

SERPHOS FAMILY PAPERS, circa 1928-1948
2005.572.1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
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Descriptive summary

Title: Serphos family papers

Dates: circa 1928-1948

Accession number: 2005.572.1

Creator: Serphos (Family : Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Extent: 0.3 linear feet (5 folders and 1 oversize folder)

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

Abstract: The Serphos family papers include biographical material, correspondence, two diaries, and photographs relating to the experiences of the Serphos family while in hiding in Amsterdam, Netherlands, including false identification cards, family photographs, two diaries written by Maurits Serphos while in hiding, and postcards written by Bertie Serphos from the Westerbork concentration camp.

Languages: Dutch, German

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), Serphos family papers (2005.572.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: Rita Serphos donated the Serphos family papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2005.

Separated material: A book, *Klein, Klein, Kleutertje (JU, JU PAARDJE) en 60 andere oude rijmpjes* (2005.572.2) that Rita carried with her during the war was catalogued separately as an object.

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, March 2019

Biographical note

Rita Serphos (b. 1939) was born in Amsterdam to Maurits Serphos (1898-1970) and Benjamina Sara "Miep" Serphos (née Koppels, 1898-1985). Benjamina grew up in Deventer where her father, Levi Koppels, served as a cantor, shochet and teacher. Maurits was the son of Mozes and Bertha Serphos. He was one of eight children, and his father owned a textile factory in Enschede. Rita's siblings Bertha (Bertie, 1929-1943) and Leo (1930-1993) were born in Enschede, but in 1933 the family moved to Amsterdam so that Maurits could direct the Amsterdam branch of the family's business. In late 1939 her parents obtained immigration papers for Canada, but Benjamina was not prepared to leave her parents. Therefore she gave their papers to second cousins of Maurits who had just fled Germany and also had three children. The cousins immigrated to Canada, and Rita's family remained in the Netherlands when Germany invaded in May 1940.

At the beginning of the war, Maurits distributed his entire stock of merchandise to his most trusted clients. Throughout the war, Benjamina occasionally retrieved these goods and bartered them for food and other necessities. Rita's uncle Arthur was taken from Enschede in 1941 and deported to Mauthausen where he died two weeks later. After receiving notification of his brother's death, Maurits decided to go into hiding. Another brother, Nathan Isedor ("Natsie") belonged to the resistance and promised to find hiding places for the entire family, though for security reasons he could not disclose the locations to other family members. This made Rita's mother very uncomfortable. She decided neither to wear the Jewish star nor to go into hiding. Instead she also joined the resistance and bicycled from place to place using the alias Theodora (Doortje) Tijdgaat. Rita's mother pestered Natsie to reveal where her family was hiding. When he told her the location of her husband, she immediately moved him to the attic of Mr. Heeres, a business friend in Amsterdam. Though Maurits survived the war, as a result of the cramped hiding conditions he developed Burgher's Disease and had to have both his legs amputated after the war.

Benjamina eventually learned where her Leo was hiding and moved him to the home of Mr. D. Feenstra, the head of the underground in the village of Steggerda in Friesland. Leo stayed with them for about a year and helped distribute clandestine flyers. He then moved to the home of Folkert Kuperus in Vinkega and remained with them until the end of the war. Benjamina also found Rita. She dyed her hair blond and moved her to a new hiding place approximately every three months. Rita was taught to call her own mother Tante Doortje and called each new rescuer Papa and Mama. Her rescuers included a kindergarten teacher Lien Paping, the Marsman family from Oldenzaal, and the Heeres family from Naarden (the brother of her father's rescuers). Though she could not bring any of her own toys with her into hiding for fear of identification, her mother brought her favorite children's songbook with her during each move to keep her entertained.

Benjamina never discovered the location of her oldest daughter, Bertie. Bertie had been hidden by an older nurse in Haarlem who was also hiding two Jewish baby boys. They were arrested after walking in

the park on a Sunday afternoon. The nurse was sent to Sachsenhausen where she perished. Bertie was sent to Westerbork and from there to Sobibor where she was killed. At the same time, Rita's cousin Marcel, her aunt and uncle, Willy and Sophie Serphos, and their son Marcel were also sent away and killed.

During the last months of the war Rita was able to rejoin her mother and live with her in the village of Laren. She attended a Catholic kindergarten and became best friends with two other little girls who unbeknownst to her at the time also were Jews in hiding. Benjamina worked as a housekeeper for the elderly parents of the head of her resistance group, Martinus Nijhoff. After the war, Rita remained in the Netherlands and later became a kindergarten teacher.

Scope and content of collection

The Serphos family papers include biographical material, correspondence, two diaries, and photographs relating to the experiences of the Serphos family while in hiding in Amsterdam, Netherlands, including false identification cards, family photographs, two diaries written by Maurits Serphos while in hiding, and postcards written by Bertie Serphos from the Westerbork concentration camp.

Biographical material includes an identification card for Maurits, false identification cards for Maurits and Benjamina using the names Simon Pieter, Willem Van Veen, and Theodora Koppels, identification cards for Maurits and Arthur stating they are Jewish, and papers granting Maurits permission to travel from the Netherlands under his false name. Also included are articles relating to Benjamina's work with the underground movement.

Correspondence includes letters between Maurits and Benjamina under their false names, a letter from Bertie to Leo the night before she is taken away, a letter from the family hiding Leo to Benjamina, and two postcards from Bertie in Westerbork to her mother.

The diaries were written in Dutch by Maurits in 1944 during his time in hiding in the Netherlands. In his entries he writes about what he hears going on around him.

Photographs include mainly pre-war and wartime family photographs of the Serphos family including Leo, Bertie, Rita, and several of the families they lived with while in hiding.

System of arrangement

The Serphos family papers are arranged as a single series.

Indexing terms

Person:

Serphos, Rita, 1939-

Serphos, Maurits, 1898-1970.

Serphos, Benjamina, 1898-1985.

Serphos, Leo, 1930-1993.

Serphos, Bertha, 1929-1943.

Corporate:
Westerbork (Concentration camp)

Topical Subject:
Hidden children (Holocaust)--Netherlands.
Jewish children in the Holocaust--Netherlands--Amsterdam.
Jews, German--Netherlands--Diaries.
World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives.
World War, 1939-1945--Underground movements--Netherlands.

Geography:
Netherlands.

Genre/Form:
Correspondence.
Diaries.
Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Serphos family papers, circa 1928-1948

Folder	Title
1 of 5	Biographical material, 1941-1945
2 of 5	Correspondence, 1943-1945
3-4 of 5	Diary, 1944 (2 folders)
5 of 5 OS 1	Photographs, circa 1928-1948