

Special features

Holocaust Memorial Service & Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children Reunion



Sunday 1st May 2011

Sponsored by the Jewish Deaf Association to commemorate its Diamond Jubilee (1951-2011)

As part of the JDA's special Diamond Jubilee commemorations, a group of JDA members organised an outstanding event to remember lost loved ones and be reunited with old friends.

Colleen Daniels saw her special dream realised on Sunday 1 May 2011 with a Holocaust Memorial Service and Reunion of past pupils of the former Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children (RSJDC).



Together with her husband Alan and a group of close friends, and supported by the JDA, Colleen (right) and her committee brought together more than 130 former pupils for the reunion, which took place at Hendon Reform Synagogue in North West London.

Colleen Daniels, Irene Spielsinger and Ann Hart report:

Colleen Daniels' dream

"For many years, since the last RSJDC Reunion in 1992, Colleen Daniels has been dreaming of organising the next Reunion - and of being given the opportunity to create the first Holocaust Memorial Service for the Jewish Deaf Community in this country.

The reason for her dream of this unique Memorial Service is that every year we read in the media about the Jewish community and their children holding their own Holocaust Memorial Services and lighting candles for those who perished during the Holocaust.

Colleen wanted to give Jewish Deaf survivors the opportunity to share with others their experiences of survival during World War II, and to give them the honour of lighting the memorial candles.

Colleen's committee formed

So, in April 2010, with the help of her husband Alan, Colleen finally discussed her dream with Sue Cipin and Ann Clements of the JDA, in the hope that this special event would take place during the JDA's 60th Anniversary year. It was agreed that the JDA would support Colleen and sponsor the event. Colleen formed a small group of close friends, who gave their free time for monthly meetings at each other's homes for twelve months.

The committee consisted of some former pupils of the RSJDC and volunteers, photographed below:



Event organisers (left to right)

**Back row: Abraham Ellenberg, Anthony Spielsinger, Moshe Moshy, Alan Daniels.
Middle row: Linda Smith, Ann Hart.
Front row: Esther Ellenberg, Colleen Daniels, Irene Spielsinger**

The committee volunteers agreed to set the date of Sunday 1 May 2011, to coincide with Holocaust Remembrance Day in this country.

Colleen, with some committee members, attended regular meetings with JDA staff, Sue, Ann and Suzie, to organise the arrangements. It was not an easy task to arrange this enormous event.

Special Features

Survivors' stories

With help from Alan, Irene and Ann, Colleen spent hours collating Deaf survivors' stories, as well as corresponding with the other survivors via email. They received many stories, some of which were presented at the Memorial Service on PowerPoint, created by Irene.

Gudula Cahn and her grandson Ben Forman

Gudula Cahn was one of 11 children smuggled out from Germany to safety in England during World War II. She was the only hearing child in a group of Jewish Deaf children aged 2-11 years. Her parents were both teachers at the Israelite Institute for The Deaf in Berlin.



Ben Forman

One day, Colleen was doing some research on the internet and she discovered that Gudula Cahn had a grandson, named Ben Forman, living in Uxbridge. Colleen's daughter, Marlene, endeavoured to trace him and successfully contacted him via email. One week before the event, Ben Forman met with Colleen, Alan and Marlene. It was an emotional meeting.



Marlene Daniels

Ben was enthusiastic to come to the event and speak about his grandmother. It was agreed to make Ben's appearance a surprise to the survivors who had travelled to England with Gudula Cahn.

Committee volunteers signing poems

We chose two poems for the Memorial Service, written by children held captive during World War II.

At the meetings at our homes, we practised signing these poems, with the help of sign language interpreter **Peter Abraham**. On 1 May, we had a final rehearsal on the stage and the actual performance of signing the poems went very smoothly later on. The poems are shown at the end of this feature.

So many people attending the event



The Synagogue hall was filled with members, friends, RSJDC ex-pupils and survivors for the reception!

We were overwhelmed with the number of people attending the event. We aimed for at least 100 people, and were surprised that the numbers reached 140.

