

MY STRUGGLE

A Radio Play by Cindi Sansone-Braff

Cindi Sansone-Braff

38 Clinton Avenue,

East Patchogue, NY 11772-6128

631-879-3287

cindisansonebraff@gmail.com



MEMBER

My Struggle

A Radio Play by Cindi Sansone-Braff

CHARACTERS:

DR. KASPER: Man, Age 100, and varying other ages, Viennese accent.

MAGDALENA: Woman, Age 20s, Polish accent.

THE YOUNG MAN: Man, Age 20, Bavarian accent

REBEKAH: Woman, Age late 20s, Viennese accent.

THE FOUR LEAD CHARACTERS: Can double as THE STAFF, RADIO ANNOUNCER, OMINOUS VOICE, SMALL CROWD, MALE PRISONER, and OTTO FRANK.

SETTING:

The Sunnydale Nursing Home, New York City

TIME:

March 31, 1981

Set in 1981, the day after the failed assassination attempt of Ronald Reagan by John Hinkley Jr., the Sunnydale Nursing Home celebrates the hundredth birthday of their oldest resident, Dr. Abraham Kasper. A holocaust survivor, Dr. Kasper takes a disturbing trip down memory lane as he laments the dire consequences of not listening to divine guidance.

Scene: INT: A NURSING HOME, March 31, 1981

THE STAFF: (SINGING) HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DR. KASPER, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU. HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW? HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW? HOW OLD ARE YOU, DR. KASPER? HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?

DR. KASPER: (SINGING) I AM A HUNDRED YEARS OLD. I AM HUNDRED YEARS OLD. OY VEY, HOW THE HELL DID THAT HAPPEN? I AM A HUNDRED YEARS OLD!

FX: LOUD LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE.

STAFF MEMBER: (SHOUTING) Blow out the candles!

DR. KASPER: You want I should drop dead?

FX: LAUGHTER AND THEN DR. KASPER STRUGGLING TO BLOW OUT THE CANDLES.

DR. KASPER: Get the ventilator!

FX: LAUGHTER.

STAFF MEMBER: Speech! Speech!

DR. KASPER: For starters, I want to thank the amazing staff here at the Sunnydale Nursing Home for putting up with the likes of me for the last decade. You would think by now I would know enough already to lay down and die!

FX: LAUGHTER.

DR. KASPER:

Next, I want to thank all of you for the wonderful birthday wishes, cards, balloons, and gifts. I hardly know what to do with some of them! Let me give you a for instance: this Rubik's Cube. I sat here for the first two hours of this shindig fiddling with this 3-D combination puzzle and mindblower, and nothing, could you believe — nothing solved. Though, it got me thinking. Could this be a metaphor for life? The more you try to figure out the damn thing, the more puzzling it becomes.

I have inhabited this earth for ten decades, so you would think, by now, I would have mastered this thing called life. But no! Not by a long shot. It will, maybe, take me another hundred years to figure out this Magic Cube with its three billion combinations. As for this crazy thing called life, with its gazillion moving parts, mastering it, why, that is never going to happen! Take it from me. What I have learned from a century of traversing this earth is this: Just when you think you have found the answers, they change the questions!

FX: LAUGHTER.

DR. KASPER:

But now, with a gift like this — a Magic 8-Ball, perhaps, I can finally find the answers to all my most troubling questions,

DR. KASPER (Cont.) like will I live forever? Let me shake this thing up a bit. I do not see an answer. Perhaps the all-knowing Oracle has gone fishing?

FX. LAUGHTER.

STAFF MEMBER: Hold the Magic 8-Ball with the window facing down. Then ask your question. For the answer, turn it so the window faces up.

DR. KASPER: There is a method to this madness. Will I live forever? "It is certain."

FX: THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

DR. KASPER: I especially want to thank Ms. Dottie Goldstein for baking that delicious birthday cake - Devil's Food. It reminds me of the delightful but decadent Sachertorte in Vienna.

STAFF MEMBER: What's your secret to longevity, Dr. Kasper?

DR. KASPER: The six-million-dollar question! Magic 8-Ball, should I divulge such classified information? The all-seeing, oversized eight-ball says, "Yes-definitely!" So, there you have it! Are you listening? The secret to a long life is to eat a lot of onions and garlic! It keeps viruses, bacteria, vampires, and toxic people away!

