Finding Aid to the Phyllis Helene Mattson Correspondence 1940-1946 SFH 463

Finding aid prepared by Katherine Ets-Hokin.
San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library
2017
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URL: http://www.sfpl.org/sfhistory
Title: Phyllis Helene Mattson Correspondence
Date (inclusive): 1940-1946
Identifier/Call Number: SFH 463
Creator: Mattson, Phyllis Helene
Physical Description: Two pamphlet boxes.(0.7 Cubic Feet)
Contributing Institution: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

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Abstract: Phyllis Helene Mattson was born in Vienna, Austria in 1929 to Jewish parents of Polish citizenship. In the early phase of the Holocaust her parents, fearing for her life, sent her to live in San Francisco with a distant relative. From 1940-1946 their only communication was through the letters that form this collection. Phyllis was reunited with her father in 1946, but her mother died in a death camp.

Physical Location: The collection is stored onsite.
Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English and German. Most German materials are translated into English.

Conditions Governing Access
The collection is available for use during San Francisco History Center hours, with photographs available during Photo Desk hours. Collections that are stored offsite should be requested 48 hours in advance.

Publication Rights
All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the City Archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the San Francisco Public Library as the owner of the physical items.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Phyllis Helene Mattson Correspondence (SFH 463#), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Provenance
Materials donated by Phyllis Mattson in 2009.

Related Materials
Researchers are encouraged to see also Phyllis Mattson's book War Orphan in San Francisco and to check the San Francisco Public Library catalog.

Conservation Note
During processing, the entire collection was re-foldered and re-housed in acid-free folders and boxes. Some metal staples and paper clips remain. The letters came to the library in mylar sleeves with an English translation.

Biography
Phyllis Helene Mattson was born in Vienna, Austria in 1929 to Jewish parents of Polish citizenship. When Hitler took Austria in 1938 it became part of Germany leaving her parents stateless. Her father, Samuel Finkel, was arrested (for his stateless status) in March of 1939 and sent to Kitchener Camp in England. Her mother, Laura Finkel, after failing to get both herself and Phyllis out of Austria and fearing for her daughter's safety sent 10 year old Phyllis to live in San Francisco with a distant relative. She arrived in San Francisco through a program that quietly brought refugee children to sponsoring families in the United States.

In July 1940 Samuel Finkel boarded the passenger ship Dunera and was sent to Australia for internment. Conditions on the Dunera were harsh and the refugees were treated horrendously by the crew. The ship did not arrive in Sydney until September 1940 two months later. Although Samuel was eventually released from internment he would not reach the United States until 1946.

Laura Finkel never made it out of Europe. In June 1940 she was sent to Nordhausen camp in Germany to work as a slave laborer. In April 1942 she was released from Nordhausen camp and returned to Vienna. On May 6, 1942 she was killed at Maly Trostinec near present day Minsk, Belarus along with almost 9,000 Austrian Jews between May and October 1942. Only 17 people are known to have survived the massacres.

Phyllis lived with her sponsor family for only a brief time. She grew up living with several different foster families and the Homewood Orphanage. Her father did not arrive in San Francisco until 1946 and she was eventually allowed to live with
him until she moved to attend U.C. Berkeley. Over the seven years of their separation Phyllis had developed American beliefs and values that caused conflict between her and her father. Samuel died in 1971. Phyllis saved the letters written between her parents and herself to publish her biography War Orphan in San Francisco.

**Scope and Content**
The collection contains correspondence between the Finkel family, Samuel Finkel, Laura Finkel, and Phyllis Mattson and various family members during the Holocaust from 1940-1946. Some of the letters are in German with an English translation. Most of the letters are translated but not all of them are. The letters written to Laura were lost with Laura’s death. The collection also includes Phyllis Mattson’s psychologist’s report from Homewood Orphanage, her application for International House at UC Berkeley, a CD-R of War Orphans (Phyllis Mattson’s book of her memoir) and a CD-R of Laura Finkel’s letters.

**Arrangement**
The collection is arranged in alphabetical order and then by date.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
- Children -- California -- San Francisco -- History.
- Holocaust survivors--Correspondence.
- Jewish children in the Holocaust.
- Orphanages -- California -- San Francisco.
- Orphans--California--San Francisco--Biography.
- Mattson, Phyllis Helene

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