Finding aid for the Thornton Wilder letters 6082

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Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: USC Libraries Special Collections
Title: Thornton Wilder letters
creator: Wilder, Thornton
creator: Joseph, Elfy Stoeger
creator: Joseph, Rudy
Identifier/Call Number: 6082
Physical Description: 0.21 Linear Feet1 box
Date (inclusive): 1946-1962
Abstract: This collection consists of correspondence between Elfrida “Elfy” Stoeger-Joseph, her former husband Rudolph “Rudy” Joseph, and Thornton Wilder, 1945-2011. The correspondence of this collection ranges from about 1945 to 1974, which also corresponds to the years of Elfy and Rudy’s marriage. Topics discussed in the letters include opera, writing, film, and every day matters. The letters provide a small glimpse of the lives of Elfrida, Rudolph, and Wilder. Thornton Wilder was an American writer and a graduate of Yale and Princeton. He won three Pulitzer Prizes during his lifetime and is widely regarded as one of America’s great literary talents. Elfrida Stoeger-Joseph and Rudolph Joseph were friends of Wilder’s, who divorced in 1974. Wilder maintained an epistolary friendship with Elfy after the divorce.
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[Box/folder no. or item name], Thornton Wilder letters, Collection no. 6082, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California
Scope and Contents
This collection consists of correspondence between Elfrida “Elfy” Stoeger-Joseph, her former husband Rudolph “Rudy” Joseph, and Thornton Wilder, 1945-2011, with the bulk of the correspondence dating from 1945 to 1974. The collection also contains memorials for Elfy upon her death, and a few photographs. Topics discussed in the letters include opera, writing, film, and every day matters. The letters provide a small glimpse of the lives of Elfrida, Rudolph, and Wilder.
Biographical note
Thornton Wilder was an American writer and a graduate of Yale and Princeton. He won three Pulitzer Prizes during his lifetime and is widely regarded as one of America’s great literary talents. Elfrida Stoeger-Joseph and Rudolph Joseph were friends of Wilder’s, who divorced in 1974. Wilder maintained an epistolary friendship with Elfy after the divorce.
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Correspondence
Wilder, Thornton
Wilder, Thornton -- Archives
Joseph, Elfy Stoeger
Joseph, Elfy Stoeger -- Archives
Joseph, Rudy
Joseph, Rudy -- Archives

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Box 1, folder 1  
**Wilder to Elfy 1945 5 August**

**Scope and Contents**
Letter written by Thornton Wilder to Elfy Stoeger. It appears that at the time that this letter was written, Wilder was not aware that she had been married the day before and moved to Los Angeles.

Wilder mentioned his hearing continued to deteriorate after they had lunch together. Wilder says that he wasn’t writing to her just to thank her for her letter, but also to encourage her to pursue singing. Wilder tells Elfy that she has the talent, beauty, and grace to sing the works of Mozart and Schubert. Thornton ends his letter with a reference to Wagner’s Meistersinger von Nurnburg.

Box 1, Folder 2  
**Wilder to Mr./Ms. Joseph 1945 28 August**

**Scope and Contents**
Short letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Joseph. During the time that this letter was sent, Wilder was in Miami Beach on military duty and was able to send his letter free of cost. In addition, the war had just ended in the Pacific theater earlier that month. Wilder informs his friends that the news of their marriage made him very happy. He wishes them the best and congratulates the couple.

Box 1, folder 3  
**Wilder to Mrs. Rudolph Joseph 1945 8 October**

**Scope and Contents**
Letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Mrs. Rudolph Joseph. Wilder writes that he was very happy to hear that Mrs. Rudolph was dedicating herself to music. He gives her advice and says that the best thing one can do is to be disciplined, love, and be creative. Wilder ends the letter by informing Mrs. Rudolph Joseph that he will be in the Carolina mountains to finish Alcestiad.

