



The Survivor Mitzvah Project™

Family of Strangers

Over the years we have corresponded with hundreds of survivors and visited many of them personally, hand delivering your donations and your good wishes. The financial aid you provide is lifesaving, as are the

personal connections and friendships we have forged with these isolated survivors. Without family, without memories of their loved ones, without photographs, they yearn for a familial connection, and that is exactly what you have become for them. Everyone who participates in *The Survivor Mitzvah Project* has joined the "Family of Strangers" that is an emotional lifeline for every survivor we help. Here is a letter for all of you:

Greetings my dear American friends,

Zane, I had been looking forward to receiving some news from you, and suddenly such a big warm letter came, with a photo of your parents. They are so young in it, so beautiful, so happy on the threshold of a new life. What feelings can a daughter have when she sees her parents' youth? To see the dearest people, your mum and dad, when you were not even born yet.

I do not have these kinds of memories. I do not have a photo of my parents, either young or old, or any pictures of my plentiful relatives. They ran away or they were killed. Those who didn't want to part with their lives were destroyed - they were burned alive, having taken with them the most important things - documents and photos. They went to the world from which no-one returns.



Those who came back home saw and learned what had happened to their families; saw that there was neither house nor home. And finally from illness, misery, poverty, cold, and starvation, they also died, joining those who had not come back. No roots. There is no one to pass the juice of life to the branches. There is a short word, "kin", and all your kinship originates from your family tree. How warm these words are, "family tree", how strong the roots are! And how lonely you feel without them!



Those difficult memories arose after reading your letter. They have not let me sleep for two nights already. Even if the memories are short, they exist, and you try to fish out at least something from your mind. In my memory there are no faces, not even one faint one from those who left the world of violence. Maybe the world of love will accept and embrace them there, in heaven. However, it is so lonely here without your own roots, so painful.

The post-war years were no less hard. We came back to ashes. Just the forest, the air, the river remained. No spoon, fork, saucepan, no stove. Besides, there was nothing to cook. We had been completely ransacked at our railway station. Robbers stole a sack in which we had everything. But we came home. Alive. Not all mothers were that lucky, a lot of them returned without children, or children without their mothers, only with the bitterness of their loss. We children all came back. It meant that our mother had her happiness with her. But where to get strength when her exhausted children started falling ill?

Cold autumn set in with slush and early snow. No clothes, no boots. But we wanted to play outside, to walk with our bare, chilly feet along the first snow. I started coughing heavily; I remember even now how my skinny body was shuddering, how I was gasping for breath. I had a high fever for a very long time and was delirious; my tiny body was warmed by 40° [104 F] temperature. I was panting with heat. Mother stayed with me round the clock. I still cannot comprehend how our mothers could bear it all, having already lived through so much. What to feed their children with, what to cure them with, what to warm them with?

One picture has been left in my memory forever. My mother and a woman I do not know take me somewhere for help in a homemade-nailed-together sled. They harness themselves with a rope so that they can pull it across the ice. Suddenly, a pack of hungry dogs appear tearing at a bone. They were fighting fiercely. All at once they left the bone and turned to the rags I was covered with on the sled. I did not cry; I did not have strength for this. My mother was crying. They could tear me into pieces. So, she did what any mother would do. Falling down on me with all her body, she covered me - I was almost naked at that moment in the freezing temperature. The dogs, dropping down their tails, gave up; stopped squabbling and sat down, as if obeying the command. Mother is on me, the other woman is shouting. And a miracle! The dogs, thin, exhausted, dragged themselves away. Either because our bones didn't smell like meat any longer, or because the water in the buckets froze during the nights and we could have a warm bath only many years after that - so unwashed, we probably smelled worse than the bone the dogs were fighting for. Very often I see in front of my eyes those dogs with their bloody jaws and torn off shreds of fur. They didn't want to taste my bones. My bones looked like those of a chicken, it was quite easy to bite through them. And my mother, she looked like a hanger, rags hanging loosely down her.

Memory? For that I go back to early childhood, a happy time for me, with the loving family warmth of my parental home. I have only glimmers of memory, but it brings such happiness. Jewish happiness... But now childhood was over and the hard postwar years had begun...

I planned to write a short letter, but thoughts and memories were hurrying to get out of my soul.

Thank you all very much for everything.

How happy I am that I have you in my life! I thank my lucky stars. Manya, Belarus

**This is just one of the thousands of letters from your "Family of Strangers".
Thank you for your kindness and compassion, and for your donations to bring
emergency aid to the last survivors of the Holocaust. – Zane Buzby**

Donate online at: www.survivormitzvah.org Or send a check to:

**The Survivor Mitzvah Project
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