FX: LAUGHTER.

DR. KASPER: Let me see if the Magic 8-Ball agrees. "Yes, you may rely on it!" Once again, a big thank you for this amazing gift of prophecy!

STAFF MEMBER: Let us toast to that!

DR. KASPER: L'chaim! When I was a young lad in Vienna, there were always fortune tellers with their oracle cards roaming the streets. Back then, if one of them had come up to me and said, "Abraham, I predict you will live to be a centenarian celebrating your long life in the greatest city in the world, New York," I would have shouted, "Not possible!" But look, it is so.

Now, if you do not mind, this has been, by far, one of the finest days of my hundred-year saga, but I am going to wheel myself back to my room and play with all my new toys. Again, from the bottom of my stent-filled heart, I am most grateful for all you have done to make this a day to remember.

Oh! Take a Look-see! Out the window. Snow. The sky surprised us during the first week of March with the season's biggest snowfall. We all know that March comes in like a lion, but for crying out loud, on the last day of the month, it should be going out like a lamb already!

STAFF MEMBER: Dr. Kasper, the angels are tossing white confetti to honor your birthday!

DR. KASPER: Just enough snowflakes to cover up the dirty slush still piled all over the sides of the streets. A good thing, right? Well, then, I will go to my room and watch the snow fall, much better than what is on the boob tube nowadays. Again, thank you.

FX. LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE, AND CHEERS.

FX. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A LONE WHEELCHAIR MAKING ITS WAY DOWN THE LONG CORRIDOR WHILE THE NOISE FROM THE PARTY GROWS DIMMER. THE WHEELCHAIR STOPS, AND A DOOR CLOSES.

FX. DR. KASPER TURNS ON A RADIO.

RADIO ANNOUNCER: Yesterday, March 30, 1981, outside of the Washington Hilton Hotel, with less than a hundred days into Ronald Reagan's first year in office, John Hinckley Jr. attempted to assassinate the president.

FX. A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. DR. KASPER TURNS OFF THE RADIO.

DR. KASPER: Now what?

FX. ANOTHER KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

DR. KASPER: Yes, yes. Come in.

FX. THE DOOR OPENS

DR. KASPER: Ah, it is you, Magdalena. The best birthday gift of all. My favorite aide! Such a pretty girl who does not speak a word of English but smiles so gently at me and never complains. How tragic to think she must spend her youth changing this *alte kaker's* dirty diapers and bearing witness to a wrinkled hundred-year-old *tochas*. Life can be so cruel sometimes. Oh, Magdalena, you should be out dancing, romancing, making love, making babies, making mischief, not locked away among the dead and dying.

FX. AS SHE IS CHANGING HIS DIAPER, HE LETS OUT A FART.

DR. KASPER: Oh, excuse me! So sorry.

FX. MAGDALENA GIGGLES.

DR. KASPER: Glad you find this amusing! Here, I worry that I will gas this poor Polish girl to death as she wipes down my bottom, and she laughs. Farts and giggles! The universal language. Did I ever tell you that my *bubbe* and *zayde* came from Warsaw to live with us in Vienna, the selfsame year I was born, 1881? I remember hearing the word pogrom a great deal when I was a boy, and you know how children's ears are like radar, but I had little understanding of how one word could possess so much power. When that six-letter word was uttered, the grownups in my

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) house would speak in whispers, but the sorrow in their eyes and the horror on their faces, I could decipher ... that I could fully comprehend, and so I knew the word pogrom was a word I should fear. However, *Bubbe's* Yiddish expressions were always a pleasure to hear. They were a source of great amusement to me, but my mother constantly scolded her for teaching me them. My parents wanted all of us to completely assimilate into the Viennese culture and leave the old world behind. Years later, when the tides turned on Jews and the city of Vienna turned on me, I realized my *bubbe* had been right when she said, "You will learn how wrong it is to turn your back on a way of life that loves you, to embrace one that despises you. You can dress like them. You can look like them. You can talk like them, but no matter how much you try to be like them, Abraham, to them, you will always be a Jew. And one day, they will hunt you down. They always do!" On her deathbed, she whispered in my ear, "May the God of your ancestors be with you all the days of your life."

