

JOSHUA WAINER

7/19/89

#75

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WH: "You came - ."

JW: " 1950 from Bremen<sup>r</sup>haven to New York."

WH: "...Did you meet your wife here?"

JW: "Yeh. She happened also to be from the same country, same city that I come from. But they came...in 1940...funniest part was, she lived around the corner from where I used to live...and when I came over here I had my good friends, they picked me up from the boat in New York...the Springfield brothers, they were here...two years before I came...we were liberated the same time from the same camp by the Russian army..."

WH: "...the survivors here seemed to have formed a community, a network of people who they are friendly with, their common background and - ."  
(Boston)

JW: "Yah, like there's parties, Purim parties, other get-togethers."

WH: "How many people show up usually?"

6 JW: "...100 at least, or maybe more...we have a large community here."

WH: "Is it all unified, in other words, you also have the Latvian group."

JW: "Yah, but the Latvian group is from New York...I belong there, I'm a member, and so on..."

WH: "In some communities, for example, the Hungarians and the Polish groups are separate I noticed when it comes to getting together and in some cases it even relates to the war, to the perceptions that each group has of the other."

JW: "...we are separated too, the Latvian Jews, not here in Boston, but in

WH: "...now, when you came to this country, you already had contact with the Latvian group in a sense."

JW: "At that time, there was no Latvian group. There was no Latvian, just with friends. Cantor (inaudible) who send out to me and my brother, I was the youngest of the family, my brother was the oldest, as a matter of fact, he - thanks to him he saved - ."

WH: " (JW becomes overwhelmed). It's difficult...(long pause)...(WH looks at articles and pictures with JW)...when you came here, first you stayed in New York - ."

JW: "I stayed in N.Y. with the Springfield's...in Washington Heights for a month or 6 weeks..."

WH: "...did it make you cautious in other things, like in business or something like that to be careful...(inaudible) or did you feel that since everything you went through, that you could take risk also."

JW: "Yeh."

WH: "How much worse could happen to you."

JW: "Well, in the beginning, til about 10 years ago, you appreciate things in a different way than the American, or than the people who did not go through what we went through. You appreciate more. You have different values of life. Like an average human being does."

WH: "In what way would you say the values are different?"

JW: "Life is more valuable and you have to use - you have to have priorities in life. To deal with people, and to appreciate life itself."

WH: "Where are the priorities?...What is a priority to you in life? What is the most - when you say you have to have priorities, - ."

JW: "That you get up in the morning and you are alive, and you're healthy. That is a number one."

WH: "Do you find that if something bad happens to you...invested in something and it doesn't work out, or something G-d forbid happened to your child...."

JW: "Okay. I will do my outmost before I do anything, I always try to do my outmost to investigate, to think it over, maybe more than an average human being would do, and then I'll go ahead 100%. And then, if it goes wrong, I wouldn't blame anyone, especially myself to begin with, because I know I did do my best to - in my ability. But it takes me a while until I make up my mind. But when I do make up my mind, I go all the way through."

WH: "Do you try to transmit this value to your children, this approach to life?"

JW: "In a way, yes, but my oldest is only 5 years old, my oldest grandchild...my own children? Yes I did."

WH: "How many children do you have?"

JW: "Two. Two girls. One is single and one is married and lives in Newton...she's married to a fellow from Africa who came to this country about 7 years ago..."

WH: "...in a general way, are the Latvian Jews different from the Jews from other countries?"

6 JW: "I would say, yes... I would say that the Latvians definitely feel upper class against all the others. More educated."

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JW: "Absolute  
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WH: "...what app

JW: "Well, re  
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WH: "You were

JW: "Yes...but  
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WH: "Is the

JW: "No, Cons

WH: "...Cantor  
affadavit

JW: "Yes, he

...me to Boston, he said, 'Well, you must  
...you did."

...the Cantor had not sponsored you, do you  
...started going to synagogue right away after

...after I got married. I got married in 1952.  
...ve. But I don't think the Temple has  
...to the synagogue, but it helped."

