CHOMSKY

1. LETTER AARON (RONNY) EDELSON (AUSTRALIA) 6-10-92
   TO LARRY AND DOROTHY
   A. ORIGINAL LETTER
   B. TYPEO VERSION

2. [Space] [Space] [Space] [Space] [Space] [Space]
   Picture cemetery date
Post 17.5.92

Greetings to you, Mrs. Bitzel,

The wife of this lines is Shlomo Weintraub from Bereza. My mother came from Bereza and Mordchal, Semionovski's daughter (The relatives of Mordchal), visited us and have also been in Chomsk and in the whole area.

Now your son, Aaron is a visitor in my house. Together we went to visit the graves in Chomsk and in Borka Gurah that is near Bereza. There lie the bodies of 50-thousand Jews. Because I am not very fluent in Hebrew, he asked me to write to you the facts in Yiddish. So I am writing this letter because he asked me to tell you what happened.

In the forest government archives are documents of the local Commission whose duty it was to investigate and expose the horrible massacres perpetrated by the German fascists on the civilian population during the occupation.

The Commission started their work immediately after the liberation of
Postcard 17.5.92

Greetings to you, Mr. Bubel.

The note of this news is written from Bereza, a village near White Haven. My mother came from Bereza to the village of Hamburg, the relatives of my darker Heineken. They visited us and have also been in Chernik and in the whole area.

Now your son, Aaron is 13, a visitor in my house. Together we went to visit the graves in Chernik and in Bereza. There are the bodies of 50 thousand Jews. Because I am not very fluent in Hebrew, he asked me to write to you the facts in English. So I am writing this letter because he asked me to tell you what happened.

In the present government archives are documents of the Local Commission whose duty it was to investigate and record the horrible massacres perpetrated by the German fascists on the civilian population during the occupation.

The Commission started their work immediately after the liberation of
Brest, the 28th of July 1944.

This is what I, Shalom, Miriam, and Shulamit, Racially mixed, fear-miraculously left among the living.

As soon as the Germans entered 'Brest', the 22nd of June 1941, they immediately started making big and small roundups and persecutions of Jews. By the end of November 1941, they created a Ghetto for the Brest Jews. They fenced up a certain area about a square kilometer with barbed wire and then they headed in all the Jews of the city.

The overall extermination of the Brest Ghetto started the 15th of October 1942.

The 14th October 42, the people in the Ghetto became very restless and frightened after noticing that around the barbed wire collected a lot of Police and SS-men. People didn't understand what does it mean, while a few days before they had to collect money for contribution. In the evening the police dispersed and the people thought there is no more danger.

But tomorrow at 4 in the morning a neighbour woke us up and said: 'The Ghetto is again surrounded. They started in the Ghetto scenes which it is impossible to describe.'
A few hide themselves in places which they prepared before hand. But most of the people had nowhere to hide and they were running like crazy over the streets of the ghetto.

Then came the order that everyone should stand in lines. They were herded like cattle into the direction of the fortress. In one place called "Spoleto" they were all loaded into goods wagons and the entire train went to Bronza Bura near Bereza.

A second witness by the name of Roman Stanislavovicz Nowir, a resident of the village Bronza-Bura, told the Commission:

A goods train of 16 wagons packed exclusively with Jews arrived from Brest-Litovsk. All wagons were overfilled with people. The train was put on a side line about 250-300 metres of the central line. There were already prepared 6 enormous rows from 25 to 30 metres long and 4 metres deep. Near the rows they put down the wagons. They ordered the people to get themselves naked and after inspecting everybody's fingers to see if he made marks, they left on anything's finger which they
took away if they found one, they told them to jump into the pit and lie down in the face facing the dirt one next to the other. Then everyone in the pit was shot down with automatic machine guns. Immediately after their execution they ordered another batch of people to lie down on the first dead bodies a second, and a third row and so on until the whole pit was filled up. This all I've been personally with my own eyes and I heard their prayers and cries and screams of the children. This is the way I had the opportunity to see because I have been less than 250 meters from the place of the execution. I was in the shed of the Strelke. (That means that he was opening and closing the barrier of the train and was in the shed of the controller).

This is the way 50 thousand people perished their life in Barama Gora. On this "Brother" grave there is no monument till today.