Box 1, Folder 4  
**Wilder to Joseph 1946 10 January**

**Scope and Contents**
Letter written by Thornton Wilder addressed to Rudolph Joseph, Elfy’s husband. Wilder often called Rudolph Joseph “Mochven” which means “little seagull” in German. Wilder mentions Elfy’s charming letters and jokingly says he should become a singer himself. Wilder mentions that he has a British film offer, as well as 3 American ones. He says he is almost at a point of accepting a film offer and visiting Los Angeles.

Box 1, folder 5  
**Wilder to Joseph 1946 4 March**

**Scope and Contents**
Letter written by Thornton Wilder addressed to Rudolph Joseph, Elfy’s husband. Wilder writes to inform Rudolph, or “Mochven” as Wilder calls him, that a certain matter is in suspension due to pending negotiations with London bidders. He mentions that his latest interest is Existential Philosophy and Jean Paul Satre. Wilder concludes his letter by asking Rudolph whether he is an “existialiste” and sends his best regards.

Box 1, folder 11  
**Christmas Card to Elfy 1961 December**

**Scope and Contents**
Brief letter written by Thornton Wilder to Mrs. Elfy Joseph. Item is a Christmas/New Year card with an image of a Christmas tree. Wilder writes to Elfy to inform her that he is in opera world and that she ought to be a part of that world. He lets her know that his short opera by Hindemith opened in Mannheim, while his long opera by Louise Talma opened in March in Frankfurt with Frau Inge Borkh. Wilder mentions that Elfy has a beautiful voice and that if she were not so shy she could be a wonderful addition to the world of opera. He ends the letter by thanking her for the beautiful card she sent him.
Wilder to Joseph 1947 26 June
Scope and Contents
Letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Rudolph Joseph, Elfy’s husband.
Wilder greets Rudolph and says he is pleased that he has been enjoying Cabala. He tells Rudolph he has an obsession with creating film adaptations based on works of literature. Wilder informs him that his translator Herbert Heilischtra is trying to interest him in a publishing company Albatross, which will publish German books in London. Lastly, he mentions that he has heard no news of Gnadle Frau and jokes that he punished her by making her sing aria from Re Pastore and Pamima’s lament three times.

Thank you Letter to Rudolph Joseph 1948 12 August
Scope and Contents
Thank you letter addressed to Mr. Rudolph Joseph
The writer of the letter thanks Rudolph and his wife for the Piaf records. The writer states that he has heard of them but has never listened to them.

Wilder to Elfy and Rudolph 1949 5 March
Scope and Contents
Letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Rudolph Joseph and Elfy Joseph. Item is a brief letter from Wilder in which he answers Rudolph and Elfy’s questions. He offers them both a reading recommendation titled Fear and Trembling The Concept of Dread. In addition, he mentions that Dr. V. Frisch of Graz gave a great lecture on how bees communicate with each other.

Wilder to Elfy and Rudolph After Divorce 1945-1952 August
Scope and Contents
Letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Rudolph Joseph and Elfy. Wilder writes that he was delighted to hear that Maxwell Perkins had granted Rudolph the rights. Perkins was senior editor of Schribner Publishers and was instrumental in the making of writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway among many others. Wilder asks Elfy about her singing and whether she has been keeping up with her singing exercises.

Wilder to Thornton 1949 14 March
Scope and Contents
Letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Rudolph Joseph, Elfy’s husband. Wilder starts off his letter by apologizing for not being able to write much, he states he received a large stack of mail while he was in Europe. He mentions that his new play is about halfway done. Wilder writes that he has had ongoing contact with Vittorio de Sica and would love to collaborate with him. He tells Rudolph that charming and beautiful Elfy ought to be singing for them. Wilder concluded the letter by telling Rudolph that Hollywood is not a good place to live and that they should consider living in the east.

