



Letters from Prague: 1939–1941

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Their discovery of a box of letters to America sent from relatives in Prague led two sisters to compile this extraordinary collection. Raya Schapiro and Helga Weinberg found the letters among their mother's effects after her death in 1990. They were written by their grandmother and uncle, trapped in Prague after the Nazi occupation, to the girls' parents who had escaped to the United States in May, 1939, leaving the two girls behind. The 77 letters reprinted here span a period of two years, during which the Nazis drew an evertightening noose of destruction around the Jews of Prague: each letter is followed by notes of explanation and amplification, as well as notes on Nazi laws and official restrictions and the progress of the war. The early letters deal with the difficulties of getting the two small girls out to join their parents in America. After that is accomplished, the grandmother and uncle concentrate on their own prospects for immigration, and they struggle to maintain a normal life while hope slips steadily away. Each letter has a censor's stamp on it; each envelope bears the stillfrightening emblem of the Third Reich. The letters dramatically convey the tension, growing daily, of existence under the Nazis, and their tone becomes increasingly desperate as every avenue of escape reaches a dead end. Reading Letters from Prague is a moving experience, because it makes tangible a time in history so cruel as to be almost surreal. A rich legacy of bygone European Jewish life is maintained in this book, and Schapiro and Weinberg—a psychiatrist and retired teacher respectively—now grandparents themselves, can point to an invaluable record of human suffering and show the world that their voices, and those of their ancestors, cannot be silenced.

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