

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH RABBI DR. ALBERT ISAAC SLOMOVITZ

CONDUCTED, EDITED AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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TS: Let's start with your background. I know you grew up in North Miami Beach.

AS: Right.

TS: Why don't you talk about your family and what year you were born and such as that?

AS: Well, it's actually very interesting. Most people don't know—I was born in New York—but my original name was Savitsky. My parents divorced when I was four. Mother took myself and my younger brother, who'd just been born, down to South Florida. That's where I grew up.

TS: So, your father stayed in New York?

AS: Yes, and there's a whole backstory, which we won't go into. By the way, he's still alive. He just turned 98. The first name is Lester, and he shortened Savitsky to Savitt. He was part of the Manhattan Project. When my mother left him and we moved to South Florida, we also lost all contact.

TS: So, she's the Slomovitz?

AS: She married David Slomovitz, who was my stepfather. He adopted us. So, that's the name change. So, I went from Savitsky to Slomovitz.

TS: So, you had no contact with your [biological] father?

AS: Correct, till about twelve years ago. We've reconnected. So, there's a gap in there of about sixty years or so.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

AS: It was just an agreement that when they split up, his second wife said, "No contact with the first wife and the kids."

TS: How many siblings do you have?

AS: A younger brother and younger sister.

TS: Now your mother—what was her [maiden] name before she married Savitsky?

AS: Teitelbaum; Estelle Teitelbaum.

TS: Do you know anything about the family history of when they came to America or from where?

AS: My daughter is the genealogist of the family. She knows all those studies. I know they came on my mother's side in early 1900, and I think they came from Russia, Poland, like millions of other Jews. When I say my father, there's the biological father and the stepfather; the biological side, also Russia-Poland through Montreal then to New York. The Slomovitz side, I don't know too much about it. It's a little weird, but that's the true story.

TS: Well, talk about growing up in North Miami Beach. Was it a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, with a lot of snowbirds from the north there?

AS: We were technically, in an area called Opa-locka, which is unincorporated Dade County. It's further on the west side, and it was mixed—Jewish kids and non-Jewish kids. I attended religious school like a lot of Jewish kids did during the weekend, had my bar mitzvah down there. But in the teenage years, we associated with the bigger Jewish community, a larger synagogue in North Miami Beach. So, I did a lot of driving back and forth. I would say also on the personal side that my parents [mother and stepfather] divorced when I was a teenager. They'd had my sister. When David Slomovitz married my mother, she had me as a four-year-old, and an infant son, my brother. I always felt that they didn't get adequate counseling to take on that responsibility. Then they had my sister, and they were together about nine or ten years, and then split up. In many ways, being the oldest, I was rushed throughout adolescence, I would say. By the tenth grade, being sixteen years old, my mother basically said, "Okay. You're the man of the house now. You take over." I'm sixteen years old. I was saying, "What does that mean?" And she was saying, "Okay. You'll discipline your brother and sister when they don't do their home activities."

TS: You were? Not her?

AS: Yes. It was a tumultuous time.

TS: How did you get along with your brother and sister once you became the father?

AS: Well, it was interesting. I would be told to discipline my sister. We'd walk into a room, and I'd take a belt and hit the bed. I'd say, "Make noise! Scream! Or something." And so, we'd pretend going through it. But I would say that it was most difficult for her because she was eight years younger. I was sixteen.

TS: And she was a half-sister at that.

AS: Yes. I never perceived her as half, but I think the fact that our father—my stepfather—left at that time, affected her subsequently, but that’s another story. But, anyway, the balance of all this is, as I was getting more involved in the synagogue and youth groups and going to services, I think the male people that I encountered like the rabbi and the youth group director had a disproportionate positive influence on me because at that time, any family male figures were out. So, that I think led me down pathways I would ultimately follow. Looking back, I realize that.

TS: Yes. Well, I knew you had said in a previous interview that you found solace in your neighborhood synagogue in that period. And it’s from the rabbi and the youth director?

