

*A journal in letters, from Amsterdam,
Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen*

Mirjam Bolle

Let Me Tell You What a Day Here Is Like

IN 1938, MIRJAM LEVIE'S FIANCÉ, LEO BOLLE, left for Palestine to prepare for the young couple's new life in the Promised Land. Mirjam remained behind in Amsterdam, where she found a job as secretary to the Committee for Jewish Refugees. After May 1940, when the Germans occupied the Netherlands, that organization was incorporated into the Netherlands Jewish Council, set up by the Nazis to intermeditate between the Jewish community and their own authorities.

In 1940, at the age of 23, Mirjam began reporting in her letters to Leo on what was happening to the Jews. Her position on the Jewish Council not only allowed her a good view of events as they happened, but also made it possible for her to protect her family. Her letters, therefore, provide us with a unique picture of the dilemmas of the Jewish elite. At first, that elite had hoped to circumvent the threat of chaos and violence by working with the Nazis. In the course of time, however, it became clear that the most anyone could do was attempt to keep their family, friends and acquaintances off the deportation lists for as long as possible.

In her letters, Mirjam describes the terrible days and nights during which the lists were drawn up, the panic, despair and arguments among members of the Council's staff, the poignant cases of human suffering that underscored the impossibility of their task. Yet those same letters also make clear precisely how natural the urge to survive really was. Throughout it all, her love for Leo in Palestine provided Mirjam with hope for the future, and the determination to save those she loved.

Finally, in 1943, the last members of the Jewish Council's own staff were deported. Mirjam focused all her hope on being added to the 'Palestine List' of Jews eligible for a possible exchange of prisoners. In June 1944 she was actually allowed to leave Bergen-Belsen, as part of the only such exchange ever held with Palestine.

Day by day, Mirjam describes a nerve-wracking world, in which the Jews did everything they could to survive. She makes the reader immediate party to the sense of growing danger, the hope, and the issues which divided and subdued the Jewish community. These moving letters are of great historical importance.



Mirjam Bolle was born in Amsterdam in 1917, and from 1947 has lived in Jerusalem, where she worked for successive Dutch ambassadors. In 1943, a friend hid her unsent letters to Leo; she herself took the letters written in Bergen-Belsen to Palestine. Until recently, their existence was known only to Mirjam Bolle's closest friends and family.

The appearance of a book that sheds such original light on the persecution of the Jews almost sixty years after the end of the Second World War is nothing short of a miracle. Here we have a chronicler of great acuity, one with extraordinary empathy with the fates of those around her, and with a movingly realistic view of herself and of the possibilities and impossibilities created by the complexities of the war. Mirjam's letters are phenomenal.

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Sample translation from

Let Me Tell You What a Day Here Is Like

by Mirjam Bolle

(Amsterdam: Contact, 2003)

Translated by Jeannette K. Ringold

Amsterdam

[p. 31-47]

February 1, 1943

Well, I'll tell you what happened that evening of the *razzia* [raid], when we could not yet imagine that people would be released. The mood was terrible. The Germans were like wild animals, and Sluzker (the Jewish intermediary between the Germans and the Jewish Council) was *ratlos*, at his wit's end. I also forgot to tell you that people were taken away even from the Jewish Council building on Nieuwe Keizersgracht, although to be sure these people were released again after several hours. Even at your father's home Miss Roos and Daisy, who were both under forty, were taken away, as well as Michel Kleerekoper.

You know Eddy Barendz.¹ The Sunday before July 15, Max Barendz called me – we all still had telephones – and asked me to come to his house. The fact was that Eddy had received a call-up and would have to leave on Tuesday. Of course his parents were desperate, all the more because he had, as an exception, been examined by the German doctor and had been declared fit without a real examination. The fact was that everyone was declared fit. When you hear how Aunt Suze was treated, it makes your hair stand on end. They asked if I could do anything about it. Actually, they had been reassured somewhat before I came because Mrs. Van Tijn at the *Expositur*² had told them that everything would work out. I called Sluzker, whose answer wasn't favorable at all, and who advised me to get in touch with Mrs. Van Tijn. Eddy would supposedly get a job in a rest home³ and in this way it would be possible to cancel the call-up. Mrs.

¹ Eddy Barendz had Down's syndrome; this outwardly handsome and robust boy was sweet but also quite aggressive.

² The division of the Jewish Council that kept in touch with the *Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung* [Central Agency for Jewish Emigration]

³ Lodging for the aged, primarily for evacuees.

Van Tijn kept saying that everything would work out, but she couldn't give a confirmation.

That Tuesday at six o'clock the parents didn't know yet whether he'd have to go or not. So I bicycled over to the *Expo* in the evening, although there was great unrest in the city. I'll never be able to tell you what all was happening. Everyone was having fits of nerves, the staff and the people who were supposed to leave and who came to ask if there was anything that could be done for them. And Eddy had to go. I almost didn't have the nerve to call his parents, but I had to. At this moment I still don't understand where I got the courage. After about an hour I got a call from Eddy, who was totally confused and was shouting threats over the phone. I heard his parents sobbing, I can't tell you how awful it was. And the worst was that Aunt Suze still hoped that he would be sent back home from Westerbork and hadn't even given him the proper baggage to take along. Moreover, people had to be at the train station at one-thirty in the morning. Just imagine, a boy like Eddy going to the station by himself at night in the dark. And imagine seventeen and eighteen-year-old children, who have to leave their homes in the middle of the night and have to go to the station with a rucksack.