Some of them came from abroad, Canada, New York and Germany. Many people had not seen each other for a long time. For example, **Ann Miller** with her partner (from Canada) had not seen her old school friends for over 50 years and it was indeed a memorable reunion for them all. We also were thrilled to meet two ex teachers from RSJDC, **Liz Wieneke** and **Norma LeBihan** (nee Sansom) again.



From left to right: Liz Wieneke and Norma LeBihan

Survivors share their emotional experiences

During the first part of the Holocaust Memorial, the survivors shared their childhood experiences of the Holocaust and explained how they escaped the clutches of the Nazis.

Unfortunately, some Deaf survivors were unable to attend, so their stories were told by committee members. It was very emotional 'listening' to their stories.



Ruth Fallman, sharing her Kindertransport experiences as a child refugee from Germany

Special Features

We displayed the speakers' childhood photos and their stories on the PowerPoint screen. Thanks to Gillian Stringer (RSJDC ex pupil), another screen was set up showing live filming of the speakers. This enabled those sitting at the back of the hall to follow the dialogue more easily.

There were two interpreters - Peter Abraham and Gloria Ogborn - who voiced-over everything that was being signed for the hearing guests, as well as a lipspeaker, Rosalind Josephs. Hands-on interpreters made sure the Deafblind guests could participate fully throughout.

A first Memorial Service for the Jewish Deaf Community



Some Holocaust Memorial Service participants (left to right):

Alan Daniels, Leslie Bieber, Ruth Fallman, Anne Senchal, Rabbi Lisa Barrett, Ben Forman, Linda Smith, Esther Ellenberg, Horst Marschner, Rachel Holder with Maria Economou (guide), Irene Spielsinger, Ann Hart, Colleen Daniels.

Rabbi Lisa Barrett led a beautiful Memorial Service, reading expressively the meaningful Memorial and Kaddish prayers. Following this, each of the survivors lit individual memorial candles for those who were killed in the Holocaust.

RSJDC Reunion Reception and buffet supper



Eva Mansell enjoying the finger foods at the reception

Now that the serious part of the day was complete, it was time to enjoy being reunited with old friends after many years.

It was difficult trying to choose foods for the reception and buffet supper, trying to be flexible and meet all the guests' needs.

Finally, we put our trust in the caterer and Suzie at JDA, who helped us choose the appropriate foods.



A delicious buffet supper was laid to suit all the RSJDC ex-pupils, both Jewish and non Jewish and friends. Many of the guests complimented the food.

We chose the colours of the tableware to match the colour of the RSJDC uniform – brown and yellow.



Guests socialising over supper during the event

Everyone enjoyed the chance to catch up with friends' news and exchange their school memories.

The cameras flashed as everyone took photographs of each other. The atmosphere during the social time was wonderful.

In memory of Leon Lebor, tragically killed on September 11th 2001

A very moving tribute was made to Leon Lebor, an RSJDC ex pupil who was tragically killed in the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th 2001. A photo of Leon was shown on the screen, as well as a slideshow of photographs of his name engraved, along with the names of other British people killed, on the bronze memorial plaque in the Memorial Garden in Grosvenor Square, London.

One minute's silence was held to remember Leon, and all those who are no longer with us all.

Special Features

Heartfelt thanks

It gave Colleen and all the committee volunteers great pleasure to know that everything went well and this became a truly memorable event.

They wish to express huge thanks and appreciation to those who were unable to attend but donated kindly towards this event. The organiser Colleen, and each of the committee volunteers also donated generously to this wonderful event. "

Thanks from the JDA

The JDA thanks Colleen and Alan, and their hardworking committee - Irene, Anthony, Ann, Moshe, Esther, Abraham and Linda - for creating the first Holocaust Memorial Service for the Jewish Deaf and Deafblind Community and reuniting the children of RSJDC once again.

On this day, we learnt a great deal, we remembered, we shared, we mourned the loss of loved ones. But we also celebrated the friendships that have lasted through the years.

The JDA is delighted to have sponsored this event and congratulates the committee on its outstanding work.

