Marianne Winter / Jane Bomberger Packet

DOCUMENT 1 (Overview)

In 1935, 14-year-old Marianne Winter of Vienna, Austria, became pen pals with Jane Bomberger, a non-Jewish girl in Reading, Pennsylvania. The pair were matched by chance through the Camp Fire Girls organization. They forged what Jane's father, Joseph Bomberger, described as “a deep friendship.” Over the next three years, they learned about each other’s lives and families and occasionally exchanged pictures and small gifts.

Nazi Germany annexed Austria (the Anschluss) on March 12, 1938. At that moment, the Winter family became subject to Germany's restrictions on Jews. Not long after the Anschluss, Nazi storm troopers stopped Marianne and her mother in the street and forced them to scrub the floors of a Nazi barracks. The Winters lost their citizenship and became “stateless.” They realized they needed to leave Europe as soon as possible. The Winters wanted to immigrate to the United States, but they did not have any American relatives who could grant them a financial affidavit promising that they would not become “public charges” there.

A few months later, Marianne wrote to her pen pal in Pennsylvania to ask Jane whether she knew anyone who could help the Winters by providing an affidavit of financial support—a necessary document for anyone hoping to immigrate to the United States. The Bombergers decided to sponsor the Winter family, promising to take responsibility for them if the Winters were admitted into the United States.

Though the Winters had found an American sponsor, they still had great difficulty obtaining visas to the United States. While waiting for their turn to present their papers at the US consulate, they planned to travel to the relative safety of Czechoslovakia, where Anna had relatives. The Nazi government forced the Winters to surrender most of their belongings before being allowed to leave Vienna. They could only keep ten Reichsmarks each, equivalent to $45 today.

The US consul in Prague, Czechoslovakia, initially rejected Joseph Bomberger's affidavit because the two families were not blood relatives and the consul was not convinced that the Bombergers would support virtual strangers. Fearing a Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, Max Winter wrote to Joseph Bomberger on September 11, 1938, desperate for additional help.

Bomberger immediately submitted additional income statements to prove his suitability for sponsorship. Though the Bombergers were an average middle-class family, they were determined to help the Winters. The additional income statements persuaded the US consulate in Prague to reconsider the Winters’ application and interview them. They finally received their immigration visas in January 1939.
The Winters sailed from Genoa, Italy, on January 26, 1939, on the SS *Conte di Savoia*. Joseph Bomberger brought his daughter Jane to meet the Winters’ ship when it arrived in New York City on February 3, 1939. The Winters stayed with the Bombergers for a brief time before moving to a nearby apartment in Reading, Pennsylvania. After they arrived, the Winters immediately sought to help other refugees, but leaving Nazi-occupied territory became more difficult.
My dear, dearest Jane!

You can not imagine how we felt after having received your letter an hour ago. We could not believe that there are such people, who are really so kind to help us. It is not to think that real strangers, as you are, give us so much love. To my mother came the tears when we received the letter, because no one of our family understood our situation as well as you did.

Of course my parents give you the most thanks and would like to accept. We thank you again and again that you yourselves have claimed for us. We have enough money for to cross, thank you, and my mother has three brothers abroad, who do live in Europe, and so they can-not take us to them, but who promised to give us a certain amount of money for a start. So that you need not fear that we would fall into your pockets.

We can not imagine, how I feel to think to see you in a short time, do you remember in your first letter you wrote me that you have dreamed I was with you. Now it will be true. But it will last two month till we get the papers for to leave.

I thank you again for your frank question about money, because we can not take any money out of there.

I cannot express, how we feel, everything I write is too little, but I hope that once we will be able to show our thanks, we are so happy.