The first transport took place in cattle cars, locked and without toilets. People protested against this, and the next transports took place in passenger cars. Yet people didn't come. They went into hiding or got an exemption through a job with the Jewish Council.

Thank God, there was never a summons for Bobby. The fact is that in the very beginning parents, brothers, and sisters living with a staff member of the Jewish Council were not called up either. Through me, Marc had got a job as an errand boy in our office. That's how he was exempted, and through him Lea too, although both of them had received a call-up. Meanwhile, Aunt Delphine had joined the Jewish school system; I forgot to tell you that in September 1941 Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend public school. One time Uncle Nathan was in the provinces where this regulation naturally created many more

problems, and he asked a Jewish boy who couldn't attend school and for whom no solution had been found yet: "And what do the other boys think of this?" The boy answered: "They'd like to be Jewish boys too." In the provinces there was a poor turnout for call-ups too. This led to the large *razzia* in Amsterdam in August 1942, when hundreds of Jews were dragged out of their houses or were picked up in the streets.

At the time of the first transports, people were "stashed" for two days in the former "Hollandsche Schouwburg" theater building, later called "Joodse Schouwburg." I worked there at the time, helping to organize rucksacks, and doing errands for people by bicycle. There was, for example, the case of a man who had gone to the German authorities to ask if he could leave with a later transport because he and his wife hadn't managed to get ready. The man was immediately held and taken to the Schouwburg so that his wife had no idea where he was. Then I had to go to the wife to tell her that her husband was in the Schouwburg and that she had to pack her luggage and go there too with her two small children, one was ten and the other five. The house on Tugelaweg was an indescribable mess – after all, the husband had gone because they hadn't managed to get ready – several Christian neighbor women were helping and made everything even worse with their crying. The wife herself was completely dazed; she packed a big stack of children's books while she didn't know where to put the most essential baggage – well, it was hopeless. Of course I helped as much as possible, but that's very difficult in a house where everything is lying on the floor and where you have absolutely no idea where anything is.

I returned to the Schouwburg, but later I saw the woman with the two small children get out of the tram: the fact is that people with a call-up were allowed to go on the tram. It was late in the evening; the children and the woman trudged along – it was a scene of utter wretchedness that I can't really describe to you.

During the day of the *razzia* in August, I received a telephone call to tell me to stay home and not go to the office. In the evening I was summoned to work in the

Schouwburg. Petitions had to be written for employees of the Jewish Council who had been picked up, for people who worked for the *Wehrmacht*, for those married to non-Jews, etc. We worked through the night. Early in the evening Aus der Fünten, who was in charge of determining who was Jewish and hence in charge of carrying out the deportations, showed up, and the members of the Jewish Council had to line up. He examined case by case, but indescribably arbitrarily. There was, for example, someone who showed a proof of identity from the Jewish Council. “Wie lange bist du beim Judenrat tätig?” [“How long have you worked for the Jewish Council?”] The man was totally shaken and was unable to answer. “In Ordnung, der Mann kann gehen.” [“It’s in order, the man can go.”] He asked the same of the next person. “Vier Jahre,” the woman answered. “Muss untersucht werden, wird nicht entlassen.” [“Must be investigated, not released”]. Petitions had to be written for those people who were not yet released, and there were hundreds. I felt good when I heard the next day that almost all of the cases that I had typed out had turned out all right.

But everything became worse. In August, Uncle Joe, Jet, and Meta were called up, and in Rotterdam everything happened so fast that it was not possible for me to get them a job. They wrote once from Westerbork; they were very brave. After that we never heard from them again.

We still “celebrated” Father’s birthday – that is to say the Boassons, who always slept in our house but didn’t eat with us, ate with us for the occasion. September 2 was Grandmother’s birthday. We were with the Boassons and with Dina, who was visiting, enjoying ourselves around the table in the front room where we have been living for a year. – We could no longer have Jewish visitors in the evening because Jews had to be indoors after eight o’clock. After I had to work at Nieuwe Keizersgracht for the first call- ups, I received a permit allowing me to be in the street from seven-thirty until midnight. That permit was continually extended. – It was eleven o’clock and we were just having cake. The bell rang, very loud. Bobby opened the door, and we heard: “Police.” I was so scared that I couldn’t

think, couldn't feel, and couldn't move for a moment. There were two policemen with call-ups for Mr. and Mrs. Boasson. They were stiff, but eventually they relaxed a little. The Boassons were allowed to pack their bags, but were allowed only ten minutes. I recovered a little and called the *Expositur* to ask what was going on because the call-ups were never sent out that way – whereby you didn't even get the chance not to show up. On the telephone I was informed that it wasn't a *razzia* or a disciplinary operation, but that many evacuees were being picked up. It was terrible.

We made sandwiches and helped them to pack – winter clothes, etc. Fortunately they had a filled suitcase standing ready.

