhuman obscenity of the concentration camps of the East.

It was worse for our good father. He maintained his courage in the midst of all the wretchedness and deprivation in Theresienstadt. He was full of good spirits and confidence. He remained jovial despite all the hunger and filth in which we lived, and he served as a role model for others in these surrounding for seventeen long months.

However, when we were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau in mid-December 1943, when he saw the raw animalistic way we were treated there, he crumbled spiritually. He could not bear to see it. He refused all food; he could not swallow the dry bread and he died within three weeks of our arrival, on January 12, 1944. A few days earlier, in tears, he had taken farewell of me and of life.

A very small number of Jews had the good fortune of being allowed to stay in Theresienstadt and thus were rescued. Numbered among these are Martha Fried with Viktor and her son and Uncle Semi who lived with them. More distantly, Vera's mother who overcame her illness (internal haemorrhaging) and got well again. Vera gave her own blood so that her mother slowly got better and is still alive today. Sadly, so far, none of her three children has come back.

Papa Grünhut is missing and presumed dead. For a long time (until 1944), he kept himself in Theresienstadt where he had a very nice, influential position as head of the household division of a large barrack. Unfortunately, he did not know how to use the job to our advantage, as was common practice. Then, like most others, he too had to set out on the thorny road to the East. It is not impossible that he will still report in. It is rumoured that there are still convalescents in the Crimea, but sadly, one cannot count on it.

Of the remaining family, the following died in Theresienstadt:

Uncle Sigmund Vogel and his wife.

Uncle Heinrich Vogel.

Uncle Gustav Waldstein succumbed to acute pneumonia within three days in Unterkralowitz where he had fled from Strobnitz.

The following dear relatives and family members had to go down the awful road to Poland, to the Concentration Camps that, internally among the Germans, were called Extermination Camps, whereas for the general public, they bore the name of Work Camps:

Elsa with her whole family in October 1942. No news since.

Martha with Emil and the two little girls in August 1944. No news.

My sister-in-law Edith and her husband, also in August 1944.

Last news from Stettin in 1945.

My brother-in-law Eduard in February 1943. No news since.

Uncle Fritz and Aunt Hilde in the fall of 1943. No news.

Vally Roth with her husband and sons in September 1943.

Deda Glückauf in the summer of 1943 with her husband and sons.

Marenka Pick and her incredibly cute daughter Vera on the same transport as Papa, Vera, and myself.

Uncle Max Waldstein with his wife and their incredibly lovely seventeen-year-old daughter.

Uncle Emanuel Eisler with Aunt Bertha.

Aunt Theresa of Linz.

All of the above were with me in both Theresienstadt and in the accursed extermination camp Oswieczin (Auschwitz) with its dreaded gas chambers and with its four crematoria steadily spewing thick smoke.

And yet, wonders do occur. After five years in the infamous Buchenwald, Alfred Pick, Marenka's husband is supposed to have sent news recently. Poor Erika, a blossomingly beautiful young woman of twenty-two years, Martha and Viktor's pride and joy, went with her young husband in front of my own eyes into the gas.

Does this fact alone not scream to the heavens? Do you believe that one can stay sane in the face of such things?

Lost and gone are more distant relatives:

Cousin Hermann Vogel and his sister Lina.

Hermann Bloch and Emmy.

Aunt Bertha from Strobnitz along with Erich and Walter. It is possible that the latter will still report because he was still alive in Auschwitz. Unfortunately, the end was the worst time, those last days when the wild beast of National Socialism thrashed about in its death throes, exacting that hundreds of thousands of humans be sacrificed.

These are the dreadful statistics that I have counted up for you, my dear ones, knowing that you will hardly be reading them dry-eyed.

And now, consider that I live, that I must live in this world that I have just portrayed, surrounded by the shades of all these dead relatives and by my memories of them and of the gruesome conditions in which I was last with them, so that all thoughts and memories of that time of my deepest abasement and human degradation rise up again before me and I have nothing that I can put up in defence except for my work and one person.

That one person, a golden person, my comfort and my joy is our brother Otto who as always is there when my need is greatest, who consoles and helps and lightens and beautifies my life as best he can. Of course, I came back sick and poor as a beggar, dependent upon the good will of people and of the Red Cross. Along came Otto at the right moment, my knight in shining armour. The reunion was so gripping and so unexpected for me that for a long time, I could not restrain my tears.

I embrace you and kiss you with all my heart

Arnold

SECOND LETTER

Prague, July 11, 1945

My Dear Ones,

I want to number my letters and send you another of these reports in a few days. To be on the safe side I will make a copy so that I can send it to you right away if one of the letters gets lost.

Of course, the sad list of our deceased relatives can make no claim to completeness, especially since the fate of more distant relatives remains unknown to me. In addition to this list, there is another equally sad and gruesome one, that of our good friends and acquaintances.

Many a dear person is included whose name will never again be spoken, many a dear person who will no longer exist. It would be senseless, and indeed, it would not even be possible to count them all up for you, and so I only want to name the few that you also knew.

Included among them is my dear friend and teammate Bruno Skutetzki. Along with his exquisitely beautiful young wife, he had to die so tragically in Oswieczin. He lasted for three weeks in that hell, she for only a single week. Her mother, a woman who is still stately at age fifty, is beyond herself at this loss. She stands alone and bereft in this world. I visit her every week and we usually cry together for an hour or so.

The next in line is Schiff who was your former colleague at the bank, dear Edi. His wife found her way back here after an adventurous flight. Two years ago, she was still a radiant woman. Today, she is an old hag.

And now, my dear ones, I will try to describe for you in as much detail as possible the events as they unfolded, starting with those that pertain to the family.

As you may perhaps know, after your departure Elsa and her family were not allowed to stay much longer in the apartment in Tebesin with which you were familiar, so they moved to the Kronenstrasse in Weinberge.

