

Interview with Albert & Naomi Zeder 5-24-89

AZ: I was born in Warsaw in 1910. I'm 78.

NZ: They came here to interview us from the Holocaust Center in Atlanta. So I said: 'Who can they send that would understand anything about socialism, the Bund, things like that?' We're here all alone. In New York we have friends. Here they think the Bund and communism is the same thing. We don't have nobody here. To the other survivors, if it's not Zionism, that's it'.

WH: What was your involvement with the Bund?

AZ: I was working with the leather workers union.

NZ: And I was born near Treblinka in a small town. I belonged as a 17 year old to the Zukunft. That was the stage for my age. The Bund started in 1897. We went to lectures and excursions sponsored by the Bund in Poland. Not like here, where they just play cards and watch television.

WH: When the war started, did the Poles act differently towards Jews in the Bund?

AZ: No. To them a Jew is a Jew though there were exceptions. But very few. But I ran to the Russian side during the war because I was afraid of the Poles. But I will tell you, if I could have what we had in Poland. I had such a life, such a culture, I would give up everything, every material possession that I own. In Europe I just had a roof over my head but I had culture. Here, it's all lost. I'm all alone and I can never get it back again. And that's a real tragedy. (It's interesting that he says someone like Mrs. X has no culture and Mrs. X says person B had no culture because she read Dickens and Uncle Tom's Cabin. One could only say that each person's version of what is culture can differ. To Zeder if you don't have socialism then you don't have culture.)

WH: What year were you born?

NZ: 1912. We came to the U.S. with the Marine Flasher in 1948. I got an affidavit from the Jewish Labor Committee. The trip was free. UNRRA paid for it. At first we stayed in Lafayette Street where the HIAS was.

WH: How many children do you have?

NZ: Two. A son and a daughter. My daughter is 44. Her husband is Jewish. But my son took a non-Jewish girl. But she converted like an Orthodox, she went to the mikveh and it was done with three rabbis.

WH: How come you went to Atlanta?

- AZ: We had here a relative, a grand-uncle, and he sent us \$100.00 to come. In New York we had the Bund, friends, everything. We was used to a different kind social life than they had here in Atlanta. In New York we had theaters, lectures, plays. Here everyone stays in the house, locks the doors, and watch TV or play cards. Is this a social life? When we came to Atlanta there was still a Yiddish school from the old-timers, the Americans. But the newcomers (refugees) they didn't want anything; they was a raw element; they didn't belong to any party or organization. So I considered myself a prisoner here.
- NZ: Twelve years we didn't know what it means to take a vacation. We worked seven days a week in the grocery store.
- AZ: Then I sold the store.
- WH: So why didn't you go back to New York then?
- NZ: Because they wouldn't help us then. In the beginning they would help us. Since we left, they had no obligations to us. Here too, we came on our own.
- AZ: When I came here my wife was still sick from the trip. So I begged the Federation for a doctor. So they said: 'We should get you a doctor? You have your own store.' So I went on my own to a doctor. But when I told the doctor the story, he refused to take the money, a Jewish doctor. I was insisting to pay but he said no.
- NZ: When I came here and I was in the hospital, a non-Jewish woman in the bed next to me she heard I was a survivor, she felt so much for me, more than the Jewish people. The Jewish people, when we came here, they didn't want to know from us. We talked to the American Jews but they weren't interested. They said " 'The newcomers coming, they telling us tragic stories---leave us alone.'
- AZ: All they said was: 'The Greener; the Greener!' And when we start making a few dollars, they start open their eyes. 'Look how much money they making. They probably got from overseas the money.' They was snobs.
- WH: But you had opportunities here that you didn't have in Europe.
- AZ: Absolutely. It is a good country. We have to be thankful very much to this country.
- AZ: Twice a year was coming here Jewish shows. From Arbeiter Ring. So we bought tickets. We love this. So another woman said she tried to sell tickets to a rich American couple and they said they couldn't buy tickets because they had to spend the money to support a survivor couple that they brought over. It's amazing, not to buy even a ticket.

- WH: Was there a difference between the Arbeiter Farband and the Ring?
- AZ: Yes, the Farband was a lot more Zionist. We were more with the Arbeiter Ring.
- WH: What about this school that was here when you came?
- NZ: The older people tried to get the newcomers to take it over, but we were the only family that was interested. They came from N.Y. to help us organize a branch of the Arbeiter Ring but no one was interested. They didn't know what it means. They don't read Jewish books, they don't read at all, just the TV. Even \_\_\_\_\_. She don't know nothing. In the first years we didn't want to look at her. Now, she's the leader of the group. So we stepped away. We don't wanna be involved.
- WH: Are you involved with the survivors' group here, Hemshech?
- AZ: Not at all. It's not my way, these people. First they ignore Yiddish. Everything they do in English.
- NZ: They do me a favor when they speak Yiddish. My brother came over here for six weeks from Israel and he was wondering: 'Where these people lived in Europe that they don't know Yiddish.'
- AZ: I'll give you an idea what an element this is. Last week was here Abba Eban. So I went to hear him. I love to hear Abba Eban whenever he speaks. So I told a few newcomers. So they said " 'I hear from already.' One time and that's it!
- NZ: The same with Elie Wiesel. \_\_\_\_\_said: 'I heard him already.'
- WH: So how did you survive here?
- AZ: I was crying always. Now I'm telling you.....
- NZ: We gave up already. It's too late to move.
- WH: Why didn't you return when you sold the grocery store?
- NZ: Because when we sold, we had \$8,000 left. So we invested a little in real estate. We bought eight units. And we cleared \$100.00 a month. That was then a lot of money. And we took in investors from N.Y., our friends. We helped them.
- WH: I spoke with your next door neighbor, Wind.
- NZ: Wind. Why you talk with him?

- WH: My friend Ben Hirsch said to talk with everybody.
- NZ: Oh, he's a millionaire. Works seven days a week in the grocery and they don't go nowhere. He was in the worst camps. He's nothing. Now he's crazy. They never go to a movie. They never go to a restaurant.
- AZ: He's the only newcomer that still stays in a grocery. Everyone else, they go rid of the grocery. They don't go to Israel. (In fact, they did.)
- WH: Do you subscribe to the Forwards?
- AZ: Of course. We got every Yiddish paper here, seven of them, everything. You name it. We got every Jewish publication. Come down to the basement here. I show you. I got here a thousand records. Every Jewish record I got. This is my only enjoyment. Every Saturday or Sunday morning. I hurry to do it. I put the records and I listen. My wife is mad at me. I live in the past, not in the future. (Not at all religious but goes on R.H. and Y.K.)
- WH: Tell me, are you sorry you didn't go to Israel? Do you think you would have been happier there?
- NZ: Socially, yes. Much happier. I have friends there.
- WH: How do you vote here?
- AZ: Democrat. This time though, I vote for Bush because of Jackson.
- WH: Do you think the blacks are basically anti-Semitic?
- NZ: Oh, and how. They are.
- WH: Do you feel sorry for them?
- AZ: Oh yeah. I do. They don't have it so good, a hard life here and the hatred is not for nothing, really. But the Jews tried to help them.
- NZ: They came into the store, they buy beer and wine; the children without shoes--this was years ago. They spend and Jews are saving the money.