

HAARETZ

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Farewell letters, written as the Holocaust closed in, still await delivery in Tel Aviv

Just before hell engulfed Poland, a Tel Aviv family returning from a family trip brought back to a box of correspondence to deliver. More than 70 years later, some of the letters are still unopened.

By [Ofar Aderet](#) | Aug. 25, 2013 | 3:46 AM



A family trip from Tel Aviv to Poland in the summer of 1939 turned, for Hannah Tikotzky and her daughters, into a nightmarish escape from the Nazis. They brought back to Israel letters, including last farewells from Jews to their relatives in Palestine. More than 70 years later, some of these letters are still waiting to be delivered.

On October 31, 1940, a headline in the newspaper Hatzofeh read: "Regards from the Russian occupation." The story, which appeared about a year after World War II broke out, said "Hannah Tikotzky ... who returned from the Russian occupied territory, brought regards for people from Grajewa and Bialystok."

The story listed numerous names of people from Tel Aviv, Ein Hashofet, Jerusalem, Kfar Sava, Petah Tikva, Herzliya, Ramat Gan, Kfar Ganim, Nahalal and Hadera. They were invited to Tikotzky's home on Yitzhak Elhanan Street in Tel Aviv "between 2-4 P.M." to receive letters from their relatives in Poland.

[Gidi Poraz](#), a kind of history detective specializing in tracing lost family members, recently found the story on the website Historic Jewish Press, which carries about 1 million pages of Jewish newspapers from Israel and the world. Poraz found Tikotzky's story as part of the research he is doing for an Israeli family who wanted to trace relatives.

He contacted Tikotzky's daughter, who is 80 and living in Tel Aviv, and she told him she still had a crate full of letters in Yiddish left by her mother after her death. Some of the letters, Poraz believes, are those sent by Poland's Jews to their relatives here on the eve of the war, perhaps their last farewells before they were slaughtered by the Nazis.

"Obviously most of those people perished," says Poraz. "Perhaps this was the last letter they ever sent to Israel. This lady sat between two and four in the afternoon, ready to distribute the letters. But how many people could come to Tel Aviv in 1940 from all over the country to get the letters? And how could they come - with a donkey and cart? It's likely some of them never got the letters."

Tikotzky's daughter, who did not want to give her name, has not opened the crate. For her, it is fraught with difficult memories. But she was willing to share the story of how the letters were brought to Tel Aviv.

Before and after

Hannah Tikotzky was born in 1908 in Grajewa, in the Bialystok region in Poland. In 1933 she immigrated to Palestine with her husband. The couple had two daughters. In the summer of 1939 Tikotzky traveled with the girls to Poland for a vacation and for them to meet their grandparents. The war, which broke out on September 1 when Germany invaded Poland, turned the vacation into escape from death.

Before the war Tikotzky took photographs of herself with her daughters on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard. The three look happy and healthy. After the war they were photographed again, this time looking thin and aggrieved.

The excursion of 1939 was supposed to be a pleasure trip, says Tikotzky's daughter, who was five at the time. Before the war broke out she had good times in Poland. "I went to summer camp in Bialystok, we learned songs," she recalls. "I still remember the Russian soldiers who came into the city and the songs they sang."

Then the war started and the family embarked on "a journey of hardships on trains in Europe, toward the Russians, in an attempt to reach Odessa and from there to go back to Israel."

The three somehow arrived at Odessa and took a ship filled with Anders' Army troops - Polish armed forces in the East who operated in the Soviet Union and were loyal to the Polish government in exile. After docking in Turkey they boarded another ship and sailed to Haifa Port. There they reunited with Hannah's worried husband, who had paid someone to arrange their return home.

In their luggage they brought numerous letters from Jews in Bialystok, Grajewa and Pruzhany to their family members in Palestine. Tikotzky published the full list of the addressees' names in the newspaper, but her daughter does not remember how many of them had been delivered.

Tikotzky and her husband Yaakov opened a store for books of law on Ahad Ha'am Street in Tel Aviv in the '40s and managed it. In 1965 Yaakov died and in 1994 Hannah died as well. Their daughter continued running the business until she closed it a few years ago.

"Today everything's online," she says. "Even the Eichmann verdicts, which we used to have in books in the store, nobody wanted. The recycling company took it all."

"But when I closed down the store I found a whole crate of letters," she says. The crate remains unopened, but Tikotzky's daughter says she intends to open it soon.

Hatzofeh, October 31, 1940 - [**the full list of the addressees' names**](#)