

REMEMBERING THE SWASTIKA

A teenager was arrested recently for scrawling swastikas around a San Francisco neighborhood.

He was caught by Inspector Tom Dickson, who had arduously staked out the neighborhood. At the request of the Jewish community, Dickson has been assigned to give special attention to problems of anti-semitism. The swastika scrawler was identified with a kind of generalized hoodlum movement called White Punks on Dope. Perhaps you have seen their signature, WPOD, on walls and sidewalks around the city.

In the course of extensive interrogation, it developed that this teenager thought that the swastika was a WPOD emblem. He had heard vaguely about the Nazis, but he did not know that it was their emblem. He did not know that it had anything to do with Jews.

Now, in itself, that is not so surprising. A few years back, before mounting a major holocaust-education program in the schools, the JCRC asked some junior high school teachers to find out what their students knew about the Nazis. The answer was: "not much." The level of knowledge was that the Nazis were bad people against whom Americans had fought a war a long, long time ago. But there was little understanding about why the Nazis were bad, or what they did, or what insignia they wore.

Last week, a Protestant minister in Northern California, Jody Parsons, pointed out the problem in all this ignorance: "We are charged with the awesome responsibility of remembering the mass murder of 6 million Jewish people ... And for us (Christians), what is necessary to remember is our part in the Holocaust. Whether we were alive or conscious at that time or not, no matter what relationship we had to that event, we have a responsibility."

"Can we now weep for ourselves?" asked the Reverend Parsons, a minister of the United Church of Christ. "And in the weeping and the remembering, can we be warned about the similarities in our history, past and present?" She then told her congregation a story from the Talmud. The Rabbi was asked whether it is proper to sew together garments which

Earl Raab
"Remembering the Swastika"
page 2

had been torn by someone whose relative had died. The Rabbi replied: "Yes, you may, but when you sew it, don't tuck in the edges of the seams to make it look as if it's never been torn."

"But," commented Jody Parsons, "we are so prone to tucking in the seams, to forgetting the painful and shameful territory of our experience; to tucking in the seams and making everything all neat and tidy again."

A few years back we began to realize that even movies about the Nazi era were thinning out; and generations were growing up without any firsthand knowledge of what the swastika had stood for. That's when the organized Jewish community began multiple efforts to help the rest of the world remember what they had never known.

That's why there was, this past week, a proclamation of remembrance from the President of the United States, from the Governor of California, from the Mayor of San Francisco. That's why there were editorials of remembrance in both our daily newspapers.

And that's why, by way of radio and TV, *several million* Bay Area residents learned, in the past couple of weeks, exactly why so many San Francisco Jews gathered for the Yom HaShoa observance at Temple Emanu-El. The Mass Media Project of this Jewish community, under the directorship of Sydnee Guyer, reached those millions of Bay Area residents by producing, in the few days before Yom HaShoa: about 5 hours on 4 different radio stations; about 2 hours on 3 different TV stations; plus 8 free speech messages on TV; plus repeated public service announcements on at least 4 radio stations and 5 TV stations; plus an additional 3 interviews on radio and 4 on TV as part of the coverage. In addition to all this local programming, there were 3 nationally produced programs on TV.

Earl Raab
"Remembering the Swastika"
page 3

There will be more, much more. As the Reverend Jody Parsons told her congregation last week: "Perhaps forgetting our sins may be an even greater sin than committing them."

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