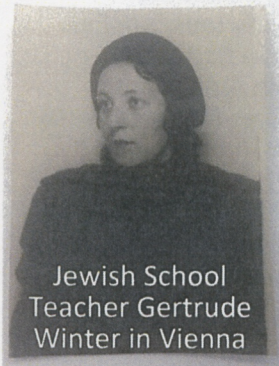
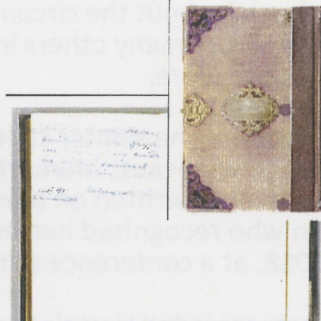


Herta Griffel Baitch's Story



After the Nazis annexed Austria in 1939, a teacher at a Vienna Jewish Girls' School, Gertrude Winter, gathered documents that she considered important and gave it to a non-Jewish woman for safekeeping. These documents were recently discovered and obtained by the US. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The museum staff's research revealed that Nazi officers took over the school for their use in late 1941, Gertrude was deported and murdered in Auschwitz Concentration Camp along with many of the students. The only living student located by the Museum's researchers was Herta Griffel, age 83. After discovering several drawings with Herta's name on them, they tracked her down and visited her in Baltimore, MD. They showed her the drawings she had made at age six or seven, as well as the photographs of her class. She didn't remember the drawings, the school, or her classmates, yet she couldn't deny that it was her in the photographs. She was struck to see that she was a happy, confident girl who seemed to fit in.



Herta, born in 1933, was the only child of Wolff and Beila Griffel, a Jewish couple who lived in Vienna. After Austria was annexed by the Nazis, Wolff was forced to do slave labor. One evening after returning home, he died, possibly from exhaustion. Partly because she was fatherless, Herta was selected to be one of the last children to leave Vienna. In 1940, Beila gave Herta, age 7, a suitcase containing several heirlooms, including a doll, a book of handwritten songs, some handmade dresses, and a prayer book from her teacher, Gertrude. Inside the prayer book, Gertrude had written "To my brave student Herta, remember your classmates." Beila said goodbye to her daughter for the last time as Herta boarded a train with eight other children and a chapparone. Herta's passport, stamped with a swastika, said "stateless" under the "country" space. Soon after, Beila sent the attached letter to the organization that was taking care of Herta.



Herta Griffel Baitch's Story - 2

For several weeks, the children travelled through Europe. They crossed the Atlantic on the S.S. Excambion and arrived in New York, where they were soon split up and taken in by various families. Herta, who only spoke German when she arrived, was raised by two foster families in Baltimore, never knowing what happened to her mother. Her memory of her early childhood in Austria was repressed and all but disappeared as she grew up. Despite the hospitality of the foster families, Herta never felt that she quite fit in. Eventually, she formed close friendships; in 1952 she married Arthur Baitch, a medical student and the son of immigrants.

It was only about 12 years ago that Herta learned, through German Government records at Yad Vashem, that her mother Beila was killed in the Maly Trostinek concentration camp in Poland, on September 18, 1942, four days after she arrived there. Beila and Wolff's names are included among others on the Bet Torah Holocaust Memorial wall.

Herta and Arthur now have three married children, seven grandchildren, two great grandchildren, and a wonderful marriage. When three of their grandchildren celebrated their bar mizvahs at Bet Torah, a beautiful unfinished tablecloth that Beila had been embroidering was used as a Torah table cover, since it had never served a purpose. How the tablecloth was discovered in a trunk of Beila's belongings in England and eventually returned to Herta is an entire story in itself.

Herta always felt a deep sense of regret that she has little memory of her life prior to getting on the ship to America. Due to an amazing chain of coincidences and meetings, Herta continues to learn increasingly more about her childhood in Vienna. In addition to the discovery of the Gertrude Winter collection, a researcher in Austria found a list of the eight children with whom Herta escaped. Herta was able to meet two women from the list; they were 13 and 15 when Herta was seven. They remembered Herta and much about the circumstances in which they left Vienna, including how the nine children were chosen from many others in the community. They even remembered Herta's mother Beila and the hat she wore.

