

# Seven-year-old Marty beaten every day for being Jewish

BY MIKE COHEN

**COMEDY legend Marty Feldman suffered antisemitic violence as a child.**

Feldman died in 1982, aged just 48, but his autobiography was recently discovered by his wife Lauretta.

*eyE Marty* (Coronet, £20) features a foreword by his friend, fellow comedian Eric Idle.

Born Martin Alan Feldman on July 8, 1934, at University College Hospital, London, to Cecilia (née Crook) and Myer Feldman, he was barmitzvah in Finchley on July 19, 1947.

His Jewishness played a major role in his early development.

Speaking about his school years, he writes: "So I became a villain and got respect mostly for being a jester and troublemaker.

"Being Jewish had an extra impact. Most of the time I was at schools I had been evacuated to during the war where there weren't as many Jews.

"So, as well as being a jester, I was regarded as somewhat exotic-looking, long before my *eyE* and broken nose took exotic to the utmost. I was not considered to be different, more an alien."

Feldman, who boxed for the Jewish Lads Brigade, added: "I didn't do Bible class because I was a Jew, the only Jew in my class. They didn't know what to do with me so gave me extra maths.

"The Bible must have been hard work because God knows maths was. I used to get annoyed by it and would draw graffiti over the boys' Bibles when they weren't looking. Once I was sent home for drawing glasses and a moustache on some saint."

When he was seven, his family moved to Luton.

Feldman recalled: "I was the only Jew for miles around and all the kids would put out stories that my dad sacrificed pigs at midnight, making us out to be the monsters of the neighbourhood.

"They had never seen a Jew till they saw me, and they would beat me up each and every day."

But this did not change his feeling about his religion.



JESTER: Marty Feldman

He writes: "By the age of 12, I was terribly efficient in Hebrew, partly because of my love of language, but also because it was a good way to connect with my parents."

Of his ancestry, Feldman revealed: "My parents were always referred to by their nicknames, Mossy and Cissy, but my grandfather was referred to as the Tailor, which I found out years later his name had been changed, as happened to many immigrants on entry to a new country.

"His original name was Bondel, which meant 'tailor' in Kiev where he came from. I wonder how an official interpreted Bondel as Feldman!"

Feldman had a successful TV career in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it was the 1974 film *Young Frankenstein* which saw him become a global star.

The classic comedy was directed by Mel Brooks – "we shared a love of Yiddish humour and would cackle at each other all day," Feldman writes.

Despite not being religious, Feldman writes in *eyE Marty*: "I recognise a role for religion even though I do not believe in God. I believe in the usefulness of the idea of God."

Feldman died from a heart attack in Mexico City on December 2, 1982 during the making of the film *Yellowbeard*. He had actually finished filming his role, but stayed on in case they needed to reshoot anything.

