

## Building a Judaic Collection in a Public Library

*Carla Trounson*

**Description:** The Shia Szut Holocaust Memorial Collection gives agency to lost voices. The collection encourages the general public to ponder the “when, why and how” questions of the Holocaust, genocide, and intolerance. Our Washoe County Library Statement of Values encourages inclusiveness to the idea that we are all part of the human family. The library provides a commons, a place for our community to gather together, exchange ideas, and use the resources of the Holocaust Collection without cost. The purpose is to educate and remind a broad spectrum of people that they have choices: to become a perpetrator, or bystander, or rescuer. These are some of the advantages of managing a special collection, but there are also challenges, some of which include financial restraints and insufficient time to devote to the collection. What makes it work is the desire among parents and children, teachers and librarians, and all the private organizations and state agencies, to bring out the best in us all, knowing our worst. The profound challenge is ‘Never Again’.

**Carla L. Trounson** works for Washoe County Library System and manages the Shia Szut Holocaust Memorial Collection which is housed at the Northwest Reno Library in Reno, NV. She grew up traveling around the world and experiencing many cultures. Additionally, she developed a love of history, saw the violence of poverty, experienced acceptance and kindness, and was struck by the prevalence of intolerance and racism. The book *Night* was her introduction to the Holocaust, and it has never left her. She began to ask questions such as, “when does genocide begin” and “why do ordinary people go along”? Carla graduated with a BA in International Relations from San Francisco State University and studied history at the Masters degree level at the University of Nevada Reno, and completed course work in three fields of study: the Holocaust, African American History, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century American History. With twenty years of experience working in academic and public libraries, she considers it a privilege to serve as a member on the Nevada Holocaust Education Task Force.

### Housing a Special Collection in a public library

Good Morning. I am honored to speak here today at this conference for the association of Jewish Libraries. For the last 7 years I have managed the Shia Szut Holocaust Memorial Collection for Washoe County Library at the Northwest Reno Library in Reno Nevada

### **The history of the collection**

The Shia Szut Holocaust Memorial Collection was created in honor of Judy Mack’s father, Shia Szut, who perished in 1940 in the Treblinka concentration camp in Poland. It is a partnership between private individuals and foundations, both the Washoe County library

and school system, and state organizations, including the Nevada Governor’s Council on Education Relating to the Holocaust.

This special collection gives agency to lost voices. Our patrons learn about people who have been muted, hurt, broken, tortured, and destroyed, as well as the frightened, the fighters, and the saved. There is a poster in the collection on which there is a statement by a Czech resistance fighter who was executed by the Nazis... He wrote, “I ask for one thing: you who will survive this era, do not forget. Forget neither the good men nor the evil. Gather together patiently the testimonies about those who have fallen. One of these days the present will be the

past, and people will speak of “the great epoch” and the nameless heroes who shaped history. I should like it to be known that there were no nameless heroes, that these were men, men who had names, faces, desires, and hopes, and that therefore the suffering of even the least among them is no smaller than the suffering of the foremost whose names endure in memory. I wish that they may always remain close to you, like acquaintances, like kinsmen, like yourselves.”

## **The Purpose**

The Washoe County Library is a public library. It provides a place for our community to gather together, exchange ideas, and use the free resources of the Holocaust Collection. We are a *commons* ....where the public can browse materials to promote their greater awareness of the Holocaust and related subjects.

Our Library Statement of Values encourages inclusiveness, the idea that we are all part of the human family.

The Holocaust collection embodies inclusiveness. The purpose is to educate people about the Shoah, to teach respect for human dignity, as well as to value cultural and ethnic differences. To remind a broad spectrum of people they have choices, and by exploring our materials they can become cognizant of their own agency: to be a bystander, rescuer, or become a perpetrator.

## **The Collection in a public library**

Each branch of our library system houses materials on a vast number of subjects, and most materials in the Washoe County Library System float from branch to branch.

- Housing the non-floating Shoa Szyrt Holocaust Collection in one branch, at the Northwest Reno Library, maintains the materials permanently together, and gives patrons the opportunity to learn about various genocides and related topics.
- Housing the collection in a public library guarantees the public greater access than would occur if it were housed, for example, at a university. Location is also an advantage because there is a high school next door, and many elementary and middle schools are only few miles from the Northwest Reno Library.

