

SUSAN WARSINGER PAPERS, 1934-1949
1995.A.0470.2

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW
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Descriptive summary

Title: Susan Warsinger papers

Dates: 1934-1949

Accession number: 1995.A.0470.2

Creators: Susan Warsinger (1929-)

Extent: 13 folders plus 2 oversize folders

Repository: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW,
Washington, DC 20024-2126.

Abstract: The Susan Warsinger (Hilsenrath) papers comprise documents and photographs related to Susan Warsinger's Holocaust experiences as a Jewish child from Bad Kreuznach, Germany who took refuge in France from 1939 until she immigrated to the United States in 1941. Much of the collection pertains to Susan's life while living in the Chateau les Morelles in Broût-Vernet, France, which she describes in a diary and through a series of correspondence to her parents and little brother in the United States. Also comprised is correspondence with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and American Friends Service Committee as well as identification documents for herself and her brother. Photographs included in this collection largely depict the Hilsenrath family in Bad Kreuznach, Germany before the outbreak of World War II.

Language: German, English, French, Polish

Administrative Information

Access: Collection is open for use, but is stored offsite. Please contact the Reference Desk more than seven days prior to visit in order to request access.

Reproduction and use: Collection is available for use. Material may be protected by copyright. Please contact reference staff for further information.

Preferred citation: (Identification if item), Susan Warsinger papers (1995.A.0470.1) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: Susan Warsinger donated her papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in three separate donations in 1995, 2000, 2002, and 2003. These papers were assigned accession numbers 1995.A.0470, 2000.127, 2002.427.1, and 2003.56.1, respectively at the time of each donation. These have since been unified into this collection.

Accruals: Accruals may have been received since this collection was first processed, see archives catalog at collections.ushmm.org for further information.

Processing history: Colleen Benoit, May 2016

Biographical note

Susi (Susan) Hilsenrath was born on May 27, 1929, in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, to Israel (August 24, 1902- March 1984) and Hanna (Annie) Drimmer Hilsenrath (1908-November 1972). Israel was born, in Kolomyja, Poland (Kolomyya, Ukraine). He left for Germany in 1921 and settled in Kreuznach in 1922. He and Annie married in 1927. Israel owned a successful linen store, where Annie also worked. The family was prosperous and their house was in an upscale neighborhood. Susi had two brothers, Josef (Joseph), born on July 28, 1930, and Ernst (Ernest), born on January 2, 1938.

The Nazi dictatorship took power in Germany in 1933. For a while, the family's life remained unaffected. But as more anti-Jewish policies were enacted and Jewish businesses were boycotted, the family had to move to smaller and cheaper houses. Israel had to display a sign in the window warning people it was a Jewish owned business. Susi attended public school until 1936, when she had to leave and attend a one room school with the other Jewish children. One day, an SS member came into the store, and insulted and threatened Annie and Israel with a chair. Annie was so frightened she fainted and, after that, she was so fearful that Israel or one of the children had been taken or killed that she could not be left alone. She went to a doctor for treatment and was given a diagnosis of persecution mania. With fewer and fewer customers, the store was no longer profitable. Israel closed his business and became a peddler. Not long after this, Annie was threatened by SA men on the street, and her mania worsened. In 1937-1938, she was hospitalized for over a year, but returned home in October 1938. November 9-10 was the Kristallnacht pogrom. The family lived on the first floor of a three story building and stones were thrown through their windows. Rabbi Alfred Jacobs lived on the second floor, and a non-Jewish family lived on the third floor. Susi and Joseph were in their shared room and, when they heard the windows crashing, ran into their parent's room. Israel gave Susi all of his money, which she hid in her underwear. The family and Rabbi Jacob's family hid in the attic. Nazi party members and local people broke the door with a telephone pole and found them. They cut off the Rabbi's beard and took him to jail. Israel was arrested, but was soon released because he was Polish. Susi and the others stayed in the attic for three days. The family on the third floor brought them food. Eventually they came down and found that all their furniture had been destroyed. The Jewish school was shut down.

