

April 14, 1977

Dear Bob!

I received a short letter from Leo* on April 1st. On April 10th, I received a postcard from a woman I don't know – a Muscovite – with a request that I call her. When we met (her name is Asya), she told me that three years ago she stayed with relatives in America. She became acquainted with Luba there, and [Luba] asked her to find me. [Asya] was not able to do so, but yesterday she received a letter from her acquaintance in America, and in it was a note with my address. And finally, yesterday – a letter from you.

Your letter was most informative, but most of all it was written in Russian and I can answer it in Russian, not running to a translator for help. Therefore, I will try to write to you at length.

As a result of my lack of knowledge of English, the letter I sent to Leo on April 9th is probably very muddled and hard to understand.

I do not know whether you will understand, but for the span of decades, we (Mama and I) not only were not interested in our American relatives, but we tried in every way possible to forget about them. Now, though, after everything that has taken place, and they informed me through the Moscow division of the International Red Cross that a Leo Etter was searching for me and I found out that I still have many relatives, you simply cannot imagine how excited and happy I became. After all, in Russia I have not one relative on my father's side.

* She is referring to Bob's uncle Leo Etter.

What shall I write to you about myself? After all, it is necessary to describe an entire life, but this is not so easy to do. And it would be easier to tell it than to write it. There are too many painful memories.

My papa (Zalya), the brother of your grandmother, worked as an economist. In 1934, he died far away from us. Mama (Gita) worked for her entire life as a nurse and she died in 1973, when she was 87 years old. She was terribly ill for the last two-to-three years and she was not able to get around without my help.

For all of my conscious life, I have lived in Moscow. I worked as an engineer-geologist. Now I am on a pension. My husband is too. We do not have any children.

It is difficult for me to write about several circumstances regarding my father and my husband. I very much hope that at some point we will see each other and we can talk at more length and more openly.

Leo asked about aunt Chana (Chane?)*. This is first time I have heard this name, and the same for the name of the doctor Shiel**. Is he my father's brother? As regards my father's brother who worked as an engineer in Germany, I only know a little about him. In 1932-33, together with his wife and two children (Robert and Sara)***, he moved to Moscow. But when misfortune came papa's way, they began avoiding us. Since that time I know nothing about them. A couple of years ago, by complete happenstance, I found out that he and his wife were dead, and that the children left for the German Democratic Republic after the war.

* One of Zalya's five sisters was named Chana.

** I do not know whom she is referring to here.

*** These children were actually Moritz and Susi.

Bob, your letter made me both glad and upset. You were in Moscow. What a pity you did not look for me. I would have been happy to meet you and speak with you, to show you Moscow and Leningrad.

You are studying Russian history and, judging by the letter, you know the language well. Perhaps I might be of use to you in terms of packages of books, textbooks, and records. I would do this with pleasure.

I really want to establish a correspondence with you. I hope that if someone from the Mebels or your descendants will be in the USSR, they will let know. My telephone is 137-52-69.

Dear Bob, tell Leo that I am grateful that he initiated this search for me. I am very interested as to why he suddenly decided to pursue this.

Send my sincere thanks to your parents for their invitation. I would come as a guest with pleasure. I really want to make the acquaintance of all the relatives and of your country. But I already wrote Leo that I am embarrassed by my total lack of knowledge of the language. If you live in your parents' house and you would be able to spare some time for me, then that difficulty would disappear and you would be able to give me a call.

Mama and I loved my father very much and honored his memory. Stories have it that the Mebel family was an unusual family. What a pity that my acquaintance with all the relatives is taking place when Mama is already no longer among the living. She would have been happy to find out about her husband's sisters.

Say hello to all the relatives. Tell them that they can write to me in English. I have friends who will translate their letters.

Many thanks to you for your letter. It amounted to an entire diagram of the family tree. It is very interesting. In order to complete the picture, the first name and surname (in English) of Levik Beninson, who works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of his son Leo, the editor of the Philadelphia newspaper, is not enough.* Which one?

Is everything comprehensible to you in my letter? Maybe it is simpler to type? How is the handwriting? I really tried to write every letter of the alphabet carefully.

Please write to me. Where will your graduate studies take place? Which branch of Russian history are you studying?

Hello from my husband. His name is Victor.

Your Sara.

P.S. Your letter is dated March 11th – this is my birthday. A great gift.

S.

* There seems to be some confusion here: Leo Etter's son Gerald Etter worked for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.