

HOLOCAUST MUSEUM HOUSTON

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www.hmh.org



ARNOLD LIEBSTER
FOUNDATION

www.alst.org

The Holocaust Museum Houston opened its new 27,000 square feet facility on March 3, 1996. The Permanent Exhibition is called “Bearing Witness: A Community Remembers” and is located in the Morgan Family Center. In addition to artifacts, photographs and documents, the Permanent Exhibition includes a postcard from a Jehovah’s Witness concentration camp inmate to his wife.

PETER ESCH POSTCARD

Arrested by the Gestapo in 1938, Peter Esch was imprisoned in Buchenwald Concentration Camp for five years. As one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, he refused to renounce his beliefs and swear allegiance to Adolf Hitler. On May 7, 1944 he sent his wife, Mina, a postcard with a brief message. Included on the postcard was a stamped message from the SS Obersturmbannführer:

“The prisoner remains a stubborn Bible Student [as Jehovah’s Witnesses were then known] ... For this reason only, the privilege of otherwise permissible correspondence is taken from him.”

When relatives of Jehovah’s Witnesses received correspondence from their loved ones imprisoned in the camps, they looked for that stamp because it usually meant more to them than anything else the letter said. In German, the word for “stubborn” literally translated is “hard-necked” (hartnaekig). This message told Mina that Peter was holding true to his faith.

BUCHENWALD CONCENTRATION CAMP

Buchenwald opened in July 1937 and was one of the largest concentration camps in Germany. Nearly 800 Jehovah’s Witness inmates were identified by a purple triangle sown on their garments, and made up part of the more than 250,000 imprisoned in the camp over the years by the Nazis. Throughout most of its existence as a Nazi camp, there were always between 300 and 450 Witnesses in Buchenwald. On arrival they were immediately assigned to the “punishment battalion” and given the hardest and dirtiest work. The SS kept them separate from other inmates by keeping them in isolation barracks. Initially they were not allowed to write letters to family and friends, but eventually were allowed to write one monthly letter of 25 words.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN EUROPE (1933-1945)

Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian community of 35,000 in Germany and occupied lands, refused to conform to the Nazi ideology of hate. They suffered severely for their belief in nonviolence and their utter rejection of racism. Thrown into Nazi camps, they became eyewitnesses of Nazi genocide and were the only group offered a way out of the camps.

Banned – June 1933

Arrested – 12,500

Killed – 2,000

Executed – 370

Children taken away – 500

THE ARNOLD-LIEBSTER FOUNDATION

The Arnold-Liebster Foundation was established by Holocaust-era survivors Max Liebster and Simone Arnold Liebster in January 2002 to educate future generations in the lessons of history. The foundation supports historical research, teacher training, educational seminars, scholarly publications, museum exhibitions, and similar projects. Through these activities, the foundation especially aims to help young people to repudiate racism, xenophobic nationalism, and violence, and to learn to listen to the voice of conscience. See www.alst.org for more information and resources, including Adolphe Arnold's biography.

Additional Resources At Holocaust Museum Houston

Boniuk Library and Resource Center

- Facing the Lion: Memoirs of a Young Girl in Nazi Europe by Simone Arnold Liebster in English, Spanish
- Crucible of Terror: A Story of Survival Through the Nazi Storm by Max Liebster in English, Spanish
- Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault 28-minute Classroom Edition (DVD-English or VHS-Spanish) and Study Guide (English or Spanish)
- Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault 57-minute DVD in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese (Brazilian), Russian, Spanish
- Purple Triangles: The True Story of a German Family 25-minute DVD in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese (Brazilian), Russian, Spanish