AS: Yes, solace. I think as a kid, we’re looking for role models. And so, they exemplified role models for me.

TS: Do you remember the name of the rabbi?

AS: Oh, sure. He has passed. His name was Max Lipschitz. He was quite prominent in North Miami Beach. And there were a few others. So, yes, you do what you have to do, but those circumstances rushed me, as I said, throughout adolescence and brought a lot of responsibility on me.

TS: Right. Did you experience much anti-Semitism when you were growing up?

AS: No, one little incident, but minor; nothing that I would recall. I went to public schools. We had mixed religions in the public school. Originally, that was a time we integrated the public schools; and so, my brother had race riots and all that, but I missed it.

TS: What year were you born?

AS: In 1951; graduated high school in 1969.

TS: So, yes, the civil rights movement took place throughout that period. When did the schools integrate in Miami?

AS: Well, my high school was not integrated while I was there. Of course, we were dealing with Vietnam at that time.

TS: Yes, it was pretty hot and heavy in Vietnam during that time.

AS: Yes. I wanted to add something that slipped my mind, but I would say also that financially, I worked every day after school from ninth grade on. I would walk out of the school, and there was a nursery school called Beacon Hill where they took first, second, and third graders, and it was like a day camp. They would pick up the kids in their van, and they would stop in front of the high school. Big tall me, ninth grader, tenth grader! I’d walk out and go into the van. They drove me over, and that was my job after school.

So, I worked Monday through Friday from ninth grade on through college, etc. So, I didn't have a lot of time for afternoon activities.

TS: Well, you weren't going to be caught up in the hippie culture and such as that.

AS: No. At that time, again, because of the divorce, money was tight with our family. So, even the small amount of money I was making as a counselor was given back to the family and paid for food and things. To show you how weird it was, I graduated in 1969, the next year I entered junior college, and my mother was putting herself back into school to earn a degree, and we were in class together.

TS: She was in Miami Dade?

AS: Yes. Miami Dade Junior College; she said to me, "Don't tell anyone I'm your mother." We were taking classes together. I mean, she had me early.

TS: It is often the other way around.

AS: Well, she had me when she was nineteen or twenty; so she was in her late thirties when I was eighteen or nineteen. I said, "Well, what do you want me to say?" She said, "I'm your big sister." And so, we went to school together. That was weird. Of course, we would have a test together. I wasn't studying that much, and she was studying a lot.

TS: You weren't studying much?

AS: No, because I just kind of knew it, whatever it was, and so she was giving me a hard time and then a really hard time when I got a better grade than she did. But that just shows you how weird things were.

TS: I was going to ask you why you went to Miami Dade. I think you've explained very well that you didn't have money to go anywhere else.

AS: Yes. That's exactly right.

TS: So how did you get to New York and Columbia University?

AS: Well, this rabbi friend I mentioned, Max Lipschitz, was very involved in the Conservative movement, which in Judaism there's the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, which is the most liberal. There was a program called the joint program where you go to Columbia and the Jewish Theological Seminary at the same time.

TS: Oh, I didn't realize that.

AS: Yes. So, he spoke to my mother. My mother spoke to me, and I applied for it and got in and received a number of scholarships to go.

TS: So, you were already thinking about being a rabbi?

AS: No, at that time, I had taken a few scholarships, and the provision of the scholarships was that I would come back to South Florida as an educator and work in religious schools, etc. That changed over time, but it was quite a leap going from the junior college in South Florida, Miami Dade. I had done well there, and then going up to New York and going to Columbia and the seminary at the same time. So, I went from taking a normal load of fifteen credits. In that joint program, you're pursuing two degrees. So, I was taking twenty-one credits, twenty-four credits, plus. Some of those courses at the seminary were taught in Hebrew. I wasn't on that level of Hebrew, so it was quite a challenge.

TS: I bet. And you didn't make any attempt to reconnect with your father while you were up there?