...anything to do with what one believes in,  
...something you went through, didn't you question

...fact, I questioned our Rabbi here."

...rived.' He couldn't answer it. You have  
...estions - ."

...e said, 'that we can't ask questions but  
...ou are a strong believer, you wouldn't ask  
...he answer they can give you. What I get."  
...believer."

...I'm asking the question. I'm not."  
...and you don't get a satisfactory answer--."

...at anyway?"

...nce - something, it's a feeling that's - ."

WH: "...if one of your children had said to you, that they were in love with someone who's not Jewish...you must be worried about it."

JW: "Yes. If I'll say no, I'll be a liar. But I also know that my children wouldn't do that. Then you can say, 'Well, how do you know? You never know what can happen in life?' I do know. At least, I hope so. That it wouldn't happen. And I gave them to understand that too. Not now, but - (when they were) 18, 19 years."

WH: "How far did your daughters go in school?"

JW: "One has a master's and the other one, has a master too. One was in Biology and the other one was...Business..."

WH: "The one who's not married, what does she do?"

JW: "She's in computer...programmer...she spent 4 years in Israel...she was English teacher...she taught over there, Hebrew...she's 32..."

WH: "...you were in Stutthof, right?"

JW: "I was in Stutthof. That was the last journey for me."

WH: "Did you think that you survived because of luck or did you have to make certain decisions to save your own life at certain points."

JW: "Well, to be honest with you, I followed my brother. 100% and we were in the last - we were liberated March 10, 1945..."

END SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO.

WH: "...you came here with your brother?"

JW: "I came by myself, but he came a year later."

WH: "Is he still alive?"

JW: "No, he's not...we were a family of six children. Three brothers and three sisters. He's the oldest, I was the youngest..."

WH: "And your parents were not able to make it?"

JW: "Yes. That's right."

WH: "Did you think of going to Israel after the war?"

JW: "As a matter of fact, if not for my brother, we would have been in Israel...in 1946 or '47 when they started to organize aliyah, I was ready to go. As a matter of fact, I signed up to go to Israel, but he held me back. He said, 'We don't need it anymore. We went through enough. We're not going to fight anymore. It's enough. Let's see if we can go to the United States.' "

WH: "...can you tell me what your first impressions were of this country?"

JW: "Very good."

WH: "In what way?"

JW: "People were friendly. They fed me, they treated me well, I mean the people who I stayed with they were friends of ours, of mine, anyway, and I enjoyed it very much. I was not surprised at all. And I had a vision, especially Times Square and so on."

WH: "Did you see it?"

JW: "Of course."

WH: "What was it like when you saw it compared to your vision?"

JW: "The way my vision was. Big, lots of people going where you wanted, when you wanted, be free. It gave you the feeling of being free."

WH: "...you were in D.P. camp?"

JW: "No...I lived... privately. Also went to school...dental technician school in Germany ...and then I went to Belgium...Brussels...and then I came back to Frankfurt and then my visa was ready. And in 1950 that's when I came over, and as a matter of fact, I wasn't so eager to come over here already, because I went out of Germany, and I enjoyed the life in Brussels. It's not bad at all. But it was the last chance I had to come over here, and...all my friends here and so on, and my brother would come after me too."

WH: "What year were you born?"

JW: " 1924."

WH: "After a month you went to Boston, why?"

JW: "...because that's where my sponsor was."

WH: "...did you take a train to Boston?"

JW: "Yah. From N.Y. a train and they pick me up from the train..."

WH: " Did anyone ask you about the war in those early years, Jews or other people, when you came to Boston, did anybody discuss it with you?"

JW: "Not that I can recall. I mean, what you do here is, 'How come you stayed alive.' "

WH: "Asked accusingly, or in a general curious way?"

