

Books

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In piecing together this story, Daniel recovers some sense of who these six people were in their lives as well as their deaths—as in the story of the second daughter, beautiful, outgoing Frydka, the Polish boy who loved her, and the schoolteacher who hid Frydka and her father in her house until they were all betrayed, probably by a neighbor, in 1944. The trail of stories leads him to the actual hiding place.


“It had been to rescue my relatives from generalities, symbols, abbreviations, to restore to them their particularity and distinctiveness, that I had come on this strange and arduous trip,” Mendelsohn writes after the first of his many trips. Few of us have the resources to undertake such an exhaustive search, but I found this book very useful in contemplating the goals of my own trip. I’m not sure I want to know exactly where and how my young aunts died, but I can see already that the search generates its own momentum.

**Every Day Lasts a Year: A Jewish Family’s Correspondence from Poland** edited by **Christopher R. Browning, Richard S. Hollander and Nechama Tec**

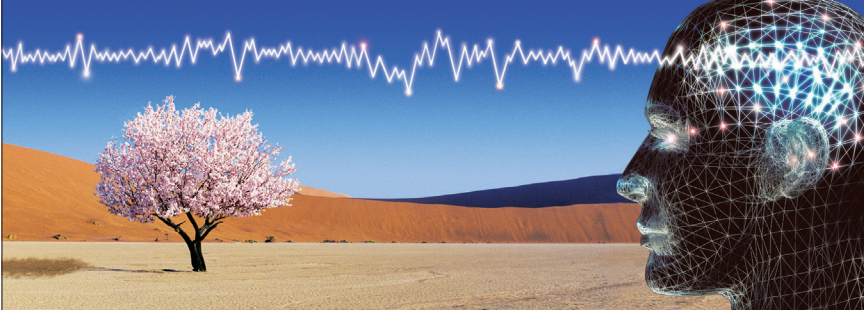
*(Cambridge University Press, 285 pp., \$28)*

Arriving in New York from Poland without a visa in December 1939, Joseph Hollander faced a double battle—trying to avoid deportation back to Poland while trying to obtain visas for the rest of his family in Krakow. His case dragged on for years and became something of a *cause célèbre*, engaging the support of Eleanor Roosevelt. Meanwhile, the Nazis cut off emigration from Poland. While Joseph was a lawyer with money and connections, his situation paralleled that of other Jewish immigrants with fewer resources who entered America illegally after 1924 and did not have the legal standing to help their relatives in Europe. Letters from Joseph’s three sisters and their spouses from November 1939 to December 1941 (mail stopped when America entered the war) attest to his efforts as well as their growing desperation. Joseph’s son, Richard, found these letters after his father’s death. His father had never mentioned them.

Two essays by historians Christopher Browning and Nechama Tec provide a context for this wartime correspondence. Browning offers a chronological account of the deteriorating situation of Jews in Krakow under Nazi occupation from the autumn of 1940, when the Nazis tried to expel Jews from Krakow, forcing many to flee as refugees to small nearby towns (like my mother’s sisters, who wound up in Mielec), to March 1941, when those who remained (including Hollander’s family) were restricted to the Krakow Ghetto. Tec comments on general features of the letters—the use of code words to get by the Nazi censors, guarded references to their difficulties, repeated appeals for help to obtain documents, expressions of family love and longing. At the same time, the voices of the individual letter writers come through clearly, reflecting their personalities and family dynamics: the tyrannical brother-in-law, Dawid, who hates not being in control of his family’s destiny; the youngest sister, Dola, who seeks Joseph’s approval



“Difficult things we do quickly. The impossible takes a little longer.”  
— David Ben-Gurion



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