They wished to emigrate to the US but the strict quotas made it unlikely that the family could get visas to emigrate, especially as they were considered Polish citizens. Israel heard of a French woman who took children across the border to France for a fee. A relative in Paris said that he would take Susi and Joseph for a while. In August 1939, Susi and Joseph left Germany with the woman who pretended that

they were her children. Their uncle met them in Paris, and took them to a hotel. Annie had sent a trunk ahead for them. Josef wet his bed, and their uncle wrote to their father that he would keep them no longer. He placed Susi and Josef in a house with fifteen to twenty other children run by Madame Zaltiski in the Paris suburbs. On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded France. The siblings were moved to another house and when France surrendered in June, some nuns took Susi and Joseph to Versailles. Many others were hiding there, and the children slept in the Hall of Mirrors on straw mattresses. There continued to be letters back and forth between the children and their parents. Eventually the nuns took the children to Brevut-Vernet, where they stayed for a few weeks and watched German soldiers goosestep into Vichy. Susi was asked to help translate for a German soldier. They were placed in the Chateau de Morelles, a children's home with 100-150 Jewish children, ages 4-16. The chateau was operated in the Jewish orthodox tradition. They attended religious services and their food was kosher. They had no chores on Saturday, but they did have school, although they had to walk. The teachers and counselors were Jewish, German, and French. The children played on the grounds of the chateau, and did not associate with the children in town. Susi and Joseph continued to write to their parents, although they had received no replies since they left Paris. They heard from them by the fall of 1939 and knew that their father had gone to the US in September. Israel settled in Washington DC and, in February 1940, brought Annie and Ernst to America.

On March 2, 1941, Susi and Joseph were told by the director of the home that they would be going to America by plane. Then there was a problem with their visas and they were told they might be going by train and then boat. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) personnel came to the children's home in search of Susi and Josef. Israel had asked HIAS to help him get his children out. Israel bought boat tickets for the children to leave in August 1941, but the tickets were lost. In September, he sent new tickets. The children took the train from Vichy to Marseilles, and then to Lisbon. They boarded the Serpa Pinto along with seventy other children. They arrived in New York on September 24, 1941. They could not disembark, because Joseph had a rash. They were allowed to see their father, but had to stay on Ellis Island until Joseph recovered. They then drove with their father to Washington DC. Israel ran a delicatessen. Their mother remained ill and was frequently hospitalized. Susi went to an Americanization school to learn English. She also studied with Rabbi Jacobs from Bad Kreuznach, who lived with his family nearby. Susan later learned that most of the residents and staff of Chateau de Morelles were deported to concentration camps around 1943. Susan married Irving Warsinger (1924-2006) on December 25, 1948. Joseph had served in the US Army during the war. They had 3 children. Susan attended the University of Maryland and was a teacher for over 25 years.

Scope and content of collection

The Susan Warsinger papers comprise documents and photographs related to Susan's Holocaust experiences as a child taking refuge in France. Much of the collection pertains to Susan's life while living in the Chateau les Morelles in Broût-Vernet, which she describes in a diary and through a series of correspondence to her parents and little brother in the United States. The diary, given to Susan on her 12th birthday in May 1941, discusses her life in the Chateau and her relationships with other children with whom she attends schools while they all await transport. The diary reveals her anxiety about her circumstances and desperation to be reunited with family. The last entry is made in September 1941 shortly before she immigrated to the United States. In addition to the letters from Susan and Joseph to Israel and Anni, other correspondence includes letters from a relative named Herman Feuer, who assisted the children in Paris and a letter from a cousin, Felix Knoll, who was interned at Camp de Gurs. Materials detailing Israel's efforts to bring Susan and Joseph to the United States includes correspondence with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and American Friends Service Committee, as

well as identification documents for the children. The photographs in this collection largely depict the Hilsenrath family before the war in Bad Kreuznach, Germany.

System of arrangement

The Susan Warsinger papers are arranged as single series.

Indexing terms

Warsinger, Susan (1929-)
Hilsenrath, Joseph (1930-)
Hilsenrath, Ernest (1938-)
Hilsenrath, Israel (1902-1984)
Hilsenrath, Anni.

American Friends Service Committee.
HIAS (Agency).
Serpa Pinto (Steamship).
Gurs (Concentration camp).

Holocaust diaries.

Jewish children in the Holocaust--Germany--Bad Kreuznach.
Unaccompanied refugee children-- France--Broût-Vernet.
Kindertransports (Rescue operations)--France--Broût-Vernet.
Jews--Germany--Bad Kreuznach--20th century.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--France--Broût-Vernet--Personal narratives.

Bad Kreuznach (Germany).
Broût-Vernet (France).
United States--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Susan Warsinger papers, 1934-1949

Folder	Title
1, OS 1	Affidavits in lieu of passports, 1941
2, OS 2	Clipping and postcard of <i>Serpa Pinto</i> , 1941
	Correspondence:
3	Felix Knoll, 1941-1949
4	Friends and family, 1940-1941
5	Hermann Feuer, 1939-1947
6	Regarding immigration, 1941
7	Susan and Joseph, 1939-1941
8	Declarations and testimonies, 1938-1940

9	Diary, 1941
10	Identification documents, 1939
	Photographs:
11	Broût-Vernet, France, 1941
12	Children playing in Bad Kreuznach, 1934-1939 and undated
13	Hilsenrath family in Bad Kreuznach, 1938 and undated