In 2017, Herta's drawings from the Winter collection were printed as greeting cards and sent worldwide as part of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Membership Campaign. Rabbi Brusso even received a thank-you note written on one of those cards. As a result of that campaign, Herta is about to meet a woman who recognized herself in the class picture. They are scheduled to reunite today, Yom HaShoah 2018, at a conference at the Museum. The meeting will be recorded.

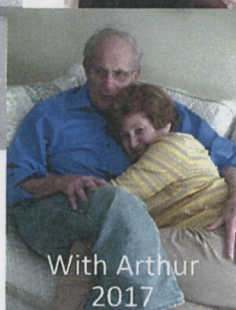
Also in 2017, the Museum recorded Herta's testimony in a two hour interview, which can be viewed on the Museum's website. She recently donated a number of personal items, including her suitcase, doll, dresses, passport, books, and other personal items to the Museum's permanent collection. She now speaks to both Jewish and non-Jewish children and adults to help others learn lessons of the Holocaust, keeping the memories of those who were lost alive in her own way.



Honeymoon,
1952



Herta reunited with Stella
Bruckenstein, another
refugee child, in 2008



With Arthur
2017



A dress donated to
the Museum



A doll she
carried



Her interview at the Museum

Herta Griffel Baitch's Story - 3

LETTER FROM BEILA GRIFFEL TO ROSE BESER, SOCIAL WORKER WITH GERMAN-JEWISH CHILDRENS AID, BALTIMORE, SENT IN 1940

Translation

From: Beila Griffel, Mother of Herta Griffel
II Novaragasse 49/19, Vienna

To: Mrs. Rose Beser
German-Jewish Childrens Aid Inc.
319 W. Monument Street, Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Mrs. Beser:

For your valuable institution and your effort and work for good things, I cannot express the words which I wish you from my heart. I weep with joy and thank our Almighty for having sent me so kind people who take such good care of my orphan child, Herta.

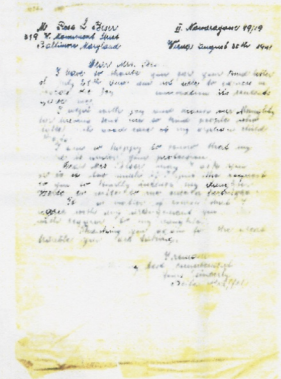
I am so happy to know that my child is under your protection. It gives me comfort, and my soul is moved that she is with people with such warm feelings and knowledge. I am a widow; please understand that my only child is my whole world. She surrounds my all, and I speak as a very concerned mother who is longing and trembling for her child.

My child was always alone. How does she feel with other children and does she get along with strangers? I am happy that my child is now in freedom, and I would like to see her shielded from pain and neglect so that her childish soul and heart are protected.

I implore you to keep your eyes on my child at this difficult time of separation. I pray that the Almighty will reunite me with my child in the future and then everything will be fine.

It is a matter, of course, that I agree with any arrangements you make regarding my daughter

Thanking you again for the great trouble you are taking, I remain, with my best compliment,
Yours sincerely,
Beila Griffel



Herta Griffel Baitch's Story - 4

Some of the drawings that were among the Gertrude Winter Collection



This drawing is similar to the windmill in Retz, Austria



Hansel, Gretel, the old woman and the candy house



Possibly a vendor Hats?



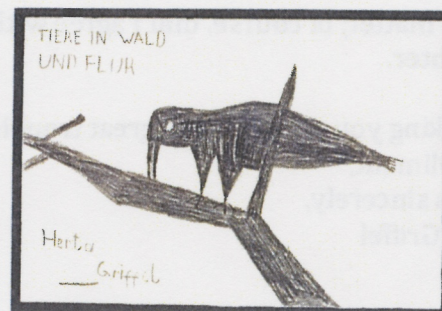
"Playing in the snow in winter"



These flowers are strikingly similar to the flowers Herta's mother embroidered in her dresses.



The happiness of this picture contrasts with the darkness of the crow in the next



Possibly "Animal in the woods and fields"