Of course I passed the case on to the *Expositur*, with the message that Mr. Boasson worked at the Jewish Council, and I thought that the matter would work out all right. But the next morning I heard from Dr. Sluzker that it had been impossible to do anything about it. They were too late. Aus der Fünten had stopped giving exemptions at ten o'clock. We sent luggage and provisions to Westerbork; everything was set in motion to keep the Boassons there. Among other things, they had a declaration that they belonged to a Protestant church in Middelburg; a minister from Middelburg, who was a good friend of theirs, traveled to Westerbork. Even the Secretary-General of the Interior, Mr. K. J. Frederiks, originally from Middelburg too, got involved, but nothing helped. After two days they were sent on. We heard nothing from them, not even from Westerbork.

But this was only the beginning. Every evening about five hundred people were picked up by the “black police.”⁴ On September 14, our doorbell rang at eleven-thirty in the evening. We were already in bed and of course we thought: They've come to get us. I wasn't very afraid for myself, because I have somewhat of a “position” with the Jewish Council. But I was petrified, scared to death for the

others. However, it was Mr. Pinkhof at the door – he was being picked up and asked us to telephone. Almost no one had a telephone anymore, but we still did, also because of my “position.” We called, but these people were sent to Westerbork too. But through Bram Asscher they returned, practically the only family that did return.

The following evening, September 15, the doorbell rang around midnight. This time it really was the police, with a list with our name on it. I opened the door, after telling Bobby that she had to hide, and after smoothing her bed. It was the police with a list. We had to dress and come with them. I asked if Grandmother could stay home. That was allowed. Then I said that Mother should also stay home, otherwise there would be no one to take care of Grandmother. First they didn’t agree, but later they consented, as long as Father and I – for Bobby had been quickly hidden – would be ready in five minutes. There was nothing we’d rather do than go quickly, for the later you arrived at Adama van Scheltemaplein [location of the *Zentralstelle*] – that’s where you were taken – the less chance you had of being released. And I was “overjoyed” that only the two of us had to leave, for the fewer people had to be released, the easier it was. And I would really not have known how to take Mother with us; she was a total nervous wreck.

I had to get dressed in the presence of two policemen. Meanwhile a higher-up had joined them. He searched the whole house and even shone a flashlight on Bobby but didn’t see her. I forgot to tell you that the policemen asked: “How many are in the family.” I said: “Five, grandmother, parents and two daughters. My sister has an evening permit and is at work.” Fortunately for me, I had not concealed Bobby – I had mentioned her because her bed was in our room, and during their search they could see that there were two closets, etc. One of the policemen said: “The young woman speaks the truth. I’ve been here before, and I have seen the entire family.” I hadn’t recognized him, but he was one of the policemen who had taken

⁴ The so-called “Schalkhaarders,” NSB [National Socialist Movement] police in black uniforms, armed with light automatic rifles.

away the Boassons. They were rather decent, but still one of them put a bottle of wine in his pocket, looked in all the cupboards, and asked if we had hoarded. I answered: “We don’t have money for that.” And when he stuck the bottle of wine in his pocket, I said: “It’s for ritual purposes.” And he actually gave it back.

When I knew that only Father and I had to go, I called the *Expositur*, whose line was constantly busy. Then I called my boss and gave him the information. So you see how lucky it was that we still had a telephone, and later it would prove to be even luckier than we knew at the time. The policeman who took us to the “Houtmarkt” – that’s what they’re calling J.D. Meijerplein now – was very friendly, he had completely come around and said: “You’ll surely be released, and then we’ll certainly come by.” He was sorry that I was already going with someone; he had seen my ring. Well, I really made a hit.

When we came to the car – we were transported in a police van – we were handed over. And then the hell started. What was happening in that van cannot be described. People with fits of nerves who lay moaning or screaming; we had to pick up other people and heard how the doors were kicked in. Sick old people in pajamas and a coat were literally dragged out of their houses and thrown into the van like a bunch of rags. For there was a high step, and the old people couldn’t get in without help. They were lifted up by the policemen and literally thrown into the van. And everything in pitch-darkness. The drawbridge of Weesperstraat and J.D. Meijerplein was up, and every time that the car had to get across, it had to be let down. And we drove back and forth repeatedly until the van was finally filled.

By that time it was one-thirty, and I was desperate, for I no longer dared to hope that anything could still be done for us now that we came so late. But once we arrived at Adama van Scheltemaplein, I revived. It appeared that the worst was over. For our case had been passed on, and even though we weren’t there ourselves, it was dealt with and we were released. When I stepped out of the van, I said to Father: “Hold on to me tightly, or else we’ll lose each other.” It was like

a movie or a horrible dream. In the dark you walked through an inner courtyard. Soldiers with guns stood on either side. Right and left, behind the soldiers, stood the transport, ready to leave. When I stepped out of the van, I heard Sluzker say: “Is Mirjam Levie in this group?” Then I knew that everything was all right. We didn’t go to the room where the others were taken, but went immediately to the line of those who had been released. We stood there for half an hour. Of course we were very happy, but when we saw that the others who had been in the car had to stand near the transport, it was awful. Max was there too, and many acquaintances who all came to chat. I can never describe how I felt. After standing for half an hour, we walked in a line to Jan van Eijkstraat, to a school where we were supposed to spend the night because we weren’t allowed to be in the street until after six o’clock in the morning. Mr. Blüth, who lives across the street from that school, came to pick us up. In the kitchen with Blüth we cried a little, and later – it was two-thirty – we sat very comfortably in the room with Mr. and Mrs. Blüth and Sluzker who slept there too. Max had already called Mother, and we called her once again at two-thirty so that she wouldn’t be worried any longer than we. I went to bed at three-thirty. Father stayed up and went home at six o’clock. I slept until ten o’clock, and then went home and later to the office. But that day I felt tired and groggy anyway.

