

Dear Family,

I know I haven't been able to write to you because I have been sent to a concentration camp, but if you don't believe this letter is from me then burn it. If you do believe it is from me, then brace yourselves...

I have finally managed to escape, but before I tell you what happened, I'm going to tell you what happened to me whilst I was in the prison of war.

Well, on the first day that I was at the camp, the man in charge, Colonel Wozniaki was directing us where to go. He pointed to the right for hard labour or to the left for the death shower (as we called it.) Lots of people were sent to the left, but because I am a healthy, strong man, I was sent to the right. When I saw his right arm go up I was so relieved after that I was taken to a small and packed shack that was to be my home for the foreseeable future.

A few months passed by and my muscles were growing ever weaker because of the limited amount of food we were given and the long hours we had to work each day. During this time I thought of my escape plan, since I worked alone I was able to explore the prison and one day I found a trap door. Every day I tried to check it to see if it was sealed off, but I kept getting interrupted by the guards. Finally the moment of truth came...the door was sealed shut. So I was forced for another good year, because of illness, to not attempt to escape.

After another harsh winter, I tried again to escape. There was a block of cells called the cooler, where you were left to freeze to death, if you were caught for doing something wrong. Call me crazy but I attempted to get there as part of my escape plan. One evening in the shack I shot some paper pellets, out of my mouth, at a guard to get his attention. The pellets hit him and I was sent to the cooler.

It was so cold I couldn't lie on the floor for more than five seconds without falling asleep and I was worried I may pass out and eventually freeze to death, so I was constantly doing jumping jacks and push ups to keep warm and stay awake.

Then one day, when a guard came to give me my rations, I fired a stone out of a catapult I had made from the elastic in my shoes, I couldn't believe my luck when it knocked him out! Quickly I got his uniform and put it on. The warmth of the jacket made me feel amazing, but I had to act quickly so I could get out of the prison before the unconscious guard woke up and before the changing of the evening guard. I waited in the cooler for a minute or two and then I heard the bell which signalled the changing of the guard.

When we got to the gates we were asked if there was anything to report from our shift. I said in my best German, "All correct Sir!" The head guard dismissed us and I followed the other guards down an icy road to my freedom. Suddenly one of the other guards approached me and asked me where I was going, "Shangri La" I muttered. I had heard the

guards talk about this bar when I was kept prisoner in the cooler. I was scared and excited as I headed down the cold and icy road away from the prison.

A little further down the road I heard a voice behind me yelling, "Karl, where are the cigarettes, give me the cigarettes!" It was a drunken soldier who had mistaken me for his friend. I was nervous that my cover would be blown and did not want to hang around so I started to run. The soldier ran after me. He struggled to keep up and stumbled several times so it was easy to lose him.

A mail cart pulled up at the side of the road and started to unload the mail for the town. I saw my chance to travel to the other side of the valley and jumped into one of the mail crates and pulled a tarpaulin over myself. The man loading the crate started to load things into the crate I was hiding in. One of the crates landed on my toes, it was so painful and I had to bite my lip to stop myself from screaming out in pain. I managed to stop myself from screaming and the crate began its slow descent into the valley.

When I got to the other side of the mountain I began to search for something I may need to protect myself with. I felt into the soldier's fur lined jacket and in the holster, where I was expecting to find a gun, I found a chocolate bar. An old man pulled back to tarpaulin, he was shocked to see me and I could tell he was about to raise the alarm. I threatened him with the holster of my gun...little did he know it was just a bar of chocolate. He took me to his house where I managed to convince him and his wife that I was Polish and had escaped from the prison. Just then the alarm from the prison began to ring and I showed them my prisoner number.

I am heading to Switzerland, to meet you at the secret place we agreed should we ever be separated by this war. I hope that you and the children are safe and I cannot wait to see you.

Much Love

Joseph

Writing from a Character's Point of View – by Joseph Prep 6.

A letter written as Joseph from the novel 'The Silver Sword' by Ian Serraillier