I am sending you my address in any case:

Am. Case: UND/Beutement
224023 Breoch - 23
Mockolokla, 33616 kl. 20
Tel. 4771 - 67. Shalom Shalom.
Dear friends Dorothy and Larry,

Sorry I didn't write for some time, hope you and the whole family are well. The reason I didn't write is that I have been very nervous and upset about Ronnie. Though God he is home now and doing well, but as you know, there is always something happening in my life. This time it was that ever since Reimund Meyer’s brother returned from this God forsaken place, where I had the lead back to the camp Chomut — Ron was obsessed by the idea of visiting the murderous place. When he told me about it, I wrote to him several letters begging him not to go there — the murderers that helped the Germans to kill the Jews are still alive and living there. One of my two cousins survived the war years in Russia and went to visit there after the war that was the last time anybody heard anything from him. That happened in 1946 — a year after the war ended. In New York there lives a Rabbi by the name of Felson, he was in a Yeshiva when the war started, the whole Yeshiva was evacuated to Japan and survived. After the war he lived in Przek. He went to visit Chomut and the Cronin, neighbors of
my father used to live as a boy, come to the night to kill him but he somehow talked them out of it. I was there when travelling from Russia to Poland in 1916. Then I stayed through the night in the house of friends of my father, but nobody touched me.

Then Roman was planning to travel in Europe. Stefan asked him to visit his daughter in Poland. Then we had a telephone call from him saying he was there and needed to return, but said he will be able in a week or so. I straight away understood that he went to transmit to get a visa to go - you know there.

A whole week I thought I'll go crazy, imagine all kinds of things and if you'd say that I am crazy. So much so that I lost these. Even the name of the place shone through my body. Hell, rather about a week that is a phone call from Stefan's daughter and met? Ronnie on the phone. Thank you, God Almighty.

After a week he showed up home as bright and cheerful as ever, and started telling stories that send me sick to bed for 3 days with pains in my arms and legs. Thank God for Dr. Stefan that keeps massaging it so that today I feel a bit better.

He also brought a letter from a friend from Brest which was the main city
in that corner of the world. Theresa looks
forever after all. Things terrible (whatever
is left of it which is very little) in Brest.
And she went with Romeo to Ch starts for
which I am very grateful to him and
wrote him a letter to that effect. The
letter he wrote to me is a historica
document, I thought it will finish
me off to translate it but I made
myself sit down and translated it
I did, although it took some real pow-
not to throw myself on the floor and
living on it with my fists. But...
What good will it do that you don't care
about yourself, there are other people
around to care about. So, somehow,
a person has got to go on living in
this world.

Anyway, I am sending you a copy
of the original in Yiddish and a copy
of the English translation. Please, if
the "Forverts" is still coming out maybe you
can send it to them a copy with a few
words of explanation. Also to the
Jerusalem holocaust centres there must
be one in N.Y. - don't know about
Chicago - there must be one in L.A. with
so many Jews there.

There is no monument to the memory of
of 50,000 Jews of Brest. Perhaps the Brest
Jews of America could organize something?
And the anti-semites say that it never happened.

Love and kisses to you and to all your family.
Hello Larry and Dorothy,

I arrived back home in Melbourne last week after having travelled for over a month nonstop since leaving Israel in early May. It was a trip of a completely different nature than any other that I had made till now. I left by boat from Haifa to Cyprus, then Rhodes to Athens. From Athens I took the Hellenic Express train through Greece and Yugoslavia to Belgrade. Never mind the war, and from Belgrade continued on to Warsaw. I spent about a week travelling to areas around and in Warsaw itself visiting places of mainly Jewish historical importance as well as investing considerable effort in securing a visa to Byelorussia of the former Soviet Union.

By making friends with a nice guy called Marek who works at the Bureau Touristika I got the name of a travel agency in Warsaw that specialises in visa applications. What you simply do is purchase bogus vouchers that cover the number of days you intend to spend in Russia and that satisfies that technical requirement of the Embassy that you travel with an organised tour arranged by a travel company. Of course the travel Co. owed me nothing, but eventually I paid the Embassy 20 bucks and I renewed the visa.

Visiting the various sites connected with the Jewish Uprising was an incredible experience for me. Being a former Youth Movement member I had learned to idolise the heroes of the ghettos and here I was at Mila 18 where Mordechai Anielewicz and the other leaders of the uprising were eventually cordoned off and killed.

I also made it to the Jewish Museum and Historical Institute. There I visited the archives room where a young lady produced a record of survivors who returned to Warsaw following the war and registered. Sure enough there was our father’s name in its correct alphabetical place and his address in Warsaw at that time which turned out to be in Praga the own Jewish suburb.

After visiting Stefan’s family in the north of Poland I decided that it was time to take the train to Brest in Byelorussia and from there to go to Chomsk where I was born.

I took the night train to Brest and crossed the border at about 5 o’clock in the morning on the 20th of May. From the train station I negotiated with a taxi driver to take me to Chomsk for about $20 and wait with me there and to bring me back. The drive to Chomsk took about an hour and then low and behold right there in front of me appeared the sign Chomsk. Well to tell the truth I was absolutely exhilarated to have finally reached this place that I had speculated about for so long.
From the drawing of Chomsk which I had seen in Israel, I understood more or less the layout of the village and the approximate position of the synagogue and Italian street where the Strawitz house stood. But I still wasn't prepared for the fiddler on the roof. It was really something out of a dream. Can you imagine horse-drawn carts and cows being herded down the main street, wooden log houses and hens and geese running everywhere.