That night at twelve-thirty the doorbell rings again. I go to the street door because I’m always out of bed fastest, Bobby hides again. It’s the same policemen – they came to ask if we had been released. At twelve-thirty at night! How do you like that lack of sensitivity? And these were the decent ones. You should know that the evening before, when we were walking to J.D. Meijerplein, in answer to their announcement that they would come to check, I had said: “Then you’ll get a glass of wine.” And they had come for that, I felt it immediately. And if we hadn’t been released, they would have stolen everything. The evening before, for example, I had a nice hand-cranked flashlight. One of the policemen took it from me and gave me his instead, which was fairly decent of him.

Well, three of them came and flirted with me a bit. They thought, would you believe, that I had a good figure for horseback riding. I was really in the mood for that. I'm embarrassed to have to tell you that I actually gave them a glass of wine to keep them as friends, because they told me that they were always in our district. And then, several days later, the bell rang at ten o'clock. A call-up for Grandmother for the *Arbeitseinsatz*.⁵ However, they said right away that they wouldn't take her. They came for a nice little visit and discussed the British radio. Of course we didn't say much. I haven't told you yet that on September 9, your father's birthday, everyone living in his house was picked up but they were all released. However, they didn't experience a horrible car ride. Your uncle and aunts at Nieuwe Keizersgracht 56 were also picked up one time, together with Aunt Leen. But Hijman and Rika were sent on.

On October 1, they stopped these pick-ups. But that was not the end of the misery. In another letter I'll tell you about the tragedy that then took place. It's already ten-thirty. Fortunately it's quiet this evening. I'm going to sleep early because I can't get out of bed in the morning. Sleep well, my love. Are you snoozing too?

Amsterdam, February 2, 1943

Today we've had to endure another significant blow. Yesterday a German officer was shot dead in Haarlem, and as punishment one hundred hostages have been arrested, among whom four Jews. One of the four was Philip Frank. Today we heard the terrible news that three of the four Jews and seven non-Jews have been executed by a firing squad. The family members of the Jews have been put on a transport to Westerbork. It's awful. When someone is put on a transport to Poland, it's of course terrible, but not irrevocable. But this is irrevocable. For Frank's wife it is truly unbearable. She has gone through so much. First her father and mother, her sister, her brother, Jo Dunner with his family, and now her

⁵ Employment in Germany

husband shot dead and she herself deported. It's unbelievable how someone can bear that much. And the awful thing is that this doesn't seem to be a typically German measure. People say that when an officer is shot dead in Great Britain, hostages are taken too. But the person who is affected is unhappy for the rest of his life.

It is said that Frank was not shot dead but was hanged.

I'll now continue with my story. At the end of September Aunt Griet, Uncle Meijer, and Uncle Moos were taken away and sent on. There was nothing to be done about it.

I should also tell you about our inventory, for that was really a farce. Toward the end of September, Father and I happened to be going down the stairs together to go to the office. The doorbell rang, and three men came upstairs who said that they came from the *Hausraterfassungsstelle*.⁶ They came because the Boassons had been taken away. We went back up with them of course. They sat down at the table in the living room. An older man asked questions, and the others looked around the room in a really "nasty" way. They had faces that should be "run over by a tram," and you could see that they evaluated the stuff for themselves. The man asking the questions was fairly decent. We told him that the Boassons had no furniture and that we had sent them their underwear. The man asked for dates of birth, etc., and we gave those. When he was finished, he said: "And now it's your turn." "Why?" I asked, "we have nothing to do with this, and when we are taken away, then you can come and take an inventory here, but not yet." He said that he had been instructed that if the sublessee had been taken away, to make an inventory at the lessor right away. I answered that I thought that no inventory would be made at homes of members of the Jewish Council, but he said that it used to be that way, but no longer. "But," he said, "you can raise an objection, and then we'll leave." "Then we raise an objection," Father and I said in unison.

⁶ The department for inventories

Well, he noted down that we were with the Jewish Council and that we raised an objection, and with this the three of them left. When they got to the stairs, they still wanted to see the room of the Boassons. The leader looked at the closet and said: “Only some *Steingut*, earthenware. And, by the way, what is linen in German?” With a straight face I said: “*Wäsche*.” And that, would you believe, was the *Hausraterfassung*. When they finally left, the leader said: “Well sir, maybe you’ll see us again, maybe not.” Father said: “If I may be honest, I must tell you that it will not be pleasant to see you again in these circumstances.” He answered: “I understand. We are not here as friends.” The other two smiled. Then I said: “In that case you would be received differently.” Then they really left, and we haven’t seen them back yet. This was a really good story, and I still get a kick out of the way we “raised an objection.”

