

Appendix iii



Translated from Yiddish

To Issy Gevisser
Warsaw, 3 May 1965

My dear friend Israel,

You cannot imagine how pleased I was to receive your letter. Finally I have found you, and you got in touch with me immediately.

May god bless the lady, Helen, and the circumstances which brought us together. Unfortunately she did not know how to explain to you who I am. To tell you the whole story in one letter is impossible – it is a long and tragic story.

However, a few years ago, a friend in Israel asked me to write about your sister “PESIAH’s” family. I did write but unfortunately I did not have your address and I don’t know if you received my letter. Now I will tell you the whole story in a series of letters, as I understand that this is very dear to you and you should know everything that happened.

I did not know your brother Morris, nor did I know your elder brother Bereleib before he left for Africa. I came into your family after your visit to your sister Pesiah. They always spoke about you.

Now I can tell you who I am. Your sister was my mother-in-law. In 1935 I married her eldest daughter DVORAH and we lived together with the whole family. My wife was very dear to me and to this day (I am a writer) I use the pen-name “D. GINSBERG”.

In 1936 my wife gave birth to a daughter and we called her “Bebele”. We were very happy in those days.

Your sister had five children – my wife DVORAH, two other daughters, LUBA and ETELE, and two sons, Yosel & Motele. Yosel had a weak heart and when about 16 or 17 died suddenly in his sleep. This was before the war.

You supported your sister and her family from Africa, and this is how we lived before the war. When war broke out in 1939, and Vilna was united with Lithuania, you managed to help us through a Kovno merchant, but in 1940 all the borders were closed and I took it upon myself to support the whole family. I was making a good living and we weren't too badly off.

Then the real war started – Germany against Russia and from that time onwards, and relating this story comes with blood and tears. And for me, this is more so, as the war separated me from my loved ones. I was called to the army and served till the end. I was twice wounded, on one occasion very seriously. When I came back to Vilna whilst still in the army in 1944, I found no one alive – not my mother, not my two brothers and four sisters and their families and no one from your sister's family and their children.

It is difficult to realize from so far away what it means to a man to come home and found he has lost his whole family to a soul. It is a miracle that I didn't go out of my mind. Even today I cannot understand how I overcame my grief. Their faces were always in front of me, and especially at night I could not fall asleep.

And then I developed an obsession to find out what happened to every single one of them up to their last day and how each one of them died. I made extensive inquiries from survivors and gathered details from each member of the family and how they met their end. Each detail hurt, but I undertook this task as a labour of love.

Should I tell you here everything I learnt? Are you prepared to hear it all? You were so far away from the war – would you understand?

In the meantime, read my letter and I shall await your reply. Unfortunately, I don't know English, but if your wife writes English, I am sure I will be able to find someone to translate for me. Also please let me know if you can read my handwriting.

I await impatiently for your reply.

With best regards,

Your friend and relation.

SHLOMO

Jennie Gevisser did not reply until 30 November 1965 – basically – amongst many comments – to ask Shlomo “not to tell us any more and not to open the wounds of the past”.

No reply was received. His address was as follows.
MR L BELLIS-LEGIS, R.ed. FOLKSSZTYME, ul. NOWOGRODSKA
5, WARSAW, POLAND.