

MARK ZAUROV
KLAUS-B. GÜNTHER
(EDS.)

*A contribution for
Deaf Studies, Holocaust
Studies and Sign
Language Education.
Proceedings of the
6th Deaf History
International Conference
July 31 – August 04,
2006 at the Humboldt
University, Berlin*

OVERCOMING THE PAST,

DETERMINING ITS CONSEQUENCES AND FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR THE PRESENT.

REMEMBERING THE DEAF KINDERTRANSPORTS FROM BERLIN

*Douglas D. Bahl**

After visiting the Israelite School for the Deaf (ITA) in Weissensee, Berlin, Germany, several years ago, I noticed a memorial plaque hanging on the former school building and it reminds us that 146 Deaf Jewish students were abducted from that building in 1942 and later murdered. I learned that Dr. Felix Reich, the principal of the school managed to smuggle 10 deaf students out of Germany by train and boat in 1939. Dr. Felix Reich planned to come back to get more Deaf children but unfortunately this did not happen and those remaining 146 Deaf students and staff were taken by Nazis and perished in the gas chambers of concentration camps in Auschwitz and Theresienstadt.

I decided to do further research on a major part of this story covering the heroic efforts of Dr. Felix Reich and was curious to know what had happened to these 10 deaf children, who they were and how did they survive.

In 1919, Dr. Felix Reich took over as the principal of the ITA to continue its work fully in the spirit of his father who founded the ITA. Dr. Reich was most like other German Jews, naive and shocked at the rising waves of fascist anti-Semitism. He was not prepared on the evening in 1938 when Gestapo burst the door into the ITA dining hall and beat him in front of the students and staff and arrested him. A few weeks later, Dr. Reich returned to ITA with crutches where the students and staff were shocked to see his shaved head and his back was bent from the beatings he had received. Dr. Reich bought safety of his wards for a short time by allowing his son to be taken into the German army where he was soon sacrificed in battle of a front line.

From there, Dr. Reich decided to contact the Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children (RSJDC) in London and made plans to smuggle Deaf children out of Germany in small groups. Mr. Benham, the acting principal of RSJDC wanted to accept 19 children from ITA in Berlin and was willing to collect funds in aid of those children. However, the RSJDC authority could take in 10 students as they were of 10 years old or less.

Dr. Reich explored and decided to get involved in a mission rescued by Kindertransport which brought about 10,000 refugee Jewish children to Great Britain from Nazi Germany between 1938 and the outbreak of the war. The British government agreed to admit unspecified number of Jewish children up to age 17 when German and Austrian Nazis burned and destroyed synagogues and smashed many Jewish stores. This event is known as "Kristallnacht" meaning the night of broken glass. These kindertransports were brought to private homes and institutions in England while their parents remained behind. Most of the Kindertransport children never saw their parents again after the war. Of the Jewish children who stayed in Germany after 1939, over a million were murdered or deported to concentration camps.



Front: Sam and Marion (Schlessinger) Intrator reunited with Ruth and Harold Fallmann (back) in Los Angeles, California (1998)

ment had arrested him immediately because they mistook him for a German spy. Dr. Reich could not fulfill his plan to return to Berlin so it was too late to save more Deaf students from ITA. He was later freed from jail but decided to settle down and taught hearing children in England until his death in 1964.

These ten Kindertransports were brought into the RSDJC in London just before the outbreak of the war in 1939. They are not sure why their beloved teacher, Dr. Reich, who saved their lives, could not come and visit them while living in England after the war. They might want to express how much they appreciated his heroic efforts to save them.

Based on interviews with several Deaf Kindertransports, many of them had lived the trauma and terror of being uprooted from their Berlin school as well as their home. They were separated from their parents and were expecting eventually to be reunited with their families but some of them never saw their parents who were killed in concentration camps. I would like to give the update on what is happening to these 10 Kindertransports today.