Now I dare say, we will, I hope, see each other very soon, I am

Yours lovingly

Marianne

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1 Letter from Marianne Winter to Jane Bomberger, June 29, 1938, gift of Marianne Selinger to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, gift of Stephen Winter.
Joseph Bomberger wrote and signed this affidavit for the Winter family, promising to be financially responsible for the family in the United States.
DOCUMENT 4

Tax form from a German administration office, September 9, 1938 (in German):
Winter family’s inventory list (translated):

1 Piano
1 Dresser with hutch
1 " " drawer
1 Bench
5 Chairs
1 Table
1 Sofa
1 Sewing machine
8 Sofa cushions
3 Blankets
1 Rug, hand knotted
2 Rugs
1 Bookcase
1 Armoire
7 Paintings
Miscellaneous photographs with frames
Miscellaneous books
" " musical scores
9 Mattresses
11 Duvets
10 Duvet covers
24 Pillows
4 " small
4 Table settings
6 Tablecloths
30 Doilies
15 Sheets
12 Handkerchiefs
6 Kitchen Towels
15 Sheets
12 Dishtowels
6 Fans
14 Men’s shirts
2 Pajamas
2 Nightshirts
5 Men’s winter underpants
1 Men’s undershirt
2 [Pairs of] shorts
5 Children’s dresses
Miscellaneous lace remnants
5 Ladies’ trousers
5 Ladies’ shirts

1 Dinner’s quilt
Miscellaneous fabric remnants
1 Bath towel
1 Child’s bathrobe
11 Feather pillows
1 Horsehair "
5 Featherbeds
2 Quilts
2 Flannel blankets
1 Bedspread
1 Venetian blind
4 Tulle curtains
6 Small curtains
5 [Pieces of] Embroidered trim
4 " " " " " " for the kitchen
2 Wool sweaters
1 Sweater
1 [Perfume] atomizer set
Miscellaneous needlework
6 Plates
2 Coffeepots
2 Tea services
2 Mocha services
1 Mocha cup
12 Drinking glasses
23 Wine glasses + tankard
2 Coffeepots
2 Candy dishes
2 Jardinières
6 Vases
1 Figurine
2 Mantle clocks
1 Dessert service
4 Sandwich platters
3 Salt shakers
2 Ladies
2 Sugar tongs
1 Nutcracker
12 Coffee spoons¹

¹ Winter Family’s Inventory List, gift of Marianne Selinger to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, gift of Stephen Winter, translated by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
DOCUMENT 6

The Winters fled Vienna and went to live with relatives in Prague, Czechoslovakia, less than 200 miles away. The American consulate in Prague denied the Winters' applications for visas because Mr. Bomberger's affidavit listed them as “friends” instead of relatives. Refugees with relatives in the United States had a greater chance of receiving visas. Below is a translation of a letter to Joseph Bomberger from Max Winter.

Dear Sir,

I regret to inform you that the efforts you have made to help us have not yet succeeded, I am sorry to say. The American Consul of this place has refused to give us the visas, because I can't proof [sic] a sufficient evidence of support. if the affidavit would have been sent by relatives it would find a more favorable judgment. I shall try to change the consul's mind by a friend of mine who has relations to the consul, but I have to wait several days my friend being abroad at this moment.

I have been informed, that in case I could get an additional affidavit by a relative it would be sure that we could all get the visas and the affidavit must not be strong and show a big amount. or if I could show a banking-account amounting at least to $3,000 on my own name.

I again dare to apply to you if you could find any cousin of mine, who would send me this additional affidavit I know that I am claiming in an extraordinary way to your philanthropy, reading the newspapers you will understand the International political circumstances in Europe and especially those concerning Czechoslovakia make it recommendable to leave as soon as possible. I believe I have to try in this moment every possibility to reach this aim, but I assure you that I will understand if also, if I should get refusal to my request.

Please be convinced that I know to appreciate all you have done for us till this moment and let we have your answer as soon as possible.

Your obedient servant,
Max Winter¹

¹ Letter to Joseph Bomberger from Max Winter, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, gift of Marianne Selinger to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, gift of Stephen Winter, translated by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
The Winters’ ticket from Genoa, Italy, to the United States, January 26, 1939. The ship tickets cost the family 1,976.28 Reichsmarks, the equivalent of about $14,000 today.
DOCUMENT 8

Left: Max, Anna, Marianne, and Stefan Winter at Stefan’s high school graduation from Reading High School in Reading, Pennsylvania, 1943.

Right: Local Reading Eagle newspaper article about the correspondence between Marianne Winter and Jane Bomberger, February 5, 1939. The Winters didn’t want their names mentioned in the article; the caption reads: “Fearing retaliation on relatives in Germany, the family of four declined to permit their names to be used.”