So, my dear, everyone kept asking me today, "Dr. Kasper, how did you live to be one hundred?" "Eat lots of onions and garlic!" Always the jokester! That is me! Why tell the truth? There is nothing worse in this

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) world than to have to listen to the

kvetching of an old *mashugana* who has lost his faith. And so, I smile and laugh, dole out bits of wisdom, offer words of praise and encouragement. Why, I even willingly partake in whatever lame entertainment the "Rah rah, sis boom bah!" recreation director has concocted for the amusement of the residents, whether it be the boredom of BINGO Night or the banality of the brain games. I am, however, always careful to give the illusion that I am a team player, a pious and righteous man.

"Dr. Kasper is a living saint," they say. "He's always upbeat and fun!" "Dr. Kasper always has a smile on his face!"

Illusion. Life is so much grandstanding, pretension, peacocking, propaganda, if you will. "The Big Lie," we tell because the truth is too brutal to bear. And besides, who would believe the truth if I told them?

But Magdalena, because you must suffer the indignity of giving this decrepit body a sponge bath, and since you cannot understand more than a few words of English, this will not interfere with my vow to take my deep, dark secret of longevity to the grave. Just

DR. KASPER (Cont.) between you and me, sadly, no one else who knew this secret ever lived to tell. So, on this snowy March night, on the hundred-year celebration of my life, I will tell you the tale of how Abraham Kasper, a family physician from Vienna, came to live to be the oldest resident in the Sunnydale Nursing Home. A hundred years is an obscenely long time to live, now, isn't it?

Warning: this bedtime story is much darker than any Grimm's fairy tale, and this surprise spring snowfall, Magdalena, is a sign from God that he has not forgotten me. It is a little special effect from on high to add to this grisly tale that began a long, long time ago on a freezing, blustery, snowy December evening.

Back then, there were a few streetlights illuminating the city; after all, this was Vienna 1909. But the snow, coming down in droves, obscured the lights, and lying in the gutter was a young man sporting a scraggly brown, shoulder-length mane with an odd clump of greasy hair glued to his forehead. A ragged beard covered his gaunt, chalky-white face, and his scrawny body was buried beneath a worn, grey overcoat, several sizes too big for him, complete with gigantic holes in the elbows. The soles of

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) his shoes were worn through and stuffed with paper dripping blood all over the pure white snow. And did he smell ... a sickening blend of sweat, stale urine, and rancid breath. But ultimately, he reeked of death.

When I brushed his hair aside to check his temperature, he pushed my hand away, frantically smoothing the matted hair back over his forehead as if I had ruined his coiffure. I said, "Despite the frigid temperatures, you are burning up." He did not answer me but stared at me like a wounded animal, waiting for me to put him out of his misery. I felt sorry for the lad, so frail, delirious, half-starved to death. Surely you must have parents. You cannot be more than 15 or 16 years old."

THE YOUNG MAN: (SPEAKING IN A BAVARIAN ACCENT AND GASPING FOR BREATH.) I am 20. My father and mother are both dead. Today, 21 December, is the second anniversary of my mother's death. Breast cancer. She was a very good mother.

DR. KASPER: May her memory be a blessing. I suspect you have pneumonia. Do you live nearby?

THE YOUNG MAN: I am homeless. I was staying in a shelter in

THE YOUNG MAN (Cont.) Meidling but fought with some fellows there and left. I have been living on park benches, but the police always order me to move on. For days on end, I have been walking and walking until I could walk no more and collapsed here on the street.

DR. KASPER:

You have traveled far ... and it is cold and raw. It is no wonder you are exhausted.

Now, let me clarify something, Magdalena. In 1909, when I first encountered that homeless creature on the street, I was a young doctor, all of twenty-eight, living a happy life in a fine home with my beautiful wife, Rebekah, and my two lovely, small children, Sarah and Samuel.

I hesitated to bring this street urchin into my home, but how could I live with myself if I left him out there to freeze to death?

As I helped him to his feet, I heard a voice scream, "Leave him where he fell." I looked up and down the street, but there was no one around for blocks and blocks, and when I grabbed his hand, I felt as if I were being electrocuted. Again, I heard the same voice scream, "Do not touch him. Leave him where he fell!"

FX. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AS DR. KASPER WALKS UP AND DOWN THE STREET.

DR. KASPER: I am a doctor! I took the Hippocratic Oath. If I leave him here, he will surely die! Perhaps I was in the presence of a dybbuk, a demon, a poltergeist, or a golem. God only knows. I am certain it was something otherworldly, but I was a man of science. I did not believe in such things.