Wilder to Elfy Joseph 1960's-1974
Scope and Contents
Letter written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Elfy Joseph, who at the time was divorced from Rudolph Joseph. Letter is dated after 1952, between the 1960’s and up to 1974. Wilder thanks Elfy for her last letter, but says that she wrote very little about herself and too much about him. He tells her that he is happy that she surrounds herself with music, although she doesn't sing much. Wilder tells Elfy that she came to mind during the time that he was in Vienna during Christmas, while having a talk with Frau Seefried after a Wolf recital.
Wilder to Joseph 1954 26 April
Scope and Contents
Item is a postcard from Thornton Wilder to Mr. Rudolph Joseph. Wilder thanks his friends for the birthday greetings. He writes that he will think of them when he is in Vienna next year after being at the Berlin Festival. During the time of this letter, Elfy and Rudolph Joseph had divorced in 1952. Rudolph moved to Santa Barbara, whereas Elfy remained in Los Angeles for the remainder of her life.

Re: Aug 27/11 Memorial Service For Elfy 2011
Scope and Contents
Joan sends an additional letter in which she provides the exact location of Elfie’s unmarked grave. The letter provides with information that Elfy was living at the vintage Retirement Home on Tiverton in Westwood. She acknowledges all of Elfie’s dear friends who attended her memorial services despite the 100 degree weather that day. Joan included a copy of 2 photographs, one a portrait of Elfie by herself and the other accompanied by two friends.

Photograph of Elfina undated
Scope and Contents
Item is a colored photograph of Elfy.

Photograph of Elfina "Elfy" Joseph and Friends undated
Scope and Contents
Item is a

Wilder to Mrs. Elfy Joseph 1962 19 April
Scope and Contents
Letter is written by Thornton Wilder to Mrs. Elfy Joseph. Wilder thanks Elfy for a book. He addresses her previous letter and tells Elfie that she is her usual charming self. In addition, he brings up an opera and lets Elfie know that he greatly enjoyed the music and hopes to hear it often. Wilder concludes by thanking Elfie for the photographs and for remembering his birthday.

Wilder to Elfy Joseph 1974 9 January
Scope and Contents
Letter is written by Thornton Wilder and is addressed to Mrs. Elfy Joseph. Wilder thanks Elfie for her letter and informs her that he has not been able to keep up with his correspondence due to the deterioration of his eye sight. He ends by sending his best regards to Elfie and Rudolph.

Wilder to Rudolph and Elfy Joseph 11 November
Scope and Contents
Letter is written by Thornton Wilder, addressed to Rudolph Joseph and Elfy Joseph. In this item, Elfy is the main subject. Wilder tells Elfie that her presence in a university would be beneficial and very much appreciated. He suggests that she start off by volunteering first, and then getting involved with the production of elements at universities such as UCLA, Pomona, and Scripps College. In addition, he suggests that she try to approach television and states that she may use his name as a reference. Wilder concludes by encouraging Alfie and telling her not to waste time.

Letter from Joan Newman to Alice 14 July
Scope and Contents
Item is a letter from Joan Newman to Alice.
Box 1, folder 22  
**Guide to Letters of Elfy Stoeger Joseph Clifton Barrett Library undated**  
**Scope and Contents**  
Item is a guide to Thornton Wilder correspondence in the Special Collections Department of the Clifton Waller Barrett Library in Virginia.

Box 1, folder 17  
**Remembrance of a Lovely Friend 2011**  
**Scope and Contents**  
Letter written by Joan Harding Newman who was a friend of 30 years with Elfrida Joseph, known as “Elfy” by her dear friends. Joan describes Elfy’s memorial service at Hollywood Forever cemetery on August 27th 2011. Elfy is described as an artistic and musical woman who blessed others with her voice. Joan acknowledges Nedra, Elfy’s closest friend of 45 years and says she can only imagine how hard their loss may be to her and all of her friends and loved ones. She concludes the letter by stating that Elfy will will be dearly loved and her musical voice and presence will be missed.