

Lotte's Story

In the spring of 1992, Lotte Friedman returned to the place of her birth, Aachen, Germany for the first time in 55 years. Since 1955, Aachen's Society of Christian-Jewish Cooperation had been endeavoring to create a Christian-Jewish dialog. Finally, in 1989 they were able to reach out and start gathering the names and addresses of former residents who lived in Aachen before the war and began to assemble a list of those to invite to a homecoming. They located about 270 former Jewish residents and in the end, 204 survivors accepted the invitation to return. Together, with spouses, some 300 people made the trip back to a past, they had tried to forget.

"When I was first asked to join the group, I must confess that I was, as were the immediate members of my family, rather reluctant to accept the invitation. In my own mind I was not sure that I really wanted to go back and relive the sights and scenes of my last memories of Aachen and Germany itself. My exit from Germany in 1938 had been a life-saving device for me and my family, an occurrence for which up to now I could not forgive the German people," Lotte said.

Lotte Stern Friedman was born in Aachen in the early 1920's, the daughter of Max and Anna Stern. Struck with scarlet fever, when she was two years of age, left her deaf. After her younger sister, Liesel, was born, an influenza epidemic claimed their mother. Later their father remarried the wonderful Minna Buxbaum, who really steered Lotte toward the proper education she would need to survive in the hearing world. She helped her perfect her lip-reading and taught her to be independent. So successful was her education that by the time Lotte was 15, she was living on her own in a rooming house many miles away from her hometown. Lotte enrolled in the Art Academy in Berlin, learning sculpture, drawing and lettering that is still a large part of her life today. She thought she would stay in Berlin forever.

Then on the morning of November 10, 1938, as Lotte walked to her morning class at the Academy, she witnessed evidence of the horrors that the SS troops had committed the night before. Not being able to hear the commotion the night before, she now saw the remnants of peoples lives; broken glass and destruction littered the streets and sidewalks, a terrorizing site of broken homes, stores, synagogues, and schools.

Soldiers were still searching for more Jews and as a soldier walked toward her, she knew immediately what she had to do. Not even returning to her rooming house for her possessions, she fled to the train station. As she counted the money in her purse, she discovered she did not have enough to get home to Aachen. Remembering her father had a friend in Cologne, she bought a ticket, got on the train and went there for help. She arrived in Aachen in time to join her family and escape to Holland. Lotte and her parents were held in a detention facility in Amsterdam for several months until Lotte's aunt managed to get them out and into an apartment. Lotte worked as a maid in a home, where each day the lady of the house would put on white gloves to run over the furniture to make sure it was dusted properly.

In 1940, their visas for the United States were granted and soon after the family arrived in New York.

Lotte received a grant to attend the Institute of the Deaf in St. Louis, where in exchange for room and board, she cared for a deaf spastic child. After two years, during which she learned English, she moved to Los Angeles and found employment at the National School as a textbook illustrator.

In 1947 her story appeared in the Volta Review along with her picture. It was seen and cut out by Irvin Friedman, who lived in Chicago. When young Irvin attended a convention of deaf people in Los Angeles, he showed the picture around and was able to obtain Lotte's address. It took only three months for Irvin to contact, meet, court, woo and finally ask for Lotte's hand in marriage. Two sons resulted and three loving grandchildren.



The Friedmans both devoted their Los Angeles years to Temple Beth Solomon. Irv passed away in 1996, but Lotte still remains an active member of the TBS Board.