OMINOUS VOICE: Leave him where he falls!

DR. KASPER: Did you hear that?

THE YOUNG MAN: Hear what?

DR. KASPER: An ominous voice.

THE YOUNG MAN: No, I heard nothing. It is quiet. Quiet as death. (PAUSE) I am an artist. I often roam the city painting postcards of street scenes, statues, and buildings, but it has been too brutally cold to do so. It is how I make my living. If I cannot paint, I cannot eat. If I cannot eat, I cannot live.

DR. KASPER: I imagine there is nothing glamorous about being a starving artist.

OMINOUS VOICE: Leave him!

DR. KASPER: Surely, you heard that!

THE YOUNG MAN: No, but it could be the angel of death summoning me.

DR. KASPER: When I brought him into my home, my wife took one look at the disheveled mess of a young man and let me have it.

REBEKAH: Are you going to rescue every starving artist in Vienna? That is the job of the Rothschild and Gutmann families, who gave all that money to the homeless men's dormitory. Let him take his germs, fleas, and lice to the Brigittenau district, where he belongs. Abraham, must you always be a fool for every stray cat and vagabond in the neighborhood?

DR. KASPER: Oh, Magdalena, poor child. You always look at me with such knowing sorrow as you wash my left forearm with my numerical tattoo. That is a ghastly token of remembrance from my stay at the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. From the look of horror on your face, I can tell, yes, yes, you know what that place was. Let me set the record straight, Magdalena. The Nazis had such respect for our Jewish traditions: could you

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) believe we ate every day like it was Yom Kippur! Perhaps you have visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum? I see the guilt in your eyes, unearned, my dear. You were not even born when those atrocities took place. I have been to the museum myself. Trust me, it does not do that hellhole justice. One would have to be there during the Nazi regime to register the full impact of that slaughterhouse with its Tower of Death, savage SS officers, and vicious barking dogs. And let us not forget the wall of fences with electrified barbed wire that kept us caged like animals and the endless roll calls that went on from here to eternity. Sweet, Magdalena, you are now washing my knees, wondering about those scars. Those are souvenirs from the spring of 1938, after the *Anschluss*, the "Rape of Austria," when I, a well-respected doctor, was ordered to spend the day on my knees, scrubbing the Schuschnigg slogans off the streets of Vienna. Should I live to be as old as Methuselah, I will never forget that day.

The pure white snow had fallen the night before, but by then, the street was covered with filthy slush. Kneeling and prostrating

DR. KASPER (Cont.) before the laughing, jeering, sneering crowds, I fought back tears of rage, shame, and humiliation.

A SMALL CROWD: (SHOUTING) *Deutschland Erwache!* Germany Awake! *Juda Verrecke!* Jewry Croak! One people, one Empire, one leader! Jew perish! When the Jewish blood spurts from the knife!

DR. KASPER: I saw Jewish shops graffitied with the Star of David, and the word "JEW" scribbled across their front windows with dripping blood-colored paint.

Hours and hours later, exhausted and limping, I made my way home, stopping now and again to read the signs on the doors of the shops saying, "Jews Keep Out!"

Oh, Magdalena, believe me when I say this: Had I known then, what I know now, I would have blown my brains out right then and there in front of the jackboot-stumping, heel-clicking, steel-helmeted Nazi soldiers and the hordes of Hitler worshippers, who shouted, "At last the Jews are working!"

Ah, you are wiping the chocolate from my finger. That is from when I smeared my name across my birthday cake. I bet you like chocolate. Here. Eat my piece. It isn't good for my diabetes. Perhaps the staff of the

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) Sunnydale nursing home wants me dead? Death by chocolate. I imagine there are worse ways to go. Sit. Rest. Nosh and I will tell you about a bitterly cold 1945 mid-January day when a snowstorm raged, and the SS guards were more out of their minds than usual as the Russian forces advanced toward the death camp. For months, our captors tried frantically to destroy the evidence of their massive crimes. Piece by piece dismantling the structures, including the infamous "Wall of Death," where the SS shot down several thousand people, mostly Polish political prisoners, and members of clandestine anti-Nazi organizations. They had already demolished the small crematorium and gas chamber, and on this day, they began blowing up the place with dynamite. Amidst the chaos and the rumbling and the deafening noise, heavily armed SS troops were given orders to begin the final evacuation and liquidation of the camp.

