

Arnold Zweig

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Answer: And I'm saying you can't blame the whole population.

Question: You don't see that it was a whole country that...

Answer: You cannot say all Poles are bad. You can't say all Russians are bad. You can't say all Turks, all Arabs, you can't do that. You can't ration... just generalize. And as far as I am concerned, I've made this speech many, many times to different schools. I've spoken to high schools, I've spoken to teachers, to Rotary Clubs, to Kiwanis Clubs, Lions Clubs. I've always prefaced my speech in explaining to these people... a lot of them are of German ancestry here. A lot of kids have German parents... came over here. I don't want to give those kids a complex either but when I'm talkin about this I'm not talkin actually about Germans. I'm talkin about a system, a political system that was known as Nazism. That was bad... just like you can't say all Russians. Communism was bad but I'm sure there were a lot of decent Russians that were just nice people, wanted the same things that you and I want. They just want to live and enjoy life.

So you cannot blame; personally I cannot blame people that are younger than I am that were born way after the war... what can I blame them. They didn't do anything to me. On the other hand I have had very, all along I've had very few German acquaintances or good relationships with people that were a heck of a lot older than I was. Because the question was always in the back of my mind... Were you one of them? Were you a concentration camp guard? Were you a Nazi? But people that were of my age and younger, what the heck... they were probably, they were born after the war and they had a different ideology, even today they think differently, but they also need to know of what happened.

Question: And it does get forgotten, doesn't it?

Answer: I don't know. There was a long time Germany tried to, the education system, tried to sort of brush it under the rug, like it never happened; but it is not... there is some... As I see Israel and Germany have patched up, have some relations. Germans have made restitution and trying to do this and that and the other and they are very conscious of that period of time and it is the newer generation that actually started asking the question. It's the older generation that tried to not speak about it. It was the younger generation that wanted to know about it and they wanted to bring it out in the open. They wanted to know and they are the ones I take it that have taken some steps for those things not to happen. And, although there are still some of the old, engrained, call them Neo Nazis that you see here and there, but I hope that they will stay in the minority and that the rest of the world's keeping an eye on it.

Question: Do you think the younger generation is bringing it up because they want to prevent it from happening again?

Answer: I think so. I think they're ashamed of what happened and they want to know and just don't want it to happen. They don't think it is right.

Question: I think and again as I listen to you create these images, different things that triggered my mind... it was your country that took you as a prisoner so when you were set free it wasn't like, here you're free, go back to your country. It was...

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Answer: I was already there. I've always thought of myself as from Germany even though Danzig was a free city, but still the language was German. I always thought of myself as a German of Jewish religion and that's the way it was in World War I. There was so many Jews in WWI that were in the service, that were officers. They were in the Army. They were Jews but they were German military, military people like we have in the United States.

Question: Now your Mom was not Jewish originally, right?

Answer: She converted; she converted.

Question: And your wife is not Jewish?

Answer: She converted as well.

Question: But when you met her..

Answer: No, she was no, she was in the... on the outside. She had been in the labor service. She wasn't much better off with the exception. I guess she was exposed if you want to say that is bad too. She was exposed to the bombings because she had to work in a munitions factory and they were subject to bombings but she was as young as I was and foolish and just eventually towards the end ran away from there, became AWO, and went home. And fortunately for her the thing ended before anything serious could come of that. But she didn't have anything to eat; she didn't, she was exposed to things. The only thing she wasn't exposed to was systematic killing like we were that you wound up in a camp where you systematically were eliminated. She didn't have to worry about. But as I said, a lot of those citizens were exposed to the bombing raids which were unpleasant... but it, somehow it had to be done in order to get this thing over with.

Question: When you came out of the camp, were you, had you lost a lot of weight? Would you...

Answer: I was skinny. I was undernourished. I hadn't had any, I hadn't had... eaten an egg, drank any milk, had no butter for four or five years. Just the necessary staples, in limited amounts, but somehow I managed to stay healthy. Again, I don't know what caused it but I was stayed healthy. I wasn't sick. If you were sick you were done. You were gone. So, I took the first few months to normalize, to, as I said, we left the camp, moved into an apartment in the local town. My Father engaged himself with the military authorities and the German authorities, such as they were, to try to repatriate these people that were from Hungary, wanted to go to Hungary; and those that were from Poland wanted to go to Poland so he was trying to provide food, clothing. There was a local shoe factory that my Father went and talked to and the shoe factory donated so many pairs of shoes. There was a couple of railroad cars on a siding with bolts of cloth of material that was distributed and the people used the cloth to make clothing to sew suits so all of the surviving... many, many, many of the surviving men all had the same suits of the same color of the same material but they had clothing. And the local farmers and the population donated food and all that, so the transition was reasonably calm and of course my thought was...Well I had always from as far as I remember, I wanted to be an engineer so eventually the subject came up. I haven't had any schooling for all these years; I have to somehow continue where it stopped. So my Father organized private tutors on the local, from the local population and I went to

