Dr. Kohn Receives Unique Gift from Artist, Uncle of Dr. Hussong

Dr. Murray Kohn lost his little sister, his mother and other family members in the Holocaust. On April 9, he got back a little bit of 7-year-old Ida Rebecca, in the form of a drawing by internationally known artist Manfred Bockelmann.

Dr. Kohn, Rabbi Emeritus of Beth Israel Congregation of Vineland, NJ and a professor of Holocaust Studies at Stockton, survived two-and-a-half years in a Nazi death camp, along with his father. Last week, he remembered how Ida Rebecca, three years younger than he, kept holding on to him “for three days and three nights as we were dragged on the railroad cattle cars to Auschwitz.”

“She held on so much, as if saying, ‘This is the last moments together’... And this stays with me forever,” he said.

“This man didn’t just take a picture - he has read her face from the inside out,” Dr. Kohn said while looking at Bockelmann’s portrait of Ida Rebecca, done in charcoal on burlap.

“It’s a present for you,” Bockelmann said.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe it,” responded Kohn. “I will find a place for it,” he assured Bockelmann.

Bockelmann, who lives in Austria, is the uncle of Stockton’s Dr. Marion Hussong, professor of Literature and Holocaust and Genocide Studies. She photocopied a picture of Dr. Kohn’s family from his memoir, “Weep Tears of Blood,” and asked her uncle to make the drawing of Ida Rebecca from it as a surprise gift.

Dr. Kohn’s mother and sister were sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival, and their belongings, including the family photo, were confiscated. A woman from their village, assigned to sort those belongings for valuables for the Nazis, recognized the family.

Continued on next page
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Continued from previous page

The woman, who was later killed, hid the photo, then eventually wrapped it in cloth around a brick and threw it over the fence to Dr. Kohn and his father, according to Dr. Hussong.

That same photo became the basis for Bockelmann’s portrait.

“I planned this for years,” Dr. Hussong told Dr. Kohn when he was given the drawing. “I wanted to tell you so badly, but I couldn’t. This was a long time coming, my friend.”

A major exhibit of Bockelmann’s charcoal drawings of children murdered in the Holocaust was shown at the Leopold Museum in Vienna in 2013. His portraits start with photos salvaged by survivors, like Dr. Kohn’s, or those taken by the Nazis, who also recorded the names of the people they murdered. His pictures are not for sale, but will be given to Holocaust memorial sites after exhibition, said Dr. Hussong.

“I had a feeling for the person” (Ida Rebecca), Bockelmann said about drawing her from the family photograph. He said it was very emotional for him to meet a family member such as Dr. Kohn.

Final Frame, an international film crew based in Munich, Germany, has been shadowing Bockelmann for 18 months as he works on this project, which includes more than 100 large portraits so far, all in charcoal on burlap. The film crew came to Stockton to film the meeting of Bockelmann and Dr. Kohn, who was the first to teach Holocaust Studies at the college.

They met at the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center. Director Gail Rosenthal welcomed the artist, explained the significance of the region as a home to many survivors, and assisted Bockelmann in his research. Scenes shot on campus featuring Rosenthal and Dr. Kohn receiving his sister’s portrait will be an integral part of the documentary film.

Dr. Hussong coordinated the two-day film shoot: “The entire campus community supported this project,” she said. “I am tremendously grateful to President Saatkamp and Provost Kesselman who gave us permission to film all over campus. Library Director Joe Toth allowed us to film in the stacks, Media Productions provided us with a film studio, and Gail Rosenthal gave us full access to the beautiful facilities of the Holocaust Resource Center. Throughout the shoot, students kept showing up to volunteer for errands.”

The film crew was impressed by Stockton’s natural beauty and the condition of the campus. “Your students are really something,” commented Bockelmann, as he walked around Lake Fred. “There is not a single piece of litter anywhere on this campus!”

The trailer for the film, “Drawing Against Oblivion,” won the gold medal Tuesday night at the New York Festivals - World’s Best TV & Films. To view this powerful film trailer, click here.