But there were more terrible things. At Sukkoth⁷ a rumor was going around that some members of the Jewish Council would be exempted, *gesperrd*, and that they would get a stamp in their identity card so that they could not be sent away. On the first day of Sukkoth, I was visiting my boss and heard that he had to go to Asscher and Cohen. That evening I had to work, and when I came to Eitje’s office the next day – they had worked through the night – I received a notice to go to the *Zentralstelle*⁸ to get myself exempted. And Eitje added that my parents and Bobby would also be exempted. Meanwhile Bobby was transferred from a public information office to the office of Mr. E. E. van der Horst, the new secretary of the Jewish Community. I was totally overjoyed. I also got hold of some notices for colleagues, but I bicycled quickly by Father’s office to tell him. At least we’d be safe for the winter months, we thought. We didn’t know yet that this safety didn’t mean a lot.

Eitje was a member of the exemption commission. It is hard to describe what that meant. Every department of the Jewish Council had to hand in a list of its staff,

⁷ Feast of Tabernacles

⁸ *Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung* – Central Agency for Jewish Emigration

divided into three groups: 50% A, 25% B, and 25% C. A would certainly be exempted, B perhaps, and C probably not. It was a miserable job for the bosses to condemn a part of their staff to death. In addition, thousands of others came to ask for an exemption, a *Sperre*, on the basis of previous services, etc. Everyone fought for his life.

But things would get even worse. On October 2, the evening before the last days of Sukkoth, it was a Friday, the professor announced that there would be a large operation that evening. There was a rumor that the rest of the month of October would be quiet. That Friday evening all the work-camps were emptied, and the families living in Amsterdam or outside it were also put on transport. Thousands were taken to Westerbork, among them the Kibbutz at Elden.⁹ But that day we didn't know yet what exactly would happen. Therefore it was decided to send out all notices that very day for the A-people, who would certainly be exempted, so that these people would at least have a piece of paper in their hands. Thousands of notices were sent out, and very many injustices were of course committed in the excitement. The notices until October 22 were sent out that day. I won't easily forget that day. We were besieged. I had experienced November 1938 – Kristallnacht,¹⁰ the siege of the Committee for Jewish Refugees – but this was an awful lot worse. I totally lost my voice. I came home at seven-thirty in the evening and tumbled straight into bed.

But there was a telephone call at eleven-thirty. I had to come and help. Rosien Leuvenberg had called me, and she came to pick me up. I was terribly groggy when I got on my bicycle in the pitch-darkness, but that improved. Still, I was glad when it was six o'clock in the morning and we went home. In the afternoon I had to be back in the office. It was dreadful. Everyone was begging for an

⁹ A center for pioneers for Palestine who were trained by local farmers in agriculture and animal husbandry.

¹⁰ Night of 8-9 November 1938: Pogrom in Germany and Austria, as the result of the murder of a German diplomat in Paris; many synagogues were burned and windows of Jewish stores were smashed. Hence the name Kristallnacht.

exemption, a *Sperre*, it was to drive you to distraction. This drama lasted for weeks. I could write books about it, but it's actually indescribable. I hope, my dearest, that I'll be able to tell you about it soon.

This *Sperre*-affair is a very black chapter. The Germans threw us a bone and watched with great pleasure how the Jews fought over it among one another. I still believe that Max was sent away because he was reported by someone whose request for an exemption he had refused.

It was mid-October. That afternoon Max and I happened to work together, for at the time we worked night and day. He left, and an hour later we heard that Eva and the children had been arrested and had been taken to the Schouwburg and that Max was on his way to the Schouwburg with Sluzker. And a little later we heard that Max had been arrested too. General dismay, of course. It was a few days before we were certain that there was nothing to do about it.

A few days later, Chief Rabbi Sarlouis and his family were arrested, as well as the father-in-law and sister-in-law of his son, the Huysman family. Of course everyone was terribly shaken. Freddy had conferences right and left, but we all knew that everything would be useless. And that was the case. The reason why Max and the Rabbi were deported was not known. I think that the professor really didn't know it at the time, but later he did and never told us.

The gifts that poured in for Max and Eva were overwhelming. Freddy, Juul, and I packed his luggage. We were not allowed to say good-bye to them. Your father said goodbye to them on the back balcony of your Uncle Mendels, in Middenlaan; of course it was terrible. We received a beautiful letter from Max and Eva from Westerbork. They were extremely brave. But now, when I think of the children, I just don't know which way to turn. For your father this blow was almost unbearable. Max was his pride, and this fall was very sudden and very precipitous. Of course we are doing everything to help him to get over it, but you can't find words of consolation for something so terrible. A few weeks after their

deportation, we received a letter from Max, sent surreptitiously, which was somewhat hopeful but in which he wrote that his blankets had been taken away. And when you hear that the temperature in those areas is 25 degrees below zero at the moment, then you know what that means. Until now we haven't heard any more from them. Max wrote, but we knew that already, that he had been separated from Eva and the children.

