



Love During the Holocaust

Dr. Edna Friedberg

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#1, Israel Lichtenstein's Last Testament, Warsaw Ghetto, July 31, 1942

[translation from *A Holocaust Reader*, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, p.296]

“With zeal and zest I threw myself into the work to help assemble archive materials. I was entrusted to be the custodian, I hid the material....To survive and remain alive [after] such horrible murders and massacres is impossible. Therefore I write this testament of mine. Perhaps I am not worthy of being remembered, but just for my grit in working with the society Oneg Shabbat and for [putting myself at risk] because I hid the entire material [underground]....

I don't want any gratitude, any monument, any praise. I want only a remembrance, so that my family, brother and sister abroad, may know what has become of my remains.

I want my wife to be remembered. Gele Seckstein, artist, dozens of works, talented, didn't manage to exhibit, did not show in public. During the three years of war worked among children as an educator, teacher, made stage sets, costumes for the children's productions....Now together with me, we are preparing to receive death.

I want my little daughter to be remembered. Margalit, 20 months old today. Has mastered Yiddish perfectly....At 9 months began to speak Yiddish clearly. In intelligence she is par with 3- or 4-year-old children. I don't want to brag about her....the teaching staff of the school at Nowolipki 68 [tell me so.]

I am not sorry about my life and that of my wife. But I am sorry for the gifted little girl. She deserves to be remembered also.

May we be redeemers for all the rest of the Jews in the whole world. I believe in the survival of our people. Jews will not be annihilated.”

[The Nowolipki school is where a cache of the secret Oyneg Shabbes archives was buried.]

#2, From the diary of Gusta Dawidsohn Draenger, Krakow Ghetto, October 1942, a Friday night gathering of Zionist youth in a period of mass deportations to the Belzec killing center

[translation from *A Holocaust Reader*, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, pp.345-6]

“From the grayness of a weekday one is suddenly plunged into a festive mood. In religious concentration one anticipates the moment when the candles will flame into light in the festively decorated room. The girls in white blouses, the boys in white wide-collared shirts took their places around the table, covered with a white cloth. First a moment of silence, then a strong burst of song, greeting the Sabbath. Eyes gleamed in the candlelight. Strong emotions were reflected in those wide-open black pupils. Another spirit animated them, purer and better. This is the way it had always been, for years and years. In a quiet village, in the noisy city, high up in the mountains, among the factory smokestacks, they had come to greet the Sabbath with the same song, the same emotions. And today it was the last time together. They had no presentiment of disaster. They were so happy! Song followed song, the ringing notes binding them more tightly and strongly together!...It was our last supper....

In a corner, Martusia, wide-eyed, staring at Dolek [group leader], at the radiant faces, at the flaming candles. This was her first Sabbath away from home. She left Tomaszow a few days ago, when the ‘action’ had already started, aware that she might never again see her parents....She is alone, all alone in the world. Only seventeen, her eyes wide, she scans the room. She does not feel pain, she does not long for her lost home...for that carefree girlhood which has gone forever. Here is her place, among this youthful company. She feels happy in the crowded room.”

#3, Chronicle of a Single Day, Leyb Goldin, Warsaw Ghetto, August 1941

[Translation from *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, edited by JTS Prof. David G. Roskies, p.428]

“Somewhere in the world there is still something called love. Girls are kissed. And girls kiss in return. And couples go walking for hours in the gardens and the parks and sit by a river, such a cool river, under a spreading tree; and they talk so politely to each other, and laugh together, and gaze in such a friendly way, so lovingly and passionately, into each other’s eyes. And they

don't think about food. They may be hungry, but they don't think about it. And they are jealous and become angry with each other--again, not eating. And all this is so true, and it is all happening in the world--far away from here, true, but it is happening....

'Sick fantasies!' interrupts the scoundrel, my stomach; he's woken up, the cynic. 'What a dreamer! Instead of looking for a practical solution, he lies there deluding himself with nonsensical stories. There are no good or evil stomachs, no educated or simple ones, none in love and none indifferent. In the whole world, if you're hungry, you want to eat.'

#4, Excerpts from the diary of Renia Spiegel, Polish Jewish teenager

Translated from Polish by Anna Blasiak and Marta Dziuros

[<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/hear-o-israel-save-us-renia-spiegel-diary-english-translation-holocaust-poland-180970536/>]

April 24, 1940

Terrible things have been happening. There were unexpected nighttime raids that lasted three days. People were rounded up and sent somewhere deep inside Russia. So many acquaintances of ours were taken away. There was terrible screaming at school. Girls were crying. They say 50 people were packed into one cargo train car. You could only stand or lie on bunks. Everybody was singing "Poland has not yet perished."

About that Holender boy I mentioned: I fell in love, I chased him like a madwoman, but he was interested in some girl named Basia. Despite that, I still like him, probably more than any other boy I know. Sometimes I feel this powerful, overwhelming need...maybe it's just my temperament. I should get married early so I can withstand it.

May 1, 1940

I would never have thought a year ago that I would be marching not on May 3 [Poland's Constitution Day] but May 1 [International Workers' Day] instead. Only two days apart, but those two days mean so much. It means I'm not in Poland but in the USSR. It means everything

is so...I'm so crazy for Holender! He's divine, adorable; he's amazing! But what does that matter, since I don't know him? Tell me, will I ever be contented? Will I ever have happy news to report to you about some boy? Oh, please God. I'm always so disgruntled!

