

RUTH AND KURT ELIAS PAPERS, approximately 1918-1947 2004.621.1

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

Title: Ruth and Kurt Elias papers

Dates: approximately 1918-1947

Accession number: 2004.621.1

Creator: Elias, Ruth, 1922-2008.

Additional creator: Elias, Kurt.

Extent: 0.4 linear foot (4 folders)

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

Abstract: The Ruth and Kurt Elias papers include correspondence from Kurt's father asking relatives to help him immigrate to the United States and providing his address at the Mauthausen concentration camp; identification papers for Ruth, her sister, and Kurt's father; and photographs depicting Ruth and Kurt Elias and their families before the war and after liberation in Czechoslovakia.

Languages: German, Czech, English, Hebrew

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), Ruth and Kurt Elias papers (2004.621.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Ruth Elias donated the Ruth and Kurt Elias papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2004.

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

Processing history: Julie Schweitzer, December 2017

Biographical notes

Ruth Elias (1922-2008) was born Ruth Huppert in Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. Her parents Friedrich (Fritz) Huppert and Malvina Ringer divorced when she and her sister Edith (b. 1920) were still young. She and Edith moved in with their paternal grandmother and then with their uncle, but they kept in close contact with their father. Ruth trained to be a pianist and hoped to attend a musical academy in Prague. Fritz was a member of a Zionist movement, and Ruth and Edith joined Maccabi Hatzair. In March 1939 Germany occupied Bohemia and Moravia. The foreman of the family business who had declared himself a Volksdeutscher (ethnic German) took over the business one day later. Ruth's aunt and uncle were forced out of their house which was adjacent to their butcher shop. Shortly after that, Ruth had to leave school. That fall, all Jewish males of working age had to report for forced labor, and Ruth's father was forced to clean streets. He escaped to his sister in Brno and arranged for Ruth and Edith to go to an aunt in the town of Vyskov. After a month he sent for his children and paid a Czech farmer to allow him and his daughters to work on a farm in Pozorice near Brno.

In 1942 Ruth and her family were deported to Theresienstadt ghetto where she married her boyfriend, Koni, a ghetto policeman. She and her husband were able to build a little apartment in house L408 with another couple so that they could have some time together. In 1943 Ruth became pregnant. She begged doctors in Theresienstadt to terminate her pregnancy, but they refused. She and Koni were taken on a transport to the family camp of Auschwitz. After moving rocks back and forth in Auschwitz, she managed to get assigned to a leather workshop. In July 1944 there was a selection in the family camp, and she was subsequently moved to the women's barrack. Ruth was sent to Hamburg Germany to clear rubble along with 2000 other women. After three days of work, her block elder reported Ruth and another pregnant woman. After Ruth gave birth to a baby girl, an SS doctor ordered her breasts to be tied off with string as part of a medical experiment to see how long her baby daughter could live without food. Ruth secretly fed the baby by soaking pieces of bread in water, but the baby grew weak, her stomach swelling from hunger. A prisoner-doctor convinced Ruth to inject a lethal dose of morphine into the suffering baby, who had no chance of surviving.

On October 8, 1944, Ruth was taken on a work transport to Taucha, a sub camp of Buchenwald where inmates were forced to produce rocket launchers. Ruth became a translator and was part of the transport squad that brought the daily supplies into the camp. The squad managed to steal some of each load and distribute it among the inmates. Ruth also was ordered to stage two cabaret shows, and she met Kurt Elias, another Czech prisoner, during the rehearsals. When the camp was evacuated on April 14, 1945, Ruth and Kurt both volunteered to stay behind with the sick. They left the camp after being warned by the inmates of a nearby camp that the SS might come back and kill them. They were liberated by American troops in a nearby forest.

Ruth and Kurt were first taken to Poenitz and then to Leipzig, Germany before returning to Czechoslovakia and registering with the Jewish Community and Repatriation office in Prague. Kurt

learned that his wife Lisa Wodak and child had perished. Ruth returned to Ostrava to discover that none of her immediate family had survived either. Her father perished in 1941 in Theresienstadt, and her sister perished in a concentration camp. Though her husband Koni had survived, they had become estranged while in Auschwitz, and the marriage did not survive. Ruth shared a small, furnished room with Kurt and worked as a secretary while he studied pharmacology. She eventually became the head of the Prague office of a Dutch shipping company. She and Kurt married on April 18, 1947, the anniversary of their liberation and Kurt's birthday. They immigrated to Israel on April 1, 1949 aboard the ship *Galilah*. Ruth published her story under the title *Triumph of Hope: From Theresienstadt and Auschwitz to Israel*.

Scope and content of collection

The Ruth and Kurt Elias papers include correspondence from Kurt's father asking relatives to help him immigrate to the United States and providing his address at the Mauthausen concentration camp; identification papers for Ruth, her sister, and Kurt's father; and photographs depicting Ruth and Kurt Elias and their families before the war and after liberation in Czechoslovakia.

System of arrangement

The Ruth and Kurt Elias papers are arranged as a single series.

Indexing terms

Elias, Ruth, 1922-2008.

Elias, Kurt.

Weddings--Czech Republic--Prague.

School children--Czechoslovakia.

Jews--Czechoslovakia--History--20th century.

Prague (Czech Republic)

Ostrava (Czech Republic)

Czechoslovakia--Emigration and immigration.

Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Ruth and Kurt Elias papers, approximately 1918-1947

Folder	
1	Correspondence, 1939-1940
2	Identification papers, 1939-1945
3	Photographs, Kurt Elias and family, approximately 1918-1947
4	Photographs, Ruth Elias and family, approximately 1918-1947