

Gemma La Guardia Gluck: Sister of Fiorello La Guardia and Holocaust Survivor

Gemma's and Fiorello's father Achille was a native of Foggia, Italy, and their mother Irene Luzzatto-Coen was an Italian Jew from Trieste, a seaport of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which became part of Italy after World War I. They came to the United States in the early 1880s, where Fiorello, Gemma and their brother Richard were born. Achille became a U.S. Army bandmaster, but they returned to Trieste to run a hotel after Achille contracted hepatitis from spoiled Army rations during the Spanish-American War in 1898. After Achille's death in 1904, the family moved to Fiume where Fiorello was working for the U.S. consulate, but Fiorello moved back to the U.S. and became a translator at Ellis Island.

Gemma La Guardia married Herman Gluck, a Hungarian Jew, and settled in Budapest. Herman worked for the Budapest Central Bank, and together they raised two children. They lived in relative safety during World War II until the spring of 1944, when the German Army overthrew Hungary's wavering pro-Nazi government and invaded and occupied the country. Deportation of Jews to concentration camps then began. The Glucks were taken to the Mauthausen concentration camp, but the Nazis knew Gemma was the sister of the mayor of New York City. They separated her from Herman and took her to Ravensbruck, a forced labor camp. Eventually she, her daughter Yolanda and infant grandchild Richard were taken to Berlin to be used in a prisoner exchange which never occurred. (Both Gemma's and Yolanda's husbands died in Mauthausen.)

The La Guardia and Wagner Archives has correspondence and related documents between Gemma and Fiorello, as he sent money to her and worked to get Gemma and her family first to Denmark and eventually to New York City. Gemma had lost her U.S. citizenship when she married Herman Gluck, but after his death she regained it. Her daughter and grandson, however, were both Hungarian citizens and had to enter the U.S. as immigrants. Gemma used Fiorello's name to bring attention to her case, much to his consternation. Fiorello, who was then head of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, refused to ask for special favors to bring Gemma and her family to the U.S. He did, however, use his connections in the military (including General Eisenhower), the State Department, and the American Red Cross to send them money and oversee their welfare. In 1947, he successfully sponsored them through the very restrictive immigration process. Gemma, Yolanda and Richard arrived in New York City in May 1947, but Fiorello La Guardia died of cancer in September of that year. Gemma and her family later moved into the Queensbridge Houses, built during her brother's years as mayor.

What follows in chronological order are some of the letters between them. Gemma's story is also told in Thomas Kessner's *Fiorello H. La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989) p. 562-565 and in her memoir *Fiorello's Sister: Gemma La Guardia Gluck's Story*, edited by Rochelle G. Saidell (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

Charlottenburg
July 15th, 1945

My dear Fiorello and Marie:-

I was permitted to send you this letter, therefore I'm writing. I wish you to know that since I spoke to you last Tuesday, I feel much better and am not worrying any more; as I know you are doing all in my behalf.

We three are feeling already much better, especially our little Richard. Of course the imprisonment handicapped him as being 16 months old, he has not yet any teeth out, can't stand nor walk, but now we don't fear and all will be O.K. with him.

Miss Craven, the captain is very kind to us, and she with other American officers often visit us. The other day, she gave me M. 500 which she said you told her to give me.

The lady I'm living with would not hear of my paying (she's not at all interested); but I told her my brother has said I must pay and if she doesn't accept the money, I'll be compelled to go where I can pay (as I must do as my brother wishes). So finally I arranged with her to pay 5 marks a day. I have a good room, light and food. I think this is quite reasonable, don't you? Of course we have the most simple food (as there's no food to be bought here). So this will be about 150-155 marks a month.

To-day, Mrs. Carroll from American Red Cross of Paris came with your cable. I read it. O, Fiorello, you're a dear fellow, to see how you are working for us -- keep it up, try to find our husbands and get us soon over

to U.S.A. (but I should like to come with a ship and not with an air-plane as I fear my heart is too weak and I think a sea-voyage would do me good.

Mr. Carroll asked how much money I wanted. I told him that I got through Miss Craven from you already a sum and just now, I have not much use as we can't buy anything (perhaps later the shops will open). As there's a great scarcity of food, Mr. Carroll said he's going to speak with the Americans to provide me with food (especially for Richard).

Miss Craven and the Americans are very kind and nice to us, of course on account of you, "Little Flower" (they told me you are so called now).

