

POSTCARDS FROM A FATHER: LICHTWITZ FAMILY



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

Max Lichtwitz was born on May 7, 1902 into a well-established German Jewish family. His father, Ernst, owned and managed a printing press in Berlin. His brothers, Ludwig and Walter, worked in the family business, while Max became a lawyer.

At age 27, Max married Ilse Badt and they had one son, Heinz (nicknamed "Heini"), born on June 12, 1932. Ilse passed away in 1937 and Max raised Heinz with the help of his mother.

As life grew more dangerous for Jewish people in Germany, Max made the decision to send Heinz to the United Kingdom as part of the Kindertransport. He arrived, aged 6 ½, on February 3, 1939, in Swansea, Wales. There he lived with Morris and Winifred Foner, who he called uncle and aunt. In Wales, Heinz Lichtwitz became Henry Foner and, in a few months' time, he learned English and forgot his German.



Max and Heinz, at 3 months old

When Heinz said good-bye to his father in Germany, he didn't know it would be the last time they would see each other. Over the next seven months, Max sent his son a series of beautiful postcards expressing his love and concern. When the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939, it became difficult to send letters and Max was unable to write regularly. Henry's Aunt Winnie saved the postcards for him in an album.



The last photo Max took of Heinz, in Feb. 1939, labeled: "Farewell. 6 ¾ years."

During the war, Max used his skills as a lawyer to help Jews flee Germany. On at least one occasion, the captain of a ship offered to take Max as a stowaway, but he refused because it meant leaving his elderly mother behind. Max was arrested and deported to Auschwitz, an extermination camp in Poland, on December 9, 1942. He was killed a week later.

Morris and Winnie Foner raised Henry as their own. At age 21, Henry enlisted in the British Army. Later, he studied at the University of Leeds and became a chemist. Henry and his wife, Judy, settled in Jerusalem, Israel, and raised three children. In 1961, at age 29, Henry received a letter from his father's cousin. It was a farewell letter from his father that his cousin had been holding for 20 years. Dated November 5, 1941, the letter included the following words:

I think my Heini has found a good home and that the Foners will look after him as well as any parents could. Please convey to them, one day when it will be possible, my deepest gratitude for making it possible for my child to escape the fate that will soon overtake me... Please tell him one day that it was only out of deep love and concern for his future that I have let him go, but that on the other hand I miss him most painfully day by day and that my life would lose all meaning if there were not at least the possibility of seeing him again someday.

The following postscript, dated February 10, 1942, appeared at the bottom of the letter:

This letter has been delayed until now. In the meantime [Uncle] Otto left us in November and we have had no sign of life from him up until now. I fear that we too will soon go the same way.



Berlin, February 5, 1939

Dear Heini!

I was delighted to receive your card from the journey. I hope that you are healthy and cheerful and that you like being with Uncle Morris and Aunt Winnie. Please give them my fondest regards.

Many loving kisses from
Vati (daddy)

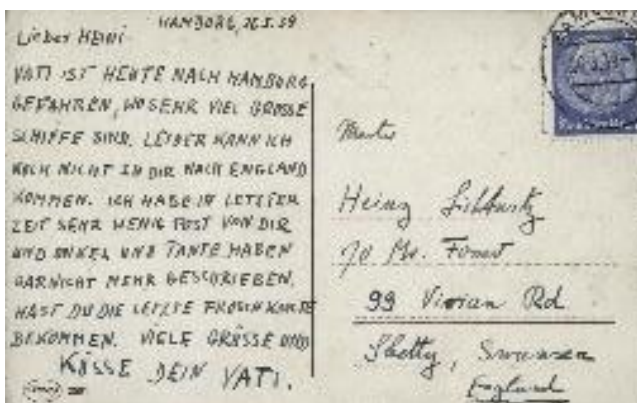


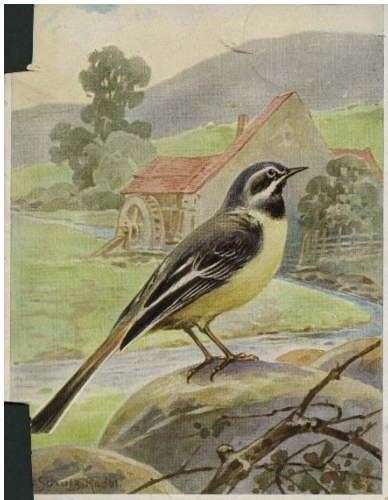
Hamburg, May 26, 1939

Dear Heini,

Vati traveled to Hamburg today, where there are many big ships. Unfortunately I cannot come to you in England yet. I have received little mail from you lately and Uncle and Aunt have not written at all. Have you received the latest frog card?