JW: "Well, in a general, curious way or - (laughs) it depends! It's a legitimate question - "

WH: "...the kapos, it's always a question of how such people even can live

JW: "That's correct. That's correct. But, that's why they had jobs like that, so they could live with themselves too."

WH: "That's a good point."

JW: "Right. They really want to have that position."

WH: "...do you think that what happened in Europe can happen again here?"

JW: "I often think about that, and I think it can happen here. And, if I saw something even to my family, they say, 'AHH. You're always thinking about that. Right away you blame it on anti-Semitism.' I shut up but I do think about it, that it can happen, and I also, it happen to me personally, that, about anti-Semitism very often."

WH: "Isn't it true, in a way, that once something happens once, that by definition it can happen again, because it already happened?"

JW: "Yes, I would say, yes. The only thing here, what you have, even though you don't have it any more, we tried to talk into ourself...(inaudible)."

WH: "A bigger Jew."

JW: "Right! It's like a barrier before they get to us."

WH: "Do you think it's a barrier?"

JW: "Not anymore. I mean, because they will be against us..."

WH: "I mean (inaudible) Blacks and Christians, right?"

JW: "Yep."

WH: "And now Jesse Jackson came close."

JW: " (inaudible) very close. He couldn't come any closer."

WH: "If not for Dukakis, maybe he would have been the nominee."

JW: "Absolutely! Absolutely!"

WH: "Do you think that the Blacks see us in a different way than Whites do?"

JW: "Well...(inaudible) we were helping them in the late '50's, '60's, and they don't like to see us. I mean, seeing what's happening, in N.Y. and here, - ."

WH: "Do you think that we should have helped them?"

JW: "Now, seeing what I do see, I say 'no,' ."

WH: "Because they don't appreciate it."

JW: "No, they don't."

WH: "I mean, our moral obligation is to help people, - ."

JW: "Absolutely, yes."

WH: "But if they spit in your face, - ."

JW: "Of course. And yet when you talk to - I mean, it sounds like racist, but believe me, I'm not. If somebody will need any help, or do something, to me it wouldn't make any difference whether his skin is Black or White or Yellow. If you need help, you help him. But when you see after a while what's happening, like Jesse Jackson, Farrakan and the others, of course you come from the other end, you can't blame all of them, but the literature what we get nowadays, and what we read in the paper, the majority are against us."

WH: "The Latvian get togethers that you have, you go to New York for them...what it's like when you get together?"

JW: "It's very nice. You meet people what you - as far as I'm concerned, as I say again, I was a youngster, but I do know them by the name, family from the old country. And it's really a pleasure and all you talk about is about the old times. 'Where did you go,' 'How did you survive.' And so on, do you 'remember this,' and 'remember that,' and my place was different, and I did this and I did that. And all you talk about is, is about the past...and we also come to the present time, how you made out, how each one getting settled and so on, family life, community life, and so on."

WH: "Do you find that there it's difficult to talk about the war...?"

JW: "No, it's not...somehow it's different..."

WH: "It's an interesting question because you say, you don't want to talk about it, but if you fall in - ."

JW: "Right. You just - ."

WH: "Well, maybe it's because like they'll look at you and say, 'What do you mean you're not going to talk to me about it. I went through it too.'"

JW: "Right."

WH: "Maybe it's because you can skip the introduction."

JM: "...I don't know. I really don't know..."

WH: "...(pause for telephone conversation with daughter)... we were discussing something about - ."

JW: "The feeling when you are among, - ."

WH: "That there, it's possible - ."

JW: " To be open and it doesn't affect you so much...as a matter of fact, it's like a competition. One tries to overdo, - ."

WH: "Who had it tougher, you mean?"

JW: "Right. Maybe that's why. (inaudible)."

WH: "Well, associated with the idea of who had it tougher, is the (inaudible- needs translation) but on the other hand, (needs translation) which means, you know, (inaudible) 'You're here!' "In other words, if the Blacks say 'We shall overcome,' you can say, 'We did overcome,' I mean the fact is, that for all the toughness and everything, did you ever think that when you were in Stutthof, you couldn't - it's beyond the imagination to think that in 1989 you'll be sitting in a house in Milton, right?"