A little while later, our dear Mama had to come to Prague because of her ailing heart. She spent several weeks in the hospital until she was released into homecare. Under Elsa's provident ministrations and self-sacrificing attentiveness, the state of Mama's health was almost back to normal when suddenly there was a powerful relapse. Mama became completely apathetic and said farewell to us.

But my dear, good Vera would not let go. With her own medical instinct, she was the only one who did not consider Mama's life as lost. She did everything humanly possible and more. Together with a young cardiologist who really knew how to reach into Mama's soul, they slowly and almost imperceptibly brought her back up until she regained her health completely.

Interestingly enough, this so sensitive and over-strained heart survived in Theresienstadt. Doctors there shook their heads at so much will to live.

After a few months, Emil Urbach hinted that dear Mama's visit was lasting a bit too long. His words were excusable given that the Fränkels were also living in the none too spacious quarters.

Since dear Vera had meanwhile been forbidden to practice medicine, Vera and I invited Papa to leave Budweis and, with Mama, to move in with us. We fixed up Vera's former waiting room as a living room. Mama cooked and did the housework. Touch wood, it was just like in the old days.

Our dear parents spent more than a year in our circle, surrounded by what then was such a large and extended family. I think it was the nicest year of their life. Certainly it was the quietest year of their normally so hardworking and productive existence.

There was a constant coming and going of visitors, so that on Saturday afternoons, there were often not enough chairs. Uncle Fritz and Hilde, Uncle Heinrich with his wife, Walter Waldstein with his young bride, the Urbachs and the Fränkels, my in-laws, Edith and Viktor, and of course Papa Grünhut were almost daily visitors in this family circle.

Papa, Uncle Fritz, and I were the unshakable trio of optimists who never gave in. Again and again, we knew of new facts and indicators that would guarantee, or at least point to Hitler's demise. The greatest of German victories and the worst battering of our own freedoms could not disabuse us of this conviction.

I also made every effort to keep up our guests' spirits, and I pushed the good humour act to its limits. At that time, I played all kinds of instruments. Above all, I was best at the accordion. I had a wonderful instrument, a piano accordion with a keyboard, 90 bass buttons, and three octaves.

I went about studying it in a completely scholarly manner. I had someone from the conservatory as a teacher, and by dint of extraordinary hours of practice, I was making nice progress. After three to four years, I had the dexterity and could read notes well enough to play operas. This music gave me immense pleasure. It was my only source of distraction, the only one still permitted to a Jew.

But soon, that too was forbidden. I switched to the guitar, then to the Hawaiian pipe, the mandolin and finally, when all musical instruments had to be turned in, to a mouth organ.

Lacking the opportunity to do other things in those days, I discovered a talent for singing and whistling to accompany the guitar. I had a whole booklet of cheerful German and Czech songs and poems, and I entertained our many guests for hours with my productions.

To my great regret, my beautiful accordion went missing during the events of the May revolution here in Prague. Although I had forfeited so much, this particular loss pained me the most because I still cannot get a replacement for it today.

And so, we lived peacefully alongside our dear parents, until the call was issued to us to report for the transport to Theresienstadt. Our dear parents' number came up in July 1942, Vera's and mine a month later.

Now I have to reach back and chronologically describe the unfolding of events.

Contrary to expectations, nothing changed in our situation after the entry of the Germans. It remained thus for over a year. We had already begun lulling ourselves with the sweet thought that everything would remain the way it was, that we as non-German Jews would remain unshorn, when the vexations began.

The Germans followed the principle of not doing anything to us themselves. Instead, they first trained the Czechs in anti-Semitism, and in this, they succeeded very well.

For our first horrendous surprise, they picked Yom Kippur, the holiest of days, to make us turn in all radios and report the sum total of our financial worth.

Blow upon blow followed, usually at two-week intervals. Always something new, something else that was forbidden, some unexpected limitation that made our life difficult, until bit by bit, life became impossible.

Restaurants and coffee houses were forbidden, then theatres and libraries, then all parks and public grounds, even public baths and swimming anywhere.

Shopping time was limited to a few hours in the morning and in the afternoon, later to only a single hour in the afternoon when there was nothing left in the shops.

Bit by bit, we were forbidden to buy almost any groceries. First, we could not buy sugar and candies, then meat and fish, then even jam and any dried fruits like prunes or raisins, then even vegetables, milk, cheese, etc. Finally, there was nothing left except bread, flour, and potatoes.

It was forbidden for us to take a streetcar except to and from work, and even that, only standing up in the last car. Bit by bit, we were banned from all streets and city squares in the downtown area.

Later, entire areas of the city were forbidden to us. Finally, we were not allowed even to be on the street on Saturday afternoon, so we were simply under house arrest every weekend.

The worst though was the Jewish star; a mighty yellow splotch

above the heart where in satirized Hebraic script stood the German word "JEW." This was the worst discrimination, for with this single move, they delivered us up to the mob at the command of the lowest of human urges.

And yet, that still wasn't the worst. Something much worse came next. Overnight, in entire sections of the city, they threw the Jews out of their homes and penned them up in ways unworthy of human beings.

Four to seven families in a single apartment. Because we lived on a main street, we alone had the unheard of luck to be spared this terrible evil.

My absolutely incomplete total has not yet included the full number of torments. Next came the endless list of bureaucratic vexations, the countless and limitless regulations concerning possessions and property of Jews and the enumeration, registration, delivery, and distribution of said possessions.

No two weeks went by without such an ordinance appearing, and these two weeks were usually filled with obtaining and filling out forms, packing and delivering the itemized objects, so that I coined the witticism "Being a Jew is a profession."

A thousand hugs and kisses from your Arnold

THIRD LETTER

July 12, 1945

My Dear Ones,

I hope that you have received both of my letters and I want to continue my description as best possible.