MALE PRISONER: I heard the guards say, "We will shoot anyone who stays behind and then torch the barracks."

OTTO FRANK: (FIFTY-EIGHT YEARS OLD SPEAKING WITH A GERMAN ACCENT.) They say a lot of things.

DR. KASPER: Anyone well enough to leave, I would advise you to do so. You will be walking west to Wodzislaw.

MALE PRISONER: That is more than 60 kilometers away! Surely, we will all freeze to death!

DR. KASPER: When you get to Wodzislaw, you will be transported by trains to concentration camps in Germany to be used as slave labor.

OTTO FRANK: I cannot even stand up. To look at me here, now, in this condition, and in this godforsaken hellhole, who would believe during WW I, I was a respected German officer, Lieutenant Otto Frank, decorated for bravery in the Western Front? And the thanks I get for my service to the motherland will be a bullet in my back.

MALE PRISONER: But according to Hitler, it was the Jews' fault in the first place that Germany lost the Great War because we "stabbed Germany in the back!"

OTTO FRANK: I will stay put and place my faith in the Red Army, liberating us.

DR. KASPER: I will remain here to care for those who

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) choose to stay behind. As for the rest of you, gather up as many warm clothes as you can find.

MALE PRISONER: Those Nazi bastards know full well most of us will not survive this death march. Better they should gun us all down now.

FX: DR. KASPER SOBBING.

DR. KASPER: Thank you, Magdalena, for wiping my tears. I have not cried in years, but look at me now. On my hundredth birthday, I am wailing like a baby. (LONG PAUSE) I need a sleeping pill.

FX: SOUND OF DR. KASPER FUMBLING WITH HIS PILL BOTTLE AND SWALLOWING A PILL.

DR. KASPER: I pray that puts me out of my misery.

Oh, my dear, by now, you must be wondering what became of that young, homeless man, the one I had rescued from certain death.

On the first night he stayed with us, I went into his room to check on him. When I took his pulse, he reacted like a horror-stricken animal, fearing for his life. I said, "I didn't mean to frighten you. I was trying to see if your fever broke." The young man trembled in his bed. If ever I moved too quickly toward him, he jerked his

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) hand up to protect his face as if expecting me to strike him. My God, I thought, what horrible things this young man must have experienced in the middle of the night.

"I will leave you alone to get some sleep. Good night," I said.

FX: SOUND OF DR. KASPER SHUTTING OFF A LAMP.

THE YOUNG MAN: I am terrified of the dark.

DR. KASPER: There's a simple and final solution to that problem.

FX: SOUND OF LAMP BEING TURNED ON.

DR. KASPER: Leave a light on!

THE YOUNG MAN: (BARELY AUDIBLE.) Thank you, sir, for not banishing the light.

DR. KASPER: On another night, he woke my entire household with his blood-curdling screams.

FX: SOUND OF THE YOUNG MAN SCREAMING AND FOOTSTEPS AS DR. KASPER RUSHES TO HELP HIM.

DR. KASPER: Wake up! Wake up! You are having a nightmare!

THE YOUNG MAN: I dreamed a man entered my room and forced something into my mouth. I was terrified that I would choke to death! (THE YOUNG MAN STARTS MUTTERING TO HIMSELF AND FLIES INTO A FIT OF ANGER, RAGING AT NO ONE IN PARTICULAR. THEN THE WHOLE BIZARRE EPISODE ENDS WITH A BOUT OF HYSTERICAL CRYING.)

DR. KASPER: Growing up in his household, I suspected there must have been many dark secrets, but I was not a psychiatrist, and I did not dwell upon the matter.

This odd young man, for the most part, was quiet, but once he opened up, he had more opinions than anyone I had ever known. Not all of them wrong, mind you, many of them quite well thought out, but he was immature for his age, and I attributed his skewed perceptions to his childlike inability to distinguish opinion from fact.

But, with God as my witness, I swear, there was nothing extraordinary about this young man, no nothing at all.

One night, when I asked him about his parents, he stated, "I honored my father, but I loved my mother."

Once, during dinner, without any prompting, he said, "My father wanted me to be a civil

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) servant, which I told him, 'I would never be!'" He then added angrily, "My father always eyeballed me up and down, and that always made me nervous."