Many greetings and kisses
Your Vati



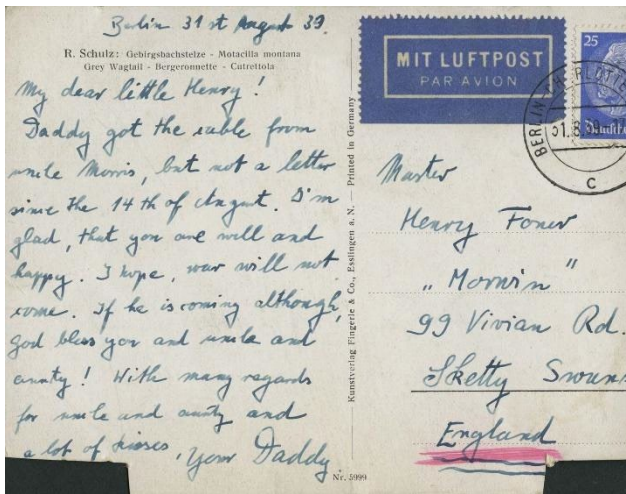


Hamburg August 31, 1939

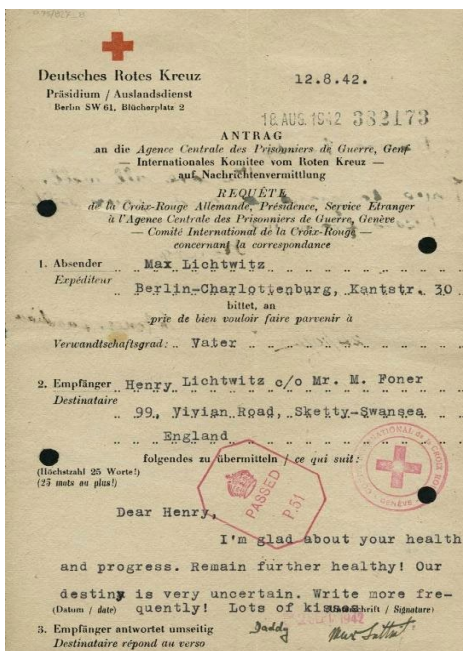
My dear little Henry!

Daddy got the cable from uncle Morris, but not a letter since the 14th of August. I'm glad that you are well and happy. I hope war will not come. If he is coming although, God bless you and uncle and aunty! With many regards for uncle and aunty and a lot of kisses.

Your Daddy



The last letter Max wrote was at the bottom of a Red Cross form. Henry replied on the back of the form.



August 12, 1942

I'm glad about your health and progress. Remain further healthy! Our destiny is uncertain. Write more frequently.

Lots of kisses,
Daddy

Dear Daddy,

We are all well. Love to grandma and yourself.

Kisses from me. Henry.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

After reading the letters from Max to Heinz, choose three questions from the list below on which to reflect.

- 1** What might 6-year-old Henry have been thinking or feeling as he received those first postcards? How do you think he might have made sense of his new situation?
- 2** What do the postcards reveal about the hopes and fears Max had for his son? What specific language stands out?
- 3** When Max writes, "Unfortunately I cannot come to you in England yet," do you think he believes he will make it there someday? Explain.
- 4** Beyond sending his "fondest regards" and "many greetings," what might Max have wanted to express to Heinz' foster parents?
- 5** How did the contrast between the light-hearted scenes on the front of the postcards and the reality of what was taking place make you feel?
- 6** What did Max sacrifice by rescuing his son? What did he gain?

Source: Yad Vashem, <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/de/exhibitions/through-the-lens/postkarten-kindertransporte.asp>