

Remembering Helene Samuels

15.11.1919 – 19.10.2018

Here we pay tribute to a very special lady — Helene Samuels — whose father, Julius Newman, was inspired to set up the Jewish Deaf Association, and without whom all of our lives would be very different.

Minnie and Julius Newman were the proud parents of three daughters — Mavis, Helene and Evelyn.

Helene became deaf when she was 14 years old, after having her tonsils and adenoids out. It was later suggested that the anaesthetic might have been the cause of this, which was not unusual in those days.

Her adoring parents did everything they could to support her and sent her to a residential school, where she learned how to lip-read for her future life. Over time, she became proficient at lip-reading.

She became the bookkeeper for her father's lingerie business during the Second World War. It is believed that she wanted to be an accountant but she never pursued a career — maybe because she was a woman or perhaps because she was deaf.

Her parents were keen for her to meet other Jewish deaf people. When her father Julius Newman realised that Jewish deaf people had nowhere of their own to meet and socialise, he set to work. And in 1951, inspired by Helene Samuels, the Jewish Deaf Association was born. (Full story on opposite page.)

At an engagement party given by friends of her parents, Helene met Eric, a delightful hearing man, who was in the Royal Navy. The couple were married after the war and were devoted to each other.

They began married life living in the same block of flats as her parents, Minnie and Julius Newman. Eric started working for his father-in-law. They moved to Leigh-on-Sea whilst Eric was running the lingerie factory there.

Ten years later, they moved to Solihull in Birmingham because Eric's parents and sister were there. They started Solihull Synagogue, where Helene always had a seat in the front row. Helene became Chairman of B'nai B'rith and the couple were well regarded in the Jewish community.

Helene loved to give lavish dinner parties in their lovely home. She did a flower arranging course and always displayed elegant floral displays in the house. She was also a fantastic cook and baker, famous for her signature Black Forest Gateau.

Following Eric's untimely death in 1984, she moved to Bournemouth to be near her older sister Mavis and eldest niece Marion and her family — and the sea. Later, her nephew Simon and family also moved to the area.

Helene survived both her sisters and was thus the last of her generation. She became a figurehead for the next generations of her family — always contributing her opinion and remembering to mark everyone's birthday and anniversary. She was a close and loving Aunt and a very important pillar in the family.

Helene never let her deafness stand in her way. As a widow, she continued to lead an active life, playing bridge, adventurously cruising all over the world and being with the family.

Helene retired to a care home in North London to be near her sister Evelyn (Gee) and family. Here she was lovingly supported by Trudy, Caroline, Duncan and Barbara.

Helene had a long and fulfilling life. Right to the end, she had a keen memory and a strong personality – and a love of bridge!



JDA— HOW IT ALL BEGAN

When Julius Newman discovered that there were no social or welfare facilities for Jewish Deaf people, other than the occasional 'get together' in local church halls, he decided that something must be done.

It was just after the end of the Second World War and money was tight, facilities in short supply. But he approached a number of friends who supported his aims and they held their first meeting at the Palestinian Club in London's West End. They asked Deaf people from the Jewish community what their ambitions were and were told that they desperately wanted a centre of their own, where they could meet up socially, discuss their issues and feel safe and secure.

Not long after, Julius responded by forming the Jewish Deaf Association Concert Committee (later to become the Jewish Deaf Association) and their first event - an 'All Star Concert' took place at the prestigious Palace Theatre in London. The then considerable sum of £3,200 was raised and a member of the audience that night subsequently alerted Julius to some premises that might be suitable to house the first Jewish Deaf club on a permanent basis.

However, the building was far from ready to move into. Having suffered bomb damage during the war, 90-92 Cazenove Road in Stamford Hill was in a sorry state. But Julius was advised that it could be obtained at a knockdown price if he acted quickly.

"I immediately contacted the Chairman of the Joint Synagogue Children's Hostel," said Julius, relating the story of the JDA at a later date, "....and arranged that,

providing we repaired the building and made it habitable, they would give us a peppercorn lease at 1/- [one old shilling] per annum. We then proceeded to have the necessary construction and decoration carried out at a cost of £1,400." Thanks to the fundraising efforts of the committee they were now fortunate enough to be the owners of "this magnificent freehold premises, and free from all encumbrances."

The Jewish Deaf Association was established as a Registered Charity in 1948 and the official opening of the Jewish Deaf Association Club and hostel finally took place on 27 May 1951.

The JDA remained at Cazenove Road until 1998, when it moved into its present, purpose-built Community Centre in North Finchley. The original building had become outmoded and was no longer at the heart of the Jewish Deaf community, which had since moved further out to the suburbs of London.

When Julius Newman was ready to retire, his daughter Evelyn continued his work as Chair of the Jewish Deaf Association. She and her husband, George Gee (who became President of the JDA), worked tirelessly building and raising funds for the charity. And when it was their turn to step down and enjoy a more relaxed later life together, their children took over from them. At this stage of JDA's history, Trudy (Kling - Chair of JDA), Duncan and Caroline are dedicated JDA Trustees, a driving force on JDA fundraising committees and active JDA volunteers.

Without Julius Newman, Helene Samuels and their family, the Jewish Deaf Association would not exist.

We owe them all a huge debt of gratitude and will always remember Helene with great fondness.

▼ *Inaugural meeting at JDA in 1951 at 90-92 Cazenove Road*