- The Holocaust collection includes all the classifications found in the general collection. Classifications include: children's picture books, children's fiction/non-fiction, audio books, reference books, feature films and documentaries, class sets, adult/young adult fiction and non-fiction, biographies, and posters and maps.

The collection encourages the general public to ponder the "who, when, why and how" questions of the Holocaust, genocide, and intolerance.

- Parents and children come to the library to use the Holocaust collection to find materials for school reports.
- We have parents and teachers who come in to find books on problems like bullying.
- Teachers frequently make use of the class sets including *Night* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*
- All patrons utilize our posters as these photos are a powerful visual aid for teaching the Holocaust. We also have a giant map that pinpoints the location of thousands of camps throughout Europe.

The goals of the founders of this collection and United Nations Declaration of Human Rights inform selections and the management of subjects. The collection has materials not only on the Holocaust, but also includes resources on many past genocides and current atrocities.

Some of the subjects include: The Holocaust, hatred, bullying/bullies, genocide/atrocities -Armenian, Cambodian, Bosnian, Rwandan, Darfur, The Diaspora, violence against women/mass rape, intolerance/prejudices/discrimination/religious, propaganda, hate groups, perpetrators and deniers, rescue/rescuers, Nazi criminals and trials, Social Darwinism, Nazi medical experiments/torture, Holocaust art and poetry, resisters, concentration camps/German and Japanese, persecution-Roma, Jehovah Witness, Gays, Intellectuals, human rights, business- looting, trials and justice, and remembrance.

I had a student who came into the library seeking information on the Holocaust. He said he had to write a 3 page report on the Holocaust. I began by suggesting topics and I asked him if he wanted to write on teens or children, or perhaps children in hiding? He replied he wanted to write a report on the *entire* Holocaust.

I took him to the collection. He quickly realized the broad expanse of the Holocaust, and narrowed his topic. He spent the afternoon busily among a stack of books!

Programs and Displays: Throughout each year we have programs and displays featuring themes in genocide and intolerance, and we always have a display or

program on Holocaust Remembrance Day. We want to encourage reflection and thought on many topics and questions, such as, "when does genocide begin" and "why do ordinary people go along?" Some of our programs include children, remembering that over a million children died in the Holocaust. We have had a display featuring the haunting doll collection of Anna Brahm; and we have hosted many programs with survivors like Robert Clary who was featured on Hogan's Heroes and Ela Weissberger, who was one of 100 children out of 15,000 who survived Terezin. Mrs. Weissberger wrote the book *The Cat with the Yellow Star*. Another program featured survivor Dr. Julius Menn, who wrote the book *Waves: a Memoir*. We recently featured a program with the Kempler family. Joseph Kempler is a survivor, and his daughter-in-law April Kempler wrote his memoir *The Altered I: A Holocaust Memoir*.

## Challenges

In addition to the cited advantages of managing a special collection, there are also challenges, some of which include:

**Financial:** The Great Recession which began in 2008 has produced financial constraints for state and local governments. Over the past 5 years, there have been financial reductions to the entire library system which has, in turn, filtered down to all the branches of the Washoe County Library System (from reduced staff by way of attrition and fewer dollars for materials).

**Insufficient Time:** Library volunteers and technological innovations have been utilized in different ways to maximize efficiency for staff in serving the public. Despite all of that, the fact is, there is less time to devote to the specific collection development and programming needs for any special collection.

**Awareness of sensitive materials:** Because of the topic, we must be sensitive to people who lived through and are deeply affected by genocide. Also, we are a public library, so we have to be cognizant there are people of all ages viewing the

collection. We don't have the funding to provide camouflaged viewing (like the camouflage that exists at the Holocaust Museum in Washington). Some of the materials (i.e. some of the posters), are horrific, so we have to be aware of the sensitivities of our younger patrons in displaying these materials.

I conclude with passages from Eve Bunting's book *Terrible Things* and *Night* by Elie Wiesel.

What makes it work is the desire among parents and children, teachers and librarians, and all the private organizations and state agencies, to bring out the best in us all, knowing our worst. To know '*the other*', is us. The profound challenge is 'Never Again'.