They used the whole powerful force of bureaucracy and red tape to strip the Jews of all their possessions, both portable and fixed. First they stripped the very rich, the ones who had houses, factories, businesses, etc. Then, with every conceivable form of spitefulness, it was our turn.

My company was not even allowed to pay me my salary directly. The money had to be processed through the bank where we were only allowed to be on the premises one predetermined hour of the week.

Then came the surrender of hundreds of items that normally, one would not even think of as possessions. In uninterrupted sequence, usually in two-week intervals, this laborious bureaucratic machinery would be set in motion. It hit us Jews all the harder because the various offices were only rarely open to us, and they created problems for us at every step of the way. It began with radios, then paintings, carpets, works of art. Next were musical instruments, trunks or suitcases, any tools or technical instruments, cars or motorized conveyances, all ski equipment, all gold and silverware. Then we had to turn in leather goods and furs, and later, even wool clothing and underwear if you had more than two sets. They did not even stop with the poor animals. All dogs and canaries had to be taken to the collection depot.

Now you must not think that we constantly had our pants full or that we promptly and correctly complied with all the regulations. On the contrary, we sabotaged whatever we possibly could, knowing that all was lost for us anyway.

On principle, we delivered up only very few and mostly useless things and we chose to give things away rather than throw them into the jaws of the Germans. We risked our necks repeatedly in those years, knowing that the Gestapo would not waste time on the fine print if one of us were caught.

However, thank God, everything always turned out well, even if we constantly had our head in the noose and we stood with one foot in crime and the other in the grave. Thus, for example, I worked in the factory for a whole year without wearing the yellow star. As I approached the factory, I would cover the star with my briefcase, and then, in the factory I would cover it with a lab coat without a star. Meanwhile, Vera practiced medicine illegally for over two years in her back room while her surgery stood empty.

You can well imagine how dangerous this was, and how many precautions we had to take, since all contact with Aryans was strictly forbidden. We even refused to give up our Sunday outings and our outdoor bathing, even if we did have to find a hidden spot. Nice game, playing hide-and-seek with the Gestapo and the police!

With food too, we in no way followed the regulations. I kept my job at Parik's until almost the end of 1940. Then I had to leave the firm, but I found another job almost immediately, albeit no longer in a managerial capacity.

I began to work as production controller in a factory that made precision tools, mainly small precision parts for military aircraft. My job was to supervise the precision of semi-finished and completed products. It was mostly a matter of a thousandth of a millimetre or less, so the responsibility was great. This was doubly true because military agents came to the factory to take possession of the finished product. Still, although the salary was rather low, the work itself was pleasant, easy, and not strenuous.

I worked here for over two years until the anti-Jewish campaign drove me out of this job as well. I had already become a source of admiration as one of the very few Jews who were still working.

And still, I found another job almost immediately. This one was in a factory in Straschnitz that made gas masks and precision instruments. I was only granted three weeks at the job, for just when we were the busiest, my name came up for the transport to Terezin.

Of course, even in the matter of the transport, we did not stand by idly and wait to be led to the slaughter. Instead, we used every conceivable means and subterfuge to put off the date of our entry. Next, despite warnings of extreme penalties, we did not report for registration, and when they forced us to do so, with Emil's help, we simply disappeared. Emil had a job in Jewish Community Services and he was able to remove our cards from the file from which the transport lists were compiled.

But in the end, we packed up kit and caboodle and awaited our

deportation. For us, it was the beginning of a new world and a new life. Of course, one could only take a limited amount of baggage—I think it was 40 kg. We were supposed to leave everything else in the apartment, and this was to remain unlocked. Of course, this was another regulation that we did not obey. We each took with us about 70 kg, and we gave things away. The carpets and some of Vera's instruments, which of course should have been delivered up long ago, went to good friends for safekeeping. We gave many other things to the cleaning woman, to the caretaker of the building, etc. In the apartment itself, we only left a few things just for show.

The assembly place for the transports was a part of the fairgrounds where radios and furniture were usually displayed. The surroundings were grim, a real entry to and a foretaste of what awaited us later and actually never again left us in all the years ahead: filth, vermin, slops to eat, straw to lie upon, latrines, no opportunity to wash, and raw, bestial treatment.

I was quite able to bear all this. I had gotten used to it during World War I, and I took everything with a grain of salt. I had two bottles of cognac and some chocolate with me, and I just let things be. However, with her exaggerated love of cleanliness, my poor dear Vera absolutely could not adjust to this pigpen, and the latrine especially inflicted such violence on her that she suffered from total constipation for more than a week.

From the very first moments, Vera practiced medicine and devoted herself to every single person as if they had been private patients. In no time, she had become not only the best-known doctor but also the most beloved person in the entire transport.

And this quite extraordinary belovedness, yes, this almost deification remained her very own trademark in the years that followed. Because of her ultra-good heart and the repeated success of her medical skills, people really honoured and adored her. They showered her with gifts, as they did no one else. Vera, however, was unpretentious and modest. She simply believed that it was her duty to help every single person to the utmost of her ability.

After about a week, two thousand of us were shipped under Schutzpolizei surveillance to Terezin. At the railway station in Bauschowitz, which is about 3 km from Terezin, the S.S. received us and immediately ordered all suitcases to be left behind. We never saw them again. We took with us whatever we could manage, but it was a hot July day, and the enforced march with much too heavy gear quickly turned into a torture.

During our entry into Terezin, the streets had to be emptied of all inhabitants. Doors and windows had to be closed, so that nobody could have any contact with us until we had been “appropriately prepared.”

They locked us into the old subterranean casemates from which we were only allowed to emerge after a thorough inspection of our bodies and our baggage, an inspection that stripped us of our most valuable belongings.

Even here, we cheated if we could. Dressed in the habit of a nun, Cousin Erika appeared before us and took some things for safe-keeping. Thus, we were able at least to save watches, medication, and the like.