On the bittersweet occasion of seeing Ida Rebecca’s face again, Dr. Kohn said he was angry and determined to continue bearing witness to the murder of millions of Jews while the Christian world “stood by and let it happen.”

“Yes, I want the world to have a guilty conscience,” he said. “Maybe then, we will have a better world.”

Dr. Colón Named SCCE Interim Exec. Director as Dr. Curry Leaves

Dr. Merydawilda Colón, professor of Social Work, has been named interim executive director of the Stockton Center for Community Engagement, beginning in June. She will be filling the position that Dr. Reva Curry is leaving for the position of vice-president of Instruction and Learning Services at Delta College in Michigan.

Dr. Colón has served on the Stockton faculty since 2001 and has been the coordinator of the Social Work undergraduate program since 2001 and has been the coordinator of the Social Work program since 2007.

Under her leadership, the Social Work undergraduate program achieved reaffirmation of its accreditation unconditionally through 2019. Dr. Colón was also a member of the design team of the Master of Social Work program, which achieved accreditation in October 2012. In addition, Dr. Colón has served in a variety of leadership initiatives at Stockton.

She was the first Faculty Administrative Fellow in 2009, shadowing Cheryl Kaus, dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and she also led the Program Competence Essential Learning Outcome Team during the 2011-12 academic year. Most recently, Dr. Colón was co-appointed with Dr. Marissa Levy, associate professor of Criminal Justice, as Coordinator of the Coordinators during the academic year 2012-2013.

“Thank you for congratulating me on my interim position as executive director of the Stockton Center for Community Engagement. Reva has done a wonderful job, and I am honored to continue her legacy,” Dr. Colón said in a note to colleagues.
Dr. Colón Named SCCE Interim Exec. Dir. as Dr. Curry Leaves Cont.

Dr. Curry served as interim dean of the School of Health Sciences in 2008-09 and was later asked to lead Stockton’s community engagement initiatives. In 2010, she coordinated the successful application to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s Elective Classification in Community Engagement, in which Stockton achieved national recognition as a community-engaged institution. She chairs the Community Partnership Workgroup which is gathering community engagement data from across the college in preparation for the 2020 re-application to Carnegie. Dr. Curry also chairs the SCCE Advisory Council which guides SCCE in implementing its mission “to promote the ideals of public service and social responsibility by fostering community-based experiential learning and civic engagement for students, faculty and staff.”

In 2011, Dr. Curry created the Community Partnership Student Fellows Program in which Stockton students are assigned to manage projects in Atlantic County including coordinating an after-school mentoring/homework program, establishing community gardens, increasing awareness of issues related to homelessness, participating in the Long Term Recovery Group for residents affected by post-Hurricane Sandy, developing volunteer recruitment strategies for local community organizations, creating operating policies for the African American Heritage Museum of Southern New Jersey in the Arts Garage, and running a small business—the Campus Kitchen of Atlantic City. Last year, Dr. Curry developed the SCCE Faculty Fellows Program in which faculty leaders work with faculty, staff, students and community partners.

Stockton Partners in Colombian Student-Exchange Program

India Karavackas, director of the Office of International Services, and Dr. Victoria Schindler, associate professor of Occupational Therapy in the School of Health Sciences, traveled to Colombia March 15-23 to forge a student-exchange partnership with the Universidad del Rosario and explore other academic partnerships.

Stockton has approved a 2020 grant of $20,000 that will enable eight faculty members to take students on short-term trips abroad. These three-week trips are a complement to study-abroad programs that typically involve a full year of study, Karavackas said.

“These shorter trips permit more students to travel abroad and be exposed to other cultures,” she said.

Starting over 2015’s spring break, 10-15 second-year Master’s students in the Occupational Therapy program will be visiting the Universidad del Rosario and its clinical sites, as well as some cultural sites in Bogota, Dr. Schindler said.

The plan is for the school to bring groups of OT students from Universidad del Rosario to Stockton. The exchange program has the potential to expand to other Health Sciences programs, such as Physical Therapy and Speech, Schindler noted.

