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Goals and Accomplishments of the Spungen Nazi Scourge Exhibit

I am a new “student” of the Holocaust since June 2007 and I am sure it will take years for me to even have the possibility of explaining the “how and why” the Holocaust took place during WWII. I regularly change my goals as I reach new accomplishments which are based on the reactions and comments made by my audiences, particularly high school & college students.

I believe it is important to point out that the Holocaust is a story about a **complete breakdown in humanity** that exposes how sensitive humanity is.

Yes, the Holocaust is clearly associated with the murder of 6 million Jewish people in such a way never seen before in history. But, the story of the Nazi Scourge is much deeper, exposing that some 13 million were murdered or killed under the Nazi rule and more importantly that 60+ million were murdered or killed on the WWII stage all over the world.

The ultimate goal of the exhibit is to bring to life a story of a breakdown of humanity using philatelic and numismatic collectibles that lived during the Holocaust era. The exhibit pieces are witnesses of the horrors that took place during WWII. Students have the incredible opportunity (often considered controversial) to pick up the pieces and physically connect with an item they find interesting. Textbooks and movies are extremely valuable in learning about the Holocaust but our exhibit is unique in that it is set up for students to hold an item and like very engaged students often say, “see the horrors in your face.”

Currently, our exhibit is something like an “opening act” for the real important feature of having survivors speaking to future generations of all backgrounds. I believe the best educational pieces we have today to promote tolerance and acceptance are those survivors willing to tell their stories and answer questions about their experiences. It’s an honor having survivors attend our events and having our exhibit as a back drop is perfect. When survivors pass on or can no longer speak then our exhibit which has the ability to travel all over the world can be the witnesses to carry the message in an unusual and interesting method that students can relate to.

What is especially rewarding is going to venues where it is not easy to get to museums or to venues where there are very few Jewish people (or none at all). It's great meeting so many new people that show an interest, even for a short time, in learning about this horrific period in history and to discuss what we have learned from the past and what we have not learned!!!

How can we measure the goals and accomplishments? On the surface it is easy to assume that we can measure success by how one feels or reacts to the exhibit. However, another interesting measurement is reflecting on what they are "thinking" about through their experience in viewing the exhibit. We want to generate thoughts about how the events took place, why they took place, how humanity has moved on since WWII and where humanity is going in the future.

The incredible reactions to the students through assignments given by teachers are powerful and emotional. The student's feedback to the news media and student made videos are very moving.

A favorite writing assignment that some teachers give is after students spend time looking at the overall exhibit, have students pick a piece that they connected with and do one of the following:

1. Be the piece...write about being that piece and how it feels to be that piece. Write about what you (the piece) have seen or what you (the piece) have been through.
2. Write to that piece. Ask the piece questions. Tell the piece how you feel about it and what made you piece that piece to write too.

The accomplishments of our exhibit are clearly seen by reading the responses!