MARION SCHLESSINGER INTRATOR (1928-2002)

Marion Schlessinger was born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1928. At the age of two, Marion became deaf due to scarlet fever and was sent to the Israelite School for the Deaf two years

It is interesting to note that Great Britain tried to get USA involved with Kindertransport Plan but didn't do anything. The 76th Congressional resolution (SJ Res. 64 and HJ 168) was introduced in the U. S. Congress in April, 1939 but was failed. After bringing the first group of 10 Deaf Kindertransports to England in the summer of 1939, Dr. Reich escorted the first group of 10 children ranging the ages of 3 and 11 by train to Holland. Prior to boarding on the ship to Liverpool, each child was given a number and similar number was attached to suitcase. Parting was terrible and very sad for them so they hoped that their parents one day would come back and then see them again. Lack of language skills and homesickness made the long stay in England even harder for these Deaf Kindertransports. Upon their arrival at England, the RSDJC staff undertook to care for them. Unfortunately as soon as Dr. Reich stepped on the ground in Liverpool, the British govern-

later, only 11 hours by train ride from Berlin to her hometown. She was the only girl at school with distinctive orange hair and was known as a "Marmalade girl".

In 1939 the neighbor informed Marion's father that he and his family were on a list slated to be deported to the concentration camp. Her father realized time had come for them to leave Germany and called Dr. Reich, asking him to send Marion immediately to Holland where they would meet her. Dr. Reich was frightened to see her going out on her own so he traveled with her to Holland, hoping to put her safely into the arms of her family. Unfortunately, Dr. Reich could not find her Schlessinger family, so he brought her back to school. At that time, Dr. Reich negotiated with the RSJDC to arrange transport for the Berlin students and was successful in moving the first 10 deaf Jewish children including Marion from Berlin to England. She remembered that she and the Jewish Deaf children were evacuated to a Christian school for the deaf in Brighton. When minefields set for German soldiers posed a danger to playing children, they were evacuated to a farm in Wiltshire where they grew vegetables and fruits and knitted sweaters, scarves and gloves for English soldiers. All this time Marion wondered where her parents and siblings were and if they were still alive. She had no idea and thought that she was an orphan. For 5 years she had no contact with her family. International Red Cross found that her family was safe in New York City. Difficult part occurred that USA refused to issue visas to any Deaf or other disabled persons. Her father read the paper that there was a shortage of farm hands in the North Central states because most of the farmers' helpers moved out to cities for better pay in the factories. Marion finally arrived at Halifax, Canada and two-day train trip brought her to New York City where she was reunited with her family. Her father enrolled Marion in the Lexington School for the Deaf. Marion had to become and get used to American ways and made new friends and prepared herself for a new life in America. She was married to Samuel Intrator and lived in California for many years until her death on October 8, 2001 at the age of 73 years. She was crowned Mrs. JDC Senior Citizen during the 22nd Biennial Conference of the Jewish Deaf Congress in California.

ANN MARSCHNER SENCHAL

Ann Marschner was born in Berlin, Germany in 1929. Her parents were hearing and divorced when she was young. Her mother worked as a machinist to support her and her two brothers. The oldest of her brothers was deaf, too. They both attended the Israelite School for the Deaf where they learned to communicate in German Sign Language. She thought it was a big adventure when Dr. Reich took the 10 children on a train to England. At the station everyone seemed happy and her mother gave her a Star of David necklace and told her that she would see her in two weeks but never saw her again.

On the ship she was given bizarre food she had never tasted before-- white bread and milky tea. When the ship docked at Liverpool, the headmaster from the RSDJC came to meet the group and took them by train to London. They were made to have a bath and went to bed without any food even though it was during the afternoon. Her Star of David necklace and earrings were never given back.



Photo of Ann and her brother Horst taken at the DHI Conference, 2006 in Berlin

Her school was later evacuated to Brighton and then to Marlborough. She never knew there was a war. She saw some British planes taking off from nearby base. Children yelled "Planes to Germany, Germany bad!!" She later became ill with skin diseases and had received several letters from her mother but some had pieces cut out of them and it didn't make sense. When she was 13 years old, the letters stopped. She recalled feeling bitter or jealous of other children when their parents came to visit. She was good in dressmaking and went to work as a machinist at Manchester but the war was ended one year later. She got a job in a Jewish hostel for only deaf persons. She was very poor and felt so isolated and tried to take her life several times when she was 19 years old in 1948. One day she saw some people using sign language, they introduced her to a deaf clubhouse and then her life

changed. She made friends and fell in love with a Christian deaf boy but his parents forbade him to marry her because she was a Jewish. Through the deaf club, she met her future deaf husband named Stanley who was also a Jewish. She had no love but was impressed with him for showing his caring. Marrying Stanley was her way out. Later she wanted a divorce but realized she had not been mothered herself and then changed by growing more love for Stanley and she finally loved him to the end of his life. She has two daughters and is now living in Bristol, England.