AS: I did actually once or twice. We met almost secretly because his second wife had actually forbidden him from having contact. And then that was dropped. I saw him once or twice. Then I would write him letters when I joined the Navy. We're jumping ahead a little. He kept the letters and never responded till she passed. Then that opened the door for him to allow us to reconnect. My brother didn't want to have anything to do with him at all because he just felt that he had abandoned us. I was old enough to have some memories of him when I was two or three years old, and those memories carried me to the point where I said, "Let's pick this up." So, now I'm his medical power of attorney, and I'm his executor for his will, etc., even though he has a stepson. It's weird when everyone is married and divorced. Everyone was like, off by one. In other words, my mother divorced, and then somebody else is raising us. Then my biological father is raising another stepson. So, it's like everyone is just out of kilter, but that's the world. And so, we had to make our way through it.

TS: Okay. So, your father's second wife had her son already, and that's the stepson.

AS: Yes. Yes. And just to make it more weird, my mother's name is Estelle, and the second wife was Estelle.

TS: Well, that makes it easy [for your father].

AS: And my father's mother, which is my biological grandmother—her birthday is on my birthday. My birthday is on her birthday.

TS: What is your birthday?

AS: January 21st. And I always wondered how she processed that—that it was her birthday, and she knew that somewhere in the world, there is a grandson who is growing up and no connection.

TS: Okay. January the 21st, is that late enough to be an Aquarius?

AS: Yes. I think I'm the first day of Aquarius.

TS: Well, I was thinking of what your sun sign might be the other day, and I didn't think of Aquarius at all. So, that's interesting. [Former KSU president] Betty [L.] Siegel was an Aquarius.

AS: There you go.

TS: I've got a brother who is an Aquarius. Anyway, you're going to have a career in education, you think, but your major is in history. Is that right?

AS: In Columbia, yes, in history; then at the seminary, I don't think I had a major per se. But what quickly happened is that I started getting involved in the Jewish world, as you would expect, and started teaching in religious school, and realized quickly that there was a higher goal I could aspire to. So that's when I started thinking about the rabbinate.

TS: Did you have classes with many of the hotshot professors at Columbia in history?

AS: I can't recall the names, but I can tell you that it was a major jump going from a small junior college in Miami. At Columbia I was a walk-on on the wrestling team.

TS: Oh, really? Miami Dade isn't a small college anymore.

AS: No. In addition to the Wrestling team, which I lettered in, I was in the Columbia Symphony Orchestra with all the many studies. It was an amazing time. I had two other roommates. My girlfriend, whom I ended up marrying, Gail...

TS: You meet her in New York?

AS: No, down in South Florida for a year down at Miami Dade. Then she went up to the Springfield College in Massachusetts, and I went into New York, and that was our test to see if we would maintain that relationship.

TS: What did Gail think of your older sister at Miami Dade? Is that the way she originally knew her, as your older sister?

AS: No. No. No. She met her as my mother. They did not have a good relationship for most of the time. I don't know why. My mother...

TS: Well, I didn't want to get into that. I was trying to make a joke out of it.

AS: This is a Dr. Phil Show [television personality Philip Calvin McGraw]?

TS: Yes, I guess so. I think you said in a previous interview that you were preaching in front of a congregation, and that's when you knew you wanted to be a rabbi?

AS: Yes. It was just one of those insightful moments. My wife's rabbi, we had been to services on Friday night, and she introduced me as going to the seminary in this joint program, and he said, "Oh, that's great. I'm going to be away in a few weeks, and I want you to take over services." And I said, "Okay. But I'm not in that program. I'm just studying, being educated." So, "It doesn't matter. You know the prayers. You can do it." And so, I did. I gave a three to four-minute sermon and just discovered that I enjoyed that. And that set me thinking to pursue the rabbinical degree, which I did.

TS: How do you compare standing in front of a congregation and preaching as opposed to standing in front of a classroom and pontificating?