When the exemption distribution was completed, 17,000 people had been exempted by the Jewish Council.

The month of October had been calm, but early in November the dreadful business started up again. During the first few evenings, even those with exemptions were taken away, but after a few evenings this was reconsidered. But those who were the victims still remained victims.

At the end of November our doorbell rang again, at twelve-thirty at night. And sure enough, it was the police again, this time with call-ups for Father and Mother. Thanks to the fact that they had exemptions, they could stay home, although these fellows kept us in suspense until the last moment about whether they would take them along or not.

In November, a large daytime operation took place against Jews who worked at the *Wehrmacht*. Many of them were taken from their workshops, and their families were taken from their homes, and all these people were sent away. Your Uncle Isidor had a narrow escape. All of us had thought that people who worked for the *Wehrmacht* had the greatest security. Mid-December we had a break again because of the Christmas vacation. But at the beginning of December, during an evening that was supposed to be quiet, someone rang our doorbell at twelve-thirty. I thought that I had dreamed, but I still got up and went downstairs. I asked the night nurse who was there for Grandmother: "Did someone ring the bell?" She was just about to call us. I quickly threw some apple peels into the fire – Jews were not allowed to have fruit – and went downstairs to open the door. It

made no sense not to open it, for otherwise it was kicked in. As I walked downstairs, I heard German voices. I thought: We're lost, an arrest. For I knew that there would not be any picking up, and moreover it was always the Dutch "black police" who did the picking up. But when I opened the door, I saw the shapes of three people, and one of them asked: "Sind Sie Jüdin?" I knew immediately that it wasn't an arrest, for in that case they would have called out my name. I answered: "Jawohl." ["Yes"] "Personsbeweis." [I.D. card]

I raced upstairs to the bedroom, where my purse was, and was back at the level of the living room when one of the guys arrived there. I steered him into the living room because I didn't want him to go to the bedrooms and see the others. The fewer people those scoundrels see, the better. When he saw my identity card, the guy asked what I did. I told him. He asked if there were more people in the house. I answered the truth for that seemed most sensible. The nurse was in the back room because the last time the police had cursed her out and had called her Jewish slave. He looked at Grandmother and actually went away. When he walked down the stairs he said: "Sie haben sich tapfer bekommen. Schlafen Sie nun schön weiter." ["You have conducted yourself bravely. Now go to sleep."] I had difficulty not breaking down. When those fellows feel sorry for us, we must be in a very sorry state. And you can't bear pity at a moment like that. It makes you weak.

Bergen-Belsen

[p. 246-255]

June 29

Coming out of the wash barracks at a quarter past five, I see Lübke (a *Grüne*¹¹) standing in front of barracks 15 and people dancing. I understood: leaving. Didn't think, acted. Ran off with the towel under my arm, said goodbye to friends, for I understood that would not be possible later. Grounds fenced off. Four *Grüne* searched our luggage piece by piece from six-thirty in the morning till seven-thirty in the evening. We (the women) had to leave the barracks at one-thirty. Crossed the main road, *Leibesvisitation*¹² in the garage. Didn't amount to anything. Had to leave our luggage in the barracks. The men's turn at seven-thirty. Saw the luggage riding away on carts. At three in the morning we marched away, the sick and the old in cars. I'll never forget the opening of the gate. It was still night (three o'clock), and I had a good quick cry in the dark (I think I wasn't the only one). At five o'clock, after a very tiring walk, arrived at Bergen station. Luggage a mess. Still managed to fish something out of it. The train leaves at seven o'clock sharp. Old second-class cars, seven in a compartment, cars with aisles, toilets, in short, everything that we hadn't had for years. Seats with backs! Velvet seats! Actually not that special (there was for example no water, no sleeping accommodations – we slept like sardines, with seven people) but our standards had changed. Seeing stores, view of countryside without barbed wire.

Our journey – magnificent doesn't do it justice. Through the Thuringian Forest, Hildesheim, Nordheim, Gottingen. Mountains covered with woods and in their midst a wide, sloping valley. Sometimes with villages, sometimes with single houses. All shades and shapes of green, bright yellow corn, red poppies, and pink

¹¹ Describes the green uniform of the German *Ordnungspolizei*

¹² Strip search

clover in orchards. And now the Main river with a broad valley and then the mountains that curve around the valleys like a protective arm. And the train winds through this, and you have constant vistas, so wide and so peaceful and lovely that I keep looking out even though I should really write. Until now there has been little to remind us of the war – except no men, and those you see are in uniform (mostly SS), female workers in the stations and almost no people or cattle on the land anyway. In the stations, notices that read: DIE RÄDER ROLLEN UNS ZUM SIEG, UNNÖTIG REISEN VERLÄNGERT DEN KRIEG [The wheels roll us to victory, unnecessary travel lengthens the war]. In the train: VORSICHT BEI GESPRÄCHEN, FEIND HÖRT MIT [Careful when you speak, the enemy listens in]. That's all.

