

JOAN KENT FINKELSTEIN FAMILY PAPERS, approximately 1920-2013
2009.376.1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126
Tel. (202) 479-9717
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Descriptive summary

Title: Joan Kent Finkelstein family papers

Dates: approximately 1920-2013

Accession number: 2009.376.1

Creator: Finkelstein, Joan Kent, 1936-

Additional creator: Kent, Nadine L., 1904-1967

Extent: 1.1 linear feet (1 box, 1 flat box, 1 oversize folder)

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

Abstract: Consists of correspondence and documents dated between 1940 and 1966 from family and friends of Jerzy and Nadzieja Solomon Klein (later George and Nadine Kent), originally of Warsaw, Poland. Includes correspondence from family who remained in Poland during the war, family who emigrated to Palestine and the Soviet Union, and family and friends who emigrated to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina prior to or during the war. The collection includes translations and explanations of much of the correspondence. Also includes a photograph album containing images from the 1920s and 1930s, largely of holiday and vacation trips throughout Europe and including photos of funeral of Pilsudski, as well as a diploma from the University of Warsaw.

Languages: Polish, English, German, Russian

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), Joan Kent Finkelstein family papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Joan Kent Finkelstein donated the Joan Kent Finkelstein family papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2009 and 2013.

Related materials: Joan Kent Finkelstein also donated 41 items of clothing, accessories, and linens to the Museum. The items are individually cataloged under accession numbers 2009.376.2 through 2009.376.42.

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, November 2015

Biographical note

Joanna Ludmila Klein (later J.L. Kent Finkelstein) was born November 15, 1936, in Warsaw, Poland, to Jerzy and Nadzieja Solomon Klein. Her mother, Nadzieja, born in 1904, was a literary critic and wrote for the liberal weekly *Wiadomosci Literackie*. Nadzieja received a PhD in 1928 from the University of Warsaw. Her father, Jerzy, born in 1901, was a mechanical engineer and a 1926 graduate of the Polytechnic Institute in Warsaw. As an independent entrepreneur, Jerzy directed such projects as installing sound systems in movie theaters and devised plans for an underground train system in Warsaw. Following Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, Jerzy decided to leave Europe and applied for American visas. He obtained a British immigration visa, but not a work permit, despite previous study and work experience in England.

In September 1939, Germany invaded and occupied Poland. In January 1940, Joanna's nanny, a Volksdeutsche [ethnic German], returned from a family visit to western Poland and warned the Kleins to leave. They lived in Warsaw on Marszałkowska Street in a building owned by Joanna's maternal great aunt, Elizawieta Palcew, who had immigrated to Warsaw from Moscow as a young wife. Now a widow, she operated a lucrative shoe factory and kept some of her savings in pre-1933 American dollars. The family had also deposited funds with JDC [Joint Distribution Committee.] Jerzy purchased travel visas and exit permits for round trip travel to Italy via Peru, from the Jewish-owned Orbis travel agency, which obtained them for fifty US dollars each from a corrupt German official in Krakow. The morning they were to receive their documents, Orbis was raided and closed by the Nazis, but the agency's courier was tipped off about the raid by the non-Jewish doorman, and he personally delivered the permits. Jerzy had arranged to have nine steamer trunks and several suitcases forwarded; all arrived intact in New York. The Kleins left Warsaw by train immediately, about 20 April 1940, along with four other family members: 74-year-old Elizawieta Palcew, her maternal uncle, Zachar, his wife, Maryla, and their young son, Andrew. Joanna's paternal grandparents, Herman and Regina (Krykus) Klein stayed to care for Jerzy's handicapped younger brother; her maternal grandfather, Abraham, and uncle, Leon, also stayed. Nadzieja had a concealed clothes brush, which Jerzy had hollowed out to hide some family jewels. At one point, while she was using the brush en route, it broke, and they spilled out but were salvaged after Jerzy left the train in Krakow station to rent a hotel room where he was able to repair the brush and return to the train before it left the station.

In Trieste, through the good offices of Fano, a philanthropic Jewish banker from Milan, they obtained transit visas for travel through Yugoslavia and Greece, as well as entry visas into Turkey in June 1940. In Istanbul, Jerzy obtained a job teaching calculus and physics in English at an American school, Robert College, his first encounter with Americans. An official of the Polish Consulate attested that they were “good Polish Catholics” for their applications for Brazilian visas, but then Jerzy, Nadzieja, Joanna, and Elizawieta Palcew obtained visas for America, valid for three months. Zachar and his family, without US visas, decided to immigrate to Palestine. The Kleins and Elizawieta Palcew traveled by train to Baghdad and then to Basra, Iraq, where they boarded a British ship, HMS Varella in December 1940. The ship stopped in Karachi and continued to Bombay (Mumbai), India, where they disembarked. Although Jerzy was offered a job, he was determined to reach the United States. In January 13, 1941, they boarded the USS President Harrison, an American cruise ship, thus legally reaching American soil before the visas expired. They arrived in New York on February 17, 1941, and settled there.