AS: Well, I would say they're kind of the same. It's good, I think, if you're going to teach, to be a minister because you can take those skills of communicating with people and work with students and vice versa. So, I think that being a rabbi and speaking publicly never hurt me in this university environment. It maybe made me sharper; I think, being aware of people really listening to you, not playing with their phones as students do all the time, and that sort of thing.

TS: When I started teaching, you didn't have to worry about students playing with their phones.

AS: Right. There were no phones.

TS: Exactly. Now something that I've never quite understood is the relationship between Jewish Theological Seminary—and you've already explained the connection with Columbia—but the connection with Hebrew Union College.

AS: Okay. Actually, there isn't.

TS: There isn't?

AS: No. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is the rabbinical seminary for the Reform movement, which is a more liberal movement. And the Jewish Theological Seminary is a headquarters for the Conservative movement. At that time, if you wanted to become a rabbi, there were only one or two major seminaries you could go to. There was a more traditional one, but it really depended on your level of religiosity. I mean, if you were very, very traditional, you wouldn't go to the more liberal seminaries. You'd go to a more traditional one. I was in the middle of this joint program and started having some concerns about their curriculum. I was finishing up Colombia, and I went back to the seminary. I wasn't finished with their program because I had come in as a transfer student, and they wanted me to stay an additional year to finish up the undergraduate requirements and then apply to the rabbinical school, which is five years. And I just decided to look at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion as an alternative.

TS: To get through faster?

AS: They get through faster, but, also—this is getting into the weeds of Jewishness—but the Conservative movement at that time was very, very traditional oriented. For example, in their chapel in the school, they had a division between men and women. Which is very, very traditional. So, where I was, I was thinking that, “This isn’t the education that I need to serve the people that I’m going to be serving.” And I looked at Hebrew Union College and felt that curriculum was more appropriate to be an American rabbi in the liberal setting. The seminary is still focused on Talmudic codes and Jewish law. Even growing up in that movement, it would be fairly rare for a congregant to say, “Rabbi, what is the Jewish law here?” So, for a number of reasons, I applied and was very fortunate to get in because the competition was pretty rough. At that time, for every person that got in, there might be twenty that didn’t get in.

TS: Really?

AS: Yes, because there were only those one or two major seminaries, and that was it. So, if you applied and you didn’t get in, “Oh, well, try next year.”

TS: Well, I noticed that at Congregation Etz Chaim [in Marietta], it looks like all the rabbis there went to Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

AS: Not anymore. Today, there are a lot of smaller seminaries that are creating rabbis who are nondenominational; they’re not linked necessarily. So, a lot of people are going to these smaller seminaries and then through the backdoor coming into the movement.

TS: Well, I was wondering the connection between Hebrew Union College [in Cincinnati] and the Jewish Institute of Religion.

AS: The Jewish Institute of Religion was its own little seminary connected with [Rabbi] Stephen [Samuel] Wise in New York [founded in 1922]. Hebrew Union College’s main campus was in Cincinnati. It started 1875, and they merged [in 1950]. So these two liberal seminaries joined up. He was well known to Roosevelt in World War II.¹

¹ According to the online *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Stephen Samuel Wise was born in Budapest in 1874 and was an infant when his family moved to New York. Like his father and grandfather, he became a rabbi. He was a longtime advocate of Zionism, a founding member of the NAACP, and a good friend of Albert Einstein and President Franklin Roosevelt, whom he advised on issues affecting American Jews. In 1933, while honorary chair of the American Jewish Congress, he began alerting the public and the Roosevelt administration as to the plight of Jews in Nazi Germany. He played a central role in creating the World Jewish Congress, headquartered in Geneva, to combat Nazism. From 1938 to 1945 he served on Roosevelt’s Advisory Commission on Political Refugees. During World War II he was co-chair of the American Zionist Emergency Council. He died in 1949.

TS: I did a little research the other day on Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, who started Reform Judaism in Cincinnati. I visited his synagogue once on a tour in 1988 sponsored by the American Society of Church History. I used to go to the AHA [American Historical Association] each year, and if you got there a day early, there would be a church tour. It was called the Plum Street Temple.