Many compliments to Colleen's dedication

Unfortunately, the TV interviews filmed by REMARK! for the programme The Hub were cut off.

Reunited after many years, some of the male ex-pupils of the RSJDC



School friends together again, some of the female ex-pupils of the RSJDC



RSJDC ex-pupils (from left to right):

Pauline Gibbons, Linda Woolfe, Carolyn Denmark, Paula Boreham, Maureen Winterflood, Lorraine Silver, Ann Miller, Esther Ellenberg

Colleen Daniels and her committee were overwhelmed by the many lovely comments and compliments they received about this event. They thank everyone for their many messages.

It is with regret we cannot print all of them here so we have selected just a few:

Thank you so much for your wonderful idea to set up a Holocaust Memorial Service and the RSJDC Reunion. It was a unique first time experience to have this memorial service. I was speechless and so proud of you for your hard work.

What more can I say?

Love Lydia Handscomb and Darren Townsend-Handscomb

Gerry and I would like to thank all of you for organising this very worthwhile event. It was so nice to see so many old school friends and other visitors during this reunion. It was very moving to learn about those who escaped from Germany and to watch the film taken during the first RSJDC reunion in 1992.

Gerry and Valerie Litman

What an amazing event! Congratulations!

The Holocaust Memorial was very moving, and I learnt a lot. So many incredible stories of strength during horrific times. On behalf of JDA, I want to thank you for organising such a special day – it was sad, happy, beautiful, professional ... JDA is proud to have sponsored it.

I hope you are all pleased with yourselves – you did a brilliant job together.

Sue Cipin, JDA

Special Features

It was a bittersweet occasion. The bitter part was to be reminded of the people who perished during the Holocaust and 9/11. The sweet part was re-creating friendships with our long lost friends. I was amazed when I saw Ann Miller from Toronto and Joshua Menzcer from USA. I have not seen Ann for over 54 years! It was the best kept secret! Incredible!

Many thanks to you and your team for the hard work and making the occasion memorable.

Neil Kaufman

I want to say how much I and my two daughters and son-in-law enjoyed the day. You worked very hard and did a good job to ensure all went well smoothly.

We also enjoyed the signed poems and the performance on stage. So thank you and your committee for presenting a wonderful stage show.

Debra Britton

Thank you and your team for making the Holocaust Memorial and Reunion a great success. It was a surprise for me to meet Ben Forman whose great grandparents Mr and Mrs Cahn worked as teachers at my former Jewish school for deaf children in Berlin. They sent their daughter Gudula to join the deaf children including me on the Kindertransport in 1939.

The food was superb and there was good planning with the setting and the arrangement in the hall by you and the team. The Holocaust Memorial will be a good lesson for all younger people in the future.

Ruth and Harold Fallman

I would like to thank you and your hardworking committee on the highly successful event - a huge credit go to you all. It was a wonderful reunion with a fantastic Holocaust Memorial Service for Jewish Deaf people. A brilliant event. We all enjoyed ourselves very much.

Mira Goldberg and Emanuel

I would like to thank you for organising the event. It was very successful. I was very emotional with the stories told about the last World War from some of the members. It is so sad that many lost their lives and also of the late Leon Lebor in USA.

Harvey Clements

Poems signed at the Holocaust Memorial Service

I'D LIKE TO GO ALONE

**I'd like to go, away alone,
Where there are other, nicer people,
Somewhere into the far unknown,
There, where no one kills another,
Maybe more of us,
A thousand strong,
Will reach this goal,
Before too long.**

Alene Synkova

Written by children from Terezin (Theresienstadt) Concentration Camp, located in the hills outside of Prague, 1942-1944

A total of around 15,000 children under the age of 15 passed through Terezin. Only around 100 survived.

BUTTERFLY

**For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto,
But I have found what I love here.
That butterfly
Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly way up high
I am proud of my people
How dignified they are
Even though I am suppressed
I will always come back to life
Like the butterfly.**

Pavel Friedmann & Franta Bass



Painting of a butterfly
by the children in Terezin camp