

Great Neck artist brings life to grandparents' words

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Photo by Danielle Finkelstein

Great Neck artist Dorrit Title feels she has fulfilled her mission to honor her grandparents by giving them back the voice stolen by the Nazis.

In April 1939, when she was 2 years old, Title fled with her parents to the United States from Vienna to escape Adolf Hitler's persecution of Austria's Jews. Left behind - but with the hope that they could soon join the family - were several relatives, including Title's maternal grandparents. In

the next two years, the grandparents, Anna and Heinrich Gluckstern, wrote more than 100 letters and cards to their daughter and son-in-law - with special messages for young Dorrit - expressing their love, hope, and ultimately despair when it became clear that time was running out.

After mail delivery ceased in December 1941, Anna used a spiral notebook to write notes to the family, a practice she continued until she and Heinrich were deported to the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp in 1942. Heinrich died there and, in 1944, Anna was deported to [Auschwitz](#), where she was killed. The couple's son, Paul Gluckstern, returned to Austria after the war and retrieved Anna's notebook.

Title inherited the notebook and her grandparents' letters in 1987, and she and Paul, her uncle who by then was in his 90s, undertook their translation. During that process, she said, a vivid emotional and visual picture of her grandparents emerged, and their love, courage, and determination to survive inspired her to create works honoring their memory.

"As I became more involved with the translation of the letters, the art became a visualization of the written words," said Title, a graduate of The Cooper Union Art School and The [San Francisco Art Institute](#) whose work has been exhibited across [Long](#)

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One of her works, "The Spiral Notebook," has been chosen for permanent display at the Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Center at [Queensborough Community College](#). It combines a pen, a rose, a crocheted doily her grandmother made and photographs of Title with her grandparents, along with copies of handwritten pages from Anna's notebook and translations of lines such as: "I wish I had wings to come to you and see you once more, just for a moment." 🌹

The work was one piece in an exhibit at the center this summer of Title's works, "Reflections: Art Inspired by My Grandparents' Letters." She used painting, photography, and collage - interspersed with copies of excerpts of the letters - to convey how, despite being caught up in unimaginable circumstances, her grandparents were able to maintain their dignity and humanity.

While the subject matter is tragic, Title emphasizes that the art is intended to celebrate the richness of their lives before Hitler. In one, "Grandmother's Recipes," an assemblage of copied pages of Anna's handwritten cookbook, fragments of broken china, baking utensils and a coffee mill illustrate a passion for cooking and baking.

And in the construction of another, "As Long As We Breathe," fragments of lines from the last letter Anna sent before the mail stopped are juxtaposed with a red rose behind twisted wire. "No matter what happens to us be assured of our eternal love for you," Anna wrote in the letter. "You are our only thought as long as we breathe."

"The symbolism speaks for all who wished in vain for survival and for those who keep their memory alive for future generations," Title explained.

"The Spiral Notebook" in particular has resonated with students, Kupferberg Center Executive Director Arthur Flug said. "Our mission is to give relevance of the Holocaust to the 15,000 students on campus, representing 140 different nationalities and speaking 52 different languages," Flug said.

The exhibit had a "powerful emotional impact because it shows the importance of narrative in relating stories," he said. "The letters show what took place and the impact it had on these people."

For Title - now 73 and a grandparent herself - her grandparents' letters hold special meaning. "What I think is important - they wanted my life and my parents' lives to go on," she says. "They wanted to leave a legacy of hope."

Reading the letters now, Title is convinced Anna intended for them to be made public someday. "I feel I have fulfilled her wishes," she said.