

SPUNGEN HOLOCAUST POSTAL COLLECTION

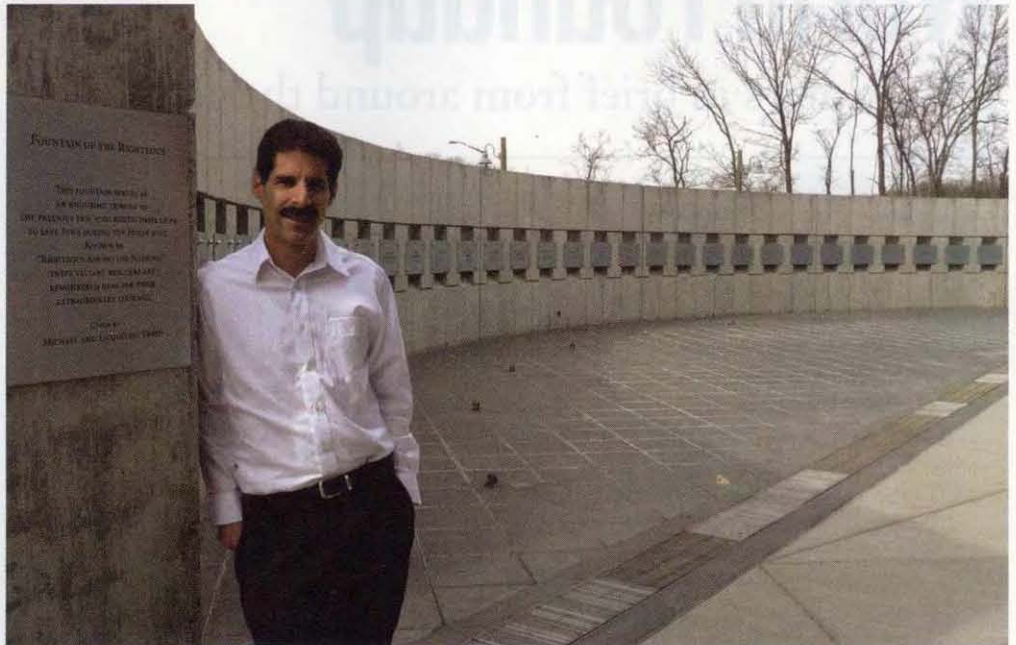
Illinois Rotarian confronts racism with Holocaust letters

A chance encounter at a stamp-collecting event three years ago put Danny Spungen in possession of one of the world's most extensive collections of postal memorabilia documenting Nazi atrocities during World War II. Spungen, an avid stamp collector, was looking to buy an "Inverted Jenny," a rare U.S. stamp featuring an upside-down airplane, when a fragment of Hebrew scripture covered with Nazi insignias caught his eye.

"I thought, what the heck is going on?" recalls Spungen, a member of the Rotary Club of Lincolnshire (Morning Star), Ill. The segment of scroll belonged to Ken Lawrence, a philatelist who spent 30 years assembling more than 250 letters, postcards, and other materials to counter those who claim the Holocaust never happened.

Lawrence had planned to sell his award-winning collection to a museum, but Spungen convinced him to let his family's charitable foundation purchase it instead. "It's changed my life," says Spungen, who travels with the items, visiting schools, universities, Rotary clubs, and other community groups. He often invites Holocaust survivors to speak at his presentations and volunteers as a docent at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie.

The Spungen Holocaust Postal Collection includes a letter from a man in Prague to his father in the Schwarzheide concentration camp, lamenting the difficulty of finding warm clothes to send. The stamp was



Clockwise from top: Spungen at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, where he volunteers; Auschwitz currency worth 1 reichsmark; the fragment of scripture that a soldier used to wrap a package.

removed by Nazi authorities to search for hidden messages. Another item, a swastika-marked envelope addressed to a Herr Dachwitz, is displayed with its contents: a summons to an interrogation. A postcard from a guard at Dachau to his family was sent in May 1933, shortly after the Nazi government set up the concentration camp; it bears a view of the Würm River canal flowing past the compound.

The fragment of Hebrew scripture, which recounts the story of David and Goliath, is folded and covered with stamps and postmarks. It was plundered from a Jewish synagogue and later used by a Wehrmacht corporal as wrapping paper to send a parcel home to Vienna in 1942.

Spungen, who has hosted several students through Rotary Youth Exchange, says his conversations with young people have reminded him how

important it is to teach kids about the Holocaust, and about tolerance. "Racism is not dead," he observes.

Of his collection, Spungen says: "I really believe that each piece is a witness. It's great to put all these witnesses together in one room to tell a whole story."

—ARNOLD R. GRAHL

See the collection at
www.spungenfoundation.org/collection.

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ROTARY'S MAGAZINE

JULY 2010

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look at Rotary's
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