

# LETTERS FROM LONY: A HOLOCAUST STORY



**THREE CHOIRS  
FESTIVAL 2025**  
HEREFORD 26 JUL – 2 AUG

**Ronald Corp**  
Letters from Lony 70'

Olivia Ray *mezzo-soprano*  
Sholto Kynoch *piano*  
Gildas Quartet

**Supported by John Hammond, George Meyer, and Peter Lobbenberg, and The Museum of Cider**

**Gildas Quartet supported by Bruce and Sarah Herriot in memory of Dr and Mrs JCS Turner**

**This performance is in memory of Ronald Corp, who sadly passed away in May 2025**

## Letters from Lony

### **No 1: 13 September 1939 (written in halting English and addressed to 'Johnnie')**

Welcome, my sweet little boy. I am anxious to see you as soon as possible, and I hope you are all right and your little mother is very happy with you. I think of you day and night and I am so happy to know you are here. How is father? And your great brother? [*Peter's half-brother George Lobbenberg ('Otschi'), born in 1922.*] I am shure [*sic*] they all are so found [*sic*] of you, the same as I am! Now I have a wish, answer as soon as possible to your grandmother Lony.

#### **No 1a: Lullaby**

Schlaf Kindlein, schlaf Kindlein, d'Äuglein mach zu,  
Schlaf Kindlein süß Kindlein, geh nun zur Ruh.  
Schlaf Kindlein, schlaf Kindlein, d'Äuglein mach zu,  
Schlaf Kindlein süß Kindlein, schlaf Kindlein süß  
Kindlein, geh nun zur Ruh.

*Sleep, little child, close your eyes,  
Sleep little child, sweet little child, go to rest now.*

### **No 2: 28 September 1939**

My beloved little boy, today I received your first sweet letter, when you were just a week old. I was so thrilled to get it, and will keep it safely, and when you can read you can have it back. How I'd love to see you, and take you on my arm and watch you feeding or sleeping, or being bathed. But who knows whether your first and maybe your second birthday will pass before we make personal acquaintance.

Now something else that will interest you quite terribly. We managed to let two rooms of the flat upstairs to a ping-pong club, and the three others we've nearly let. But now I have to buy provisions. Everything is more and more expensive, and sometimes not to be had at all, like pineapples and peaches. You'll probably say that's not at all important, and in my view you'd be right, but customers want all that kind of stuff, even when it's wartime and they should be glad to have anything at all. Well now, Granny has to go to bed, and you too, although I could chat with you for hours, but it's midnight and high time.

### **No 3: 16 November 1939**

You know, my little treasure, your Mummy always used to write very interesting and nice letters, but never a one as charming as yours. Tomorrow you'll be 5 weeks old, your Mummy should enjoy each day with you, and not wish the time away. You'll grow up much quicker than she can imagine today. But when you're grown up, then hopefully there'll be no war any more. And they'll just tell you about it, because boys like to hear that kind of thing, especially if they were never there.

I'm going back to the embassy, but I think there's no chance of my getting a visa.

### **No 4: 3 December 1939**

If your Mummy can't write, at least you could. I get such pleasure out of your letters. I've got a sweet romper suit here for you and don't know how I can send it to you, because of customs and shipwrecks and things like that. So for the time being I play with it. I do up the buttons and undo them again and have fun with it. Does Daddy know we're sitting on a powder keg here? But I behave as if there were nothing going on. Got a little dress made for myself, and am very pleased with it. If you see your parents, give them my love.

### **No 5: 18 December 1939**

My beloved boy, I thank you very much for your long and adorable letter, which I read over and over again, morning and night. Of course, it's a terrible shame that we can't get to know each other, you and I, and let's just hope that one day it will be possible. Well, what do you think of the Graf Spee? I sat at the wireless till midnight and followed every phase. – Do you understand why they sank that beautiful ship? Just you wait, the people will take that about as badly as a hole in the head, but sadly they aren't allowed to squeak.

