

## Roy Meachum

# Ex-Nazis

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First of three parts

Jack Kennedy's first summer in the White House passed for me at Jennie Grossinger's Catskills complex.

The *grande dame* of this nation's Jewish resort hotels was warming up to write her autobiography by talking to a number of writers; I was that summer's choice. I came as no stranger.

My association with Grossinger's had begun 10 years before, while serving in the army with singer Eddie Fisher, whose career first took off under Jennie's loving eye.

In 1961, Adolph Eichman spent waking hours in a bullet-proof glass booth. Each day's events in that Israeli courtroom became a topic the next morning at Grossinger's staff table, where I was the only non-Jew.

It must not be imagined that my different religion placed me in an uncomfortable position. In American life, writers are generally treated as outsiders, except among Jews. Their tradition accords consideration to anyone whose work requires scholarship. My closest friend that summer was my spiritual mentor, the resident rabbi, a Lithuanian survivor of Hitler's death camps.

At those breakfasts, unattended by the rabbi, I was in the position of filling in general details omitted in the New York tabloids, which were the staple source for information on the trial. Service among the Germans in the first post-war years had prompted my study of the Nazi regime.

As might be expected, considering the tabloids' reporting style, the Grossinger's table talk dwelt on the more sensational aspects of the revelations from Jerusalem. This resulted in sometimes heated arguments among a few staff members, a "family quarrel" from which I abstained.

Not everyone in that Jewish-American circle agreed the mass murderer should be given a show trial, however "educational" the process. One view expressed was that Eichman should have received summary execution, "like the dog he is."

Several people held against a fatal sentence altogether, but for different reasons.

A quick death, one reasoning went, would be too merciful: the man respon-

sible for the ultimate Nazi cruelties should be forced to live as a punishment: his prison life approximating conditions in the camps.

Another staff member proposed simply that Israel should forego execution as a symbol of Jewish respect for human life, even when that life belonged to the man once in charge of wiping out all Jews.

At any rate, I was impressed at the time by the diversity that reigned about a man whose bureaucratic zeal had slaughtered millions simply because of their religion. In that other place at that other time my morning companions could have been Nazi victims.

My departure from Grossinger's came before Eichman's eventual execution; Jennie was not yet ready to commit her memories to paper. I was not on hand for the final summations at the breakfast table.

From this perspective, that Israeli courtroom with its protective glass booth was the last place to teach successfully the dreadful lessons of the Holocaust. Every other attempt has floundered on its overly simplified approach.

The recurring television specials — an NBC program on the SS was the latest —

are bad history: tabloid story-lines fit for cartoons. They fail simply because they seek to show anti-semitism as the reason for the existence of the Nazi movement.

In fact, Hitler made no official moves against Jews until two years after gaining control of the Berlin government. In his jockeying for power, his anti-semitism was restrained by his need to build a coalition. In that phase, he emphasized his anti-communism to receive the support of businessmen, including Jews.

The case can be made that Hitler ordered the slaughter of storm trooper leaders, in the Night of the Long Knives, because the brown-shirts' harassment of Jews hindered the Nazi attempts to attain respectability, at least as a facade.

In any event, no one approaching Eichman's long personal involvement in the Nazi carnage has been captured since.

New dimensions to the horror could

have been developed by bringing before world opinion Martin Bormann, Hitler's most "faithful" deputy, and the notorious concentration camp medical sadist, Josef Mengele. As Eichman, they both escaped during the collapse of the Third Reich.

Had death not grabbed them first, their trials would have gained the entire world's sympathetic consideration for the terrible fate of European Jews.

Klaus Barbie's trial produced only intermittent insights for anyone concerned about another Holocaust.

As a Gestapo officer in Lyons, Barbie did his barbaric best to create a Nazi hell in that one corner of France. However, his personal sadism exceeded the "norm" for even Hitler's secret police; he was sentenced to prison for his remaining years because of his criminal acts as an individual.

Among Nazidom's legion of gangsters, Klaus Barbie remained a minor functionary, never rising above the second-lowest officer's rank.

Another lowly former first lieutenant in Hitler's service is grabbing media space these days. On the public facts, Kurt Waldheim deserves no placement among the Nazi pantheon of perverted human beings.

Before continuing with this three-part series, I must confess I learned to despise the Austrian while he headed the United Nations. For me, he oozed the oily obsequiousness of a high-priced hotel headwaiter.

At any rate, the selection of each U.N. secretary general is a twisting, morally sterile process finally settled by the superpowers at the pleasure of the numerous Third World nations. It is bump-and-run politics at its rawest.

Waldheim's elevation to the world organization's top job carried no "best man" connotation. He was simply the most acceptable to the voting members at that time. His election signified chiefly international recognition for Austria, the West-leaning "neutral" rump remaining from the once-mighty Hapsburg empire.

When he first appeared on the world scene, Kurt Waldheim was little more than a symbol. That's all he remains today.

Unfortunately, as a symbol, the current Austrian president threatens greater damage to the cause of those concerned with anti-semitism than he could ever present as a German army staff lieutenant.

**Wednesday: WALDHEIM**