October 12, 1940

Today is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Yesterday everybody left the house; I was on my own with burning candles on the table in a huge, brass candleholder. Ah, a single moment of solitude. I was able to think about all the things that get lost in the daily whirlwind.

I asked myself the same question I asked last year: Mamma, when will I see you again? When will I hug you and tell you about what happened and tell you, Bulus [Renia's nickname for her mother], how terrible I'm feeling? And you will tell me, "Don't worry, Renuska!" Only you can say my name in such a warm, tender way. Mamma, I'm losing hope. I stared into those burning candles—Mamma, what are you doing there? Are you thinking about us, too, about our torn hearts?

We see the boys out in town. We're close. We see Maciek almost every day. Zygyus walked back from school with us today. He looked right at me. He has very powerful eyes and I went red in the face and didn't say anything. We're planning to go to a party soon—will I have fun? Nora is more likely to have fun than I am, since someone is in love with her. I don't believe in anything.

June 21, 1941 [day of German invasion of the Soviet Union]

I love those green eyes. We kissed for the second time today. It felt so nice, but you know, it wasn't fiery or wild, but somehow delicate and careful, almost fearful—as if we didn't want to extinguish something that was growing between us. You will help me, [Mama] and God.

June 26, 1941

I can't write. I'm weak with fear. War again, war between Russia and Germany. The Germans were here, then they retreated. Horrible days in the basement. Dear Lord, give me my Mamma,

save all of us who have stayed here and those who escaped the city this morning. Save us, save Zygmunt.

I want to live so badly. I'm humbling myself before you and begging on behalf of us all. Tonight is going to be terrible. I'm scared. I believe that you will hear me, that you won't leave me in this awful hour. You saved me before, save me now. God, thank you for saving me.

I don't know what's going to happen to us. Almost the whole city is in ruins. A piece of shrapnel fell into our house. These have been horrific days. Why even try to describe them? Words are just words. They can't express what it feels like when your whole soul attaches itself to a whizzing bullet. When your whole will, your whole mind and all your senses hang from the flying missiles and beg: "Not this house!" You're selfish and you forget that the missile that misses you is going to hit someone else. Dear diary! How precious you are to me! How horrible were the moments when I hugged you to my heart!

And where is Zygmunt? I don't know. I believe, fervently, that no harm has come to him. Protect him, good God, from all evil. All of this started four hours after the moment he blew me the last kiss up to the balcony. First, we heard a shot, then an alarm, and then a howl of destruction and death. I don't know where Irka and Nora are, either, where anyone is. That's it for tonight; it's getting dark. God, save us all. Make it so Mamma comes and let there be no more misery.

July 3, 1941

Nothing new so far. We wear the armbands, listen to terrifying and consoling news and worry about being sealed off in a ghetto.

[Zygmunt] visited me today! I thought I'd go mad with joy, and...confusion. He's working at the clinic, dressing wounds. He's sweet and wonderful, as always. It's a shame he can't go to university now. He'd be an excellent doctor. But he'll be one anyway, you'll see. We've

arranged to meet tomorrow at the clinic. It seems a little strange, but why not? Even now that we're wearing these armbands—the thing is to be with him.

June 19, 1942

God saved Zygyus. Oh, I'm beside myself. They were taking people away all night long. They rounded up 1,260 boys. There are so many victims, fathers, mothers, brothers. Forgive us our trespasses, listen to us, Lord God! This was a terrible night, too terrible to describe. But Zygyus was here, my sweet one, sweet and loving. It was so good; we cuddled and kissed endlessly. It really was so delightfully pleasant that it was worth all the suffering.

June 2, 1942

Now I know what the word ecstasy means. It's indescribable; it's the best thing two loving creatures can achieve. For the first time, I felt this longing to become one, to be one body and...well...to feel more, I could say. To bite and kiss and squeeze until blood shows. And Zygyus talked about a house and a car and about being the best man for me.

Lord God, I'm so grateful to you for this affection and love and happiness! I'm writing these words differently, whispering them in my mind so I don't scare them away or blow them out. I don't want to think about anything, I just want to desire so badly, so passionately like...you know. You will help me, Bulus and God.

[Note, June 3, 1942: the Germans murder almost all the Jewish residents in Przemysl's Zasanie quarter, on the west side of the San River. Some 5,000 Jews from several other Polish towns are deported to Przemysl.]

June 6, 1942

I desire with every tiny bit of my body, my thoughts, my imagination. Even the most innocent book stirs me up. Ah, I struggle with such disgusting dreams. I haven't seen Zygyus today, he's

overworked, tired and weak. It's very lucky, because right now I'm brimming with energy. My greed for life makes me fierce. You will help me, [Mama] and God.

June 7, 1942

I'm at peace. Nora and I went for a long walk deep into the quarter and we talked. She was the first person I told. I realized that burden was what had been tormenting me. I felt at peace.

Wherever I look, there is bloodshed. Such terrible pogroms. There is killing, murdering. God Almighty, for the umpteenth time I humble myself in front of you, help us, save us! Lord God, let us live, I beg You, I want to live! I've experienced so little of life. I don't want to die. I'm scared of death. It's all so stupid, so petty, so unimportant, so small. Today I'm worried about being ugly; tomorrow I might stop thinking forever.