*[The Admiral Graf Spee was a German Panzerschiff ('armoured ship') – a 'pocket battleship' in British Navy parlance – that was launched in 1936 and deployed to the South Atlantic in anticipation of the outbreak of war. Damaged in the Battle of the River Plate on 13 December 1939, she put into port at Montevideo, where her captain, Hans Langsdorff, ordered her to be scuttled.]*

## No 5a: Interlude

### No 6: 11 February 1940

My beloved boy, well really, it's been so long since you wrote to me that I was beginning to think you can't write any more, because you've got so much else to do, like kicking, and knee rides, and drinking, and guzzling orange juice, and all that kind of stuff. Your picture is in a little frame on my bedside table and I keep looking at it. Now I'd like to have another one soon, but I guess that won't be easy. Can you imagine how much I'd like to get to know you, but at the moment I don't see any possibility at all. And if things turn out as I believe, namely that the Allies come to the help of the Finns, go into Sweden, from there against the Russians and then through Poland and Czechoslovakia against the Germans, then it could be quite a while before the war is over. And what's to become of us here, nobody knows either, we'll have to wait and see. Most wealthy Dutch and also Germans who had money have left here and continue to leave, naturally we suffer too as a result of that, although for the time being new customers are still coming to replace them. But there's simply less money being spent, and that's such a shame. Just think, people drink so much orange juice here, and now I'll always be thinking that Mummy doesn't give you enough, at least for your appetite. Has my letter to Mummy not yet arrived? It should be there by now. Bachmann's cheque hasn't been cleared either. Young Rusy is said to have been seriously wounded, and I hear Doctor Fleischmann died in London. I'm buying lots of little parcels, it's almost beyond my means. Did my letter to Otto [*Lebenhart, nephew of Lony's late husband Ludwig, living in England*] arrive, and the one to Grandma Fanny [*Peter's paternal grandmother, died in Shrewsbury in 1941*]? Martin [*another nephew of Lony's late husband Ludwig living in England*] shouldn't worry, everyone's well. Today was your great-grandmother's birthday, but it's good that she doesn't have to live through these times. You will come into good times one day, of that I am certain. I would like to experience them, too. And I'm so curious what will turn out, and how, and how the new beginning will be, and how we can get rid of all the criminals. I hope they're already racking their brains about that. Thank God that you, my little Englishman, won't have anything to do with it. Kiss your parents, and Grandma Fanny and Auntie Resi [*Peter's father Hans Lobbenberg's sister who came to England with the Lobbenberg family in December 1938*], and your big brother and, well, everyone.

### No 7: 5 May 1940, to Annemarie

Things don't look very safe. You'll be aware that the whole country is in a state of emergency, of which we only hear, but otherwise don't notice it much, that our minister's speech was not reassuring, that there have been so many arrests of respected Dutchmen, well, and so on. We don't know what's happening from one day to the next. It is of course a tragedy that the many sacrifices for Scandinavia were in vain. [*The German army had invaded Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940.*] Tell Heidi [*a cousin of Lony who later married Otto Lebenhart*] I got her letter and showed it to her father straightaway. I was delighted and interested in what she writes about Peter, it's such a shame that I can't even see him, not even hear him squeak on the telephone. Write me every bit about him, he'll be advancing every day now and every day will bring new surprises. The photos are very sweet, I look at them again and again. He's nearly eight months old now. A strapping and discriminating man. Alice [*Lony's brother Gustav Fraenkel's mother-in-law*] is still worried that we might be invaded. What's the mood like in England? Here in general it's not very good. Such a pity I can't get a visa, otherwise I'd like to come for a holiday. I'll

try again. Even if it's difficult and costs lots of money. I would so much like to bring Hans some cigars, and Otsch a cheesecake, and you a kiss, and Peter something nice.

### No 7a: 10 May 1940 – Interlude

[*Five days after the last letter, Germany invaded the Netherlands.*]

### No 8: 26 September 1940, to the family

My dear ones all together, now it's already two weeks since our little boy's birthday, and I'm still waiting longingly for his joyous description of all the presents he got and what he thought of the birthday. I was so terribly pleased to get your last letter, firstly anyway and secondly because after the long wait there was such heart-warming news. I'm not complaining that I can't take part in the boy's development, just happy at every sign of it and the good times that he has. And that his parents get so much joy out of him. May it stay that way.