I laughed, saying, "Well, you said he was a customs official; he probably eyeballed everyone the same way!" I thought that might make him laugh or at least chuckle, but no, he was a serious young man who never seemed to find anything amusing.

Hanukkah had come early that year and was over by the time he came to us, but all of Vienna was bustling with the Christmas season. Although this young man was Catholic, he expressed no interest in going out to see any of the holiday festivities, even though he claimed he was feeling much better.

My wife slowly began to warm up to him, and one night, in bed, we started talking about him.

REBEKAH: He is such a momma's boy, making it doubly tragic that he was orphaned so young. Would it be all right if I bought him some clothes and a pair of new shoes? We can give them to him as Christmas gifts.

DR. KASPER: Even if I said no, that wouldn't stop you,

DR.KASPER: (Cont.) now, would it? You spoil everyone, including me. But I must say that odd bird seems to have taken a liking to you.

REBEKAH: I believe it's my chicken soup. He says it reminds him of his mother's.

DR. KASPER: With me, he's reticent. With you, he pours his heart out.

REBEKAH: Too much sometimes. This afternoon, he spoke endlessly about a young woman. Stephanie ... Stephanie ... Stephanie. He must have said her name a thousand times! Stephanie is graceful. Stephanie is tall. Stephanie has beautiful, long blonde hair! Stephanie looks like an angel! Oddly, after he went on and on about her for an hour, I realized that he had never even spoken a word to her. It seemed to me that the whole affair existed only in his head, but he insisted it was true love. He compared her to a Wagnerian heroine. The ideal woman. He even used the word soulmate to describe her and insisted that he could commune with her via his mind. He called it a telepathic connection.

DR. KASPER: Now, you don't hear that kind of thing every day.

REBEKAH: She is Jewish, but he insisted that didn't

REBEKAH: (Cont.) matter. He said, "Love would conquer all." He showed me a book where he had written love letters and poems for her but confessed that he had never given them to her. He broke down and cried because she was getting married soon and admitted that he had thought about committing suicide by jumping into the Danube.

DR. KASPER: By the first of the year, the young man said he was ready to leave. I tried to give him some money, but he did not want to take it. I said, "Why don't you paint me one of those postcards you are always talking about, and I will buy it from you as an investment. One day, I know you will be famous, and it will be worth big money." He went outside and, an hour later, returned with a postcard that he had painted of our home. I said, "But you must sign it so I can cash in on it someday!" That was the first and only time I ever heard him laugh. As I watched him walk away, I thought, survival of the fittest. The world will surely chew this lost soul up and spit him out. He will never last a year out there in the real world. God help him.

Magdalena, I swear I would have completely forgotten about this young man. Like I said before, there was nothing remarkable about him. No, nothing at all. Then, in 1923, my

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) wife saw an article in the newspaper about the Beer Hall Putsch.

REBEKAH: Look at the name of the man who staged that event. I believe that was the name of the odd young man you once brought here.

DR. KASPER: I remembered his first name was Adolph, and my wife reminded me about the postcard he painted of our home. I rummaged through my filing cabinet, and sure enough, it was still there. For a long time, I stared at the signature in disbelief: A. Hitler. Could that weak, sickly, scrawny shell of a human being really be the same man who now headed the Nazi party? Could that street creature, who was afraid of his own shadow, really have grown into the man who staged the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich?

I will never forget that infamous day, 15 March 1938, when I saw Adolph again. I stood in the Heldenplatz, the Heroes Square, where a quarter million people shouted, "Heil Hitler," and "Make Germany Great Again." The endless sea of red, black, and white flags bearing swastikas, the Austrian army parading down the street, tanks rolling down the block, planes droning overhead, church bells ringing, this surreal scene made me sick to my stomach, and I threw up in a bush. The frenzied populace shot their right arms into the air braying

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) like jackasses *Seig Heil, Sieg Heil*, while *der Führer*, standing in his open-top Mercedes, saluted back in all four directions. His motorcade slowly made its way through the streets of Vienna, boldly proclaiming the homecoming of Austria into the Third Reich. At 7 p.m., that crazed Nazi bastard, who once slept in my home, stood on the balcony of the Imperial Palace, screaming manically, "... whatever may come, no one will shatter and tear asunder the German Empire as it stands today." The crowd howled like a rabid beast, chills went up and down my spine, and I damn near lost my mind as I bore witness to Hitler's first step toward world domination.

