

## Surviving the Holocaust

Guests Interview by Sharon Ann Soudakoff

# A Strong Willed and Brave Woman Who Never Gave Up Hope

## Marion Schlessinger Intrator



Marion Schlessinger was born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1929. She became deaf at two years old as a result of scarlet fever. She went to school at the Israelite Institute for the Deaf in East Berlin, Germany in 1935. Her parents, brother and sister received visas to go to America. She stayed behind because the American Government wouldn't allow deaf or handicapped people into the United States. They left in a hurry since they found out that the Gestapo wanted to arrest the family. They did not have a chance to explain anything to Marion, nor did they say good-bye. The Director of Israelite Institute for the Deaf, Dr. Felix Reich, a Jewish man who was hearing told her parents to go ahead and promised that he would take care of her. In July 1939, Dr. Reich took ten students, including Marion on a train to Holland. From there they took a boat to England. She attended a Jewish School for the Deaf.

Dr. Reich wanted to return to Germany to bring over more children but they thought that he was a German spy so they arrested him for a while and then found that he was innocent. Unfortunately, at this point it was too late to go back to Germany as the war had already started.

When the war broke out, the Germans bombed London, the school decided to evacuate to Brighton School, a Christian school located in Brighton Beach about two hours away from London. The Germans bombed Brighton Beach almost every day during the years 1940-1942. They kept the Jewish and Christian children apart because the Jewish kids kept kosher and they didn't want to mix them up. There were about 75 Christian children at this school, and about 35 Jewish children. In 1942, the school decided to evacuate again. This time they moved to Havering House in Milton, Wilshire. This was a small hotel for the wealthy people who came there for their holiday. They changed it for the children from 1942-1946. They went back to London after the War. The school was oral. She learned to communicate her needs from German into English.

The children were kept busy and worked hard to raise vegetables and fruit. Many of the girls knitted sweaters, gloves, hamlets, and scarves for the soldiers. There was not much education learned during the war years.

Marion didn't know where her parents were for four years. Thanks to the efforts of the Red Cross, her family was able to trace Marion In 1942, and brought her over to New York City. She received permission to leave while at school. The committee that was responsible for her welfare arranged her travel needs. She took many tests before leaving the school and passed them all with flying colors. She traveled alone on a ship that was filled with sailors and army men on a war ship. The journey took one month. The American Authorities still wouldn't let her in because of her deafness. During the war, in December, 1944, her parents told the Authorities that she was trained as a farmer, so they admitted her.

When the family was reunited, they were able to explain everything that had happened to them, and of course, as she explained, she understood, and doesn't blame them for taking off in a big hurry. She had faith in herself, and knew that her family was trying their best to be able to get her admitted into the United States, so she was able to handle the situation.

When she moved to New York, she attended the Lexington School for the Deaf for two years, and then went to a regular hearing high school for four years.

Dr. Felix Reich died in 1950. Most of the 146 students from the Israelite Institute for the Deaf were killed in 1942. Marion thanks Dr. Reich for saving her life! She didn't know any of the students that were killed. She remains in touch with her pal Annie Marschner Senchel who lives in England. She didn't know any other deaf survivors until she participated in a panel at Temple Beth Solomon of the Deaf in May, 1983. The project was called, "Crying Hands."

She met her husband, Sam Intrator, who is deaf and Jewish at the A.A.A.D. Basketball tourney in Berkeley, CA in 1970. They live in Sherman Oaks, CA.