Then we were assigned lodgings. Vera was assigned to a house and I was sent to the barracks. Neither one really coincided with the meaning of the word, nor with any possibly associated terminology. Both house and barracks only looked like their namesakes from the outside. On the inside, they had been altered for mass settlement in accordance with German ingenuity and conceptualization.

Every house block had only a single entrance, usually in a back alley or a side street. All other doors and gates were locked off and nailed shut. In the courtyard, they had torn down the walls separating the individual buildings, sheds, stables, etc. Thus, from a single block of houses, they created a residential block that was numbered the way the streets are numbered. Every room inside a house from the cellar to the attic was inhabited by as many people as there was room for by laying them on the floor. Not until much

later did it occur to people to fetch straw, then bags of straw, and finally, boards. Not until two years later did the first primitive plank beds appear as substitutes for real beds.

As many as ten to twenty people of the same sex slept, lived, and managed in a single room. Usually these were old people. The young lived in barracks where the dark, musty old rooms were filled to the last nook and cranny with bunk beds—wooden tiers filled right up. As could be expected, things went on there just like in an (undisciplined) Jewish school. The concept of a private life lost all meaning in this massive overcrowding of people. One was always surrounded by hundreds of smelly Jews, and the longing for a bit of peace and solitude was often strong.

I could write a whole book about Theresienstadt, and it certainly would not be boring. However, I will leave that to more professional pens.

What was realized in Theresienstadt was a matter of a bold and grandiose project unlike any other. It was a mass colonization of unusual dimensions, a communistic community unlike any that had ever been attempted in central Europe. Sixty thousand people who obeyed a single authority in all their activities and functions, all nourished, as it were, from one and the same kettle, a gigantic machine with but a single direction and a single will.

Everything swelled to the gigantic in this mass conscription. Included were not only the 60,000 inhabitants then living in this city, but also the hundreds of thousands of Jews from all over Europe who passed through.

The cooking was done in a dozen kitchens in the big barracks, usually for three to six thousand people at a time. The distribution of food, which took place on the basis of ration cards, lasted several hours. A single centralized warehouse stored all the food supplies, utensils, equipment, etc. An economic advisory council decided the daily menu based on the supplies in stock. Clearly, even the smallest seasonings like pepper or marjoram amounted to kilos.

The repair workshops for clothing and shoes were major enterprises with six hundred workers and thirty office clerks.

The central bakery baked 12,000 loaves of bread a day, and the most modern crematorium in Europe in which one corpse burned the other with its impressive achievement of one hundred corpses a day was by far unable to meet the daily demand, for the number of the dead each day ran from one hundred and forty to one hundred and seventy. Everything on a large scale, as you can see.

In other ways too, the city was interesting. Even the traffic in the street was more like that of a major metropolis. At certain times of the day, there were so many people together in a small space that no city in the world can point to such a multitude of traffic. The issue was particularly interesting from a technical perspective and in terms of political economy. Here, right from the very beginning and all the way through to the development of the city as a show-piece and display case to the world, everything was created by Jews. By Jewish brains and by Jewish hands.

In addition, we experienced our miracles here. Often we could not believe our eyes. What wonders were created here by the Jewish artisan, by the Jewish engineer, by the Jewish genius! Here, beyond measure, we demonstrated the nonsense of the inferiority of the Jewish race.

It was not just the Jewish bricklayer, the Jewish carpenter, the Jewish locksmith and the Jewish painter who wrought their miracles of art and craftsmanship here. It was also the Jewish chimneysweep, the Jewish drainpipe cleaner, the Jewish well digger, the porter, the railroad worker, the wagon driver. The most menial farmhand and the former estate owner did their duty, and together, they accomplished results that could not have been better.

And beyond this, Jewish manufacturing arose on an industrial scale. Even though the work had to be done without pay, dozens of workstations were created where work took place not just for the Jewish community but also for the Germans, and especially for delivery to the German troops. We excelled in every conceivable

branch of production, including paper, cardboard, leather, mica, iron, metal-ware, toys, ink, products made of fur and much else that was in no way inferior to products made in comparable factories in the hinterland.

Many famous artists, especially painters and illustrators were at work in large studios. They produced hundreds of pictures that were then sold privately for millions by the gentlemen of the S.S. One of the best-known artists was a distant cousin of ours with the name Waldstein whom I got to know there. The ceramic workshops also created unique and valuable pieces of art that, like everything else, illustrated the absurdity of the shibboleth of the inferiority of the Jewish artist.

Technology also wrought its wonders that are worthy of standing next to the aforementioned. You must not lose sight of the fact that, overnight, a city of 7000 inhabitants was transformed into one of 60,000. The need for water, electricity and the like suddenly increased tenfold, and help needed to be immediately at hand. A new waterworks, an expanded electrical station, a dozen new artesian wells, a huge cemetery, later on, the aforementioned modern crematorium, garbage disposal areas, a mighty industrial plant with 4500 workers, a large agricultural enterprise, large scale pig farming, gigantic sized manure heaps and thousands of window beds, all these and more sprang forth in the shortest possible time.

From Bauschowitz to Theresienstadt, we quickly built a new stretch of railway. There is nothing to indicate the fact that from the first stroke of a pencil to the last cut of a spade, the railway was built by Jewish brains and Jewish hands. The tracks lead right to the streets in the middle of town.

One fine day in the middle of the Ringplatz at the town centre, a gigantic modern installation for shipping goods to the troops was erected. Soldiers set up huge tents and disappeared again. Within a few days, Jewish engineers in these tents created a major manufacturing complex that reflected the most splendid modern technical

achievements. It even had an assembly line that employed a thousand workers.

