

אני גורס משה
אשר פיר פו
משה דו
Mr. Y. L. Rosenberg
176 Agnes St,
Toronto Ont. Canada

When heaven's curtain parted

BY ROBERT ALDEN DAITCH

Yitzchak Leib Rosenberg, my mother's father, whose life spanned 82 years, was born two years before the turn of the century in the small town of Bodzentyn, Poland. His father, Reeven Rosenberg, a descendant of Rabbi Yaakov Koppel Lifschitz and Rabbi Yehuda Hasid, was known affectionately in his community as *Malakh Refu'el*, a "healing angel" because of his work as a country folk doctor.

His mother, Raizel Korenblum, granddaughter of Yisrael Pinchas Goldmintz, the baker, was Reeven's second wife, marrying him at the tender age of 15. Following his father's sudden death and his mother's remarriage, young Yitzchak Leib emigrated with his stepfather to Canada, to avoid being drafted by the Russian army.

Two weeks after my grandfather's arrival in Toronto in the spring of 1913, he was brutally thrust into adulthood when his stepfather was killed by a streetcar, leaving his mother, my great-grandmother Raizel, a widow in Poland. He grew up in the New World with only two adult relatives to guide him, his mother's brother Jacob, and his father's brother, the noted Torah scholar Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg.

After marrying and establishing himself as a tailor in Windsor, Ont., he brought my grandmother and their five daughters to Santa Monica, Calif., where I first knew him.

My earliest memory of my grandfather is of a stern man, with a small gray mustache and a hair-trigger temper who had no patience for a child's foolishness. I was surprised when my grandmother described him as shy because, as a child, I couldn't see that his severe manner camouflaged a carefully guarded inner self. By the time I reached adulthood, age and wisdom had greatly softened his nature, endowing him with a forbearance that would serve him well in his later years.

At my grandmother's funeral, no tear betrayed his inward grief as he buried his wife of 47 years. When my mother died, no muffled cry hinted at the loss of his first-born child. The memory of his own mother, who perished in the Warsaw ghetto, was wrapped in stoic silence.

You can imagine then, my emotions when, on a certain summer Friday in Manhattan, while sitting in the archives of the YIVO Institute, winding through some microfilm of inquiries to HIAS during World War I, I came across the following item, handwritten in Yiddish, by a 17-year-old youth:



Louis and Ada Rosenberg in Los Angeles in the 1950s.

Toronto, January 16, 1916

To the Honorable Gentlemen of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society:

I come to you with a request, to write about the terrible suffering that our sisters and brothers are enduring in Poland in the war (which I need not explain, as you yourselves know) I am asking you if you would possibly help me find my family in Poland. I have no other place to run, no one else but you, the only one I am turning to that I can still cling to for help, as I am going out of my mind.

Already, it has been a year that I have not received a letter. Therefore, I am asking you, sirs, to make an effort, if possible, to find out what has happened to my family. I am writing to you where my family is and what their names are: Raizel Rosenberg, Chaim Korenblum, Pesach Korenblum – Bayzetsin, Kelts province, Russia-Poland.

Regards from I.L. Rosenberg,
176 Agnes St., Toronto, Ont., Canada.

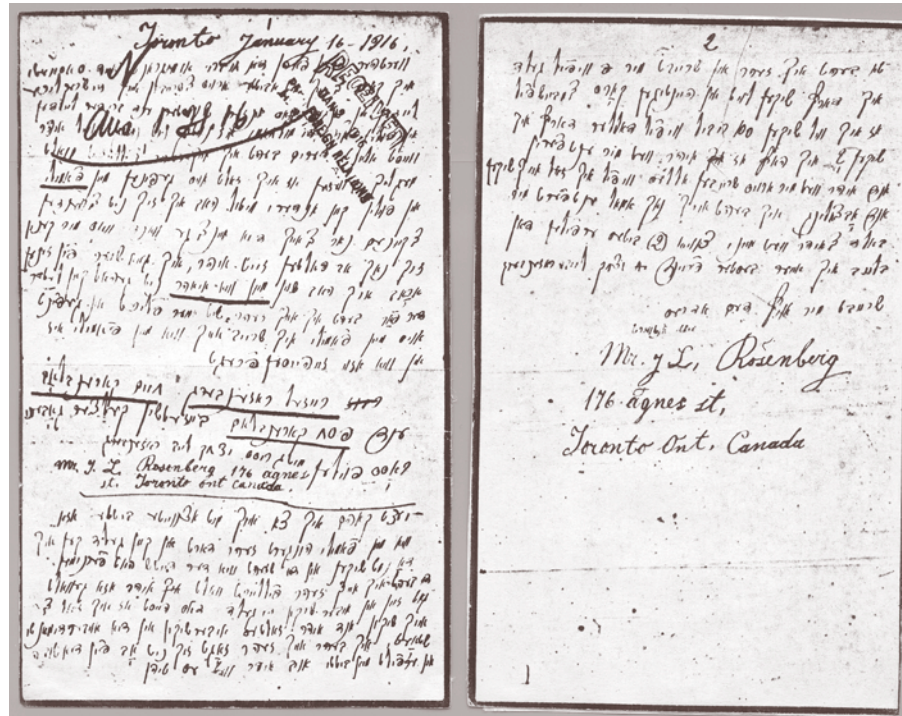
Now, I am coming to you with a second request, on behalf of my family who is hungry over there, who I can't send any money to because the Germans took over. I am asking you, if possible, to send them money which I will give to you and you will send to the above-mentioned town. I am asking you very nicely. Please do not refuse me this good deed and carry out my request. If you will do it, then I will ask you to write me how much money I can send, according to today's exchange rate. For example, if I were to send a hundred rubles, how much would it be in dollars? I hope you will reply and let me know how much I should send you and what you will charge as a fee.

I am asking you once again to reply right away – if you can comply with my two requests, then I will be your best friend.

Yitzchak Leib Rosenberg

In the 32 years I knew my grandfather, I had never seen the tears that were hidden in his heart. But as the words of his letter were translated, a curtain opened in heaven, and in one transcendent moment, the soul of a man who had felt so much, but revealed so little, was forever illuminated.

This story appeared previously in the B'nai B'rith Messenger of Los Angeles, and in Avotayny: The International Review of Jewish Genealogy and is used here, with permission.



Yitzchak Leib Rosenberg's letter.