



## "Rocking You To Sleep In The Sunlight"

A letter from the Mother She Never Knew

*The following is an actual letter which a mother sewed into her baby daughter's skirt hours before her deportation from the ghetto. It contains immortal messages about love for all time.*

Dear Mirele,

I can't believe I have one night to stuff a lifetime of love into this letter. Tomorrow morning - if 4 a.m. can be called morning - I am giving you up. I am taking you, Mirele, to the back entrance of dear, brave Hermann's grocery, and the child rescuers will be waiting there for you and the 32 other children under the age of three. They'll inject you with a sedative so you won't cry and then they'll slip off in the predawn with you, my life, my love, out of this horrible country, to safety.

We pushed it off and pushed it off, Mirele. We didn't want to believe we would have to give up our child, probably never to see her again. But this is the last child-rescue, because tomorrow, our informers tell us, is the last big round-up. Tomorrow they come for the men, women, and children. And I've been convinced by these words, spoken by our trusted informer, Hermann, the brave gentile grocer: "Any child they take away either dies immediately or dies on the way to the death camp." The word death, three times in one sentence! We are the last ones to be convinced to give up our child. He said, with the deepest of sadness in every exhausted wrinkle on his face, "I cannot force you. But if you keep her with you, she will be dead in a month. They have no use for babies, she cannot work for them. If you want to give her to us, bring her to the back entrance of my grocery at 4 a.m. No belongings. Whatever food you have. Goodbye."

Mirele, do you see why I had to give you up? He said no belongings, but I will beg. I will plead that this letter be allowed to go, sewn into your undershirt. And then I will pray to G-d that the letter stays with you until you are old enough to read it. You must know that we love you. You must know why you are alone, without parents. Not because they didn't love you ... but because they did.

It's eerie to think that by the time you read this, I will probably be dead. That's what Hermann says is going on. People either die immediately, or on the way, after a week or two of forced labor and no food. But I won't have lived in vain, Mirele, if I know that I brought you into the world, and you will live and survive and grow big and strong and you will be happy. You can be happy, Mirele, because we loved you.

What makes a difference in the lives of adults, it seems, is if they had a secure childhood. Secure, with lots of love and acceptance, and needs fulfilled, and predictable routines and the like. You've had that up to this minute. You'll have it up til 4 a.m. But then, you won't. Who knows who will end up taking care of you? Some family who will take you in for money. Hermann will pay them. They surely will be kinder to their own than to you. Here is where pain mixes with rage! I rage at the animals who are making it possible for you to cry, and I won't be there for you. But you will have this letter. And this letter will make you feel secure, if G-d answers my prayer. You have us, Mirele, even though you can't see us. We're with you, we're watching you and praying for you. Every time you have troubles, we are pounding on the door to G-d's very Throne of Glory insisting on an audience, and demanding mercy for our Mirele, down on earth alone without her parents. And G-d will listen to us. We won't leave Him alone until He agrees that you deserve health and love and happiness.

Mirele, you'll wonder what your first two years were like. You'll wish you could remember. Let me remember for you right now, tenderly, on this piece of paper. You like hot cereal in the morning, with lots of milk and sugar. Except that there is no milk and sugar now, none in the whole city. But I make your cereal anyway, and you eat it with big smiles between every bite. Then you become ready for your nap. So I rock you, after putting the rocker right where the sunlight will fall on it. I rock you until you fall asleep and then I put you in my bed. You sleep well there, you like my smell.

What will you smell tomorrow night? Surely nobody will rock you tomorrow morning, not even in the shade. Oh G-d! I cannot do it! I will do it. For you, Mirele, so you will have at least a hope for life.

Mirele, do me a favor. After you are grown, after this nightmarish war is over, I know there will be those who will

underplay the tragedies going on here every day. They will say, "A war is a war. It was just a war." Tell them how you felt secure in my arms, rocking you to sleep in the sunlight. Tell them how your father ran one night a year ago, when you were sick, to get your medicine, past sentries while breaking the curfew. He risked his life to ease your pain, Mirele. And now the three of us are being torn apart. "Just a war"? Tell them, Mirele, that all the wars in the world don't add up to the agony in my heart right now as I write this. G-d! It's 2 a.m. already.

Only two more hours with my love, my baby, my life, my Mirele. I'm going to hold you now for two hours. Your father and I are going to wake you, feed you, and tell you over and over how much we love you. You're barely over two years old, but maybe, if G-d wills it, maybe you'll keep this letter until you're old enough to read it.

There will be bad times for you, Mirele, I know. But just think about me holding you, rocking you to sleep in the sunlight. Keep that sunlight in your heart always. I love you. Your father loves you. May G-d help us all.

Mama

Dear Readers, Miracles do happen. My mother's letter stayed with me, sewn into my undershirt, and now I am getting old myself, and have decided to share it with you. After almost 50 years of keeping it private, why did I translate it from the Yiddish and decide to share it with you now? For a few reasons.

Firstly, one doesn't hear much about the Holocaust these days. There are even those who say it was made up, not true, a brilliant Jewish ploy for sympathy. My mother asked me to remind you that it wasn't "just a war." It was a monstrosity.

Secondly, my mother's faith in G-d even at that dreadful hour never ceases to amaze me. Even though she seems almost certain that she will soon die, she believes firmly in G-d, to Whom she can turn, both before and after her earthly life ends. This strengthened my own faith, and perhaps it will strengthen yours.

And lastly, I know that I am from a different generation. Nowadays, I'm told, all mothers work. But sometimes I look out my window and see little children, just two years old. That's how old I was when my mother was forced to give me up to strangers. And I look out my window and see these two-year-olds crying because they want to stay with their mothers, but their mothers are putting them on a bus because they want to be free of them... and something doesn't seem right. You mothers who are lucky enough to have your babies... raise them, too. Don't throw them out before they're ready. Go? No. Rock them in the sunlight, for my mother

-Miriam bas Liba

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