Various parts were delivered from German factories, assembled here, and then packed into crates under very precise directives. Because of their manual dexterity and because they worked so very hard, women particularly shone at these tasks. People could not believe their eyes when they saw these soft, formerly so well-tended, manicured, delicate hands tackle this difficult, dirty, greasy work, or when they saw frail women drag the heavy cases. A million cases were supposed to be shipped out within three weeks, and this target was met. Overnight, the tents disappeared again and the Ringplatz reappeared.

Our Cousin Martha Fried emerged as a model worker in this enterprise, with a real flair for industrial manufacturing, a talent to which she later remained true. Of course, all who were connected with this enterprise had received certain advantages, especially in regards to food.

I could spend hours more telling you interesting things about Theresienstadt. For such descriptions, however, there is neither enough room nor enough time. I would rather go back to events that I have personally experienced.

Like every beginning, it was hard at first. Whereas the women were still left more or less in peace, or forced only to do cleaning and the like, we men had to do hard labour right from the start, usually with pick and shovel. It was especially hard for those of us who were not used to it. Such days absolutely refused to end, and the hours crept by at a snail's pace. At the same time, Hunger gnawed at our guts and grew ever stronger until it was an unending pain. Because they were ludicrously spare for someone doing hard labour, even the meals did nothing to soothe the pangs.

We (I walked hand in glove with my brother-in-law Eduard in those days) deliberated long and hard about which measures to take. Simply folding our hands in our laps and waiting for events to unfold was not in our nature. Something had to be done, and

somehow, we had to get out of this precarious predicament. For lack of other options, we therefore reported for railroad building duty where the work was equally onerous, but was rewarded with double the share of lunch.

Our ploy did not succeed because there were no available spots, but at least in the process, I attracted the attention of the head of the Labour Office who asked me to work with him. This was an unheard of stroke of luck, and an advance in rank such as had never before occurred, this move to a respected office position after only a week of hard labour.

I then became division leader, the commandant of a work crew consisting of fifty men. My main responsibility was to select people for individual jobs for which we received daily written orders from the central Bureau of Labour that controlled over 30,000 workers. You can best picture the latter as a ministry that reported directly to the S.S.

My responsibilities were far from onerous. Aside from the dispatch of workers morning and afternoon, I only had a few entries to make and various lists to keep up to date. The rest of the time, I could idle away.

Aside from this influential role within the barrack, there was another great advantage connected to the position. I had a permanent overtime pass because I had to be available in case of necessity to work at any hour. Since the night hours were figured into my working time, this gave me the highest claim to premium bread. That was a huge benefit because this premium amounted to as much as an entire normal ration of bread. In other words, I got a double portion of bread.

Then, after a while, when I advanced to division leader for a hundred men, another very valuable advantage was added. I was officially authorized and registered with the S.S. and was thereby sheltered from being on the transport list.

Despite all these advantages, I gave up the job. When the opportunity presented itself, I threw myself into the social domain

within the same Labour Office, because the job as division leader had also had its huge drawbacks. There were jobs that were positively a pleasure and where people even got presents or food. There were easy jobs, hard jobs, and extremely hard jobs. There were jobs that were absolutely awful, like standing in water all day, and there were some jobs that were life threatening. The latter was especially the case in the so-called Small Fortress. Located about two km from the ghetto, this old fortification dated back to the time of St. Theresa. It had been converted into a small but all the more gruesome concentration camp where five thousand men had been quartered.

Our people worked in the garden there under the surveillance of S.S. gardeners who were known for the sadistic way they treated our poor boys. Countless blows, sometimes with wooden lathes or iron bars meant that almost daily, some boys came home with blood streaming from their wounds. Others were shipped back to the ghetto, forever crippled.

On the second day after my arrival. I myself had one of my worst experiences in the Small Fortress. The S.S. supervisor put me to work pumping excrement. Under his shouts and threats, I had to work the pump for one and a half hours, smoothly and without interruption. Of course my strength often failed me, and I believed my last hour to be nigh. However, the human body can endure the unbelievable when the end seems near.

It was to such tasks and to similarly unpleasant ones that I was supposed to, and indeed had to order my poor guiltless colleagues. Often I had to send them out at night and in rain and storm, and I just could not bring myself to do these things. Thus, I used the first chance I got to do something else. When my boss was entrusted with establishing a new Office of Labour in a newly opened barrack, he asked me to become his assistant. Since he gave me free choice of my field of endeavour within the operation, I chose the area of social welfare and became the operations controller. This meant that I was responsible for supplying the workers with every

conceivable remedy, relief, and bonus, even the ordering of clothing and shoes, and above all, improvements in food.

I had to fight for all these things in the different offices and do battle for them, sometimes even with the Germans. But I got good results, and the workers everywhere were granted their first and best advantages. We managed, for example, to get an allowance for double lunch rations for those doing hard labour, and for the others to get all the leftovers from the kitchens after the allotted rations had been distributed.

It goes without saying that in this distribution of food, I did not go hungry. Nor did Vera who was my daily guest for supper. In this respect, we had all we needed.

After a few nice months, this came to an end. Still, the dear Lord did not abandon us. As always, He helped us, sometimes on the very day that we thought it was the end, the very day that the ghosts of Danger or of Hunger stood directly before us. Once, a friend whose father was at the Office of Domestic Affairs got me a second ration card. Later, Vera and I managed to share a room with a colleague in what used to be a small vestibule of a non-commissioned officer's place. The three of us had furnished it very nicely and we lived together. This colleague was friends with everyone in the kitchen. He was able to come and go every day with so much food that all of us, finally including his mother and Vera had enough to eat. We lived idyllically in that little room where there was scarcely space for two beds, a table, and a few other pieces of furniture, which I made with my own two hands out of boards that I personally had stolen.