AS: Right. The Plum Street Temple. I went to New York. So, there was a branch of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and a branch in New York. And the first year was in Israel. So, you went to Israel. My wife, Gail, and I got married December 23, 1973. I had applied to rabbinical school, and she was taking her master's degree at Fordham University.

TS: Oh, a Catholic school.

AS: Yes. I remember getting a letter from the school and walking outside. It was snowing. We had an apartment in the Upper West Side. And saying, "This letter is really going to determine our future. If I get accepted, we're going to be in Israel in a few months." If not, I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do because I didn't want to spend an additional year. And the additional year didn't guarantee me acceptance into JTS into the seminary. So, I wasn't sure what to do. But fortunately, I got in. I had done well at Columbia, academically. I know my last semester I made the dean's list. Seminary was harder. Some of it was just Bs and Cs. But I got in and then things just took off from there.

TS: Well, I was surprised that it takes five years to get through seminary. The seminaries I'm familiar with in the Presbyterian tradition you get through in three years.

AS: Right. Well, if you think about it, Judaism is almost four thousand years old, thirty-eight hundred on the historical side. So, there's simply a lot to study, and the law codes are literally encyclopedic [stretching his arms as far apart as he could] and the Talmud is literally this big [stretching his arms wide again]. So, if you're going to study that, forget the Hebrew Bible; the whole Hebrew Bible is secondary to the law. And then by the time you get to the Middle Ages, you have rabbis such as Maimonides [1138-1204 CE], who codify this [again stretching his arms wide], so you're studying that also. So, there's a lot to study.

TS: Yes.

AS: What I liked about HUC is it wasn't only Talmud. JTS was Talmud and rabbinic law. My area of interest was medieval philosophy.

TS: Oh, really?

- AS: Yes, concepts such as active intellect. There was Maimonides and another prominent rabbi called Gersonides [1288-1344 CE]. They were writing papers and quoting Islamic and Christian scholars and going back to Aristotle and Plato—so, this wonderful stream of intellectualism.
- TS: When I use Robert Alter’s commentary [*The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (Norton 2018)], he drops those names all the time, so that’s interesting. When I was looking up some of the history of Hebrew Union College the other day, I saw where there was a graduation banquet in the nineteenth century that contained non-kosher food, and there became a controversy over the menu that led to the formation of Conservative Judaism as the middle position between Reform and Orthodox.
- AS: Right. Again, this is a very Jewish interview, but what the Reform movement prides itself on is being very flexible and pivoting a lot. The group initially didn’t recognize Israel, and then over time it changed. In my class of rabbinical school, half the class was female, and then the Conservative movement follows. That pattern goes on a lot like the Reform movement would ordain gay men and women, and then the Conservative movement would follow. So, you see that there is a lot of movement and a lot of trying to meet the needs of people. Even some of the prayers, they took out Hebrew, now they put a lot of the Hebrew back.
- TS: Well, let me ask you one more question before we move on to something different. And that is that why did you stay with Conservative Judaism as opposed to Reform?
- AS: Oh, that’s pretty easy. The good thing was being in the military we were never identified in that way. It was simply you were the Jewish chaplain with the Jewish personnel, period. So, in a way, I got used to being not identified in those specific terms. Then, once I got out of the Navy, people started asking me, “What kind of rabbi are you?” So, I would answer them, “Good.” But that’s not what they were asking. They wanted me to say, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. I grew up Conservative. So, I would be, if there was a spectrum, on the very traditional side of Reform or backdoor with the liberal side of Conservative, wherever the spot would be. So, I tell people, “I go either way.”
- TS: I meant to ask you earlier if you had an opinion on the war in Vietnam when you graduated from high school.
- AS: Yes. I was opposed to it—100 percent opposed.
- TS: Okay. Tell the story—how did you become a chaplain in the military? I think you met somebody, didn’t you, who was a chaplain?
- AS: Let me roll back a little bit. I get accepted, and we go to Israel for some of 1974, and Gail took a leave of absence. She was Gail Marcus, by the way. Now she’s Gail Marcus Slomovitz.
- TS: Not related to any Marcus in the Atlanta area?

