

ABRAHAM FAMILY PAPERS, 1916-1960
1996.126.3

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

Title: Abraham family papers

Dates: 1916-1960

Catalog number: 1996.126.3

Creator: Abraham family

Extent: 8 folders

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

Abstract: The Abraham family papers contain documents and photographs pertaining to Walter and Ruth Abraham, a German-Jewish family, as well as their siblings and parents. During the Holocaust, the Abraham family evaded capture by hiding in several non-Jewish German homes. The documents consist mainly of identification papers such as birth and marriage certificates and identity cards for the Abraham family. Also included are post-war identification material for Walter's mother Elsa Abraham, and a declaration of death for Ruth's mother Henriette. Other documents include documentation for Ruth's sisters and for her daughter Reha. The photographs in the collection are of the Abraham family pre and post war.

Languages: English, German, Polish, French

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 of item), Abraham family papers (1996.126.3), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: The Abraham family papers were donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by Reha Abraham Sokolow in 1996, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2019. Collections

formerly cataloged as 1996.126.1, 1996.126.2, 2004.604.1, 2005.600.1, 2006.91.1, 2019.363.1 have been incorporated 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.

Related materials: Reha Abraham Sokolow also donated a scarf, clothes brush, and hair brush (2005.600.2-2005.600.4) to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Museum's library holds a copy of Reha and Al Sokolow's autobiographical book *Defying the Tide: An Account of Authentic Compassion during the Holocaust*.

Processing history: Michael Folkerts, May 2015; updated by Katelynn Vance, October 2019

Biographical note

Walter Abraham (1906-1979) was born in Frankenthal, Germany to a secular Jewish couple, Elsa and Julius Abraham. He was a partner in his father's furniture business and later became a partner at the Berlin furniture store, Fechner and Preidel, which was destroyed during Kristallnacht. He married Ruth Fromm on December 30, 1938.

Ruth Fromm (1913-2003) was born in Löbau, Germany to Henriette (d. 1913) and Meyer Fromm (1872-1942). Ruth had four sisters: Edith (b. 1892), Anna (b. 1900), Ella (b. 1902), and Betty. Her mother, Henriette, died following an appendix operation while Ruth was an infant. Thereafter, Meyer married Henriette's sister, Frieda (1882-1942), who raised Ruth and her sisters. The Fromms were an affluent, observant Jewish family. Meyer owned several businesses in Löbau. After Löbau became part of Poland in 1921, the Fromms moved to Allenstein, Germany where Meyer worked as a property manager for Singer Sewing Company and Warner Undergarments. Three of Meyer and Frieda's daughters married and moved to Berlin, and their parents followed sometime after 1936.

Ruth and Walter married on December 30, 1938. They shared an apartment with an elderly Jewish couple near Ruth's family. Walter's parents and grandparents were deported to Gurs internment camp in France in October 1940. In March 1941, Ruth and Walter were assigned to forced labor; Ruth worked for Starke Pharmaceuticals, and Walter's work assignments varied. Meyer and Frieda Fromm were deported on July 24, 1942 to Theresienstadt and transferred on September 26, 1942 to the Treblinka killing center where they were murdered.

In November 1942, when Ruth was seven months pregnant, a non-Jewish German woman, Maria Nickel (1910-2001), a young mother, approached Ruth and gave her food. Shortly after, Maria gave Ruth identification papers issued to herself. Her husband, Willi, gave Walter his driver's license.

Ruth's sister Ella was deported to Auschwitz concentration camp with her husband, Martin Kessler and their children, Helga and Johnny, in late January 1943 and killed.

Days later Walter and Ruth's daughter Reha was born in her parents' apartment in Berlin during Allied bombings. After several days, Walter, Ruth, and infant Reha boarded a train to Strietwald and went into hiding with an older German woman whom they paid. In June 1943, suddenly two SS officers arrived at the house to check the identification papers of Walter and Ruth that were provided by Maria Nickel.