In time, thanks to my inventiveness and my experience of carpentry as a hobby, there were all kinds of forbidden and therefore secret and hidden luxury items like an electric stove, an electric iron, a reading light by the bed, moveable room dividers, etc. In time, we got quite used to this dog's life despite its often-unbearable discomforts.

Among these discomforts were the vermin with which we

conducted a constant battle. We young ones were able to rid ourselves readily of lice, but we had to battle uninterruptedly against the millions of fleas and bugs that otherwise multiplied so rapidly that it was impossible even to think of sleep. During this time, I so thoroughly learned the idiosyncrasies of these dear little creatures—their habits, their breeding cycles, their loves, and their customs—that I could have made my debut as a specialist in the flea and bug business, and I could have predicted the behaviour of every single beastie.

But here, as always, the human spirit, the capacity for thought, the ability to keep the benefits of experience in one's brain prevailed. At least in the short run, we mastered these infestations, even if sometimes with difficulty and at the cost of gassing entire barracks or house blocks. Vermin preoccupied us incessantly.

Laundry, for example, was a serious problem. Some gifted experts kept the small facility that had once served as a military laundry operational without a break, day and night, raising its capacity to an unbelievable 1000 kg a day. Still, what was that compared to the needs of a town of 60,000 people?

This meant no more than 2 kg per three-month period for the ghetto inmates, which is not even one change of underwear a month, and it includes no bedding, etc. It was impossible to do laundry at home. We barely had enough soap for washing our bodies.

Now I will close this report. In the meanwhile, it is already July 18 and Otto and I are going on holidays. Even though I have only been working for six weeks, I have two weeks off and Otto has been demobilized. We are going to Trebitsch to see Martha, the only one of our relatives to have been saved. Otto wants to go from there to Strobnitz, Vienna, and to Linz to check into what can be learned everywhere.

Assuming that the experiences I have delineated and the descriptions will really be of interest to you, I will continue my reports when we get back. For today, my dear ones, sincerest regards, hugs and kisses from your faithful old Arnold.

FOURTH LETTER

Prague, August 5, 1945

New Address—XII, Manesova 32

My dear ones,

Now we are safely back from our holidays and I want to continue my description. It was very nice in Trebitsch. Martha looked after us in a touching way, as if she needed to replace both our mother and our sisters. She cooked the very finest foods, all the things that we had dreamt about and talked about while we ate the wretched watery soup as Hunger rolled about in our intestines. Here once again were schnitzel, apricot dumplings, white coffee with cake, and all the things that by unanimous consent used to occupy the place of honour in our incessant talks about food.

In other ways too, our dear relatives ensured that we felt completely at home and that we found a replacement under their roof for the homeland and for the parental home that we had lost.

We also enjoyed the pleasures of life in the country. We took long walks, we went swimming, and we wandered in the woods. I regained the feeling and the consciousness of being a free human being and not one of the debased, the hated, the ones who had been cast out. It did me good to see that my very presence could bring pleasure to my relatives.

Unfortunately, the few days passed all too quickly and I had to go back to work in Prague. Perhaps I have not yet told you that hardly a week after my arrival in Prague, I went back to work at Parik's, my old firm. I did this even though I was still a convalescent and I could have used the time to accomplish a thousand errands that remain, including going to all the different offices to cut through the red tape needed to get lodgings. However, I went on the assumption that work would be the best remedy for my pain and for my solitude, and I was not mistaken. I have a good job, and every day, I have a mountain of work that I very much enjoy.

At least filling that position in the factory gives me the feeling that my presence has some purpose.

Otto wanted to go to Vienna but only got as far as Bratislava when he had to turn around again. There is still no connection to Vienna and above all, there are no bridges over the Danube. Monday he wants to go to Strobnitz with Walter Waldstein's widow whom we accidentally met on the street the other day. So poor Walter is also dead, even though when we were together in Auschwitz, he was still a strong young man.

Now we have an apartment again. Our old one is occupied, so I had to tread the thorny path of acquiring a new one, a path that required endless patience and was entangled with hundreds of disappointments and countless difficulties. I had begun to despair, but Otto was a trusty companion at my right hand. He ran countless errands for me with military precision, tasks for which of course his British military uniform came in very handy.

The new apartment is not nearly as nice as our old one. It only has three rooms, and the furniture is modest and old, but it is quite well located and my requirements these days are not very great. The apartment (the furniture, the dishes, etc.) are gratis, of course, a replacement for our old things, which the Germans stole from us.

I live in the new apartment with Vera's mother who at age 71 is still active and energetic. She will run the household without even a maid, since this kind of work no longer exists here since the overthrow. Otto wants to stay with us for two or three weeks and then he will travel on to Paris.

My dear ones, in the last few days we have received three parcels from you, for which I must express my sincerest thanks. The first one contained mostly chocolate and sweets, the second and third ones that had Anny as sender contained cheese and honey, sugar, flour, and little tins of meat and cocoa. As you can well imagine, for me all these things are treats that I have not known for a long time, and they represent a very welcome addition to the still rather limited foods that are available here. So again, please accept my

sincerest thanks for these gifts and be assured that I will never forget this loving deed.

Nor can I fail to appreciate the spiritual impulse, the consoling awareness that even if I am separated from you by an ocean, still, I have in you next of kin who are concerned for me and who care for me because I am family.

Now I want to continue my description of Theresienstadt. As time passed, we got fairly used to this degrading dog's life. With the deadening of the senses and the habituation that occurred, we did not even perceive the unpleasant circumstances as being so terrible. Later, from the perspective of Auschwitz, we looked back on Theresienstadt as paradise. In time, the conditions also improved a bit.

Above all, there was no shortage of distractions of every kind. There were numerous lectures by renowned professors, courses, concerts by first-class virtuosos, several improvised cabaret groups, even a top-notch theatre and an opera ensemble of a quality unsurpassed on any big-city stage. Even if it was with stomach growling with hunger, with underwear stiffened by dirt, and seated next to a neighbour crawling with lice, we could sit in a theatre, concert, or open-air cabaret just as we did in the best of times at home.