Jerzy’s parents died in Treblinka in 1942. All Jerzy’s family in Poland also perished, including 37 first cousins. Nadzieja’s eldest brother, Leon, died of disease in the Warsaw Ghetto in August 1940, and her father died there of starvation on January 20, 1942. Her brother Zachar and family survived in Palestine. Upon acquiring United States citizenship in 1946, the family changed their surname from Klein to Kent and Americanized their first names as Nadine, George, and Joan. Joan became a biomedical researcher and teacher, obtaining a PhD in 1963, married, and had two children and three grandchildren. George became the first Jewish engineer at Western Electric (Bell System), where he designed a submarine sonar detection system that aided the war effort and worked in early development of mobile phones; he also taught electrical engineering at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. Elizawieta Palcew died at age 92 in April 1959. Nadine worked in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and died on November 25, 1967, age 64 years. George died, age 80 years, in September 1981, while hiking in the Tyrol.

Nadzieja Solomon, later Nadine L. Kent, was born in Warsaw, Poland, on July 28, 1904, to Abraham and Luboff Niurenberg Solomon, the third of four children, with brothers Leon (1897-1940), a physician, Zachar (1901–1970), an engineer, and Anatole (1912-1962+), a banker. She received a doctorate in comparative literature in 1928 from the University of Warsaw, having married Jerzy Klein (b. 1901) in 1926. Their daughter Joanna was born in 1936. Jerzy Klein, later George J. Kent), with a master’s degree in mechanical engineering, was an independent entrepreneurial engineer working on projects such as installing sound systems in movie theaters and designing an underground system for Warsaw. Nadzieja was a foreign book critic, who wrote for the liberal weekly magazine, *Literary News* [Wiadomości Literackie]. Following Hitler’s remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, Jerzy decided to leave Europe and applied for American visas. He obtained a British visa, but not a work permit, despite previous study and work experience in England.

In September 1939, Germany invaded and occupied Poland. In January 1940, Joanna’s nanny, a Volksdeutsche [ethnic German], returned from a family visit to western Poland and warned the family to leave. They lived in Warsaw on Marszałkowska Street in a building owned by Nadzieja’s aunt, Elizawieta Palcew (1867-1959), who had immigrated to Poland from Moscow as a young wife. Now a widow, she operated a lucrative shoe factory and kept some funds at her home in pre-1933 American dollars. The family also had deposited funds with JDC (Joint Distribution Committee). Jerzy purchased travel visas and exit permits for round trip travel to Italy via Peru from the Jewish-owned Orbis travel agency, which obtained them for fifty US dollars each from a corrupt German official in Krakow. The morning they were to receive their documents, Orbis was raided and closed by the Nazis, but the agency’s courier was tipped off about the raid by the non-Jewish doorman, who personally delivered the permits. Jerzy had arranged to have nine steamer trunks and several suitcases forwarded; all arrived intact in New York.

The Kleins left Warsaw by train immediately, about 20 April 1940, along with four other family members: Nadzieja's aunt, 74-year-old Elizawieta Palcew, her brother, Zachar, his wife, Maryla, and their young son, Andrew. Jerzy's parents, Herman and Regina Krykus Klein stayed to care for Jerzy's handicapped younger brother. Nadzieja's father, Abraham, and brother, Leon, also stayed in Warsaw. In Trieste, through the good offices of Fano, a philanthropic Jewish banker from Milan, they obtained transit visas for Yugoslavia and Greece, as well as entry visas into Turkey in June 1940. In Istanbul, Jerzy taught calculus and physics in English at an American school, Robert College, his first encounter with Americans. An official at the Polish consulate attested that they were "good Polish Catholics" for their applications for Brazilian visas, but Jerzy, Nadzieja, Joanna, and Elizawieta Palcew obtained visas for America, valid for three months. Zachar and family, without US visas, decided to immigrate to Palestine. The Kleins and Elizawieta Palcew travelled by train to Baghdad and then to Basra in Iraq, where they boarded a British ship, the HMS Varella in December 1940. The ship stopped in Karachi and continued to Bombay (Mumbai), India, where they disembarked. Although Jerzy was offered a job, he was determined to reach the United States. On January 13, 1941, they boarded the USS President Harrison, an American cruise ship, thus legally reaching American soil before the visas expired. They arrived in New York on February 17, 1941, and settled there.

Jerzy's parents died in Treblinka in 1942. All Jerzy's family in Poland also perished, including 37 first cousins. Nadzieja's eldest brother, Leon, died of disease in the Warsaw ghetto in the fall of 1940; her father died there of starvation on January 20, 1942. Her brother, Zachar, and family survived in Palestine/Israel. Her youngest brother, Anatole, survived in Novosibirsk, Siberia, in the Soviet Union.