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their houses every day, every day, spent every day getting fed with education that I had missed until I got to the point after by 1948-49... by 1949 I was at the point where I could enter regular high school as a regular student and go one more year and a half from that high school and then graduate as a regular student with having brought up what I had missed. And then, I graduated and eventually I went to Munich. I got a scholarship from... I went to the University of Munich, studied engineering, studied there for a year. Then I did get a scholarship from Montana State University and I came over to the states with the intention of staying here and I stayed here and graduated and came out Hoquiam on my first job in January, 1955; and I've been here ever since. I worked two years in Hoquiam for Lamb Grays Harbor. You should know them.

Question: I know 'em well.

Answer: And had the pleasure, or displeasure of meeting Isabelle and left Lamb Grays Harbor after two years and went to work for Simpson and worked for Simpson in Shelton from December '56 till '83... twenty-seven years of service.

Question: Last question... Is there something that the history books is leaving out that you feel needs to be documented for generations that you and I'll never meet.

Answer: I don't know what history books have in and don't have in. It's hard for me to tell you what's left out. I don't know. I don't see the history books.

Question: Is there something we need for future generations to know about what happened or do you think it's within your story that...

Answer: I, I, I don't know. All I... I think that, and this is not my original thought, this comes from William Shire who said that the Nazis were capitalizing on the typical Jewish attitude of well, if we cooperate they're not so bad... it's okay, it's okay. That's the way they got us from here to there, from there to there and from there to there and eventually to there, always with the thought, well you're going to another camp. You're going to somewhere else. Things will be all right and Jews saying yeah, well, yeah... okay. Well, the families will be together; we'll be working so we work for them so we don't get so much to eat but we'll, we'll survive until you wind up as it is said that even the gas chamber said that it was a bath, you're taking a shower and they had regular, regular showerheads and once the doors were locked and people were in there, Zyklon gas came out of the heads even to that moment was given them the soap and the things people were lead to believe they were gonna take a shower. So I don't what else to tell you.

Question: Could it happen again?

Answer: I'm an optimist. I wanna say no. We need to, we need to do this and we do need to preserve. The other thing is that I keep telling all our audiences is that we in the states are fortunate that we can express our voices by voting, that we have the right to vote. We should, every vote counts, we should express our feelings by voting. We shouldn't say that my vote doesn't count. This was not the case in Germany. The Germans by the time Germany was where they were they were sucked into... it was too late. When, when, when it, when it was that the kids in school had to report that their parents had said something nasty, derogatory about Hitler, that you got the kids in school to turn in your parents and the

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neighbors were turning, you couldn't speak to anybody. They had built a system, not any different than what the NKBD or the KGB had built in Russia, where everybody was turning everybody in. And Hitler had based his thing on a fear tactic: Wake 'em up in the middle of the night. Knock on the door; arrest somebody; drag 'em away. Everybody was afraid of everybody. Nobody could say anything. So, and, at the time, the only other thing is that I can see that at the time when Hindenburg passed away and Hitler sort of came to power there was a void there. Hitler came, was a dynamic speaker. He promised this, that and the other. Germany was in a recession. There was a big unemployment after World War I, and he promised all of this work and employment for everybody so they fell for it. And, but, by the time, but you had to belong to the party. If you didn't belong to the party you didn't have a job and people needed jobs so by the time that people realized what is happening, I think, it was too late. They couldn't say anything. It was too late. They were just in the system. I'm sure there were a lot of the German citizens that, well you know, that even the Army tried eventually tried to make a deal with the Allies, they tried to assassinate Hitler, they tried to make some kind of an honorable.. Even they realized that things had gone way out but it was too late, it was too late and you see what happened to them.

Question: Did you ever hear Hitler speak?

Answer: Not in person, not any more than by recordings of what I hear after the war.

Question: So, never over the loud speaker?

Answer: No, I never, No, no I never was anywhere there. Even if would've had the opportunity, I was keeping a low profile away from masses like that... don't want to be seen in the gathering of 50,000 SS people. Good, good way to get killed right there and then. Nope.

Question: Well thank you. I want to get you unmiked.