

BELLA AND BENJAMIN HERSON PAPERS, approximately 1907-2006
1999.106.27

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

Title: Bella and Benjamin Herson papers

Dates: approximately 1907-2006

Accession number: 1999.106.27

Creator: Herson, Bella, 1924-

Additional creator: Herson, Benjamin, 1910-1987

Extent: 0.5 linear foot (11 folders)

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

Abstract: The Bella and Benjamin Herson papers consist of correspondence, a memoir, photographs, printed materials, prisoner of war materials, and reference materials documenting Bella and Benjamin Herson, the Herszon, Sztajnhorn, and Rys families, Bella's experiences in the Łódź ghetto, Auschwitz, and Birnbäumel, and Benjamin's imprisonment in prisoner of war camps Oflag XI A - Osterode and Oflag II C - Woldenberg.

Languages: English, German, Polish, Portuguese

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), Bella and Benjamin Herson papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Bella Herson donated the Bella and Benjamin Herson papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1999 and 2006. The accession previously cataloged as 2006.418.1 has 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 archival materials: Bella Herson also donated Benjamin Herson's Oflag XI-a prisoner of war identification tag (1999.106.24) and an engraved silver plaque (1999.106.26) to the Museum. The Museum's library holds a copy of Bella Herson's biography of her husband, *Benjamin: de prisioneiro de guerra a industrial brasileiro*, and three other books written or translated by Bella Herson.

Processing history: Julie Schweitzer, April 2014

Biographical note

Bella Herson was born Bella Sztajnhorn in 1924 in Zduńska Wola, Poland. Her mother died when she was young, her older brothers, Heniek and Miciek, fled to the Soviet Union shortly before the war, and her father, Josef, was shot and killed when he refused to move into the Łódź ghetto in March 1940. Bella and her sister Róża survived the Łódź ghetto where Bella worked in the Marysin orphanage and then the Schwachstrom factory. They were transferred to Auschwitz in August 1944 and Birnbäumel, a sub camp of Gross-Rosen, in October 1944 before escaping during the camp's evacuation in January 1945. Following liberation, they returned to Łódź where Bella met Benjamin Herszon.

Benjamin Herszon (1910-1987) was the only son of Mendel and Roma (nee Rys) Herszon of Łódź. Benjamin was a colonel in the Polish army, his unit was captured at the beginning of the war, and he survived the war in prisoner of war camps Oflag XI A - Osterode and Oflag II C - Woldenberg. His mother stayed in Łódź during most of the war while his father moved to Vilna. Both perished. His uncle and aunt, Henryk and Helena Herszon, immigrated to the United States via Vilna and Kobe. Benjamin and Bella were married in Romania, relocated to São Paulo, Brazil, and changed their name to Herson.

Scope and content of collection

The Bella and Benjamin Herson papers consist of correspondence, a memoir, photographs, printed materials, prisoner of war materials, and reference materials documenting Bella and Benjamin Herson, the Herszon, Sztajnhorn, and Rys families, Bella's experiences in the Łódź ghetto, Auschwitz, and Birnbäumel, and Benjamin's imprisonment in prisoner of war camps Oflag XI A - Osterode and Oflag II C - Woldenberg.

Correspondence primarily consists of postcards among the Sztajnhorn family in Zduńska Wola, Białystok, Łódź, and Kuznica (near Grodno), which are accompanied by English translations provided by the donor. The postcards describe the loss of the family business and the family's reduced circumstances. This series also includes a postcard from Mendel Herszon (under the pseudonym Jozef Bohdziewicz) in Vilna to Bohdan Bobiatynski containing a message for Benjamin Herszon in Oflag II C, postcards from Roma Herszon in the Łódź ghetto to Henryk and Helena Herson in Kobe and to Benjamin Herson in Oflag II C, and a postcard from Rozia Rys to Sal Rys in New York.

Tattooed Souls is Bella Herson's own English translation of her Portuguese memoir. It describes the start of the war, the death of her father, the Łódź ghetto and her work at the Marysin orphanage and Schwachstrom factory, her train ride to Auschwitz, how a bombing alert saved her from tattooing, her transfer to Birnbaumel, escape, liberation, return to Łódź, and meeting her husband.

Photographs depict Benjamin Herson in the Polish military and in prisoner of war camps, his aunt and uncle, his mother's Rys relatives, and his parent's memorial stone.

The collection also includes an article about Bella's Herson's biography of her husband, two pieces of prisoner of war camp money and a food coupon from Oflag XI A and Oflag II C, and photocopies of Stutthof records about Rosa Rosenblum's death there in 1944.

System of arrangement

The Bella and Benjamin Herson papers are arranged as six series:

- Series 1: Correspondence, approximately 1907-1945
- Series 2: Memoir, approximately 2006
- Series 3: Photographs, approximately 1920-1947
- Series 4: Printed materials, approximately 2001
- Series 5: Prisoner of war materials, approximately 1940-1945
- Series 6: Reference materials, approximately 2006

Indexing terms

Auschwitz (Concentration camp)
Birnbaumel (Concentration camp)
Oflag XI A (Concentration camp)
Oflag II C (Concentration camp)

Jews--Poland--Zduńska Wola.
Concentration camp inmates--Poland--Oświęcim.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Personal narratives.
Jewish ghettos--Poland--Łódź.
World War, 1939-1945--Prisoners and prisons, German.

Zduńska Wola (Poland)
Łódź (Poland)

Photographs

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Correspondence, approximately 1907-1945

Folder	Title
1	Bohdziewicz, Jozef (pseudonym of Mendel Herszon) to Bohdan Bobiatynski, 1943
2	Herszon, Roma, 1940-1944

3	Rys, Rozia, approximately 1907
4	Sztajnhorn family, 1940-1945

Series 2: Memoir, approximately 2006

Folder	Title
5	<i>Tattooed Souls</i> , by Bella Herson, approximately 2006

Series 3: Photographs, approximately 1920-1947

Folder	Title
6	Herson, Benjamin, 1937-1940
7	Herszon family, 1937, 1940, 1947
8	Rys family, approximately 1920-1935

Series 4: Printed materials, approximately 2001

Folder	Title
9	<i>"Benjamin, 'um retrato de Guerra,"</i> approximately 2001

Series 5: Prisoner of war materials, approximately 1940-1945

Folder	Title
10	Prisoner of war scrip and food coupon, approximately 1940-1945

Series 6: Reference materials, approximately 2006

Folder	Title
11	Photocopies of records about Rosa Rosenblum's death at Stutthof in 1944, approximately 2006