They are exploring the idea of having students from Stockton and the South American schools do fieldwork, or “clinicals” of up to three months. That would be funded through the 100,000 Strong in the Americas program, which is supported by the U.S. Department of State in partnership with NAFSA: Association of International Educators and Partners of the Americas.

Its goal is to send 100,000 students on exchanges between North and South America, Karavackas explained. The Universidad del Rosario is currently applying for grants, each worth $25,000, with Stockton as their partner school.

“The money would be awarded to Universidad del Rosario but they would use it to underwrite the costs of not just their students but ours as well,” Karavackas said.

The prestigious Universidad del Rosario in Bogota is Colombia’s oldest institution of higher education at 360 years old, and the alma mater of many prominent South Americans, including 33 presidents of Colombia. The private institution is also affiliated with the Universidad de Salamanca in Spain.

South American higher education institutions traditionally have had ties with European universities. They are eager to expand their relationships with North American schools, Karavackas said.

“This puts Stockton in the forefront,” Karavackas noted. “Just a handful of U.S. institutions are involved with Colombia.”
Stockton Faculty Members Recognized by National Academies

Stockton faculty members recently received national recognition from the National Academies, Advisers to the Nation on Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

Dr. Elizabeth Pollock, assistant professor of Chemistry, and Dr. Tara Luke, associate professor of Biology, were named National Academies Education Fellows in the Life Sciences for the 2013-2014 year.

Dr. Pollock and Dr. Luke were bestowed the honor due to their selection and participation in the 2013 Regional National Academies Summer Institute on Undergraduate Science Education that was held June 2-7, 2013 at West Virginia University.

Dr. Karen York, associate professor of Biology, and Dr. Melissa Zwick, assistant professor of Biology, were named National Academies Education Mentors in the Life Sciences in recognition of their service as facilitators for participants at the Summer Institute. Dr. York and Dr. Zwick were themselves participants in the 2012 Summer Institute, along with Dr. Michael Lague, associate professor of Biology, and were named National Academies Education Fellows in the Life Sciences in the 2012-2013 academic year.

By sending faculty to the National Academies Summer Institute, Stockton joins others at the forefront of improving undergraduate education, which is essential for preparing both future scientists and scientifically literate citizens, said Dr. Barbara Schaal, chair of the Division of Earth and Life Studies National Research Council.

Trustee Leo Schoffer Named President of Jewish Federation

Leo Schoffer, Esq., Stockton Board of Trustee member, has been named president of the Jewish Federation of Atlantic and Cape May counties.

In April 2009, the Holocaust Resource Center (HRC) at Stockton, one of the first of its kind at a public college in the country, was rededicated and renamed in honor of Schoffer’s Holocaust survivor parents as the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center. The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center serves many roles in the college and the community. One of the goals of the HRC is to record the stories of local Holocaust survivors so that they can be passed down to further generations.

Natives of Vilna, Poland, Sara and Sam Schoffer were married in a forest following their escape from a Jewish ghetto in their hometown. They immigrated to the United States in 1949 and raised their children, Lynda and Leo, on the memories of their experiences. As a result, involvement and support of the Jewish community became a central theme in the Schoffers’ lives.

The Vander Ryk Family Welcomes Baby Boy

Melissa Vander Ryk, professional services specialist in Student Development, and husband Jason, welcomed a baby boy earlier this week. Lucas Walker Vander Ryk was born on April 15 at 10 a.m. He weighed in at 6 pounds, 13 ounces and measured 20.5 inches. Big sister Marley Jade is 5 years old. Joan Vander Ryk, secretarial assistant to the Dean of Students, and husband Dennis, are the proud grandparents. Congratulations to all!

Send Us Your News!

We want to know about things going on in the Stockton community. Do you have an unusual hobby? Did one of your co-workers win an award or perform outstanding public service? Births, weddings, graduations and the like are all good things to submit to the Stockton Times. Contact the editor at (609) 652-4593 or e-mail StocktonTimes@stockton.edu

News about distinguished students can now be found at Distinctive Stockton Students. To contribute a news item for the blog, please contact the editor at distinctive@stockton.edu.