

Marga Randall remembered the past to save the future

By **JO MARKS RIFKIN**
Staff Writer

Marga Silbermann Randall dedicated her life to preserving memories of the Holocaust. She toured Pittsburgh and the world, speaking of the near-annihilation of Europe's Jews in the hope that it would never happen again.

Randall, a Scott Township resident, died Thursday of complications of diabetes, liver and heart disease. She was 75.

"I know there were certain things she was determined to do before she died," said Fran Berkman, Randall's neighbor.

The latest was Randall's project to digitize videotaped memoirs of Holocaust survivors.

Born March 20, 1930, in Lemfoerde, Germany, where her family had lived for several hundred years, Randall was the fourth and final child of Louis and Hanna Silbermann.

She endured the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which legalized the expulsion of Jewish children and teachers from schools.

She witnessed her father's death when the World War I hero suffered a heart attack while awaiting the Gestapo who were coming to arrest him.

"The family never recovered, financially or emotionally," Randall wrote in a story in The Jewish Chronicle's "We Are Family," 2000 edition.

She spent most of her childhood in her grandparents' home in Shermbeck. When



Marga Silbermann Randall

Kristallnacht destroyed Jewish communities in Germany in November 1938, Randall and her family went into semihiding in Berlin, where nightly raids by the British air force pummeled the area.

While all of her European family died in concentration camps, Randall, her mother and siblings were among the last to escape Germany in 1941.

They traveled by locked railroad car from Germany to Paris, across the Pyrenees and Spain, and finally to Portugal. For 11-year-

old Randall and her family, the journey included strip searches every few hours.

From Portugal, Randall, her mother and siblings, Herbert and Hilda, made the dangerous voyage to America. Her brother Mandred went to England where he lived until his death.

The family first stayed with relatives in New York and then came to Pittsburgh with the help and support of their American family, the Adelsheimers.

They settled in Squirrel Hill, where Randall lived until she married Jordan Randall, her husband of nearly 40 years. The two resettled in Scott Township.

In Pittsburgh, Randall learned English, which she spoke without a German accent. She graduated from Taylor Allderdice High School and received a Jewish education at Rodef Shalom Congregation.

An athlete, Randall was inducted into the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

After a career selling hardware and appliances for Sears, she devoted herself full time to Holocaust education.

"She was dedicated to educating young people, Jewish and Christian alike, to understand how her life in Germany was destroyed," said Linda Hurwitz, former director of the Holocaust Center of the United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh.

The result was Randall's autobiography, "How Beautiful We Once Were," which was also published in Germany, and her ongoing efforts as a Holocaust educator.

Randall spoke locally, nationally and internationally about the Holocaust. She spoke at area high schools, synagogues and churches and worked tirelessly for the Holocaust Center and for the South Hills Interfaith Min-

istries' annual Interfaith Holocaust Observance.

For her efforts in Jewish-Christian relations and Holocaust education, Randall received an honorary doctorate from Seton Hill University.

She often returned to her hometown of Shermbeck, and, at the request of the Lutheran pastor there, spoke in German to the congregation. She also helped the mayor of Shermbeck establish a Holocaust museum.

Randall was involved with Action Reconciliation Peace Services, which sends young Germans to Pittsburgh and other cities worldwide to teach Holocaust education and care for survivors.

A member of Temple Emanuel of South Hills in Mount Lebanon, Randall established the Holocaust Memorial Garden there last year.

Soil she brought back from ash pits at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps was placed between the garden's benches.

Her dream, she once said, was to create a sanctuary for all people, where they could reflect on the horrors of life so they would not reoccur.

"My only deep regret," Randall wrote in 2000, is that I could not share any of this with my beloved family who perished. My mission for the last 22 years has been Holocaust education ... and I will keep the memory of our Jewish brothers and sisters alive until my last breath."

Randall is survived by daughters Judy McAllister of Peters Township and Nancy Kovach of Bridgeville; a son, Bob Randall of Mount Lebanon; and three grandchildren.

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