Anne never knew what happened to her family until 1970's when she found her father died in Bergen-Belsen camp in 1942. Her hearing brother Karl Heinz was murdered and her mother was gassed in a death camp only a few months before the war was over. For the first time she discovered that the death of her mother upset her greatly. (*Doug invited Anne Senchal up on the stage and she moved many of audience to tears when she was emotional in her speech as she really wanted to thank Dr. Reich and wanted to clarify that only ten Kindertransports accompanied him to England.)

HORST MARSCHNER

Horst Marschner was born in Germany in 1928 and attended the ITA with his younger sister, Anne in Berlin. While climbing a tree to fetch her an egg hidden by the teachers in the ITA garden, Horst signed to her that he could see about 9 children marching towards him in Nazi Youth uniform. Some of them were deaf. In their brown shirts, they signed "JUDEN" and

started attacking the Jewish children. Luckily one of their teachers got rid of them. Horst and Anne never understand what was going on, so it was part of anti-semitism towards deaf Jewish children. Horst attended the same schools with Anne and other Deaf Kindertransports in England. When the war was over, Horst was deported to Germany. He was married twice and has two daughters. He now lives with his second wife in Germany.

MANFRED SCHEINROCK

Manfred Scheinrock came to England with Dr. Reich and his group when he was 11 years old. After attending schools in England, he moved to live in Israel for many years until his death. If you know more information about Manfred, please contact me.

KLAUS SILBERSON

At the age of 9, Klaus Silberman came to England with Dr. Reich and his group. After attending several schools in England, he decided to settle down in Manchester, England. He is now deceased. I would be very much appreciate if you could find further information on him.

HENRIETTA SONNTAG

At the age of 8, Henrietta Sonntag left Germany with Dr. Reich and other Kindertransport children from ITA. In 1940 she went to America and was reunited with her family. She is married and is now living in USA. She preferred not to share further details about her childhood years in Germany and England so I respect her wish.



Henrietta Sonntag



Benno Icgson

BENNO ICIGSON

At the age of 5, Benno Icgson left for England with Dr. Reich and his group. After the war, Benno was married and had two daughters. He and his second wife are now living in Israel.

RUTH DANZIGER FALLMAN

Ruth Danziger was born in Germany and attended the ITA in Berlin. She was four years old when Dr. Reich accompanied her and her group to England in 1939. Her family later escaped to Shanghai, China so they kept in touch with each other through letter correspondence with assistance of Red Cross. Her grandmother and brother decided to leave China for Germany as they thought the war was over so they wanted to get together with Ruth. Her parents tried to encourage them to stay longer but they didn't agree, so they were later sent to concentration camp after their arrival in Germany. Ruth continued to live in England for 10 years so she and her parents made plans to meet each other in New York City. Ruth left alone on Queen Elizabeth ship for New York City where she was reunited with her parents. Ruth went to Rochester School for the Deaf until her graduation. She later moved back to England where she married her childhood friend named Harold Fallman. They are now living in London, England. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Ruth for her help as well as her photos shown in my powerpoint presentation.