Please F. try to search for our husbands if they are alive, if in Bpest, or where they are. Notes; Herman Gluck born in Mako Hungary on August 6th 1881, residing in Bpest. Correspondent in Credit Bank, arrested in our home on June 7th 1944, he and I were brought to Mauthausen bei Linz (Austria) cell 26. I left him there on June 19th 1944 (since then don't know anything from him.)

Erno Denes (my son-in-law, born in Vienna, on April 7th 1887, Hungarian citizen, merchant, arrested on August 1st, 1944 from our home, Nagymezo utca 43, 11, 5 brought to Buda prison in Gyorskocsi utca, from there is unknown which camp he's been brought to. Please try to find out. From here we are also trying to make searches.

My 6 rooms apartment in Bpest is said to be destroyed and all stolen, so we have absolutely nothing -- but I don't care if we are all alive.

I don't want to write about what we went through, this I shall tell you all when we shall be together. Of course dear F. I hope it's understood that our husbands are also going to be brought over. I sent a snapshot with Dr. Carroll made by the American boys. The lady holding Richard is Capt. Craven. Richard is a real sweet and good baby. He was the one who kept us alive, as I can assure you in one year's imprisonment one got such moments where one lost courage and the thoughts of that baby kept up my spirit.

Now Fiorello, you worried me, by not saying anything about my Irene. Is she well? Healthy? What is she doing? Do write and let one know. You can understand that I am anxious to know all about her.

I'm glad to hear that the American Red Cross is going to be already in Berlin.

The family I'm living with are simple people, employees and antifacista family, not at all interested. Where we live we are in the English Zone and we are all protected.

Please now don't worry, we are all improving and since I heard your voice, am no more ill and not worrying. Please keep me informed and tell me always what I am to do and get us over as soon as possible and find our husbands. Let Irene know of this letter, give her my love and kisses.

Love and kisses for your dear self, Marie and children. Yolanda sends her love and Richard sends a kiss.

Your sister Gemma.

Address
G. Gluck
(by Vally Taroschowitz)
Fritschi str. 69
Berlin

MANUFACTURERS TRUST COMPANY

FIFTY FIVE BROAD STREET

NEW YORK, N.Y.HARVEY D. GIBSON
PRESIDENT

September 12, 1945

The Honorable Fiorello LaGuardia
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, N.Y.

My dear Mr. Mayor:

I am today in receipt of a letter from the American Red Cross on the Continent from which I quote the following paragraph:

"I have just had a further letter from Berlin about Mrs. Emma Gluck. Our people are in more or less constant touch with her and have explored every channel with a view to giving her every assistance including contact with the British authorities in whose sector she resides. For various technical reasons it is extremely difficult to do as much for Mrs. Gluck as everyone would wish, but I can say that she is receiving the kind of help she wants to the maximum of our ability to provide it. I am asking our representative in Berlin to continue as contact with Mrs. Gluck, and whenever I have any news of interest I will pass it along to you."

With kind regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Harvey

October 31, 1945.

Dear Gemma:

This is the first opportunity I have had to get a letter to you through proper legal channels. The regular mail is not yet opened from the U.S. to Germany, hence I could not write to you and I would not do anything to violate the law.

I have been in constant touch and am informed concerning you and the conditions under which you are living. The Red Cross has been very good and very kind.

Because of the limitation of space in this letter, I will get right down to the point. I need not tell you of my anxiety for your welfare. You know that.

Your situation is extremely difficult. No exceptions can be made. If any different treatment were applied to you, it would cause hundreds of thousands of demands for the same treatment. The publicity which you obtained and the fact that I might be known, makes it all the more difficult. But let me repeat, your case is the same as that of hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

I will provide for you and do the very best that conditions will permit. You must be patient. People have been very kind to you. I am thankful for it. I think you displayed a little impatience in your letter to Mr. Carrell. By the way, he was killed in an automobile accident a few days ago.

You have lost your citizenship, therefore that is something that cannot be remedied. Notwithstanding, out of kindness, help has been given to you and will continue to be given to you.

I had a talk with Mr. Harvey Gibson, who is a friend of mine, only yesterday. I understand you received \$100. from the Red Cross and then again \$200. I have reimbursed the Red Cross. I have not yet reimbursed the \$50. which you received from Miss Craven, but will do so as soon as I can see her.

