

UK NEWS

Friends reunited! Deaf former classmates meet after 50 years

THEY had not met since their teens. Now, more than half-a-century later, Ann Miller, a deaf sign language user, was finally able to hug her former school friends – brothers Alan and David West and David Jessel.

"This is wonderful and, yes, I do recognise them," Ann laughed. As pupils they had shared adjacent dorms at the former Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children in Nightingale Lane, where they had studied and boarded during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Ann and her long-term partner Alois Vlachynsky had flown in from Toronto to join 140 former students of the Residential School for a unique reunion and Yom Ha'Shoah Memorial Service at Hendon Reform Synagogue, sharing memories both sad and joyous.

Most of the school's students are now well over 60 and some have become deaf or blind in their later years. Sign language interpreters and a lip-speaker were present to support guests' personal stories and poetry

readings. The reunion was the dream of Jewish Deaf Association (JDA) member Colleen Daniels, who studied and boarded at the Residential School during term-time from 1956-1960 and organised the event with the support of her husband Alan, a group of JDA members and the sponsorship of the JDA.

Mira Goldberg, a JDA member, trustee and former RSJDC pupil said: "We are delighted that the JDA was able to sponsor this poignant event which also commemorated its diamond jubilee year. This enabled the deaf community to mourn the loss of loved ones on Holocaust Memorial Day, and celebrate surviving friendships together."

Colleen added: "Out of the horrors of the Holocaust that brought Jewish deaf children together in Britain from so many parts of occupied Europe came the all-important friendships that have sustained them through the decades and brought them to this



Friends reunited – former pupils of the Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children. Left to right: Richard Cayzer, David West, Neil Kaufman, David Jessel, Ann Miller and Alan West

reunion. Colleen's school friends, many of whom were present, included deaf children of the Kindertransport rescue movement who were sent without their parents out of Nazi Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia to safety in Britain, as well as many young deaf Jewish refugees who came from occupied Europe to live at the resi-

dential school.

A memorial service, led by student rabbi Lisa Barrett, was held in remembrance of Jewish deaf children whose families were profoundly affected by the Holocaust.

Candle lighting took place for those who perished, with a special one-minute silence in memory of close friend and former pupil Leon Lebor, who died working as a maintenance

man in the Twin Towers during the 9/11 attacks.

Former pupil Neil Kaufman said: "This was a bitter sweet occasion. The bitter part was to be reminded of the people who perished. The sweet part was recreating friendships with long lost friends. I was amazed when I saw Ann and other friends. I had not seen her for over 54 years! It was incredible!"

Ambassadors' appeal helps Shoah survivors

BRITAIN'S ambassador to Israel and Israel's outgoing envoy to Britain have teamed up to launch a unique joint appeal to help Holocaust survivors living in both countries.

Matthew Gould and Ron Prozor wrote a joint letter to Jewish communities across the UK on Yom Ha'Shoah, asking for people to help raise £2million to ensure 1,500 survivors are able to attend social activities by setting up eight new clubs across Israel and expanding eight existing ones. The money will cover all the costs for the next five years including transport, activities and social workers to help ensure that survivors' last years "are not endured alone".

Gould said: "This is a very personal mission for me. Many of my family died in the Holocaust. We have a special duty to look after survivors and to give them the dignity and comfort that they deserve."

The clubs will be set up by the Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims in Israel, together with the Ministry of Social Welfare. In addition, one-tenth of the money will go to Jewish Care to help Holocaust survivors in the UK.

The ambassadors' appeal is supported by the Chief Rabbi, the United Synagogue, the Movement for Reform Judaism, Liberal Judaism, the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, the Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregation, and prominent members of the Charedi community.