When the officers left to check the papers' authenticity at the local police station, the Abraham family fled back to Berlin. They slept with Reha in phone booths and on park benches before deciding to separate. Walter stayed with a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Goedes, outside of Berlin, and Ruth and Reha lived in hiding in Berlin with the help of the Dutch ambassador's secretary. When Reha became ill, Maria Nickel passed her off as her own child and took her to the hospital for treatments. Ruth and Reha then lived in a room rented from a German couple named Jonas in Neudamm, Germany (now Dębno Poland) until the Soviet Army liberated the area in the spring of 1945.

Following liberation, the Abrahams were transported to Landsberg, where Walter was imprisoned for six weeks by the NKVD under suspicion of being a Nazi spy. He was able to finally prove he was Jewish and was released. After which, the Abrahams returned to Berlin where they discovered that Walter's father, Julius, was transferred via Drancy to Majdanek concentration camp in 1943 and killed. Walter's maternal grandparents, Ludwig and Clara Strauss, perished in Gurs. His mother, Elsa, survived the war in France and immigrated to the United States in 1948. Ruth's sister Ella was killed at Auschwitz, but her other sisters had fled with their families to the United States, England, and Palestine.

Ruth spent some time in Switzerland recovering from tuberculosis, and the Abraham family immigrated to New York in June 1948 aboard the SS *Ernie Pyle*. Their son was born in June 1952. Maria Nickel was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1970.

Scope and content of collection

The Abraham family collection contains primarily identification material for Walter, Ruth, Reha, and their extended family. Material related to Walter's parents, Julius and Elsa Abraham, are a birth certificate for Elsa, a marriage certificate, a declaration of death for Julius, and post-war French identification and correspondence for Elsa. The material pertaining to Ruth's parents include a note written while they were imprisoned at Theresienstadt just prior to their deportation and murder, and a certificate of death issued for Meyer Fromm. Walter, Ruth, and Reha Abraham's documents include birth and marriage certificates, identity cards, certificate of good conduct for Walter, a written endorsement of employment for Ruth, an Affidavit of Support. Other material includes birth and marriage certificates and a letter of correspondence for Ruth's sisters, Edith, Ella, and Anna. Also included are photographs of the Abraham family, and excerpts from the book *Eichmann: A Man and his Crimes*.

System of arrangement

The Abraham family papers are arranged in a single series.

Indexing terms

People:

Abraham, Walter, 1906-1979.

Abraham, Ruth Fromm, 1913-2003.

Sokolow, Reha Abraham.

Abraham, Elsa.

Abraham, Julius.

Fromm, Meyer, 1872-1942.

Fromm, Henriette.

Kessler, Martin.

Kessler, Ella Fromm.
Fromm, Edith.
Aron, Anna Fromm.
Aron, Julius.
Nickel, Maria, 1910-2001.

Corporate:

Theresienstadt (Concentration camp)
Gurs (Concentration camp)
Auschwitz (Concentration camp)

Topics:

Jews--Germany--History--20th century.
Jews--Germany--Berlin.
Holocaust survivors—Germany.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Germany.
Righteous Gentiles in the Holocaust.

Geography:

Berlin (Germany)
Dębno (Województwo Zachodniopomorskie, Poland)
Frankenthal (Germany : Landgerichtsbezirk)
Löbau (Germany)

Genre / Form:

Affidavit of support.
Certificates.
Correspondence.
Identity cards.
Passports.
Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Abraham family papers, 1916-1960

Folder:	Title:
1 of 8	Fromm family, 1921-1929; all materials are from
2 of 8	Julius and Elsa Abraham, 1938-1947
3 of 8	Meyer and Henriette Fromm, 1944
4 of 8	Pages from Eichmann: A Man and His Crimes, 1960
5 of 8	Photographs, 1938-1958
6 of 8	Reha Abraham, 1943-1948
7 of 8	Walter and Ruth Abraham, 1916-1948
8 of 8	Steffi Ronau-Walter, undated