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World War II vet works to convince the IRS that he's not dead



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94-year-old Siegfried Meinstein, at his home at Sunrise on the Scioto, who is trying to prove to the IRS that he is still alive.

By **Lori Kurtzman**

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Siegfried Meinstein discovered that he was dead in April. He seems to be handling the news well.

"It isn't really a problem in my daily life," he said, sitting at a table in his Upper Arlington assisted-living facility. "Everybody accepts my money."

This probably requires a little more explanation, so here it is: The Internal Revenue Service thinks 94-year-old Meinstein bought the farm, bit the big one, took a permanent vacation.

And despite his family's best efforts, the IRS hasn't changed its mind.

"If they keep insisting, what is it you say?" Ron Meinstein asked his dad. "Eventually, they'll be right?"

The debate over Meinstein's existence began when an accountant attempted to file the elder Meinstein's taxes online in April. The return was denied. The Social Security Administration had listed the filer as dead, the IRS said.

Sure, Meinstein is a little worse for wear, nursing the hip he broke while emerging from a swimming pool. But the man sitting at the table, the German-born World War II vet with the carefully parted silver hair, hasn't conceded anything.

"He's very much alive!" says a fellow resident in the senior community where Meinstein keeps an apartment full of pictures of his late wife.

Just a few days after Meinstein's tax return was rejected, Ron, who lives 80 miles away in Warsaw, marched his not-dead pop into a Social Security Administration office in Columbus, where workers acknowledged the obvious. The Meinsteins were given a letter to send to the IRS, which they did, only to hear back that they

needed a correction form from Social Security.

Social Security does make mistakes. On average, it kills off about 1,000 living people every month, according to the SSA's Office of the Inspector General. The walking dead usually get their records corrected quickly, though, and the process is relatively simple.

Not so in Meinstein's case. Social Security doesn't think he's dead and apparently never has, Ron said. The problem seems to be isolated to the IRS, which is holding firm on its position.

It's also cashing Meinstein's checks, his son said.

After some back-and-forth, the Meinsteins went to the taxman's office in August. An IRS agent looked at dad and his beating heart and got to work trying to fix the problem.

Shortly thereafter, another IRS notice arrived in the mail: "We are unable to process your tax return. Our records indicate that the person identified as the primary taxpayer ... was deceased prior to the tax year shown on the tax form."

The same notice showed up in September. Another came in November.

Ron's wife, Crystal, contacted the Taxpayer Advocate Service for help. The advocate thought the issue was resolved in December, but by the end of the year, there was that familiar notice again: "We are unable ..."

Federal laws prohibit IRS employees from talking about specific taxpayers, and enforcement is so stern that IRS spokeswoman Jennifer Jenkins wanted to make triply clear that she wasn't going to talk about Meinstein. Jenkins could say only that the IRS regularly gets its information from Social Security and that it doesn't track how often that information is incorrect.

She also said taxpayers who aren't finding resolution with the IRS might be able to get help from the advocate service.

The Meinsteins still hope that's their answer. The tax advocate has filed again. They'll wait for the reply.

Meanwhile, they just got another letter from the IRS. It wanted to know why Siegfried Meinstein has a credit balance of \$14,000 in taxes he prepaid for 2014.

And why the IRS can't find his return.

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