I learn with a great deal of disappointment that displaced nationals in Germany cannot be sent anywhere. I am trying my best to have you sent either to Sweden or England or Portugal or Italy. There are many insurmountable obstacles. Again, if they do it for one they will have to do it for hundreds of thousands. I will try my best. I will then be able to provide for you and you can get an apartment, and of course, living conditions will be so much better.

As to your returning to the United States, I am doing all I can, but I cannot get Yolande and her child in. You do not want to leave them alone. Unless the law changes, this may continue for sometime. If it can be done, it will be done.

We might as well be realistic and recognize that through all the publicity which has been given to your case, that if Herman and Yolande's husband were alive, some communication would have reached you. However, there is always hope until definite information is received.

I know of how terrible the conditions are in Germany. Therefore, I will do all I can to get you out, but please understand that if it cannot be done, we must simply reconcile ourselves to it. Then I will do the best that conditions permit to provide for you. We cannot send American currency or packages to Germany now. As soon as that is permitted, I will send you regular packages and money.

If the Red Cross gives me the courtesy of writing again, I will do so. You can communicate with me in like manner.

You have been through so much. I know you will have the good sense to manage for a short time until something can be done. Be very careful in the statements that you make.

With love and hoping for the best, I am

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Emma Glueck,
Charlottenburg
Fritschestrass 69
Berlin, Germany.

ROYAL DANISH LEGATION
WASHINGTON 8, D. C.
1125 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N. W.

2374.

REF. NO. 36.N.40.

January 4, 1946.

1/9/46

My dear Mr. La Guardia,

It gives me great pleasure to be able to inform you that the Danish authorities according to a telegram I just received have granted entry visas to Denmark (for the time being for three months) to your sister, Mrs. Gemma La Guardia Gluck, her daughter, Mrs. Jolanda Denes, and child.

If there is anything more I can do please let me know.

Trusting that your relatives will find a pleasant provisional haven in Denmark after their tragic experiences during the war, I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Henric Kauffmann

The Honorable
Fiorello H. La Guardia,
Office of the Mayor of New York,
New York City,
N.Y.

File

1/16/46

WAR DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF
WASHINGTON

14 January, 1946.

Dear Sir:

Due to General Eisenhower's absence from the Country, your letter addressed to him requesting assistance to insure delivery of an enclosed letter to your sister, has just been noted by the General. He has instructed me to send your letter to General Clay to insure delivery, which is being done this date.

As you know, the General is preparing to appear before a joint board of Congress tomorrow, hence is unable to reply in person. He asked that I convey to you and Mrs. LaGuardia his very best wishes and also those of Mrs. Eisenhower.

Sincerely,

James Stack

JAMES STACK

Lt. Colonel, ADC

Aide to General Eisenhower

The Hon. Fiorello LaGuardia
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York City

11 June 1946

Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Gentlemen:

I enclose supporting affidavit to the application of Yolanda Denes and her infant son for quota visa. Same contains all the facts pertaining to such application.

I also enclose check for \$20 visa fees. I would greatly appreciate it if these papers could be sent to the American Consul at Hamburg on the earliest possible date.

Sincerely yours,

Enclosures:
affidavit
check

gh

----- x
In the Matter of the Application :
for Quota Visas :
for :
YOLANDA DENES and her Infant Son :
RICHARD. :

----- x
CITY OF WASHINGTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (S.S.)

FIORIELLO H. LaGUARDIA, being duly sworn, says:

My name is Fiorello H. LaGuardia. I am a citizen of the United States and a resident of the State of New York.

I am the brother of Gemma Gluck, the mother of Yolanda Denes and grandmother of the infant Richard. My sister Gemma Gluck is a native born citizen of the United States. She lost her citizenship when she married a subject of the Kingdom of Hungary some forty years ago. She regained her citizenship after the death of her husband Herman in a concentration camp somewhere in Germany. My sister Gemma Gluck was taken a prisoner during the war, separated from her family and sent to a concentration camp where she remained until the invasion of Germany by the Allied Armies. My sister's daughter, Yolanda, seemingly has lost her husband and is entirely dependent upon my sister and myself for support for herself and her son. Applications are being made for quota visas for the said Yolanda Denes and her child Richard. If visas are granted they will be able to come with my sister, who is entitled to re-entrance into the United States as a citizen.

I am able and willing to support my sister, her daughter and grandchild. I am a retired official of the City of New York, enjoying a pension for life of \$10,250 a year. I have additional income from my work in writing and lecturing amounting to approximately \$95,000 a year. This statement may be easily verified by my income tax payment for the first quarter of 1946 to the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Together with my wife I own my own home at 5020 Goodridge Avenue in the City of New York.