AS: Actually, yes. Gail's dad was Irving, but he was [Bernard] Bernie's older brother.

TS: Is that right? The Home Depot story is fascinating.

AS: Yes. It is. I was in the Navy when he started Home Depot [1978-79]. Her dad passed away when I was at the congregation in Alpharetta [Congregation Gesher L'Torah]. We had the memorial service at Bernie's house. The congregation came, and they were amazed. "Oh, you're related." Within a day or two people are coming to me asking for the connection, like, "I have this cause" or "that cause."

TS: Oh, no.

AS: So, we deliberately tried to separate family connections from issues regarding charitable concerns. But, yes, she's Gail Marcus. Her father Irving was the older brother, followed by another brother and sister, and then Bernie was the youngest.

TS: Okay. So, tell how you wind up in the Navy.

AS: Simple. The final year of rabbinical school, everyone's looking around trying to figure out what they're going to do. I was out there going to take a congregation, but at the same time, I had met a few rabbis who are in the Navy reserves. I saw them in uniform, and they looked good in the black and white they were wearing. I said, "Tell me about it." They told me, and it was intriguing. I signed up for it. As I tell people, I signed up for three years, and three years turned into twenty.

TS: I wanted to ask about that too. What made you stay?

AS: Luck, mostly. I think with a lot of jobs: right place, right time. In a bigger sense, we came in after Vietnam. I came in 1979. It fit because one of the reasons I came in was to serve with people of different faiths. If you start with that sort of mindset that you're not just there for the Jewish folks—there is a relatively small number of Jews in the military, 1 percent, 2 percent. But when you go in as a chaplain, they give you a whole unit to take care of. They say, "Here's this part of the base" or "this part of the ship" or whatever. If you're open to that idea, you really do have to care for people. We did a lot of counseling, and so that aspect of being a chaplain I enjoyed. Gail enjoyed it, and we had four kids while in the military as we moved around the world. There were a few times where I had thought about getting out, but at that time, you could work twenty years and get your retirement. So, it all worked out. I will say the Navy really was wonderful to us. I was assigned to the Great Lakes in Chicago and started going back for my PhD in history at Loyola University during the evening time.

TS: Okay. Now is it 1979 that you go in as a chaplain?

AS: Yes.

TS: And when are you in Chicago?

AS: We got there December of 1985. We had been overseas in Okinawa, Japan, and in Norfolk, Virginia. I don't know what made me go back to school. We had, at that time, two children. We had a daughter, then we had an adopted son, and we had two other daughters. One of those stories—when we got his final adoption papers, that day my wife found out she was pregnant. She had her first daughter, and then it was difficult to have more children. We go to adoption. We adopt him and then...

TS: She had two more.

AS: Yes. What were you asking me about?

TS: Chicago and the Navy.

AS: The Navy was wonderful to me and so was my wife. We had the little kids at home, and I was going to school at night and driving from where we lived at the naval base—the Great Lakes Naval Base was south, and then Loyola was further south. So, I'm driving from home, about a half an hour to the base. At the end of the day, like 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock, driving downtown, taking classes, and driving an hour back. When you're young, you can do this. Then just getting the work done. God bless the Navy! They have for chaplains, doctors, and lawyers a sabbatical year. So, I was granted a sabbatical year, and I was able to take that in Chicago at Loyola. I was able to get a second master's degree in interfaith relations.

TS: Oh, that helped a lot.

AS: Yes, and at the same time, I take all my oral exams and written exams. So, when we left Chicago to go to the Naval Academy, I was ABD—All but Dissertation. And the Navy was a blessing for me.

TS: How long were you in Chicago?

