

# Learn to stop crimes of hate

**A**s a Jewish girl who grew up in Israel learning about the Holocaust, I never felt compelled to visit the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center.

The center, under the auspices of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts, is located in the Springfield Jewish Community Center on 1160 Dickinson St.

I frequent the JCC but I had never entered the Holocaust center until a recent UNlisted assignment to interview Rabbi Robert Sternberg, the center's executive director.

The rabbi gave me a guided tour of its two permanent exhibits, "A Reason To Remember" and "A Living Memorial."

At first, I thought it would take me five minutes to skim through "A Reason to Remember" as it is all presented in one room.

I began reading the boards, and discovered I could not skim.

This exhibit is enlightening in a different way.

It focuses on what happened to five Jewish families living in the German village of Roth during World War II.

It is much more powerful to understand the personal stories of a single community than to read generalities about the Holocaust.

Out of Roth's 31 Jews, only 11 survived. Auditory accounts with Roth residents tell how the village become "Judenrein." That is, Jew-free.

The exhibit deals not only with the fates of the Jewish families of Roth but how the actions of the mayor and others in the village contributed to the demise of these families.

Many people were murdered in the war, but I learned from this exhibit that due to hatred and discrimination, whole cultures were destroyed. A movie shows the destruction of Roth's synagogue on "Kristallnacht."

Kristallnacht or the "Night of the Broken Crystal" took place throughout Germany at the encouragement of Nazi officials on Nov. 9, 1938.

It involved the burning of synagogues, the destroying of some 7,500 windows of shops owned by Jews and the looting of Jewish cemeteries.

The movie also makes the point that anti-Semitism still exists today.

The last section of the exhibit asks, "Why remember the Holocaust?"

There are three answers: understand, remember and respond.

This area embodies the center's mission of "teaching the history and lessons of the

## Markus Roth: Denounced

A farmer reported to the Mayor of Roth that a man he knew (name blacked out) had a business relationship with Markus Roth, a Jewish merchant. This resulted in an article published in the local newspaper denouncing Markus Roth.



**Widmung der Getreide**  
Man schreibt uns: Der jüdische Händler Markus Roth in Roth hat Roggen und Weizen aus neuer Ernte von Landwirten gekauft und für dieses Getreide die amtlichen Ablieferungsbescheinigungen nicht erteilt, obwohl er gesetzlich dazu verpflichtet war. Ihm ist das Recht zur Ausstellung der amtlichen Ablieferungsbescheinigungen mit sofortiger Wirkung entzogen worden. Wegen dieser, die dem Markus Roth Roggen und Weizen verkauft haben, ist Strafantrag gestellt. Es ist bezeichnend für jüdische Anmaßung, daß der Jude glaubt, die einschärfen gesetzlichen Bestimmungen, die jeder Deutsche selbstverständlich erfüllt hätten für ihn keine Gültigkeit. Berührt hat es dieser Jude darauf angelegt, die Maßnahmen im Zuge der Nachtregelung zu sabotieren, um dem deutschen Volke einen Schaden zuzufügen. Es ist eine schändliche Handlungsweise, wenn deutsche Volksgenossen diesen Schmarozhern die Handhabe zu solchen Wühlerereien verschaffen, indem sie noch Geschäfte mit ihnen tätigen.

„Oberheussische Zeitung“ vom 2. September 1935

(translation)

Defiance of Law

"We are advised:

The Jewish trader Markus Roth from Roth has purchased rye and wheat from the current year crop, from farmers, and has not made out the official purchase certificate, although he was legally bound to do this. Accordingly, his right to issue such certificates is herewith revoked. Those who sold rye and wheat to him shall be subject to legal action.

It is indicative of Jewish behavior—the Jew believes that the simplest regulations, which every German without doubt adheres to, have no application to him. Instead, this Jew decided to sabotage these market regulations, in order to inflict damage on the German folk. It is shameful behavior that German countrymen still trade with these parasites."

## An interview with the director of the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center

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**R**abbi Robert Sternberg, executive director of the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center in Springfield, believes the best way to combat prejudice is through education. He feels it is particularly important to empower teens on this issue so they can face any prejudices they may harbor even unconsciously and go on to prevent future crimes of hate based on differences among people. My own own recent tour of the Holocaust center prompted me to ask the rabbi the following questions.



Rabbi Robert Sternberg

**Q.** What were the long-term effects of the Holocaust?

**A.** The most immediate was the demographic impact. Before the Holocaust, there was an estimated 15.5 million Jews in the world, while

today there is an estimated 13.5 million. Sixty years after the Holocaust, the Jews have not been able to recover. Before the Holocaust, 9.5 million Jews lived in Europe, which was the richest Jewish cultural center in the world. The Jewish community in Eastern Europe even had its own language, Yiddish, a mix of Hebrew and German. Now the culture and the language are nearly destroyed. Yiddish is almost a purely academic language.

The horror of the Holocaust did

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Holocaust with the goal of eliminating prejudice, hate and racism in today's society."

The hope is for each person to confront his or her own beliefs and prejudices, and understand that the choices one makes in the world have profound consequences for one's self and others.

It is important for individuals to combat prejudice and discrimination because as the quote says, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing."

The other permanent exhibit, "A Living Memorial," features Holocaust histories of families from the Greater Springfield area.

