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about 16 or 17 died suddenly in his sleep. This was before the war.

You supported your sister & her family from Africa, and this is how we lived before the war. When war broke out in 1939, and Vilna was united with Lithuania, you managed to help us through a KOVNO merchant, but in 1940 all the borders were closed and I took it on myself to support the whole family. I was making a good living and we were not too badly off.

Then the real war started - Germany against Russia & from that time onwards, relating this story comes with blood and tears. And for me, this is more so, as the war separated me from my loved ones. I was called to the army and served till the end. I was twice wounded, on occasion very severely. When I came back to Vilna whilst still in the army in 1944, I found no one alive - not my mother, not my two brothers and four sisters and their families and no one from your sister's family and their children.

It is difficult to realise from so far away what it means to a man to come home and find he has lost his whole family to a soul. It is a miracle that I didn't go out of my mind. Even today, I cannot understand how I overcame my grief. Their faces were always in front of me, especially at night, I could not fall asleep.

And I then developed an obsession to find out what happened to every single one of them up to their last day and how each one of them died. I made extensive inquiries from survivors and gathered details of each member of the family and how they met their end. Each detail hurt, but I undertook the task as a labour of love.

Should I tell you here everything I learnt? Are you prepared to hear it all? You were so far away from the war - would you understand?

In the meantime, read my letter and I shall await your reply. Unfortunately I don't know English, but if your wife writes in English, I am sure I will be able to find someone to translate to me. Also, please let me know if you can read my handwriting.

I await impatiently for your reply,

With best regards,

Your friend and relation,

SHLOMO.