### No 9: Undated 1940, to the family

On Monday we're planning to pay all the rent arrears, not because we have to but because we think it's right. Detta [*Lony's aunt, murdered in Theresienstadt in 1943*] is well, she writes regularly. It's a pity I can't see your Mummy. The monthly turnover is astonishing but we get little from it, despite that I'm satisfied, we have a monopoly. Kiss our boy. When I come I'll bring him a bike, then he can come here with Daddy. How did my tender girl come to have such an enormous boy? Many many heartfelt kisses, Your Lony

### No 10: Undated, probably about 9 November 1940, to Annemarie

My only beloved treasure, in a week's time it will be my birthday and so I'm naturally thinking of you twofold and threefold, the dearest people I have left in the world. And if it weren't for the terrible longing for you all, I'd be quite calm and at peace no matter what happens. But I've much to do, I've a lot of self-control and try to picture the future. I just hope Peter hasn't grown a moustache by then. I rearrange your pictures every day, I've just put Peter's picture in front of the radio so that I can always see it, and Hans and you and Martin next to Vati [*Ludwig Rabl, Lony's late husband*] on the little dresser. Then I've been taking care at home of all the wilting flowers at the office, bought myself a sweet little writing table quite cheap because my room was overflowing with books, and papers and writing utensils, and that's the way I spend my leisure time. I have been making so many enquiries for Otto and Trude [*Hans Lobbenberg's brother and sister-in-law who moved to the USA in 1940*], but still no answer, and I don't know if George is with them yet. My visa to Brazil is not to be had either, there's no point now anyway, because no ships are travelling there.

### No 11: Undated, probably later in November 1940, to the family

I haven't heard anything from anyone, it's as though we were living on a desert island. Business is OK, for now I haven't got any financial worries. I'd have so many questions, but you know yourselves what I'd like the answers to. Little Peter should write to me again soon. Your pictures are all on my grandmother's sewing table next to my big chair and are a feast for my eyes every day. I send you many hugs and kisses  
Your Lony.

### No 11a: Interlude

### No 12: 11 February 1941, to Peter

My darling Peterkin, today is your great-grandmother's birthday, and to commemorate it Auntie Acka [*Lony's younger sister, perished*

with her husband Hugo Marx in Bergen-Belsen in 1945] brought me flowers, the first lilies of the valley; and here comes your lovely letter, and words can't express my happiness. I've been looking in every pram to see if there might be a little boy like you, but now I'm looking at every plane, because I imagine my little Peter is sitting in it and coming to visit his Grandma Lony. And now I'm racking my brains to think of all the lovely things I can show him here. Above all, there'll be chocolate with whipped cream, and a big piece of cheesecake, and a big window with new curtains looking out on to the street, and lots of people walking and driving past, big and small, and we'll wave to them and they'll wave back and be happy to see my fair-haired boy. And in the evening when we're tired, I'll put the boy in the little bath and there'll be a little boat and a crocodile that squirts water when you squeeze its tummy, and then the boy can let the water out all by himself, and when he's dried he can run barefoot into bed on great-grandmother's hand-worked rug, and then he'll get told a lovely story, about his mummy when she was a little girl. I'm looking forward to that quite terribly. You too? It makes me so happy that Daddy is content and that Mummy is happy with her two men. May it stay that way. I'm still well, we're still getting trade, even a lot, and no financial worries at least for the time being. It's a lot of work of course, but I enjoy that. The Hugos have a thousand plans and never carry them out. They're still in their big house which of course is standing empty. I had my hair done today, since I have gone grey it needs a lot of care so that I look smart. And tomorrow I'm off to the dentist, unfortunately, as my bridge no longer fits and needs renewing. But he's only a few steps away, so I'll just have to get along with it. There'd be so much more to tell and to ask, but nothing pleasurable, and one shouldn't even think about all the sad stuff, otherwise you lose the energy to live. You're quite right there.

