

Handout

New hope for help: The Feldsteins in Vienna are hoping for help from the Feldsteins in Los Angeles

November 20, 1938: Happiness and relief are reflected in this letter by little Gerda Feldstein to her uncle and aunt in Los Angeles, in which the 11-year-old thanks them for (seemingly) securing her family's move to the US.

Topics

"Kristallnacht"; "Anschluss"; Austria; USA; affidavits; emigration

Source

<https://www.lbi.org/1938projekt/detail/new-hope-for-help/>

Type: Letter

Date: November 20, 1938

VIENNA

For 19 years, Fritz Feldstein had been working at a bank in Vienna to the full satisfaction of his superiors. But, in 1938, after Nazi Germany annexed neighboring Austria, he lost his position. On July 5th, the family registered with the US consulate in Vienna, but for immigration, affidavits were needed. After months of deeply upsetting political changes, Fritz Feldstein ventured an unusual step. On Oct. 16th, he turned to a Julius Feldstein in Los Angeles who, he hoped, might be a relative, appealing to "the well-known American readiness to help." Soon, a correspondence developed, also involving Fritz's wife, Martha, and their daughter, Gerda. The 11-year-old was not only a skillful piano player, she obviously also had a knack for languages. On November 20th, she writes to the Feldsteins in California for the first time – in English.

Transcript

"My dear aunt and uncle!

I was very happy [that] to hear, that you will help us to come to America. I hope, that your dear children are in the same age, as I am and I shall get good friends. I thank you very much and I am with kindest regards yours

sincerely

Gerda Feldstein"

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Background Information

Glossary

Affidavit: An affidavit is a written sworn statement and was primarily required in order to emigrate to the US. By issuing an affidavit, the residing relatives or acquaintances assured to vouch for those persons whom they named and support them financially if the need arises.

Biographical information

Images of burning synagogues, shattered shop windows, ravaged private households and their abused inhabitants have become symbols of the destruction of former prospering German-Jewish life. In the night from the 9th until the 10th of November 1938 the orchestrated violence against Jews in Germany and Austria reached an unprecedented dimension. Against this backdrop, the news that the Feldstein family received, was all the more gratifying. Their American relatives were promising to issue affidavits and bring the family to America. But this hope for a new life in the US was shattered. Bureaucratic procedures delayed the issuing of entry visa. Only in August 1939 the Feldsteins were informed that they will receive their visa shortly – but this never happened. On September 1, 1939 Nazi troops invaded Poland and WWII began, cutting off their means of escape. Gerda was deported to Poland in June 1941, and at the age of fourteen, she was murdered in Sobibor.

Further information

Additional source material can be accessed through the original collection:

Fritz Feldstein Family Collection, AR 3250

<http://digital.cjh.org/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=1711565>

Analyzing source material

- *What kind of source is depicted?*
- *When does it date from?*
- *Where was it written?*
- *For which audience?*
- *From which perspective is the story told?*
- *How does the person describe the situation?*
- *Which words is he/she using?*
- *Which feelings are being expressed?*
- *What are the main points?*
- *How can the source be put into its historical context?*

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Additional sample Questions

What do you know about emigration? Are there differences or similarities to today's situation? How would you establish the first contact? How would you react if a stranger asked you to vouch for him/her?

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