

CONNECTIONS:  
RABBI CHARLES H. ROSENVEIG

## Devoted to the Holocaust memory

BY NICOLE STAFFORD ■  
PHOTOS BY DAN DEAN



Throughout history, politicians have embraced small children in the public eye. But preventing a dictator's rise to power demands something altogether unemotional, says Rabbi Charles H. Rosenveig, the founder and executive director of West Bloomfield's Holocaust Memorial Center. The 70-year-old, Holocaust survivor from Poland, generally steers away from assessing the murder of six million Jews in an emotional way. Instead, he concentrates on the social, economic and political ingredients that he believes would have kept "so many human beings from stooping so low."

In light of the Holocaust Memorial Center's 13th anniversary, which will culminate in a Bar Mitzvah dinner celebration on Oct. 26, we spoke with Rabbi Rosenveig about the center, the state of remembering and his personal assessment of this watershed event.

— CONNECTIONS is an occasional series featuring discussions with local community leaders.

In light of the Holocaust Memorial Center's anniversary, which of its achievements are you most proud of?

We are extremely proud of having educated over a million young people... we believe that we have created a legion of righteousness in this state, especially among the young people based on the letters that we have received from them. We have (accumulated) hundreds of thou-

sands of letters over the years from students on how affected their lives were to the good.

Which element, object or area of the museum is most poignant for you personally and why?

I personally find a particular picture in the museum affects me a lot... You will notice that Hitler is embracing a little child there. He was presented to Hitler as the model Aryan child. As it turned out, the child was the grandson of a rabbi... which goes to show you the blindness of racism... that picture tells you a lot about the mentality... We've never had a nation formally make a policy to murder a race—men, women and children.

What is the philosophy behind the center?

The philosophy is that human beings must care for each other. We need to survive as a people in total or we will be destroyed individually. Our philosophy is that diversity is beautiful... Intolerance of diversity inevitably is the road to destruction.

What are your goals for the center and how do they reflect what you view as the community's needs?

There are a number of things that we are very anxious to expand upon. Physically we need to expand. We want to establish an institution of the righteous so (visitors to the center can) see

how low the human being can stoop, but also see how high some can reach.

Why is it necessary to remember the Holocaust?

We have experienced a human behavior that the world did not think possible. That is why we must learn that lesson and make sure that we... secure a viable, vibrant and continuous social structure.

How difficult is it for people to confront what took place in the Holocaust?

For older people it's very difficult. For younger people, it is incomprehensible. They cannot understand how people could do these kinds of things. Older people have a lifetime of experience... but for young people we've found it to be extremely difficult to comprehend. And they're very moved, very moved by it.

How does remembering and confronting the Holocaust differ for Jews and non-Jews?

I don't think it is different and I don't think it should be. Yesterday it happened to the Jews. Tomorrow it could happen to the French... It is relevant to every human being.

Some people, although they agree the Holocaust should be remembered, say that it has received too much media attention. What do you think?



Guarding history: West Bloomfield's Holocaust Memorial Center takes visitors through the horrors of the Holocaust, but the lesson that comes with this experience, ultimately, affects viewpoints for the better, says Rabbi Charles H. Rosenveig.

The reason I don't believe it has been overexposed is because, in the final analysis, the Holocaust was a consequence of thousands of years of human prejudice... So therefore, it may take thousands of years to eradicate it.

What is the Holocaust's most important lesson?

To maintain a society's restraints against the evil impulses of the people... Checks and balances are critical.

Does time distance us from the Holocaust?

It would appear to be the reverse. The younger people are more open-minded in learning about it. It's particularly true, by the way, in Europe. The older people have a psychologically-invested interest (in keeping) the Holocaust out of their mind. The younger people have no such psychological hangout.

In your estimation, do Jews in the West Bloomfield area discuss, think and read about the Holocaust enough?

I never think that they do as much as they should. I don't think that any person does as much as they should about the Holocaust because I think it's such a watershed event in history.

Should public schools take a deeper look at the Holocaust?

I think so. And I think this is one of our accomplishments here. They look more seriously than they ever did before... Hopefully in due course we will have a regular curriculum requirement for the study of the Holocaust.

How is the West Bloomfield Schools District doing?

I think that they are doing as well as the other districts.

Is it important to come to forgiveness for the Holocaust?

I can forgive as far as I am concerned. But am I entitled to forgive for the 6 million who that crime was committed against? They were murdered. They are the ones who can forgive. I can't forgive for them... I have no authority, no right.

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