JW: "You couldn't. You couldn't dream about it. You live from day to day. Like when they took us out in Riga...and they took us to the crematorium...if one would take a chance...just to run away...they got it...I mean, you knew you were going to the crematorium, I'm just thinking what the human mind, how it works. You were walking, when you knew, where you were going, I mean, you knew it...and here, I mean, all together, Go! Run! - ."

WH: "And maybe half of you will make it."

JW: "And maybe even ten, never mind half...one, while we were walking, ran out of the line and...he was killed right there. Shot."

WH: "You knew you were going to the crematorium?"

JW: "Yah!...your hopes are so high, that you think (needs translation) maybe, a miracle will happen. How far the human mind thinks when it comes to you personally. And you know where you're going! From here to across the street, and yet, nobody did, except that one - and we saw what happened. - but why? And then when we're sitting there and a miracle happened."

WH: "The miracle being that the Russians came?"

JW: "No. The miracle is that I'm here."

WH: "But how?"

JW: "I expected you to answer that... when we got there in the camp and a crowd of people are already waiting there, and we saw the big, big chimneys, what you see here, that's why here when I see a chimney, a tall one..."

WH: "Industrial."

JW: "I stop and look at that. Even now...(inaudible)..."

WH: "So what hap-?"

JW: "...where I was sleeping was near the barbed wire, 'Maybe I'll get somewhere. Maybe tonight.' With my brother. Maybe we'll - run away... one day...the S.S. came and says they needs some people back on the old place to clean up...and they took us back...all of us. They took us back to the camp. Now, what does that mean?"

WH: "Luck. A miracle or whatever."

JW: "But here you knew, you were walking, you did know it was going to happen, you say 'Why didn't anybody run away? Why didn't I run away? I mean, you knew where you were going.' "

WH: "You know that...the second that you're going to run, someone's going to shoot you in the back. But if you stay, you have a chance."

JW: "This is the answer when people ask, 'How come you have survived?'"

WH: "...do you have a generally optimistic outlook on life now?"

JW: "That you have to ask my wife."

WH: "Well, you gave a hint, you told me you thought that it could happen here again, but I mean, wouldn't a miracle like that make you more optimistic? How close could you come to death, without dying, than what you just described now."

JW: "You can't."

WH: "...it should make you an optimist."

JW: "Absolutely. But it doesn't. It doesn't. There are contradictories."

WH: "It's a contradiction because you did hope that you would escape somehow...but tell me, in other words, when they asked you to go back and clean up, you didn't choose to escape."

JW: "Then you were happy to go. It's again, prolong you life, at least for a day, or two, you knew it wouldn't happen to you, they take you back, they need you for something. I mean, this was the figures. Or, I live another twelve hours. I don't have to worry about it. Twelve hours was long time! To be alive!...(inaudible)."

WH: "How come you didn't give up and say, 'I'm fed up with this terrible-'"

JW: "And what? Die? Lie down and die? And do what?"

WH: "Didn't you feel like it though at some point?"

JW: "No. There was drive to - You have to live! You have to survive! You have to live!"

WH: "...and when you dreamed of your freedom, what did you think you were going to do?"

JW: "Not at that time."

WH: "So you thought that this would be your existence the rest of your life?"

JW: "Right!...later on you develop another way of thinking, I mean, you see the different way, don't forget I was 15, 16, years old at that time. And all your thinking is about another hour, another two hours, to just to survive, to live..."

WH: "Do you ever dream about the war?"

JW: "Yah. Very often I dream."

WH: "More now than before?"

JW: "More now than before."

WH: "Why do you feel that you could talk about it now when you couldn't ten years..."

JW: "I couldn't. I just couldn't."

WH: "...you can talk to your wife, right?"

