

business & technology

The World Economic Forum's new Global Risk Report is a prospectus of gloom that will have the global elite at Davos, Switzerland, heading for the ski slopes *tout de suite*. Top threats: sovereign debt, commodity price volatility, and income inequality. *Huffington Post* complains that Davos has no real solutions. Their answer to broken governance: "sharing values of global citizenship." Good luck. But then the purpose of Davos is not to solve problems but to bring together those who will. *Après-ski*.

Pew Research reports that 47% of Americans say China is the world's leading economic power, while just 31% name the US, but David Leonhardt (*New York Times*) noted US per capita income (\$47,123) is more than six times China's (\$7,518). Chinese business leaders speak reverentially of American innovation, from General Electric to Google. In Shanghai, people recently queued up for hours to get into the new Apple store. No Chinese store like that over here.

Polaroid is determined to revive its iconic brand that invented and popularized instant photography after World War II. "Polaroid was the original social network," said board chairman Bobby Sanger. "Polaroid's niche is about real people, real moments. You take someone's picture, write something on the bottom, and give it to them." Sanger has new product ideas too: sunglasses that take digital photos and a portable printer that can produce paper copies on the spot. (*Boston Globe*)

The *Telegraph* reports that Canada's Mood Media has created authentic scents for stores to put customers in a buying frame of mind. Their clients include Habitat, the furniture shop; Timberland, the outdoor clothing retailer; Guess, a fashion chain; and many London clothes shops, banks, and hotels, which will soon start using the scents, pumped out through air-conditioning units.

—Nehemiah Horowitz



The contents of "Uncle Joe's" valise contained some surprising WWII era finds

TheLastWord

RARE FIND RAISES OLD QUESTIONS

Yitzchok Mermelstein has always been close with his uncle Joseph Weinberger.

"Uncle Joe," as his family fondly calls him, was originally from Romania's Satmar community and spent World War II hiding in bunkers before making his way to New York in 1948.

Uncle Joe suffered a stroke three years ago, and he was placed in a local eldercare facility several weeks ago due to his failing health. When Mr. Mermelstein cleaned out Uncle Joe's apartment, he found an old valise containing his postwar travel documents; several photographs; and a dull, white bar of soap stamped with the letters RIF and the numbers 0181. He remembered hearing as a child about soap made from the flesh of Jewish victims, so he carefully rewrapped the bar of soap and put it back in the valise.

Mr. Mermelstein realized if it were indeed made of Jewish flesh, it would require burial. He contacted Rabbi Yankie Meyer, director of Misaskim, an organization that provides community support, as well as assistance to families of the deceased.

"I don't know what to do," Mr. Mermelstein told Rabbi Meyer, "but let's maximize *kvod sheim Shamayim*."

At press time, it remains unclear whether Uncle Joe's soap will undergo testing, but this story is bound to reopen discussion of the RIF-soap controversy. Many believe RIF stands for *rein jüdisches fett* (pure Jewish fat). Others say that RIF stands for Reichsstelle für Industrielle Fettversorgung (Reich Center for Industrial Fat Provisioning), the German agency that made cleaning products during the war.

The consensus among scholars and historians at Yad Vashem, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is that such soap was never mass-produced and is not made from human remains. Mr. Aaron

Breitbart, a senior Wiesenthal Center researcher, contends this was a cruel rumor perpetuated by Nazis to sadistically taunt Jews in concentration camps. No evidence in soap manufacturing plants has ever been found to indicate mass production.

However, it is a known fact that Dr. Rudolf Spanner experimented with soap production at the Danzig Anatomical Institute, Mr. Breitbart said. At the Nuremberg Trials, a lab assistant testified that they made soap from human fat. Mr. Breitbart said the Nazis used any available corpses, including those of Germans and Poles, but this human soap was never mass-marketed because it was not economically viable. The numbers on the bars were probably manufacturing numbers similar to UPCs on products marketed today, said Mr. Breitbart, who contends that maintaining this debate may actually be detrimental.

"Holocaust deniers are looking for any possible discrepancy to cast doubt on the entire Holocaust, so we try to be as careful as possible not to give them any fodder," Mr. Breitbart explained.

Mr. Yosef Friedenson, Holocaust survivor and editor of *Dos Yiddische Vort*, agrees. "I also don't believe it — this story has no basis," he said. "It's a lie, but not because the Germans were incapable of doing it."

However, many graves in the United States, Israel, Austria, and other parts of Europe hold bars of these soaps, and survivors remember attending funerals for them.

Over the years, many such bars have been tested by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, but none has contained human remains, said Dr. Michael Berenbaum, former director of its Holocaust Research Institute.

"It doesn't make the Nazis one iota better if they didn't do it," he added. "Everything else they did was evil to the extreme."

—Rachel Bachrach