There was also a valuable library that enabled us to enrich our knowledge. There were even holidays of a sort, since those of us in the Bureau of Labour assigned people who had been doing hard labour for over a year to light agricultural work. Later, I advanced to a higher and more respected position as Master for Care and Control in the central Division of Labour. I had a large, bright office in the Magdeburger barrack that housed all the bureaucratic offices, a secretary, an assistant, and lots of business traffic the whole day through. I visited all the industrial enterprises and workshops, received all the requests of supervisors and workers, and played the role of the generous uncle from America who fulfills the wishes of his 5400 children to the best of his ability.

Vera was with me every day. We saw each other whenever we

had the chance, sometimes several times a day. Whenever we had something to say to each other, we just approached and talked because keeping to the exact number of hours of work was not an issue, especially at the higher ranks.

We spent very nice evenings in our own inner circle, usually with my roommate Fischer and his mother. She used to make our food more palatable with small ingredients, and sometimes she made holiday meals for us with food acquired by stealing or by spending a sinful amount of money. The black market flourished in Theresienstadt. There were people who smoked their ten to twenty cigarettes a day even though smoking was strictly forbidden. A cigarette usually cost 35 Kr and in bad times as much as 100 Kr. Although there were severe penalties for the possession of money, nevertheless, almost everyone took a chance. The often unexpected searches by our own female S.S. columns or by the gentlemen of the S.S. themselves were nightmares that haunted our being as well as our dreams.

Morality did not exist in Theresienstadt. Flirtation and the breaking of marital vows was common currency. The woman who could be had for a slice of bread and butter actually became a reality here, with the one difference that one had to substitute margarine for butter. Every woman who cared about her appearance had a man in as nourishing as possible a profession, preferably a baker, a butcher, or a worker in the central warehouse. She would justify this with the excuse that she was only doing it for the sake of her family.

I was one of the few, totally unmodern men who remained faithful to his wife. Vera and I were always together, and when Vera later moved to a room for female doctors that she shared with six colleagues, we struck a gentleman's agreement that allowed each of us to have a day to spend an undisturbed hour or two together with a wife or a girlfriend.

In November 1942, Vera got extremely sick. In the practice of her profession, she had been infected with scarlet fever. Then she got

diphtheria and jaundice on top of that, so that she had to spend eleven weeks in isolation. This was a sad and a terrible time for us both, and we couldn't even celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary except by my sending her a few little gifts and a letter that, in its sincere acknowledgement of her and in its thanks for ten so happy years, made such a deep impression on her that she wanted to keep it to the end of her life.

I could only see her in the hospital, from behind a glass window, so we communicated by sign language as if we were deaf-mutes. However, this bad time also ended, and all was well again.

A ghoulish apparition, a perennial nightmare hovered steadily above us in the form of the transports to the East. Transports to the Unknown. Transports to Perdition. Every conceivable kind of offering was brought forth in order to safeguard against being transported away, but all safeguards were usually problematic. As a doctor, Vera shielded me, and I, in my position as Master shielded her, but this only succeeded as long as normal circumstances prevailed.

Our dear parents were assigned to a transport to the East in the fall of 1942 and twice Vera's parents were assigned to a transport. You can certainly image how awful was the thought of simply allowing our parents to be dragged off alone to their destruction. Thus, we set all the gears in motion, ran from one office to another, asked, begged, went every which way, intervened and asked our influential friends to speak up in the right places until we succeeded in exempting my parents as well as Vera's from the transport.

Thus, the fact that we missed getting passage to a safe haven at least served the one purpose: that we saved both our parents from destruction and from a dreadful lonely death in foreign parts.

Unfortunately, Elsa and her family fared worse. One day in October 1942 when a transport from Prague arrived in Theresienstadt, it was, as always, placed under strict quarantine in a barrack to which no one had access.

As luck would have it, it was my job as Head of Division to take ten men over there in the middle of the night because the complete transport was to continue on to Poland. My people were supposed to help carry the sick and the luggage to the barrack that had been readied for their departure.

Here, in the midst of this unparalleled chaos of bodies and baggage, I found our dear Elsa with Marianne. Emil had been quartered amid the sick. I promised Elsa my very best help and my most energetic efforts to get her out of the transport, even though time was short and the hurdles seemed endless. However, she did not want out. She had no idea what was meant by “the East,” and she would not allow herself to be talked out of it. On the one hand, she feared that Emil would then be sent off alone, or that their luggage would get lost. As if any luggage could be saved anyway! How often in all the years have I forfeited our poor bit of belongings! How often did we stand there with only the clothes we wore! Since Elsa did not want to stay and since even Mama’s illness could not persuade her, I went against her wishes and tried by every means at my disposal to get her and her family out of the transport.

It was a hard and painful piece of work, almost hopeless and beyond feasibility. I sacrificed the night and ran from office to office. In Theresienstadt, there was no limit to the working hours. During the arrival of transports, offices were open day and night. Sleep only became a possibility once the transport had left.

And so, I succeeded in the difficult task. All that was needed to free Elsa was the signature of a doctor. Because I did not dare awaken him in the middle of the night, I got the signature first thing in the morning, and I ran at full tilt to the departure barrack. The departing transport was at a full roll, and our dear, good Elsa was gone. Gone forever and ever.

There I stood in the barrack courtyard, the liberating, life-promising piece of paper in my hand, and I howled like a beaten dog. Never in my life will I forget this so dreadful, so bitter hour, nor will the wound left by this experience ever heal completely.

Otto Urbach was not with them. At that time, he was staying at a large farm in Lipa where hundreds of young Jews were doing agricultural work under the supervision of the S.S. Later, he came to Theresienstadt. He was a strong, handsome, and high-spirited young man, but he has not come back to the homeland either.