Even after that eye-opening, bone-chilling day, I still was not ready to leave Austria, give up my home, or desert my patients, and my wife did not want to leave her parents. They said they were too old and set in their ways to uproot their lives. And so, we stayed, ignoring the gut-wrenching warnings and the blood-smearred writing on the walls.

Was it because I knew Hitler and could not fathom how that bony, sickly, smelly momma's boy, who was afraid of the dark, had become

such a revered monster? Or was it because I was living in deep denial that such evil exists on this earth? I do not know. Truly, I do not know.

Years later, when we tried to escape to England, we were turned away. We tried for Czechoslovakia, then Argentina, then Luxembourg. We prayed that we could get to Palestine, but no luck. Finally, we thought of Finland, but it was too late. In this whole godforsaken world, there was nowhere left to hide.

Sadly, in the summer of 1944, the swastika caught up with us. My family was rounded up, separated, never to be seen again. My wife, my children, my grandchildren, and all my other family members perished. Only I survived. Six million Jews annihilated, yet I survived. To have a broken body, bent over with osteoporosis, riddled with arthritis and insufferable gout, but still have your mind sharp as a tack, well, that is torture of the greatest magnitude. I have prayed, to no avail, for the mercy dementia might bring, but this life sentence, seemingly without end, is the price I must pay for having held the invincible hand of evil. Truth be told, Magdalena, I never heard that ominous voice

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) again. I suspect that I will hear it upon my death when that voice from beyond screams, "Leave him where he falls, from here to Gehenna, where Abraham Kasper will be remembered forever as the man who saved Hitler."

Let me ask the all-knowing Magic 8-Ball the six-million-dollar question. No! The eleven-million-dollar question. If I had to do it all again, with the knowledge I now possess, would I leave that sick, young excuse of a man to die? (PAUSE) "My sources say no." If that is indeed the case, then who is the bigger madman, Adolph Hitler, or me?

Suddenly, I am feeling sleepy. This agonizing day, dubbed by the Sunnydale Nursing Home as "Dr. Abraham Kasper Day," has been a sad and snowy sojourn down the scorched and stained, bloody backstreets of my soul. Mercifully, I am drifting into a drug-induced stupor. I pray the night terrors will be silenced, at least for a while.

The snow, Magdalena. See the snow still falling. Lightly, ever so lightly. Only a dusting. (WHISPERING) Tell them to leave it where it falls.

Sadly, everything pure gets trampled on and stamped and stumped upon until every

DR. KASPER: (Cont.) breathtakingly beautiful trace is wiped off the face of the earth. (PAUSE) Music, I need music. I can never sleep without music drowning out my demons.

FX: SOUND OF DR. KASPER FUMBLING TO TURN THE RADIO ON. FLICKING THROUGH A FEW STATIONS UNTIL HE STOPS AT ONE PLAYING BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONY (EROICA), 2nd MOVEMENT, WHICH HAS JUST BEGUN.

DR. KASPER: From the way your eyes are dancing and from your beautiful smile, I can tell you like Beethoven. Music, farts and giggles, smiles and tears, the universal language that God willing, one day, could transform humankind from its animal nature to its divine one. Beethoven dedicated his Third Symphony (Eroica) to Napoleon, but when "The Little Corporal" crowned himself Emperor, the Maestro, in a fit of rage, scribbled out the title, *Sinfonia intitolata Bonaparte*, and shouted, "Now, too, he will trample upon the rights of man." Sadly, nothing ever changes, nothing at all. I remember hearing on May Day, 1945, Grand Admiral Doenitz, Hitler's appointed successor, announce on the radio, "Our *führer*, Adolph Hitler, has fallen." A moment later, this same piece of music, the Maestro's *marcia funèbre*, played.

DR. KASPER: But there is some good news! Last Christmas
 Eve, Doenitz dropped dead.

FX: PAUSE. THEN, THE SOUND OF DR. KASPER
 SNORING, LIKE ANOTHER WIND INSTRUMENT PLAYING
 ALONG WITH THE SYMPHONY.

MAGDELENA: (WHISPERING) "Long live, Dr. Kasper...."

FX: FOOTSTEPS AS MAGDALENA TIPTOES OUT.

FX: THE SOUND OF A DOOR QUIETLY SHUTTING.

FX: THE MUSIC SLOWLY FADES OUT.

END OF PLAY

