



Born Feb. 19, 1900
Alfred Maier

Born to Remember

Alfred and Elsa were murdered
in 1942 in a concentration camp.

While Alfred and Elsa were murdered,
most people looked the other way.

A few did not look the other way.



Born April 10, 1898
Elsa Maier

We are all born to remember Alfred, Elsa, the six million Jews, and others who were murdered. We are also born to remember those courageous few who knew what was right and did it.

Thank you for taking time to read about the Holocaust Project: Born to Remember. I started the Holocaust Project in response to several events:

- When my oldest daughter was in 6th grade, a boy taunted her for being Jewish.
- A girl moved from Penn Hills to Franklin Regional in 2001 and was picked on because she looked different -- she had a nose ring and spiky hair. My daughter felt bad for her and befriended her.
- A swastika was drawn on my daughter's locker.

I shared my daughter's experiences with friends and acquaintances and began to hear many similar stories.

- An African American student described how another student walked by her desk in class and said, "nigger" as he passed. The student didn't want to bring this to the attention of the administration for fear that things would get worse.
- An Asian student talked about being harassed for being "too smart and getting all the academic awards."

People have told me that we do not have a problem at Franklin Regional and that those are isolated incidents. I wish it were true. What we have experienced in Murrysville, PA is happening everywhere.

I'm encouraged because most people I speak with are shocked and appalled. The majority of students at Franklin Regional are good kids who have been raised in homes where they

have been taught that racism, anti-Semitism, and bullying are wrong. Unfortunately, many of those students go along with the group or turn the other cheek instead of intervening or asking an adult for help. Why did my daughter befriend the girl being picked on, and what stops others from doing the same?

I took a class where I was privileged to hear Lilianne Gaffney speak. Lilianne and her mother risked their lives and saved over 30 Jews during the Holocaust. Lilianne said:

“The hardest part is taking the first step to do what is decent, then how do you stop? Then, you help a second time and it keeps going. You do what is right. If it isn’t right – don’t do it. Being a bystander is almost as bad as those who did the killing. Because of them the killing is done. It’s better for me to do the right thing.”

Lilianne is right about bystanders. If we teach our students about Lilianne, perhaps a few students might be encouraged to act instead of remaining bystanders.

We have recently completed a documentary about the Holocaust and survivor Dr. Fred Reif. Dr. Reif’s mother, Clara Gottfried Reif was born in Poland and she met Dr. Gerson Reif, a dentist, during a vacation to Vienna. They were married and Frederick (Fred) Reif was born April 24, 1927 in Vienna, Austria. 7 1/2 years later, a sister Dr. Liane Reif-Lehrer was born.

When the Germans annexed Austria in 1938, they effectively prevented Jewish dentists from practicing. Dr. Gerson Reif had a sister, Mrs. Lena Klinghoffer, who lived in the US and they contacted her hoping to go there. At that time, the US quota system was based on country of origin. Both Gerson and Clara were born in Poland and they were told it would be two or three years until their number came up. Dr. Gerson Reif became desperate; he felt like a trapped animal and he would silently stand for hours looking out of a window. Fred would stand next to his father and hold his hand. One September day in 1938 Fred remembers his father was due home early in the day. Hour after hour ticked by and his father did not come home. Dr. Gerson Reif killed himself by jumping off of a building.

Only a few months later, on November 9 and 10, Fred remembered, Kristalnacht. His teacher came into class and told everyone to go home. He made it home watching Torahs being dragged through the streets. There was a loud knock on the door and three people including the superintendent of their building came into their home. They went through the Reif’s drawers taking whatever they wanted.

Money was getting tight. Jews were being persecuted.

Always the same questions, “How do you get out?” “Where do go?”

A friend’s father told Mrs. Reif that they were going to go to Cuba and that Cuba was accepting refugees. The Reif family could go to Cuba and live freely while waiting for their US quota number to come up.

Clara contacted Mrs. Kinghoffer who generously purchased entrance certificates to Cuba and tickets for the SS. St. Louis, a German luxury ship that was to leave Hamburg Germany and arrive in Havana, Cuba.

On May 13, 1939, the Reif family began their voyage as first class passengers aboard the Saint Louis. They were among 937 passengers (over 900 were Jewish) thrilled to be leaving the Nazi's net.

Life looked promising for the Reifs. Or did it?

On May 27, 1939 the Reifs were told to get up early and be ready to disembark. They were ecstatic as they packed their bags and prepared for life in Cuba.

Once again, time ticked away for Fred. Only 28 passengers were allowed to disembark. Cuban police and immigration officials boarded the St. Louis. The immigration officials left the ship; the police remained aboard. Days passed and the refugees were not allowed to leave the St. Louis.

The St. Louis turned and headed towards Germany.

The mood on the ship was dismal. One man slit his wrists. The great food was gone. The Reifs had abandoned their apartment. What would happen to them next? Would they be taken to concentration camps?

The Joint and several other agencies, negotiated with several countries, each of whom agreed to take a portion of the refugees:

Holland – 181

France – 224

Great Britian – 228

Belgium – 214

After being a month at sea, the St. Louis docked in Antwerp.

Clara, Fred and Liane Reif were among the group who went to France. Unfortunately, as we know, the Nazis soon occupied Northern France and the Reif's ordeal continued.

Past chairman of the board, George Skornickel, taught a year long Holocaust class to Advanced Placement students at Highlands Middle School. Dr. Reif and I went to Highland's Middle School where Mr. Skornickel's students were taped talking to him. I was pleased with how it went. The kids brought up all the subjects I was hoping they would. For example, they talked about how learning about the Holocaust has made them look at common phrases and stereotypes differently. Phrases like, "that's gay" or "stop being such a Jew". One of the students said that since learning about the Holocaust, she has worked on not saying things like that and often comment when others make those types of statements. Another student said she knows she can't break up a group but later

she will often go up to the person being picked on and let them know someone cares. They said they didn't understand how Hitler or the Nazis could pick on a group just because they are Jewish/gay/political prisoner ET. They said how there is a tendency to categorize students the same way ... band geeks ... jocks ... and that when they think about how the Holocaust started it makes these statements even worse.

In addition to the documentary, Dr. Reif created a decision-making model. Students will analyze several decision made by Captain Schroeder and the Reif family and discuss the options and consequences of the choices. The same model will be used to discuss what options students have when they witness bullying, prejudice or a friend who has been drinking alcohol and is about to get behind the wheel of a car. In the end, students will be encouraged to think about people like Captain Schroeder when they have hard decisions to make.

I hope this answers your questions about the Holocaust Project: Born to Remember and Dr. Fred Reif and gives you an idea of what we are trying to accomplish.

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, would like me to speak to your group or to make a donation, please feel free to call, write or e-mail me.

Thank you,

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