Now write again very soon, give my warmest thanks to our friends for all their love which makes me so happy. And they shouldn't forget me. I embrace you all and am with dearest love Your Lony

**No 13: Unknown date, perhaps late September/early October 1941, to Annemarie**

Have you heard anything from my brother Gustav and his children? [*Gustav Fraenkel had emigrated to Kenya.*] Their mother is terribly worried, for herself and for their grandmother. Hilde, who used to look after the children, has had a major operation in New York. Other than that I know nothing. Hugo comes to me daily, they're having a tough time too, so many clients are falling away, some because they close so early, some because they've left, some because they've died. Tomorrow would have been my brother Erwin's birthday. Now he's been dead so long, nearly as long as Vati. But this year I'm thinking of your birthday, even though I didn't write in time, but you know anyway. Love to my Hans, kiss our boy, love to all our other dear ones, and hugs and kisses with so much love you can't imagine from your Lony.

**No 14: 1 October 1941, to Herr Bachmann (in Switzerland) [A business associate of Hans Lobbenberg]**

Dear Mister Bachmann, my grateful thanks for your kind letter, which gave me such pleasure and informed me about the well-being of my children. If I know they're all well, I can be brave and keep my head held high. I had letters from Trude and George with the shattering news that Grandma Fanny died before our little boy's birthday, and I'm greatly saddened. It only comforts me that despite all cares she was able to spend a couple of good years with her children. I too would wish myself such a gentle death after a long happy life surrounded by my family.

For myself I'm well, only I yearn terribly for my dear ones, and I find that hard to cope with. My aunt writes regularly, lives in her

own home, and gets what she needs to live, she has even saved a bit.

I myself have a great deal to do, business is still going well, but there's a lot more work than there used to be because of the changed circumstances, but I hope to be able to continue. The small debts are largely paid off, despite a serious setback in summer last year. Sadly I haven't saved anything, but can manage my obligations. I look well, just a bit thinner, but otherwise have everything I need. Only I'm short of shoes, but if things get really bad I'll just wear clogs like the others do. I get enormous pleasure from my little boy's picture, there in front of my table on grandmother's sewing desk next to me, and on that there is everything I need to write and make notes. So when I look up I watch him, eating his bread, picking flowers, and he looks just like his mummy.

**No 15: 6 January 1942, card addressed to Hans from Bachmann in Lony's name**

Warmest greetings to you and the children. It's so long since I had any news and I am concerned that you are all well, and would ask you earnestly to write to me by return that things with you are as I would hope and wish. I am well, I have much to do, and business is running. I would lack for nothing if I could hear that the children are well. Fondest wishes for the New Year and for Annemarie's birthday. Ever your Lony Rabl

**No 15a: Interlude**

**No 16: 30 December 1943, from Westerbork Camp to Josef Blum [a friend in Amsterdam]**

Hopefully all is well and in order with you. I am very worried about my brothers and sisters [*she is referring to her late husband Ludwig Rabl's brothers and sisters – he was the oldest of 17*]. Myself I am healthy for the moment, and hope I don't get an attack, though with this illness you can never be sure. Could you ask sometime whether it's possible to send clothes without a label, if so I would like the black woollen dress that was offered and the silk costume, both with white collars, it could be that I need them. I could do with a suitcase as well. Otherwise I have received everything, the gloves too of course. Everything is very good. With much love I am your Lony.

**No 17: 23 February 1944, from Westerbork Camp to Josef Blum**

My dears, Today again my first greetings, and perhaps also the last for the time being, my address is going to be Theresienstadt, and I would earnestly ask you to keep on sending me parcels and money, as you promised me in the old days. Please also tell Liesje and Ludwig [*friends in Amsterdam*], and my doctor.

I've heard nothing from my brothers and sisters, but I hope you have some news. I am worried about them.

I could really do with a black woollen dress, but nothing has arrived.

I have a letter from Acka here, which she wrote before she left, and which I couldn't send. I gave her everything I had left, and she asks that you reimburse me. So write as soon as you can, you know how you can find that out. Again thanks in advance and arrears and keep thinking of your very loving Lony.

*Schlaf Kindlein, schlaf Kindlein, d'Äuglein mach zu,  
Schlaf Kindlein süß Kindlein, geh nun zur Ruh.*

*Translations of non-English letters by Peter Lobbenberg*