

Marion Strehlow, Honorary Member SI Weybridge

Marion Strehlow was born in Berlin on 15th April 1935 to a Jewish family. As a child during the Second World War she was transported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto/Camp known as Terezin. Her father was also in the camp but she had very little contact with him and had been told he was dying. From spring 1944 until summer 1945 she was one of the children resident in 'the villa'. The children were of mixed ages and nationalities and all of them were ill, there were no adults living there. At the age of nine Marion was the eldest girl and she tried to mother the younger ones.



The children had been selected by a Czechoslovakian doctor, who wished to prove that exposure to fresh air and sunshine could cure illnesses. Marion, like many of the children, had tuberculosis. The children were very poorly fed, had few adult visitors and spent hours reclining on wooden chairs outside or sitting inside with windows open in all weathers. The villa was close to the railway line that served the camp and in the autumn of 1944 numerous trains arrived full of dead and dying people. The stench was horrendous, there were mass burials and the smell of decay permeated the garden but the children still had to do their stint outside.

Marion survived and although her father also survived her mother, who had been in Auschwitz, had died. As her father was unable to cope Marion was sent to her aunt in the UK. She came for 6 weeks and is still here.

Despite having missed more than 4 years of school, having to learn another language and suffering from ill health and nightmares, Marion completed her education and qualified as a nurse. She worked for many years in the field of health visiting, always helping others.

Later in life Marion worked in a multi-faith unit attached to the Surrey police and helped with inter-faith understanding and issues relating to the Jewish community. Despite her trauma and the difficulty of speaking about the past, Marion has in recent years spoken to school children on Holocaust Memorial Day about her experience as a child during the war. She is able to make real what they learn in history and make her own personal experience evidence of the truth of the Holocaust. The children are so affected by the talks they send her wonderful personal thank you letters. This keeps alive the terrible events of that time and lets no one forget.

Marion has been a member of Soroptimist International since April 1975 and has been an enthusiastic supporter of her club, the organisation and its aims in helping women and girls throughout the world. She has also been a keen participant in our friendship link visits, making many friends internationally.

After such terrible events in her childhood Marion has spent her adult life helping others, always cheerful and positive.