JW: "Sometimes I can, sometimes I can't. Right now, I like to watch, (inaudible) on television."

WH: "Is it hard for you to watch them?"

JW: "I don't like to watch it."

WH: "Why?"

JW: "I don't know. To see - what I did wrong, why did I do that, why didn't I do that, like you're asking questions now, why didn't I run away, why didn't I do that, why didn't I go back here, and I like to see it, it's like torturing yourself. What did I do wrong. Why am I

WH: "In a way if you feel guilty..."

JW: "Sometimes I do. Yes, I do. I admit it."

WH: "But it's a way of relieving yourself when you want to punish yourself a little bit."

JW: "Right."

WH: "Like going to shul on Yom Kippur...it's a kaporeh."

JW: "Absolutely! Absolutely!"

WH: "Do you think that they got the story right on the t.v. Winds of War, or War and Remembrance?"

JW: "Never. No. No. No."

WH: "I think this is one of those cases where the truth is worse than the fiction."

JW: "Absolutely! It's impossible to believe. People wouldn't believe that. To begin with, people wouldn't believe it. It is unbelievable."

WH: "...so when you tell people that it could happen again, and they say not, you know it's unbelievable..."

JW: "Absolutely. I don't blame them for not believing that. It's humanly impossible."

WH: "Do you think that if it happened again, that the Jews would react differently because of what they know happened already?"

JW: "I could say depends where. In Israel, yes. They would. Here, outside of Israel, I don't know. But in Israel, yes. They're not going to - if you hit me on one side, I'm not going to stretch out my other side and hit me again."

WH: "...have you ever visited Israel?"

JW: "Yes...three or four times..."

WH: "You like it? You feel comfortable there?"

JW: "Yes. Yes. I do."

WH: "Some people came here and described prejudice against them on the part of American Jews towards the 'greeners.' Did you ever experience that?"

JW: "No."

WH: "Do you think that maybe that people in Boston are just nicer?"

JW: "Well it depends. First of all, I don't like to - generalize everything. Because you can't do it. The Germans did it. All the Jews! You can't do that. I wouldn't even say ALL the Germans are guilty, which maybe you shouldn't hear that from me, but I still am not going to say that 100% Germans, they are guilty. I'm not going to say that - or that all the Blacks are anti-Semites, which is wrong. You have (inaudible) among Jews, and you have (inaudible) among the Christians."

WH: "You had kapos."

JW: "Absolutely. Percentage wise maybe not as much is among ours. But I don't believe in generalizing."

WH: "If this had happened this whole business, the concentration camps, had happened to another group of people than the Jews, do you think that they would have reacted differently than Jews?"

JW: "I think so. Because a Jew is always for years, history shows us that we always, either we run away, we speak with our other side, you hit me one side, here's my other side, and somehow we are more taking than giving back. More pacificism than just the other way around."

WH: "...when you look back on your life here in America, what would you say you're proudest of. What achievement are you most proud of?"

JW: "...family."

WH: "You'd always pick family over financial."

JW: "Yah. Absolutely."

WH: "When you say 'family' what do you mean? Are you proud of your children?"

JW: "Yes. And give them whatever you can. Not to say, give them whatever you demand, that's stupid, but give them whatever is in your ability to give. The number one is education."

WH: "Why is education so important?"

JW: "Because you live among educated people and you can only make headway with education....(inaudible) the bottom line, we know, you know, and I know, the bottom line, the name of the game as I say, - ."

WH: "The Game of Life."

JW: "Money. Okay? I mean, there's no two ways about it. Maybe it's fortunate, or unfortunate. But that's what it is. The name of the game is 'Money.' No, you have to be smart enough to be in the middle and not to take, not to live just 100% for the money. There's something else besides money. You can have millions of dollars and be unhappy. I mean this is a narrow thread what you're running and you have to be, you have to choose, you have to be - you have to have priorities. You have to know how to live. You have to have values. Not everything is money..."

END OF SIDE TWO.