I will assume responsibility for the proper care of my sister and her child and grandchild and insure that they will not at any time become public charges.

Sworn to before me this
day of June, 1946.

Helleruh April 2nd, 1947

My Dear Ones:

In haste I write this good news— Yolanda has received her “Quota No. 801-802 and I must say the legation here is working in great tempo— they called Yolanda down immediately and said one must do all quickly one thing after the other— Well, it was necessary for her to get a paper from the Denmark Police that she’s not been punished, this she got then have a passport picture with Richard taken this is done then to bring all at the Central Police and immediately she got a “Provisory Passport” as there is no Hungarian Consul, she couldn’t get a Hungarian passport— a Danish one she can’t get so this is the way she was immediately helped, this Provisory Passport” is sufficient for her departure it’s valid til June 1st 1947 (if we are not off till then) one will prolong it. We received our permit to stay still 3 months in Copenhagen valid till July 1st 1947 but this I believe we don’t get anymore.

Now the Consul at the legation congratulated Yolly have quickly all went and they are finished now he said. Your uncle must do the rest to procure the steamer’s tickets and if he wishes we are at his disposal to help also in this line, but he thinks it’s much easier from America and he gave Yolanda a list of ships to mention them to you and he doesn’t advise to travel to England, it makes the trip much more expensive and (?) knows with baby it wouldn’t be fun. Here from Copenhagen are ships – freightships of American Line the best of these is McCormick and its best to book from N.Y. these ships take only 12 passengers and takes naturally a longer time, they are also very clear(?); then once a month, May 6 ,

June 6th, or July 5th comes a big Polish ship the Batony to Copenhagen one says this would be very good. Then from Sweden are leaving every fortnight a ship so I leave this to you only notify us in time what you have decided and the legation also wants to know if they are to book tickets for us or if you are doing it. Now Fiorello, if you have deposited money for these expenses why did they make me pay? Today they told Yolanda they think some money is deposited. That time they said they couldn't cash it, that I must pay. I did so and I owe that C.180 to Mrs. Nimb, so please if the money is there authorize them to give me that money as I want to pay Mrs. Nimb. I have been 12 days ill in bed with muscular rheumatism. I called the doctor once C.10. medicine C.5 if I have to have 15 days massage at 3 cronies a day as here lives in the pension a lady who gives massages otherwise it would cost 5cronies each time. I was so angry as in the camp I wasn't ill and here the whole winter I was O.K. and as spring comes I get ill. I'm up now, I must get in order to travel. Please Fiorello dear write all clearly now and when we shall travel and give us all directions. Also, let me know what am I to do about Richard? Shall I take him to a Psycho-Analyst? Perhaps it is safer to have a paper in our hands. The doctor here when he came to me, I asked him, he said, the child has developed very well and he is alright but if you wish it to do it, he'll give me a good address but I suppose this will be expensive, I have no idea. Please answer me also in this subject. For clothes you must not worry for spring and summer now we can pull through. I should like to buy for Richard a pair of shoes - some socks, 1 or 2 little blouses. What am I to do with the "Radio". I can get from a lady here in the pension C. 100 for it. So please advise. I am so happy to think soon we shall be in N.Y. and near you all. It is 3 years we are without him. It'll be just wonderful and perhaps in this atmosphere something's we'll be able to forget.

Please answer soon. The Consul advised Yolanda to address your letter so as if you are not there, it won't delay as Marie can open your letter and inform you. Best love from us all. Yolanda baby are also happy to to think we are going soon. Kisses, Gemma.

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April 19, 1947

Dear Gemma:

This is to advise you that I have made arrangements with the Moore-McCormack Lines for your passage. In all likelihood it will be either in June or July. You will board the ship in Copenhagen. The agents of the steamship will get in touch with you through the American Legation. I will pay the passage from this end.

Now this is a very simple matter. Do not complicate it or involve it with a lot of talk. When you are called, all you will have to do is to show your documents, get your steamship tickets, and when you get the steamship tickets you have nothing else to do but get on the ship the day it sails. Do not show off during the passage.

I am sure you will find the ship most comfortable. I will keep you advised.

Your birthday is on the 24th and we all send you our best wishes for many happy returns.

Affectionately,

Mrs. Gemma Gluck
Pension Nimb
Hellerup by Copenhagen
Skt. Pedersvej 3
Denmark