With Vera and me as well, it was a tragic chain of events that brought us into the transport to Poland. We had been in Theresienstadt for sixteen months and we had seen many dozens of transports leaving during that time. One day in the middle of December 1943, the gruesome call befell us too. As I have already told you, we had been protected against being assigned to a transport, but this time they needed two hundred doctors in the East, and they selected the youngest ones. Dear Vera belonged in this category, and I belonged to Vera, for the governing rule was not to tear apart the immediate family.

The central Office of Labour immediately set all gears in motion in order to exempt me and by automatic extension, to exempt Vera as well. And now, just imagine, my dear ones, their efforts were crowned with results, but the decision came one small half hour too late. When the clerk arrived at the train station with the exemption order, we were already sitting in the sealed freight car, and the train slowly rolled away to the Hell of Oswieczin.

Another letter will follow in two or three weeks. Best regards and kisses from your faithful Arnold

THERE WERE FIVE POST-WAR letters in the box, all from Arnold. There must have been more letters, but only these five were in the box when I opened it. I translated the first four quite quickly, but for a long time, the fifth letter lay untouched. Somehow, I continued to put off translating that last letter for a very long time, as if fearing to end my connection to family and to a past that had become my daily companion.

FIFTH LETTER

Sept. 11, 1945

My Dear Ones,

I received your letter dated August 1 on August 25, in about three weeks, which represents a very rapid delivery. Its contents moved me deeply, and I thank you very much for your kind words.

Dear Gretl, I did not know that you could write such nice letters. I can instinctively tell from them that your words come from the heart and that they are sincerely intended.

Your concern for my inner as well as my bodily well-being is touching and in every way reassuring for me. Even if, thank God, I have recovered enough so that I am once again standing on my own two feet, even if I've been provided with adequate food and clothing, it is still a precious source of comfort to me and to my still raw inner wounds to know that I have total support from people who are close to me through the bonds of blood, who believe in me and will never abandon me.

I was deeply touched when I read of the profound impression that my factual reports had made upon you.

The awareness of all the horror that we had become accustomed to with the passage of years has suddenly descended upon you. Only now does that awareness step out of the shadows of the unconscious into the harsh light of reality. However, you can now take consolation from the fact that all this belongs to a gruesome but at least a vanquished past. Although we shudder to remember this past with all its horrendous experiences, its feelings and its nightmare visions, we are nonetheless trying to the best of our ability to obliterate them totally from our memory, the quicker the better. The future will make all this seem to be an evil spectre from the past, a grisly hallucination of wretchedness as we follow the eternal rule of life with its irresistibly powerful vitality that turns us always toward the future.

What is impossible to forget, however, what cannot be extinguished from our thoughts and our hearts, is the awareness and

the longing for all those dear ones who stood so close to us, those who were ripped away by that gruesome time and were swept into the abyss. They were torn away from our side with no regard for the fact that our hearts bleed and will bleed so long as we shall live.

I thank you very much for your well-intended invitation to come to you, but this is out of the question. My place is here in the homeland. I have my job here, and numerous attachments, as well as my memories. Furthermore, I no longer feel young enough to start a whole new life. These days, I usually follow the path of least resistance.

I am sorry to have to report to you that of the eleven packages you sent, only the five for which I had previously acknowledged receipt have thus far arrived. Since then, there has been a long pause.

Dear Gretl, I will gladly give you the requested measurements, but I notice that I am well supplied in the suit department and that I even have enough underwear thanks to Otto's help. Besides, I have learned to wear underwear somewhat longer than used to be the custom.

On the other hand, I would be very grateful if you could get me some warm, knitted things for the winter: sweaters, vests and the like, shawls, gloves, and above all, spats. I will hardly be able to get these things here since there is not even wool to be worked yet, let alone wares made from wool.

With food, things are not so bad today. As a worker, I get a supplemental ration card and an additional one on medical orders as a repatriate (former prisoner). Of course, it is not a matter of kilos but of decagrams, and certain things like meat, fat, fruit, and sweets are still very scarce.

About my reports, I would still like to tell you the following. I have already sent you four reports in three letters, and I have reached all the way to the end of Theresienstadt and to the transport to Auschwitz. Now, however, my strength fails me, or rather my ability to render in graphic form those events and experiences.

Words seem too weak and too petty to depict all that I lived to see and to witness. My thoughts entangle themselves. I would like to express everything simultaneously, and of course, that is impossible. I must therefore now put a period at the end of my sentence, or perhaps a pause. Maybe the time will come when I can depict everything in peace.

About the demise of your mother, dear Gretl, sadly I cannot provide the exact details that you have requested. My memory has unfortunately suffered a lot, and sometimes, the memories do not surface until months later. I only know that dear Mama Resl felt mentally better in Theresienstadt. She showed promise of a complete recovery of her mind, but her body broke down as was the case with all of the elderly, and her weakened state hastened her martyrdom.

The description of your life and of the building up of the farm was of unusual interest, although I hope and expect that you, dear Edi will still write to me in much greater detail about it.

Now, I want to tell you that Otto flew to Paris on August 3. He has since written that because of the inflationary prices there, he is not even thinking about reopening the factory. For now, he has gone to England for two or three weeks.

Before that, he went to Strobnitz for the third time, and using the shipping agent Fröstl who now lives in Number 62, he personally shipped out the best pieces of your furniture to my half-empty apartment. The big buffet, three large chests, your table and sofa now grace my new apartment where I reside with Mama Schick, and where the furniture constantly reminds me of my dear brother Edi and his good wife Gretl.

Now, be well, my precious and dear ones. Write soon and often and lots.

*Hugs and kisses from your faithful Arnold.
For your birthday, dear Edi, my sincerest and very best wishes.*

