

Holocaust Reflections

It is not unusual for me to get some pretty unusual phone calls. I am one of those lawyers who will speak with anyone, even though I cannot help all of the callers, or their problems may be outside of my sphere of practice. Sometimes the people are just what we like to call “full moon” cases.

One of the more memorable phone calls I received was from a man who told me a most unusual story. He said that a soldier had given him pictures that the soldier took while liberating a concentration camp in Europe. The soldier told his friend, who will we call J.R., that he wanted to make sure the photos “get into the correct hands.”

The gentleman who wound up with the photos after the death of the soldier from Williamsport, called me because of my community activism and involvement with the Jewish community in general. I was suspicious. Some of the “nut” calls I get do pertain to Judaism and some of the people are rank anti-Semites. I have already had people leave voicemail messages raving about the Jews and other absolutely terrible things. We have had Nazis and members of the KKK trying to march and organize in the city over the years. Fortunately, nothing ever came of that.

I told the man who called me, the inheritor of the photos, that I would be willing to take a look at them and see what I thought. In due course the photographs arrived and they did look to me as though they were old. They were horrible pictures. They depicted skeletons, piles of bodies and ovens in the death camps of Europe. I asked the man’s permission to send them to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. to see whether it could be ascertained as to their legitimacy.

It was a great disappointment that I did not hear from the Holocaust Museum, even after a number of letters and phone calls. Finally, with the influence of a friend who is on their Board, the right people took a look at the photographs and were able to ascertain that they were indeed legitimate, genuine and showed a portion of the human suffering that the Jews of Europe endured prior to their deaths.

The Holocaust Museum agreed to take the photographs for their archives and were thankful for the donation. The man who called me, delivering the photographs from his deceased Army friend, turned out to be a thoroughly decent, amiable and honorable man. I am glad I talked to him and followed my instinct.

More recently, I received a telephone call from someone concerned about a copyright issue. He is a local professional, relatively new to the Williamsport area. It turned out that the man who called me was concerned that a book about his father’s life during the murder of Europe’s Jews, was being sold by Amazon perhaps without permission. Before I would agree to do anything for the man, I asked to read the book. It was not a difficult read, approximately 200 pages well-spaced. It was an amazing account. I have heard before, from my own family members, about what it was like to hide in the forests of Poland while the Jews were hunted down, tortured and killed. This is the story of one man who, together with a family member, survived, although just barely, while the Germans and the Russians fought over Eastern Poland. Throughout the ordeal, the Polish took great pleasure in aiding and abetting the destruction of

European Jewry. I remember my father, telling me as a youth, that in all the countries where the Holocaust occurred, the locals virtually drank blood at the trough where atrocities were committed. The account set forth in the book is totally consistent with the history. So brutal was the annihilation of Europe's Jews in the Holocaust, that it makes for very difficult reading.

Like many others, I have wondered in the last few years whether there was too much emphasis on the Holocaust, rather than current Jewish survival, educating our people in the ways of our religion and supporting the State of Israel. Reading this book made me realize that there is no statute of limitations on learning not only about the murder and humiliation of European Jewry, but also the great pleasure that locals took in contributing to the German effort to exterminate the Jewish people.

Interestingly, in those countries where there was any leadership opposed to what was in essence ritual murder, the Jews survived. Bulgaria, Denmark and Italy are just a few examples. However, most of Eastern Europe was so steeped in hatred of the Jewish people that they were willing allies of the Germans in the "final solution." As the author of the book pointed out, this was a hatred nursed over two millennia. The author points out that: "The Jews... died solely because they were Jews. It was planned that they should die. It was organized, orchestrated and made government policy that they should all die. We believe that much of the western world cooperated either passively or aggressively (with government immigration restrictions and with military expediency), and we respect and share the anger of Jewish organizations and individuals that continued attempts to de-Judacize the Holocaust...."

The sentiment is well expressed. The first Holocaust in Europe occurred during the First Crusade when all the Jews in Britain were murdered followed by northern Europe, France and ultimately the expulsion from Spain and Portugal. By the time of the German led Holocaust, all of the Jews in western Europe had already been annihilated.

The Holocaust cannot and should not be forgotten or even placed on the back burner. Today, much of the Arab world is engaged in educating its people and preaching a new Holocaust. That enemy is Israel, an entity that, according to Arab Muslim thinking in the Middle East, simply cannot exist among Arab nations. A Christian is a crusader infidel, guilty of idolatry, and the Jew refuses to be humbled. Both of these evil forces must be destroyed. What is indefatigable and not understandable, is the extent to which many on the left side of the political equation in the west have joined in the militaristic rightwing Arab effort to undermine the existence of Israel.

The Holocaust continues to have relevance not only because of the great crime committed against the Jews, a crime recognized now by the Catholic Church, but also because there are those on both the left and right wing of the political spectrum who thirst for the opportunity to commit the same crime against those Jews remaining in the world, particularly the State of Israel.

Perhaps there is a chance to educate future generations if we never give up the teaching opportunity.

Thank you to both the man who called me with the pictures of the death camp taken by his friend, and thank you to the man who called me about his father's book being sold by Amazon.

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