Würzburg. Evidently the people know that there is something special about us. At every station, people hang out of their windows to see the *Sonderzug*.¹³ We get water and sometimes warm milk and warm water for the Hartog babies. The escort for our transport is fairly decent: one in plain clothes (wears gloves out of fear of contagion), two in uniform. But I still don't understand it, I'm not there yet. It all went too fast. Nuremberg. Not bombed a lot, but looks pretty battered. Dead quiet in the streets, six people in a giant station. In addition to the one man in plain clothes, we are guarded by two *Grüne* who after each station walk through the train (I almost wrote barracks) to count. As if we'd run away. We're valuable objects, really.

July 2

What we're experiencing is truly worth describing in a diary. And it's only now, now that we're returning to a somewhat normal society and gradually dare to surrender to the feeling that we've been saved, that we see how deep we had sunk. Slowly, for we're so afraid of disappointments that we don't dare to let go.

¹³ Special train

I'll continue my report to you. The camp had provided us with one *Kuch*,¹⁴ half a pound of margarine per person, and one can of delicious, rich liver paté. And my stomach was so unaccustomed to food that yesterday, when we had to get out of the train, I was terribly nauseated. We arrived in Vienna (I think at seven-thirty) and five or so *Grüne* were waiting for us. We got out, put our luggage on the platform, and waited. But because I wasn't well, I remained lying on the bench in the train. "Sie fahren das allerletzte" ["You'll be the last one to travel"], the *Grüne* said good-naturedly, "und bleiben Sie nicht in der Sonne liegen" [and don't continue to lie in the sun]. "Sorgen Sie dafür dass das Fräulein im Auto sitzen kann" ["See to it that this young woman can sit in the car"], he said to the leader. Treated like a human being! We don't know that feeling anymore at all. Really. In a police van to the *Obdachlosenheim*.¹⁵ A giant building, stone staircases, and large, bright dormitories. Beds, not on top and above each other, but separate, and white, clean sheets. And this is help for the homeless. In normal times we'd say: it looks nice, but of course minimal. For us it was a palace. My hands hadn't been really clean in months. Washed when we arrived. And ate. Curried rice and a mug of soup. All the plates, spoons, etc. belonged to the shelter. Everyone got mealtime tickets that had to be punched. Also received a ration of bread. And the people, the staff – extraordinarily kind. Yesterday evening Taubes gave a speech saying that the conversations about "thick or thin" soup¹⁶ are now finally behind us. And that's true. We're starting to learn to laugh again, are kinder to one another; in short, we're becoming human again!

Today we continue our journey; at the request of the Turkish government we're going to be vaccinated. Last night the transport from Vittel, which is going to be exchanged with us, arrived. They had it great, their own rooms, a park, ideal. Last

¹⁴ Dense, dark German rye bread

¹⁵ Homeless shelter

¹⁶ In most camps, soup was served from large tubs, and unless the contents were stirred very carefully, those who were served last received the thickest soup.

night, as a sharp contrast, a transport of Hungarians arrived that is just now leaving for Poland.

I stop. I'll continue in the train, I think. We are accompanied by a commission, one man from the *Auswärtige Amt*,¹⁷ one man from the *Polizeipräsidium*,¹⁸ one man from the Swiss Consulate. Thursday in Constantinople!!!

July 2

Now in Hungary, a Mitropa train, 2nd class. Just ate in a dining car!!! Stars off. Have a hard time writing. Am just taking notes. Forgot that in Nuremberg we saw the *Halle* where Hitler always speaks. Would not have been able to imagine that formerly.

July 3

In Vienna – soldiers. In Hungary – grasslands. Too bad to be riding through all the cities without seeing them. Budapest – suburbs destroyed. Three enormous fires. We're in Ujvidek [Novi Sad] (border of Romania and Hungary). Were originally to go via Belgrade, but too dangerous.

Yugoslavia anyway. Indescribable. Travel hundreds of meters above the Danube. Trees in the water up to their tops. Meadows in the middle of the river. On the other side, villages and small cities built against rocks. Poor, poor, poor. Sheep with shepherds and dog. Small horses. Women with a yoke with two round baskets. Everyone barefoot. Men stripped to the waist. We're standing still for a tunnel, are just starting up again, I think.

¹⁷ Foreign Affairs

¹⁸ Police headquarters

11:15

The train is standing still. Bombing. Columns of smoke waft toward us. Has the railroad been hit? One-thirty; we're still not moving, and taking advantage of the opportunity, I continue to write. Until Vienna we were treated well, i.e. comfortable seats and sufficient supplies. Even though there was no water, the journey was generally very pleasant. From Vienna on it's a show, for in this train we enter Turkey. Therefore ... a Mitropa train, 1st, 2nd and 3rd class (with excuses for the 3rd class) – the train is starting to move slowly – two dining cars, one sleeping car – the train has stopped again – but no luggage car, so the luggage had to go into the third class compartments, no water, two cars too few, so that we sit with way too much stuff in one compartment. One sleeping car, only for the Germans. The food is good (we like everything) and nice, but by no means sufficient. The German Red Cross nurses do nothing, for we have our own nurses. Everything is show. And they thoroughly detest the fact that they have to offer us this good life.