I volunteer at the Jewish Nursing Home in Longmeadow and recognized two of the survivors.

It was interesting to read their stories.

As I was ending my tour, a group of sev-

en students and their teacher arrived.

Rabbi Sternberg introduced them to the exhibit.

Later, he led a discussion with them.

One of the students expressed her disbelief over how the extermination of Jews was allowed to happen.

The rabbi explained that before Jews, the Nazi government murdered 70,000 mentally and physically ill citizens in order to purify the "Aryan" race.

Protests by religious leaders stopped more of these murders.

However, the rabbi said anti-Jewish prejudice was prevalent in Germany, and not enough people spoke out against anti-Semitic discrimination.



## "My friends stopped playing with me."

"In school, we had one teacher who found it necessary to speak briefly about the Jews every single day. Maybe it was only every other day. But it was often. He always said something really bad — that Jews were thieves and committed racial defilement, etc. I didn't know what he meant. After his short speech, he would always say 'Present company excepted.' 'Present company' was me, so no one could forget that a Jew was in the room ... My friends stopped playing with me. I wasn't asked to play in their soccer games. Many didn't say hello anymore." — Herbert Roth

Herbert Roth, Die Juden von Roth, ungewürdigtes Kennzeichen, S. 211  
Private collection of Herbert Roth

Above and to the left, boards in "A Reason To Remember," one of two permanent exhibits at the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center in Springfield, reveal the anti-Semitism Jews faced in the village of Roth, Germany, during World War II. The Nazis enacted laws preventing Jews from doing business and placing fines on non-Jews who continued to trade with them. The Holocaust, the worst genocide in history, resulted in the extermination of six million Jews as well as the murders of tens of thousands of others, including the physically or mentally impaired, by the Nazis. The Nazis forced Jews from their homes and into railway cars for transportation to concentration camps where they were gassed.

# Rabbi: Understand what led to the horrors of the Holocaust

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eventually bring about a different dialogue between Jews and Christians. The relationship with the Roman Catholic Church especially changed for the better. Re-evaluating its relationship to the Jews, the Roman Catholic Church came to no longer hold Jews as objects for conversion.

Another similar result of the Holocaust was the depopularization to some extent of anti-Semitism and perhaps racism. It revealed how prejudice can lead to the deaths of millions of innocent people.

After the Holocaust, most of the survivors were in Displaced Persons camps in horrible conditions. The United States, Britain and other countries, were not letting in a significant number of Jews. With a need to shelter the displaced people, the United Nations supported the Palestine partition plan, which built the state of

Israel. Israel's establishment might not have occurred as quickly without the vivid visible need for a Jewish land and home.

For the personal lives of the survivors, it was devastating. Many people are under the impression that most Holocaust survivors got over their experiences and used them to change the world for the better.

However, the number of survivors who did so is small and disproportionate with the survivors who continued to suffer for years after. Survivor families struggled with nightmares, fears, habits they made during the Holocaust, and physical illnesses. Family scars also affected the children of the survivors.

My best friend in elementary school, the son of Holocaust survivors, secretly brought me one day into his parents' bedroom. After promising to never divulge this secret, he showed me a drawer with a silver plate, a silver cup and a silver ciga-

**The Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center is open to the public and welcomes school tours. Education in the form of dialogue and interaction helps people not to stereotype but to learn to judge people based on their own character.**

**For more information, visit the center's Web site at [www.hatikvah-center.org](http://www.hatikvah-center.org)**

**For more information on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, visit the Web site, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)**

rette case. Both of our families were poor, but my family usually displayed our valuable items while his family did not. His family always feared that someone like the Nazis might take over again and seize all of their precious objects.

The same thing happened in the Jewish community of Montreal, where 25 percent of the community were Holocaust survivors. When they heard of the French-Canadi-

an laws requiring people to speak French many prepared to leave, thinking it was the beginning of a new takeover. It had happened in civilized Germany, and thus could happen in Canada as well.

**Q.** During a recent class trip to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., I read about the tragic story of the SS St. Louis. In 1939, some 950 European Jews had fled

Nazi persecution but the refusal of the United States and other countries to give them admittance resulted in the liner returning to Hamburg. Many on board subsequently died in Nazi concentration camps.

Why did it take the United States so long to respond to what the Nazis were doing to the Jews?

**A.** There was a lot of anti-Semitism and Nazi support even in the United States. Anti-Semitic information abounded, and Jews were sometimes blamed for the depression. The State Department was strongly anti-Semitic, and limited the number of people able to immigrate to the United States. Second, the United States was holding to the theory of isolationism. If the United States wanted to go and save the Jews, they needed a powerful political reason. There was no economic

motive to go to war until two years later. Even then, the United States did not bomb Auschwitz because it would be immoral to kill the inmates.

*Rabbi Robert Sternberg is executive director of the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center in Springfield. He is co-author of "Jewish/Christian Relations in Light of the Holocaust: A Curriculum on the Holocaust for Roman Catholic High Schools" (published in 2006 by Center for Learning Publishers). He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees in education from Roosevelt University in Chicago and Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, and his rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel at Midrasha L'Rabbanut Machon Harry Fishel in Jerusalem, Israel. He is also a graduate of Hebrew Theological College in Skokie, IL. For more information on the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center, visit the Web site, [www.hatikvah-center.org](http://www.hatikvah-center.org)*