Today the council building stands where the Synagogue was and the old Jewish cemetery has disappeared and in its place stands the local school. More around and away from us.

Not far from there, only a few meters from the last row of houses, stands a Soviet stone monument to the Soviet citizens who were murdered by the Germans. This monument marks just one of two mass graves where the one thousand and three hundred Jews of Chomsk were murdered on the 4th of August 1941.

An eye witness and survivor of the massacre who later reached Israel and put his story in writing, told me of how the Germans first murdered the men and boys and later women and babies in a separate grave called the Jews were killed by nineteen fire in two groups, a piece of land arranged in a Jew by the name of Michel Man.

The second grave is just a short distance from the first, less than a hundred meters away and appears as a small rectangular hill and has no monument, nothing at all to distinguish it from the surrounding land except for its peculiar shape.

I said Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead at both the graves, at the same time realizing that this was the first time ever that any member of our family had said Kaddish at the site of the grave.

Whilst in Chomsk, I attracted a good deal of attention from the locals particularly due to the fact that I was taking photographs of everything and anything, I actually spoke to old timers who remembered the Jewish community and even expressed regret over what had happened. One woman who was only 14 at the time of the massacre actually agreed that I tape her recollections of the events which took place.

She told of how the Germans and local police marched the Jews down the road and her testimony was remarkably vivid.

I intend to make copies of the tape and present it to the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. I have already opened a file on Chomsk with the Institute and given them all the information and evidence that I had to date collected.

Furthermore, I spoke with the Mayor of Chomsk, Piotr Vasilievitch who acknowledged the tragedy that till today no monument had been placed on the second grave.
Before leaving Byelorussia I went back to Chomsk a second time just to make sure that it wasn't all just a dream. I also contacted a local Jewish community leader Shlomo Weizman from Briest and he took me to a place in the mountains called Broniagarda where 50,000 Jews were murdered and buried in mass graves. To tell the truth I was glad to get back to Poland and be on the train to Warsaw. It took me ages to get out of the country, Poland that is, because the situation at the station in Briest was like something out of Doctor Zhivago. No English spoken, hundreds if not thousands of people trying to get out.

Fortunately I met this absolutely beautiful girl on the station from Uzbekistan who was trying to bring turtles into the country to sell them on the black market. Unfortunately turtles going into Poland are considered contraband and they wouldn't let her through. I was heartbroken for the next few minutes but resigned myself to the fate of east-west relations. Well I could write forever about this trip because it was so uncanny the that I simply discovered things as if everything had already been prepared for me and I discovered so much about myself.

Now that I'm back at home with Gittel and the rest of Australia, I'm totally committed to accomplishing several goals that I set for myself when I was still in Israel and planning to conquer the world. I was planning on visiting you this year in the States however the council of legal education here in Victoria has determined that I have to work for 6 months as a law clerk in order to be admitted as a Barrister-and-Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria. So now I'm actually trying to land a job as a law clerk here in Melbourne. It's quite an experience having to go back to almost square one after being on the top of the heap in Jerusalem but such is the way of the world. Anyway, I'm supposed to be a paid position and money is money no matter how you look at it. Apart from that I'm also looking forward to resuming my tap dancing and trumpet playing and maybe even a little skydiving if I can remember how to do it.

Everyone in the family seems great. Eve looks beautiful. She's much taller than me, and she talks and does everything...

Well now I have an opportunity to try and be a good uncle but let me ask the question... What is the job of the uncle vis-a-vis the niece? I'm learning slowly and wish me luck.

I have promised mother that I will marry by the time I'm 40 so now I don't know what I'm going to do, either get married or pack a bag and disappear. What do you suggest?

You are so lucky to have normal children. We are all meshige. Well friends, I hope you'll forgive me for not being able to visit this year and I sincerely miss you both very much.
Meanwhile I have my work cut out for me here, and as soon as I finish this letter I'm going to start writing articles about my experiences over the last month. Please give my regards to the family and I'll write soon.

    bye for now

    I love you both,

Ronny xxxxxxxxxxx
10.6.92

sender:

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41 Ormond Rd. Elwood. Melb. Vic

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3184
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Mrs. Virginia Segal
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F Play basin
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Bernie Tarshis
674-9119

LAKE & HUNTER

2149 Noquis Wilmette

SEE SHIRVINTERS' E

Dorothy - Charlotte Tarshis 3 674-9119
Bernie Tarshis

DORITHEA
within walking distance of Chomsker.

Julia Hoffman
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