Belgrade. Magnificent city. Bombed horribly. Airport smashed to pieces in front of our eyes today. All station clocks in Yugoslavia have stopped. Many people are barefoot. Shepherds and shepherdesses. German soldiers flirt with us: "Es sind Juden, ihr bekommt Unannehmlichkeiten."¹⁹

July 4

Bulgaria. Rocks, caves. Ride with armored cars in front of and behind the train; fear of partisans. Small houses of dung and straw. Population anti-German, shabby, poor, sometimes wearing bearskin caps (in July). The craziest things happen here, things that are too coarse and too improbable. This morning at some station or other – poverty-stricken, chaotic, and picturesque – a small orchestra got in, as if straight out of a show, enormous moustaches, one man in a German uniform (probably stolen) and barefoot, and the others in the most far-fetched

¹⁹ They are Jews, you may expect trouble.

outfits, so that we now travel with music! They don't send us to Poland with music. The contrast is heart-rending.

July 4

Every time we ride a short distance and then the track is checked for bombs. Between the cars we see flames on the section of track. Sofia bombed terribly. Eight-thirty and it's pitch-black. Sheep and shepherds. The Germans have already taken off their uniforms. Unrecognizable in civilian clothes.

July 5

We are stopped at the Turkish border. Last night we rode through a neutral zone.

I had never heard of it; but our commission had already changed into plain clothes, and in the villages through which we rode the lights were on everywhere, we hadn't felt so festive and safe in a long time. Father (all the men, of course) had to sign a declaration that he would not bear arms against "Deutschland und seine Verbundeten" [Germany and its allies] during the war. We probably won't leave here until two o'clock and will get off the train in Constantinople very early tomorrow morning. The funny thing is that a few days ago, when I lay in bed and imagined that I would be in Constantinople, and therefore in safety, I started to cry. And now that it is that far (for we're near the border, in a neutral zone), it doesn't really register what all this means. Except that I do know that the journey itself was a real experience that I will never be able to convey. And just think that last night, when we rode through the area of the guerillas, the commission was deathly afraid.

Security everywhere in the train, and armored cars ahead and behind us, with large searchlights. If you read it in a book, it would give you the creeps. We rode through a region with bare rocks and caves, and the train could be shelled from anywhere. Yet we are absolutely not afraid. It seems that we've experienced too much. It wasn't that I enjoyed it, for I did feel a pinch of fear, but not as much as

you'd think. And the journey was incredibly beautiful. Large flocks of sheep with shepherds, simply biblical. We saw a country road along the mountains, and a man with a black cape and a tall hat on a mule holding a stick crosswise in front was riding down it. A picture!

Meanwhile people are again making a fuss about food. For in the dining car we get ridiculously little. Just enough for a bird. But we're unconcerned, since we know that we'll soon be fed properly once again. On the other hand this transition is very good for us. This morning a Turkish *Speisewagen* [dining car], where you can get a fantastic breakfast, has joined our train. Now everyone is struggling to be able to eat there. As if you can't wait a little longer. Yet my turn did come, and I've just eaten at the Turks. Fried egg!! I needn't say more! We celebrated freedom in an unbelievable way. In the Turkish dining car, at an incredibly nice dinner with lots of amusing people. Friendly waiters. With the compliments of the Turkish government! Unforgettable.

Just rode across a yellow river. The Maritza river. Buffaloes, mosques, storks, mud huts. Last week at this time we knew nothing yet.

July 6

We're living a fairy tale. At the moment we are on a boat and are sailing on the Bosphorus. Houses so beautiful that I can't even begin to tell you, and the water is a blue like I never thought I'd see. And everything is an experience. A newspaper, Parcels with: Chocolate! Hazelnut! Egg! Fruit! Cigarettes! But there are also drawbacks. We are *schnorrers*, beggars, are put isolated on a boat and have to live off begging. And we've also got the mentality of *schnorrers*, i.e. we have learned to ask and to get everything without paying. Maybe we'll break this habit very soon. But when I think that we used to be those people who gave and not those who received. But it's still a fairy tale.

July 7

The Golden Horn. Mosques, the palace of the sultan, donkeys loaded with baskets, beautiful round-bodied pitchers with narrow necks. Wonderful boats and sailboats, but the most beautiful thing is the blue, blue water. Tonight we continue our travel. And we are coming ever closer to you. We now have a fantastic train, so stylish and beautiful. Father and Mother have a sleeping compartment, really extraordinary. And last night we dined with the lights on! Mountains with thousands of lit windows, full moon. Everything equally beautiful and glorious. Veiled women. Graveyards with rough stones. Rocks, wadis. Everything we see here is biblical. Ride along the edge of the desert. Primitive villages, camels.

July 8

Now in Adena. At the station a plaque of Churchill and Roosevelt who met here. Riding through boiling hot tunnels.

July 9

Aleppo. Breakfast, washing and showers in a tent camp, set up by the British soldiers who accompanied us from Turkey. People sleep on the roofs.

July 10

Hama, Homs, Tripoli. Desert wind, tent villages, humid heat, snow-capped mountains.

Beirut, Mediterranean. Ras el Nakura (Rosh Hanikra)

PALESTINE!!!