

# LETTERS FROM A MOTHER: WENGLOWITZ FAMILY



Berta Seliger was born on May 8, 1905. She married Herbert Wenglowitz and lived in Breslau, Germany. They had two children, George and Renate.

Renate Wenglowitz (nicknamed Renatel) was born on December 15, 1932 in Breslau. In her memoir, Renate shares that she has very few memories of her childhood in Breslau, but the events of the *Kristallnacht Pogrom* stand out to her with sounds of glass shattering, red lights through her bedroom window, and a solemn family meeting in the dining room.

After the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, Renate and her brother were sent to live in a Jewish orphanage in Breslau. Several months later, Renate, George, and about 100 other children were brought out of Germany by the Anglo-Jewish Committee on a Kindertransport.



Renate at age 6

Renate recalls their farewell at the train station: *“Mother gives George a photograph of herself and gives me a bone brooch in the shape of a little dog and pins it to my coat. She kisses and hugs us and we are on the train. The train is moving and mother is waving. I think she is crying, but I am not. I don’t know where we are going or why. That is the last time we saw our mother.”*



Mr. and Mrs. De Lange

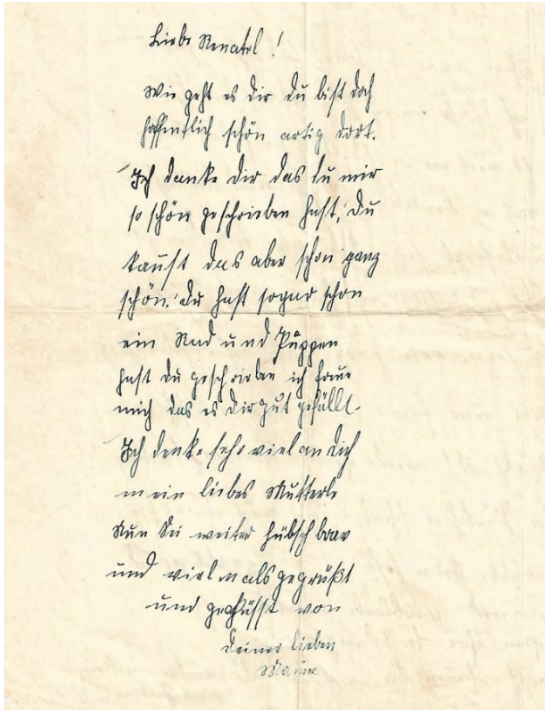
Renate arrived in Harwich, England on June 6, 1939. She was 6 ½ years old.

Most children arrived in England with sponsors lined up and housing arrangements secured. One by one, the children in Renate’s transport were sent off to their new homes. Finally, only Renate and her brother remained. The Anglo-Jewish Committee did not want to split up brother and sister, but no one was willing to take in two children. Ultimately, a family took George and Renate was the only child remaining.

Renate remembers frantic phone calls. A local synagogue was called to find out if any members would take her temporarily. A Mrs. de Lange was asked to take Renate for two weeks until a more permanent placement could be found. Although her husband was not at home to consult, she agreed. Renate was put into a taxi and driven to Twickenham, Middlesex, a suburb of London.

She arrived at 263 Waldegrave Road and noticed that the word “Sholem” was engraved on the gates to the home. Later, Renate reflected that had she known this word meant “peace,” it would have been a nice welcoming sign, since she had found a peaceful haven from all that was to follow in Europe. Renate lived with Mr. and Mrs. de Lange until she was 15, when she went to live and work in London.

One year later, Renate met Hershy Zelovic, a Holocaust survivor from Munkacs, Czechoslovakia. They were married in 1951 and emigrated to the United States in 1952.



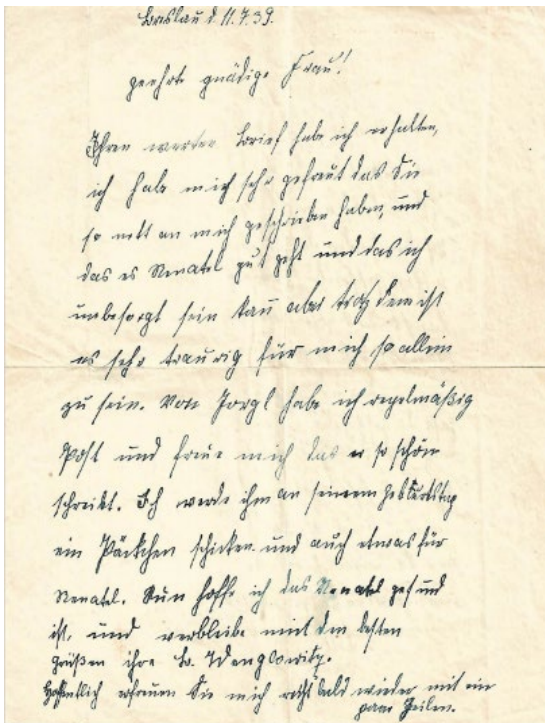
Dear Renatel!

How are you, hopefully you are beautifully behaved there. Thank you for writing to me so beautifully, you have become very good at it. You even already have a bike and dolls, you wrote. I am glad that you like it [there]. I am thinking a lot about you, my dear Mutterl [mommy]. Please continue to be well behaved and be greeted many times

and kissed

by your dear

Mom



Breslau, 11.7.39

Dear Madame!

I received your valued letter, I am delighted that you have written to me so nicely, and that Renatel is doing fine and that I can be unconcerned, but it is still very sad for me to be so alone. I receive mail from Jorgl regularly and I am glad that he is writing so beautifully. I will send him a package for his birthday and also something for Renatel. Now I hope that Renatel is healthy and remain with the best greetings, yours B. Wenglowitz.

Hopefully you will delight me again soon with a few lines.



## REFLECT AND RESPOND

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

- 1** How do you think it felt for Berta to entrust her daughter to strangers?
- 2** What might 6-year-old Renate have been thinking or feeling as she received letters from her mother? How do you think she might have made sense of her new situation?
- 3** How does Berta try to remain bonded with her daughter while far away? What specific words capture these intentions?
- 4** What questions or feelings might Berta be holding back in her letter to Peggy (Renate's foster mother)? What more do you think she might have wanted to ask or express?
- 5** How did you interpret Berta's closing line in her letter to Peggy, "Hopefully you will delight me again soon with a few lines"? What thoughts or emotions do these words reveal?
- 6** What did Berta sacrifice by rescuing her daughter? What did she gain?