

HERTA GRIFFEL BAITCH PAPERS, 1938-2019

2016.112.12

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
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Descriptive summary

Title: Herta Griffel Baitch papers

Dates: 1938-2019

Accession number: 2016.112.12

Creator: Baitch, Herta Griffel, 1933-

Extent: 0.1 linear foot (6 folders)

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

Abstract: The Herta Griffel Baitch papers include Herta Griffel's German passport and Viennese birth certificate, two letters from her mother to Herta's social worker (Rose Beser), a notebook containing handwritten Yiddish songs and proverbs Herta's mother copied for her in German, and a photograph of Herta and her mother before the Holocaust. Later photographs depict Herta with her cousin Adela Dula in London in 1977 and visiting the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in 2008. The papers also include letters from Adela to Herta and her first foster parents (Clara and Joseph Baer), notes describing the family's history, and an email from Asa Baitch about the Nagel family from Majdan Sredny.

Language: German, 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), Herta Griffel Baitch papers (2016.112.12) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: Herta Griffel Baitch donated her papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2016 and 2019. Accessions 2016.112.1 and 2019.429.1 have 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 material: Herta Griffel Baitch also donated two dresses, two nightgowns, a blouse, an apron, a siddur, a suitcase, a doll, and an oral history to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2016.112.2-2016.112.11). The Museum's Library holds a copy of Baitch's memoir *Lucky Girl* (DS135.A93 B35 2009).

Processing history: Julie Schweitzer, April 2018. Revised November 2019.

Biographical note

Herta Griffel (b. 1933, later Herta Baitch) was born in Vienna, Austria, to Wolf (1888-1939) and Beila Nagel Griffel (1896-1942). Wolf was born in Krakow, Austria-Hungary, and Beila was from Majdan Średni, Kingdom of Poland, which was part of the Russian Empire. Both areas were integrated into Poland when the nation was created in the aftermath of WWI. Wolf and Beila moved to Vienna, were married in April 1930, and established a small grocery store. The family spoke German and Yiddish at home. Beila enjoyed sewing and embroidery, and Wolf loved to sing Yiddish songs with Herta from a songbook. Wolf had minor health issues, but Beila was able to manage the store and take care of her young daughter and husband when needed.

On March 13, 1938, Austria was annexed into Germany, in what became known as the Anschluss. German authorities quickly created new legislation that restricted Jewish life. Jews were excluded from most professions and were forced to wear a yellow badge to identify themselves as Jews. On November 9-10, during the Kristallnacht pogrom, Jews and their businesses, homes, and places of worship were freely and openly attacked by the public and Nazi paramilitary units. Wolf and Beila's grocery store was confiscated and Wolf was forced into compulsory labor. Every morning a truck took him and the other men in the neighborhood to a labor camp and brought them home at night. Wolf and Beila discussed the possibility of Wolf escaping to Shanghai, but those plans never came to fruition. The forced labor complicated Wolf's health issues and one day after coming home, he died. After the loss of Wolf and the store, Beila and Herta moved in with Beila's sister-in-law, Leah Nagel.

After Kristallnacht, the Chief Rabbi of Vienna, Rabbi Mermelstein, sought to get as many children out of Vienna as he could. He began working with the German Jewish Children's Aid Society, an American organization that helped resettle Jewish children in the United States. Beila was able to get Herta on the list of thirty five children who were selected for possible resettlement and sent to a doctor for a preliminary exam. The children were selected based on two criteria: their fathers had died in camps and their mothers were ineligible for immigration because America's Hungarian, Romanian, and Polish immigration quotas were already filled. Because Beila was originally from Poland, she fell under the Polish quota. Herta and eight other children passed the exam and were allowed to emigrate from Germany. On November 23, 1940, Herta and the rest of the children said goodbye to their parents, joined their chaperone, Margaret Feiler, and took a train from Vienna to Berlin. Herta was only seven and was the youngest of the children. The rest were between thirteen and seventeen and helped take care of and comfort her along the journey. The group was forced to stay in a shelter for the night

because of an Allied night raid. The group then took another train to Lisbon, Portugal, where they stayed for twelve days before boarding the SS *Excambion* for the United States. Herta and the rest of the children arrived in Jersey City, New Jersey, on December 23. Upon arrival, they stayed in a temporary home. Later, Rose Beser, Herta's new social worker came and brought her to the Baer family in Baltimore, Maryland. Upon arrival in her new foster home, Clara and Joseph (Joe) Baer greeted Herta in Yiddish, which comforted her.

While living with the Baers, Herta exchanged letters with her mother, who hoped to reunite with her daughter in America. Beila's letters stopped arriving in 1941. Beila was deported from Vienna, on September 14, 1942, on Transport 41, Train Da 227. Her prisoner transport number was 679. Beila was taken to Maly Trostinec concentration camp in Belorussia where she was murdered on September 18, 1942. Herta did not learn of her mother's fate until 2004.

In July 1941, Herta's foster mother, Clara unexpectedly gave birth to another child and Ms. Beser felt it would be better if Herta lived with another family. She was removed from the Baer's care and placed with Harry and Mary Friedlander and their adopted daughter, Beverly. Herta lived with the Friedlanders until 1952 when she married Arthur Baitch. In 1965 Herta's maternal relative Adela Dula managed to get in touch with her, and she returned a package Beila had entrusted to her for Herta including a tablecloth, candlesticks, silverware, and jewelry. Herta and Arthur remain married with three children and seven grandchildren.

Scope and content of collection

The Herta Griffel Baitch papers include Herta Griffel's German passport and Viennese birth certificate, two letters from her mother to Herta's social worker (Rose Beser), a notebook containing handwritten Yiddish songs and proverbs Herta's mother copied for her in German, and a photograph of Herta and her mother before the Holocaust. Later photographs depict Herta with her cousin Adela Dula in London in 1977 and visiting the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in 2008. The papers also include letters from Adela to Herta and her first foster parents (Clara and Joseph Baer), notes describing the family's history, and an email from Asa Baitch about the Nagel family from Majdan Sredny.

System of arrangement

The Herta Griffel Baitch papers are arranged as a single series.

Indexing terms

Baitch, Herta Griffel, 1933-
Griffel, Biela Nagel, 1896-1942.

Jews--Austria--Vienna.

Jewish children in the Holocaust.

World War, 1939-1945--Jews--Rescue--Austria--Vienna.

Austria--Emigration and immigration.

United States--Emigration and immigration.

Photographs.

Identification cards.
Correspondence.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Herta Griffel Baitch papers, 1938-2019

Folder	Title
1 of 6	Biographical material, 1940
2 of 6	Correspondence, 1941
3 of 6	Notebook, approximately 1940
4 of 6	Photographs, approximately 1938-1939
5 of 6	Adela Dula correspondence and family history, 1953, 1965, 1977
6 of 6	Asa Baitch email, 2019