

# MARIANNE DENNIS



Before Marianne was born in Berlin in 1931, her father, Willie Latter, toured as a concert pianist. Blind since age 13, he had studied at a conservatory. Her mother, Margaret Latter, was an actress. After their marriage, Willie became a secretary for a large textile firm and later for a lawyer. Margaret worked in a telephone company accounting department.

The Latters lived in an apartment in the Berlin suburbs. They were strict parents to whom Marianne says she would never, ever talk back. Marianne went to a Jewish day school and, for the most part, had Jewish friends. Her family went to services every week, and she attended a synagogue camp. Once a year, they took a vacation to visit friends in the country. Marianne enjoyed playing games, roller skating and riding a bicycle.

Then came November 9, 1938, *Kristallnacht*, the “night of broken glass.” Jews were beaten and their homes ruined, more than 200 synagogues were destroyed, nearly 100 people were murdered and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

“They came to our apartment and painted a big Star of David with the word ‘Jew’ in the middle,” she recalls. “Soon after, we weren’t allowed to use any transportation. Grocery shopping was allowed for one hour a day.”

Marianne was beaten and harassed on the way to school. Still, her parents did not send her away. “They said, ‘If we perish, we perish together.’”

In 1941, the Jewish schools closed and the Latters were forced out of their apartment. From 1943 until the war’s end, they hid in basements. Marianne was 14 when the Russians marched into Berlin. It was, she says, “one of the happiest days of my life. They set us up in an apartment, and there was one officer who especially looked after us.”

Marianne worked as an infants’ nurse for orphan survivors and, at 18, married her first husband, a Briton who worked for the United Jewish Relief Organization. After the birth of a son, David Solomons, in 1950, the couple lived in Manchester, England, where Michael Solomons was born.

In the meantime, Marianne’s parents, with the help of the Brand family, emigrated to Kansas City. Marianne still treasures the piano the Brands gave her father.

Marianne came first to Hollywood; her husband had been sponsored to immigrate there for a job. However, he was abusive and after a year, she fled to Kansas City. Living in basement apartments, often working three jobs, she raised her two boys. She and her second husband, Robert Dennis, who died in 1996, have three daughters: Deborah, Rebecca, and Naomi.

For years, Marianne and her parents never talked about what happened in the war.

“People don’t understand,” she says. Despite the passage of decades, “when I talk about it, it’s just like yesterday.”



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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