Upon acquiring United States citizenship in 1946, the family changed their surname from Klein to Kent and Americanized their first names as Nadine, George, and Joan. Nadine worked in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and died on November 25, 1967, age 64. George became the first Jewish engineer at Western Electric (Bell System), where he patented a submarine sonar detection system to help the war effort and worked in the early development of mobile phones. He also taught electrical engineering at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. Jerzy died, age 81, while hiking in the Italian Tyrol in 1981. Elizawieta Palcew died in April 1959, age 92. Joan became a biomedical researcher and teacher (PhD, 1963), married, and had two children and three grandchildren.

Scope and content of collection

Consists of correspondence and documents dated between 1940 and 1966 from family and friends of Jerzy and Nadzieja Solomon Klein (later George and Nadine Kent), originally of Warsaw, Poland. Includes correspondence from family who remained in Poland during the war, family who emigrated to Palestine and the Soviet Union, and family and friends who emigrated to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina prior to or during the war. The collection includes translations and explanations of much of the correspondence. Also includes a photograph album containing images from the 1920s and 1930s, largely of holiday and vacation trips throughout Europe and including photos of funeral of Pilsudski, as well as a diploma from the University of Warsaw.

Biographical materials include reproductions of identification and immigration papers documenting the family of Jerzy, Nadzieja, and Joanna Klein as well as Nadzieja Solomon Klein's original 1928 University of Warsaw diploma accompanied by a transcription and translation of the diploma, information about Jewish intellectuals in 1920s Warsaw, and a reproduction of a 1928 photograph of Nadzieja Klein.

The correspondence series includes letters, postcards, and telegrams from family who remained in Poland during the war, family who emigrated to Palestine and the Soviet Union, and family and friends who emigrated to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina prior to or during the war. The document titled "Letters to America" by Joan Kent Finkelstein includes translations and explanations of much of the original correspondence. Correspondence from Abraham Solomon, Nadine's father, relates news from family and friends and the death of Nadine's brother, Leon (Lowa) in the Warsaw ghetto. Correspondence from Zachar Solomon, Nadine's brother, provides family news from Palestine, conveys his concerns and fears about his father left in Warsaw and sorrow at his death, describes his work as a Polish engineer attached to the American Army, and documents his efforts to immigrate to the United States and dispose of the family's property in Poland following the war. Correspondence from Anatole (Tolek) Solomon, Nadine's brother, describes wartime and postwar life in Siberia and addresses Cold War politics following the Cuban missile crisis. Correspondence from Rafael (Rava) Nurnberg, Nadine's cousin, documents his efforts to ship food from Argentina to Abraham Solomon in the Warsaw ghetto. Correspondence from Irena Kalecka, a Polish friend of Nadine's, describes her wartime experiences, the fates of family members and mutual friends, and poor postwar conditions in Poland. Additional correspondents describe wartime and postwar conditions in Poland and Palestine/Israel.

The photograph album contains images from the 1920s and 1930s, largely of holiday and vacation trips throughout Europe and to cities such as Hel, Poland and Vienna, Austria, and including photos of the funeral processing honoring Józef Piłsudski.

System of arrangement

The Joan Kent Finkelstein family papers are arranged as three series:

- Series 1: Biographical materials, 1928, approximately 2013
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1940-2011 (bulk 1940-1966)
- Series 3: Photographic materials, approximately 1920-1941

Indexing terms

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Poland--Warsaw--Correspondence.

Jewish children in the Holocaust--Poland--Warsaw.

Jewish families--Poland--Warsaw.

Jewish refugees--United States.

World War, 1939-1945--Refugees--United States.

Warsaw (Poland)

Poland--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.

United States--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.

Photographs

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Biographical materials, 1928, approximately 2013

Box/ Folder	
1.1	Klein, Jerzy, Nadzieja, and Joanna, (1940-1945), approximately 2013
OS 1	Klein, Nadzieja, University of Warsaw diploma, 1928
1.2	Klein, Nadzieja, material accompanying University of Warsaw diploma, approximately 2013

Series 2: Correspondence, 1940-2011 (bulk 1940-1966)

Box/ Folder	
1.3-1.4	Letters to America, introductory information and translations, 2011 (2 folders)
1.5	Arct, Gisela, 1962
1.6	Janke, approximately 1947
1.7-1.10	Kalecka, Irena, 1945-1965 (4 folders)
1.11	Kaliski, Emil and Ania, 1958
1.12	Klein, Leon, 1941
1.13	Nagorska, H., 1941
1.14	Nurnberg, Rafael, Olga, and Zachary, 1941-1942, 1952-1953
1.15	Solomon, Abraham, 1941
1.16	Solomon, Tolek, 1957-1963
1.17-1.19	Solomon, Zachar, 1941-1966 (3 folders)
1.20	Slucki, Teodor, 1942
1.21	Stak, Anna, 1940
1.22	Suryc, Michael, 1941

Series 3: Photographic materials, approximately 1920-1941

Box/ Folder	
2.1	Photograph album, approximately 1920-1940