LOTHAR BIEBER



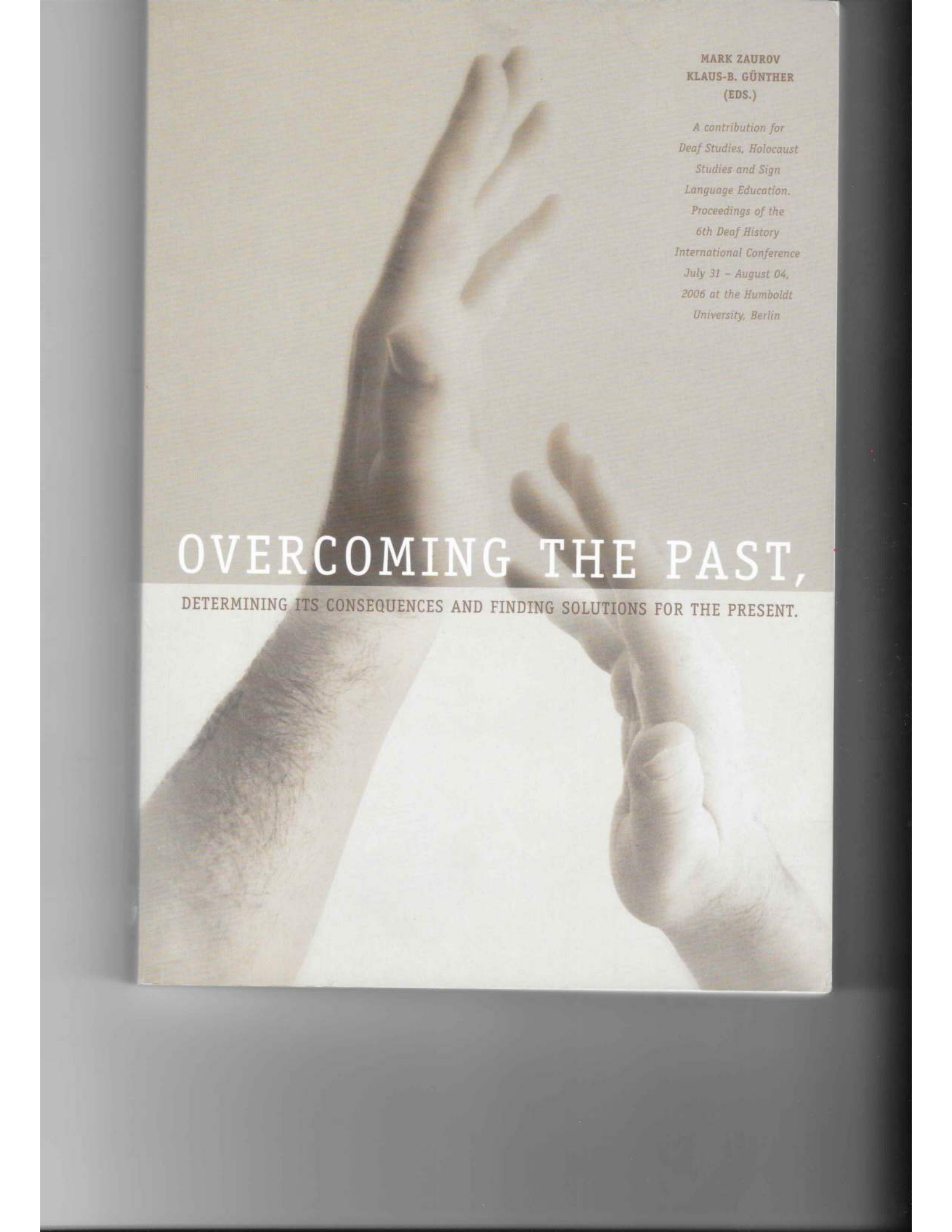
Leslie Lothar Bieber

Lothar Bieber was the youngest of all 10 Deaf Kindertransport children while accompanying with Dr. Reich to England. His parents were both deaf. His mother's sister was also deaf. Upon the arrival to Liverpool, England, Dr. Reich delivered Lothar to the waiting arms of his hearing maternal grandparents who were living in England. His grandmother was very upset to learn that Lothar's parents and aunt could not accompany with Dr. Reich and his group because the Kindertransport was limited to only children under the age of 17. She volunteered to leave for Germany to bring her daughters and son-in-law back. Unfortunately none of them returned, so all of them were perished in concentration camps. His grandfather, Rabbi Hans Auerbach, raised Lothar and became a favorite uncle to Lothar's deaf friends and could communicate in German Sign Language. Lothar is now married and is living in England.

After the war, these 10 Deaf Kindertransport children became Citizens of Great Britain, or emigrated to Israel and the United States. Most of these children had never seen their parents who were murdered during the Holocaust. We must not forget these Deaf Kindertransport survivors and their families during the Holocaust. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all these people who have contributed their help for my presentation. I will continue researching and interviewing and when I am done, I will put all of this into a book someday real soon. Thank you.

