

COLLOQUIUM

Unique Collection Offers Testimony to Life in WWII Camps

Who would guess that a program about stamps and currency used in WWII concentration camps could hold a sizeable audience in rapt attention on an unusually lovely December afternoon? Our colloquium featuring hands-on exhibits of postal memorabilia and currency used in Nazi concentration camps and ghettos, held on December 14, 2008, did just that.

The valuable historical exhibits came to Seton Hall University accompanied by Daniel (Danny) Spungen, spokesman for the Florence and Laurence Spungen Foundation in Illinois, and Professor Steven Feller and his daughter Ray, who co-authored the book, "Silent Witnesses: Civilian Camp Money of WWII." Danny Spungen, Steve Feller, a physics professor at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Ray Feller, a Ph.D candidate in clinical psychology, shared their very interesting and moving lecture and presentations with the SRTE audience. Guests Luna Kaufman (former chair of the SRTE Board) and Helen Paktor, a survivor, contributed some personal commentary during the talk from their own experiences as inmates of camps in Poland during the war.

Among the items in the collection are rare letters from camp inmates, such as the one from Rabbi Leo Baeck while he was at Theresienstadt, counterfeit money, and a certified receipt for a prayer book sent to a Jew in a camp in France. A truly disturbing desecration is a piece of scripture used by a soldier to wrap a package. The soldier, Corporal Paul Ehrenfreund, mailed a parcel to his wife in Vienna from his army post in Russia in 1942. He wrapped the parcel in a segment of a Torah scroll from the Book of Samuel relating the story of David and Goliath.

Spungen has been collecting stamps and coins most of his life, and now has turned his passion into an opportunity to educate individuals around the country about the Nazi scourge through this unique collection. Professor Feller and his daughter Ray, both members of several leading numismatic organizations, are prolific writers and speakers. Steve Feller has been collecting coins and currency for more than 50 years, and 30 of those years have been devoted to researching money used in WWII civilian camps.

The exhibits in the collection enable viewers to examine items from the perspective of both Holocaust perpetrators and victims. One of the guests at SHU that day, Bob Waks, remarked that from a historical point of view original sources are crucial to the understanding of specific eras. "In the case of our catastrophic era in Jewish civilization, the Spungen collection shows certain things that written materials cannot convey. Holding some of these items, allowing you to absorb them in this way, has an immediate and emotional impact," added Waks. Another Colloquium visitor that day, Erica Martinez, a graduate student at SHU, felt honored to meet Holocaust survivors for the first time. "I am so glad you are sharing your amazing collection this way," she told Spungen.

After a chance encounter about two years ago at a collectors' event, Spungen bought the rare collection of



Paterson, NJ teacher Kathryn Kuebler and her students, Cee-Asia Walker, Brittney Ellison and Jareen Singletary with Danny Spungen at the Colloquium viewing Danny's stamp and coin collection.

postal memorabilia accumulated over 30 years by Ken Lawrence of Pennsylvania. Lawrence, using his skills as a stamp collector, began the collection in 1978 to respond to Holocaust deniers, particularly the Ku Klux Klan demonstrators in Skokie, Illinois. Now, in a twist of fate, Spungen plans a permanent display of his collection at the new headquarters of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie. "What I've done with Ken Lawrence's collection is to re-design it in a way to reach a new target audience with, what I hope, is a great learning tool," says Spungen. Acquiring and developing this collection has been "a life-changing experience" for Spungen.

As of December, Seton Hall was the third site where the exhibit has been viewed, besides displays in Santa Barbara, California and Billings, Montana.

The SRTE Steps Out

A group of board members attended a performance of "Irena's Vow" at the Walter Kerr Theatre in NYC on May 31.

The story of a young Polish woman who, as a domestic servant in the home of a German officer, hid and saved twelve Jews, was brilliantly performed by Tovah Feldshuh. This outing was arranged by board member Paula Alexander.

On June 28 another group visited the Jewish Children's Museum in Brooklyn, a trip arranged by board secretary Susan Feinstein. This unique multimedia museum is dedicated to the memory of Ari Halberstam, a young Hasidic Jew killed by terrorists on the Brooklyn Bridge in 1994.

Both outings aimed to deepen the board's understanding of our mission and to develop a sense of camaraderie among board members.

The Sister Rose Thering Endowment for Jewish/Christian Studies

Celebrating sixteen years of fostering understanding through education and inter-religious cooperation.

Sixteenth Annual Evening of Roses

A large crowd came to Jubilee Hall on Sunday, April 19, 2009 to enjoy a moving and beautiful program at the sixteenth annual **Evening of Roses** sponsored by the Sister Rose Thering Endowment. One of the event's honorees was Irena Sendler, a Polish social worker in World War II, and in an unusual coincidence, her heroic life was depicted in a Hallmark Hall of Fame primetime movie, "The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler," on that same night.

Five female clarinetists who are Seton Hall students and part of a newly-formed orchestra serenaded the audience while the honored guests and dignitaries walked to the stage. The theme of the 2009 Evening of Roses was Focus on Children as the SRTE bestowed Humanitarian of the Year awards on **Irena Sendler** (posthumously) "Savior of children from the Warsaw Ghetto," and on **Maud Dahme**, a Hidden Child who came to the United States in 1950 from the Netherlands with her parents and sister and became a nationally respected leader in the field of education.

In keeping with the program's Polish flavor, the **Aria Chorus #303**, whose mission is to promote Polish culture through song, provided the day's entertainment with several musical selections. The Aria Chorus, under the direction of Alicja Rusewicz-Pagorek, began the festivities by singing the national anthem of Poland. Our good friend **Cantor Perry Fine** of Congregation Beth El in South Orange led the singing of Hatikvah



Maud Dahme accepts Humanitarian of the Year Award from Monsignor Robert Sheeran and Luna Kaufman.

and The Star Spangled Banner.

Reverend Lawrence Frizzell, chairman of the Jewish-Christian Studies department at SHU, offered the opening prayer, asking for blessings of peace for Israel and her neighbors, and blessings for all those who work in education to achieve understanding and amity between Jews and Christians. The prayer was followed by welcoming remarks from both the SRTE's executive director, **Dr. David Bossman**, and from our Board chairman, **Paul Gibbons**. Offering warm greetings to all was SHU president, **Monsignor Robert Sheeran**, who noted the outstanding efforts the SRTE makes on a daily basis to foster Jewish-Christian relations and carry out the work and vision of Sister Rose Thering.



Reverend Lawrence Frizzell, D.Phil, delivers the opening prayer.

A passionate advocate of Holocaust education, **Maud Dahme** was honored with one of the Humanitarian of the Year awards. Past chairman of the SRTE board, **Luna Kaufman**, came to the podium to recognize Dahme's achievements as one of the original members of the NJ Commission on Holocaust Education, past president of the NJ State Board of Education, chair of the National Association of State Boards of Education, and colleague and friend to our Sr. Rose.

Board member **Alan Silberstein** highlighted the Polish origins of the next honoree, Irena Sendler, and introduced the **Honorable Krzysztof W. Kasprzyk**, Consul General to New York of the Polish Republic, who accepted the award on Sendler's behalf. Along with her secret underground network, Sendler was responsible for saving the lives of more than 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto. She herself narrowly escaped death after capture by the Nazis in 1943. This dauntless woman, an unsung hero until 2000, was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and lived to be 98, dying in May, 2008.

continued on page 3