

BIERZONSKI FAMILY PAPERS, 1930-1945
2004.605.2

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

Title: Bierzonski family papers

Dates: 1930-1945

Accession number: 2004.605.2

Creator: Bierzonski (Family: Breslau, Germany)

Extent: 7 folders

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

Abstract: The Bierzonski family papers consist of documents and photographs relating to Viktor, Bronia, and Gerda's attempts to immigrate to the United States and Cuba and Bronia and Gerda's time in hiding. Included in the collection is a German Fremdenpass (non-citizen passport) for Viktor, a diary kept by Gerda while attending a Jewish boarding school in Switzerland in 1944, immigration papers relating to the family's attempts to flee Germany, and pre-war and wartime photographs of the Bierzonski and Lefkowitz families.

Languages: German, French, English

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), Bierzonski family papers (2004.605.2), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: Gerda Bierzonski Bikales donated the Bierzonski family papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2004, 2005, and 2011. The accessions previously numbered 2004.605, 2005.138, and 2011.196.1 have been incorporated into this collection.

Related archival materials: Norbert Bikales, Gerda Bierzonski Bikales' husband, donated photographs (2000.247) to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2000.

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

Processing history: Morgan Voth, May 2018

Biographical note

Gerda Bikales (née Bierzonski b. 1931) was born in Breslau, Germany to Viktor (b. 1897) and Bronia (b. Bilma Lefkowitz in 1906) Bierzonski. Gerda had a brother, Georg (b. 1932) who died at a young age from an infection. Viktor and Bronia fled Poland to Germany during World War I. After Hitler assumed power in 1933, Viktor was taken and questioned by the Gestapo because they believed he was a political opponent, but he was later released. Viktor tried to obtain visas for his family, but they were denied because the Polish quota was already filled. In 1938, Viktor was under expulsion orders and applied for a visitor's visa to the United States. They decided that it was safer for Viktor to go to America alone and attempt to get paperwork for the rest of the family after he got there. Soon after Kristallnacht, Viktor obtained Cuban visas for Bronia and Gerda, but they were quickly invalidated by the Cuban government, and Bronia and Gerda left Breslau for Antwerp, Belgium using false passports. After the German invasion of Belgium in 1940, Bronia, Gerda, and their neighbor, Israel (Srulke) Mandelman, attempted to flee to Da Panne, Belgium, but they returned to Antwerp and were sent to a camp in Zwartberg. They spent several months in the camp before escaping to Lyon, France and going into hiding. Bronia decided to send Gerda to Switzerland where she could contact Viktor in America. Gerda was taken to Bout du Monde, a detention camp near Geneva, Switzerland. After several weeks she was transferred to Centre Henri Dunant and later Pensionnat Marta Marcus where she attended a Jewish boarding school. In 1944 Gerda was reunited with her mother and they moved to France until 1946 when they were able to reunite with Viktor in America. Gerda later married Norbert Bikales, a survivor who hid in France and escaped to Switzerland, and they had two children, Edward and Peggy.

Scope and content of collection

The Bierzonski family papers consist of documents and photographs relating to Viktor, Bronia, and Gerda's attempts to immigrate to the United States and Cuba and Bronia and Gerda's time in hiding. Included in the collection is a German Fremdenpass (non-citizen passport) for Viktor, a diary kept by Gerda while attending a Jewish boarding school in Switzerland in 1944, immigration papers relating to the family's attempts to flee Germany, and pre-war and wartime photographs of the Bierzonski and Lefkowitz families.

Gerda began her diary during her stay at Pensionnat Marta Marcus, in Clarens-sur-Montreux, Switzerland from July 1944 until December 1944. In her diary she writes about her experiences at the Jewish boarding school and describes trips with her friends, receiving letters from her mother, and the struggles of being away from her family.

Emigration and immigration material includes an expulsion order for Vickor, medical certificates for Gerda and Bronia, character documents, certificates of conduct, a passenger ticket for Viktor's voyage to the United States in 1938, and other documents relating to the family's attempts to immigrate and Viktor's attempts to bring Bronia and Gerda to America.

System of arrangement

The Bierzonski family papers are arranged as a single series. The documents are arranged chronologically.

Indexing terms

Bierzonski, Bronia
Bierzonski, Gerda
Bierzonski, Viktor
Mandelman, Israel (Srulke)

Jewish families--Germany.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)

Antwerp (Belgium)
Breslau (Germany)
Clarens (Switzerland)
Lyon (France)
New York (N.Y)
United States--Emigration and immigration--History.

Diaries.
Correspondence.
Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Bierzonski family papers, approximately 1930-1945

Box/Folder	Title
1 of 7	German Fremdenpass, 1938
2 of 7	Diary, 1944
3-4 of 7	Emigration and immigration, 1938-1942 (2 folders)
5 of 7	Committee of Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael, approximately 1945
6 of 7	Bierzonski family photographs, approximately 1930-1942
7 of 7	Lefkowitz family photographs, approximately 1930s