References

- Biesold, Horst (1999): *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Galliner, Nicola (2001): "Open Your Hand for the Dumb: The history of the Jewish School for the Deaf & Dumb in Berlin-Weissensee 1873 1942." *Deaf History Journal*, Volume 4 No. 3 – April
- Gilbert, Laura-Jean (1998): "Deaf People in Hitler's Europe: An international conference brings attention to the roles deaf people played during the Nazi regime." *Gallaudet Today*. Fall.
- Ryan, Donna, & John Schuchman (Eds.) (2002): *Deaf People in Hitler's Europe*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Soudakoff, Sharon Ann (1996): "History of Deaf Holocaust Victims." *JDCC News*, Issue #22, May-June.
- Walter, Vickie (1987): "In der Nacht: An unusual exhibit depicts the Nazi Persecution of deaf people." *Gallaudet Today*. Winter.
- "Survivors" *Temple Beth Solomon of the Deaf News*, 2001 Includes Marion Schlessinger Intrator. *Personal Interviews*: Fallman, Ruth Danziger – July, 2003 Marschner, Horst – August, 2005 Senchal, Anne Marschner – July, 2003



MARK ZAUROV
KLAUS-B. GÜNTHER
(EDS.)

*A contribution for
Deaf Studies, Holocaust
Studies and Sign
Language Education.
Proceedings of the
6th Deaf History
International Conference
July 31 – August 04,
2006 at the Humboldt
University, Berlin*

OVERCOMING THE PAST,

DETERMINING ITS CONSEQUENCES AND FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR THE PRESENT.

later, only 11 hours by train ride from Berlin to her hometown. She was the only girl at school with distinctive orange hair and was known as a "Marmalade girl".

In 1939 the neighbor informed Marion's father that he and his family were on a list slated to be deported to the concentration camp. Her father realized time had come for them to leave Germany and called Dr. Reich, asking him to send Marion immediately to Holland where they would meet her. Dr. Reich was frightened to see her going out on her own so he traveled with her to Holland, hoping to put her safely into the arms of her family. Unfortunately, Dr. Reich could not find her Schlessinger family, so he brought her back to school. At that time, Dr. Reich negotiated with the RSJDC to arrange transport for the Berlin students and was successful in moving the first 10 deaf Jewish children including Marion from Berlin to England. She remembered that she and the Jewish Deaf children were evacuated to a Christian school for the deaf in Brighton. When minefields set for German soldiers posed a danger to playing children, they were evacuated to a farm in Wiltshire where they grew vegetables and fruits and knitted sweaters, scarves and gloves for English soldiers. All this time Marion wondered where her parents and siblings were and if they were still alive. She had no idea and thought that she was an orphan. For 5 years she had no contact with her family. International Red Cross found that her family was safe in New York City. Difficult part occurred that USA refused to issue visas to any Deaf or other disabled persons. Her father read the paper that there was a shortage of farm hands in the North Central states because most of the farmers' helpers moved out to cities for better pay in the factories. Marion finally arrived at Halifax, Canada and two-day train trip brought her to New York City where she was reunited with her family. Her father enrolled Marion in the Lexington School for the Deaf. Marion had to become and get used to American ways and made new friends and prepared herself for a new life in America. She was married to Samuel Intrator and lived in California for many years until her death on October 8, 2001 at the age of 73 years. She was crowned Mrs. JDC Senior Citizen during the 22nd Biennial Conference of the Jewish Deaf Congress in California.

ANN MARSCHNER SENCHAL

Ann Marschner was born in Berlin, Germany in 1929. Her parents were hearing and divorced when she was young. Her mother worked as a machinist to support her and her two brothers. The oldest of her brothers was deaf, too. They both attended the Israeli School for the Deaf where they learned to communicate in German Sign Language. She thought it was a big adventure when Dr. Reich took the 10 children on a train to England. At the station everyone seemed happy and her mother gave her a Star of David necklace and told her that she would see her in two weeks but never saw her again.

On the ship she was given bizarre food she had never tasted before--white bread and milky tea. When the ship docked at Liverpool, the headmaster from the RSJDC came to meet the group and took them by train to London. They were made to have a bath and went to bed without any food even though it was during the afternoon. Her Star of David necklace and earrings were never given back.

e that Great Britain
olved with Kinder-
t do anything. The
olution (SJ Res. 64
duced in the U. S.
39 but was failed.
t group of 10 Deaf
England in the
Reich escorted the
ildren ranging the
n to Holland. Prior
to Liverpool, each
umber and similar
o suitcase. Parting
id for them so they
is one day would
them again. Lack
nd homelickness
in England even
Kindertansports.
gland, the RSJDC
for them. Unfortu-
ich stepped on the
e British govern-
ian spy. Dr. Reich
ore Deaf students
ight hearing chil-

just before the
g Dr. Reich, who
ad after the war.
s to save them.
n had lived the
nited with their
i concentration
Kindertansports

2 of two, Marion
e Deaf two years