

**HELEN AND WILLIE ABRAHAM PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION,
CIRCA 1935-CIRCA 1947
2016.260.1**

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

Title: Helen and Willie Abraham photograph collection

Dates: circa 1935-circa 1947 [bulk circa 1945-circa 1947]

Accession number: 2016.260.1

Creator: Abraham, Helen, 1923-2014.
Abraham, Willie, 1925-2005.

Extent: 13 folders

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

Abstract: The collection documents the post-war experiences of Helen Abraham (born Hencia Wagner) of Dąbrowica Mała, Leżajsk, Poland in the Ainring displaced persons camp and Willie Abraham of Vel'ky Rakovec, Czechoslovakia (present day Velykyi Rakovets, Zakarpat'ska Oblast, Ukraine) in the Bindermichl displaced persons camp. Included are photographs of Helen at Ainring and the munitions factory in Menden, Germany where she worked under a false identity; a letter written to Helen from her brother David Wagner in 1943 while he was in hiding before he was discovered and murdered by the Gestapo; photographs of Willie in Bindermichl; and a protest at Bindermichl for the right to immigrate to Palestine.

Languages: Polish, 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), Helen and Willie Abraham photograph collection (2016.260.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The collection was donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by Michael Abraham, Judy Czeladnicki, and Marsha Shapiro in 2016.

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

Processing history: Adam Fielding, April 2017, updated January 2022

Biographical note

Helen Abraham (born Hencia Wagner, 12 May 1923 - 9 April 2014) was born on 12 May 1923 in the village of Dąbrowica Mała, Leżajsk, Poland to Yehudit Zimmerman Wagner (1886?-1942) and Majer Wachs Wagner (1887-1935). She had three older brothers, Aron, Mendel, and David. Her father Majer worked as a farmer and died in 1935 from an accident.

After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the Wagners lost their farm and became forced-laborers for another farm in the village. In 1941 her brother Mendel fled to Russia and presumably perished there. In 1942 her mother died of pneumonia and her brother Aron was killed by the Gestapo. Helen and David were then sent to Tarnogród ghetto. In the fall, Helen, David, and their cousin Jacob Blumenfeld escaped from the ghetto right before it was liquidated on 2 November 1942. David went into hiding in Poland, but was eventually found and killed. Helen obtained false documents and traveled to Kraków, Poland posing as a Polish Catholic. She found work in a munitions factory in Menden, Germany. She befriended a Polish girl named Carolina Wilk, who knew Helen's secret and helped her conceal her identity.

After the war, Helen went to the Ainring displaced persons camp. She immigrated to the United States on the SS *Ernie Pyle* on 3 January 1947 from Bremen, Germany. She settled in New York City with her American cousins Rose and Mitchell London.

Willie Abraham (born Yisroel Wolf, 1925-2005) was born on 1 May 1925 in Vel'ky Rakovec, Czechoslovakia (present day Velykyi Rakovets, Zakarpat'ska Oblast, Ukraine) to Mendel and Miriam Hoffman. His father Mendel (d. 1940) was born in Lipecká Poľana, Czechoslovakia (Lypetska Polyana, Ukraine). Willie had one older sister, Tzivya (later Cilia Wizel, 1923-2005). His mother died six months after he was born, and the family moved to his father's hometown of Lipecká Poľana. For unknown reasons, Willie and Tzivya were later brought to their mother's hometown of Vel'ky Rakovec where they were eventually adopted by their maternal uncle Majer Dovid Abraham and his wife Toby Gottesman Abraham. Majeer Dovid worked in Vel'ky Rakovec as a farmer. Both Willie and Tzivya changed their last name to Abraham.

In 1939, Vel'ky Rakovec was occupied by Hungary. In 1944 Willie and his aunt and uncle were deported by Hungarian troops to the Munkács ghetto. They were then deported to Auschwitz II-Birkenau where Willie and Majer Dovid were immediately separated from Toby. Willie and Majer Dovid were separated soon after. Willie was then deported the next day to the Gusen II subcamp of Mauthausen, where he was a forced-laborer producing aircraft parts for the Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters. Both Majer Dovid and Toby perished at Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

In early 1945, the prisoners of Gusen II were sent on a forced-march to the Guns kirchen sub camp to Mauthausen. The camp was liberated by the United States Army in early May 1945. Willie returned home to Vel'ky Rakovec to find his house occupied. He reunited with his sister Tzivya, and they decided to go back to Austria. They went to the Bindermichl displaced persons camp where Willie found work with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. He was in the camp until October 1947 when he immigrated to the United States. He settled in New York City and learned how to become a baker. He met his wife Helen Wagner (12 May 1923 - 9 April 2014) through a mutual friend who was also a Holocaust survivor. They married in 1948 and had three children, Judy, Michael, and Marsha.

Scope and content of collection

The collection documents the post-war experiences of Helen Abraham (born Hencia Wagner) of Dąbrowica Mała, Leżajsk, Poland in the Ainring displaced persons camp and Willie Abraham of Vel'ky Rakovec, Czechoslovakia (present day Velykyi Rakovets, Zakarpat'ska Oblast, Ukraine) in the Bindermichl displaced persons camp. Included are photographs of Helen at Ainring and the munitions factory in Menden, Germany where she worked under a false identity; a letter written to Helen from her brother David Wagner in 1943 while he was in hiding before he was discovered and murdered by the Gestapo; photographs of Willie in Bindermichl; and a protest at Bindermichl for the right to immigrate to Palestine.

System of arrangement

The collection is arranged as two series:

Series 1: Helen Abraham, 1943-circa 1947

Series 2: Willie Abraham, circa 1935-circa 1947

Folders are arranged alphabetically.

Indexing terms

Person:

Abraham, Helen, 1923-2014.

Abraham, Willie, 1925-2005.

Abraham, Majer Dovid.

Abraham, Toby Gottesman.

Wagner, David.

Fladell, Henry.

Wizel, Cilia.

Corporate:

Bindermichl (Displaced persons camp)

Ainring (Displaced persons camp)

Topical Subject:

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Czechoslovakia.

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

Forced labor.

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Refugees.

Displaced persons camps.

Emigration & immigration--United States--1940-1950.

Geography:
Linz (Austria : Refugee camp)

Genre/Form:
Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Helen Abraham, 1943-circa 1947

| Folder | Title |
|--------|--|
| 1 | Abraham, Helen, circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 2 | Abraham, Helen with Henry Fladell, circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 3 | Ainring displaced persons camp, circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 4 | Labor camp, Menden, Germany, circa 1945 |
| 5 | Letter from David Wagner, 1943 |

Series 2: Willie Abraham, circa 1935-circa 1947

| Folder | Title |
|--------|---|
| | Abraham, Willie: |
| 6 | Bindermichl police force, circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 7 | With Cilia and Shimon Wize on their wedding day, 1945 |
| 8 | With relatives right after liberation, 1945 (copyprint) |
| 9 | circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| | Bindermichl displaced persons camp: |
| 10 | Protest to go to Palestine, circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 11 | circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 12 | Fladell, Henry, circa 1945-circa 1947 |
| 13 | Relatives, circa 1935 (copyprint) |