AS: About three and a half years.

TS: So, it took you three and a half years to get through a master's and a doctorate?

AS: No. The doctorate didn't get done till 1995. I was working on that in my spare time. We would go on family vacations, and we'd put the kids to bed, and I'd walk into a closet. My wife would say, "What are you doing?" I'd say, "I'm working on my dissertation." And I'd sit there with a single light on and edit it. You have to be, as you know, quite tenacious. You have to be determined that you're going to do it. I had somebody pass away on my committee, one of the three people. He passed away, and they called me. I was in Annapolis. And they said, "Sad news; Father [so and so] died." I said, "I'm sorry to hear that." And they said, "Yes," and then they said, "Okay, now you have to get somebody else." I said, "Yes. But what do you mean somebody else?" "Well, somebody

else to sit on your committee.” I said, “I’m here in Annapolis. You’re out there in Chicago.” They said, “Good luck.” And fortunately, I knew one of the history professors happened to be Jewish. I called him up. I said, “I’m in a jam”; and he said, “Okay. I’ll do you a favor. I’ll just sit on the committee. I won’t read anything. Don’t send me anything. But I’ll sign for it.” He did, and that allowed me to finish the PhD.

TS: He didn’t read it?

AS: Nope. I mean, he might have looked at it, but he didn’t read it [thoroughly]. But I was very fortunate. Then, ironically, in the Navy, I ended up being in charge of the sabbatical program.

TS: Is that right?

AS: Yes.

TS: Okay. So, at Loyola University of Chicago, you’re there with a bunch of Jesuits. Talk about that. How does that go? They must have had some interesting discussions.

AS: There’s two important points to make here. One is, try to imagine—and when I speak publicly, I speak about this—at the same time, I’m studying American history, and I’m studying biblical history. If you’re in a class of American history, you’re talking about primary sources and historical facts, Reconstruction. “What is the best way to interpret this historical event?” I get that. Then I’d walk about two hundred yards away, and I sit with a group of priests and nuns, and we’re looking at the book of Matthew. The professor, who had his PhD from a Pontifical Institute of Rome, said, “Well, Rabbi, what do you see in this text in Matthew?” And I started telling him what I saw. Then we had wonderful dialogues with the priests and the nuns.

TS: They prepared you for the book you were going to write [*A New Look at Rabbi Jesus: Jews and Christians Finally Reconnected* (Covenant Books 2019)].

AS: Yes. It was an amazing journey to study history academically and then to shift over and study biblical history and to see that dramatic difference. When you’re studying the stories of the Bible as opposed to, let’s say, studying academic history, how people view it differently. I think it did help me because I try to bring both of those. Particularly, when I do the religious services, I try to bring history into it.

TS: Well, I always thought that modern critical scholarship on the Bible was a history lesson in how a text would have been understood by the original audience.

AS: It is, and it was. But, unfortunately, from what I’ve discovered, most people sitting in the pews are not focused on history. They’re not focused on academics. People know the stories, but rarely do they know the context behind it and say, “Okay, let’s look at it.”

TS: How do you understand it without the context, though?

AS: That's a struggle that I find all the time, ironically, that myself as a rabbi ends up educating Christians to a large extent about different ways of looking at the Bible and the history of the Bible itself.

TS: Yes. Well, I love the way that the Hebrew Bible has the text on the top of the page and the commentary right below it in footnotes. I love it that way.

AS: Right. And the great thing also I was going to mention at Loyola is that the Navy had another school for me, and part of the application said, "Tell us when you turned your life over to Jesus."

TS: No!

AS: In Chicago, yes, it was either Loyola or this other school in Chicago. I had to go to one of them for this year off.

TS: And you had to answer that?

AS: I called the Navy back. The person in charge of this whole process was someone I worked for previously, and he happened to be a Catholic priest. So, I said, "Father, this isn't going to work for me. I want to go to Loyola." He said, "Okay. Go to Loyola"—as simply as that. What I discovered at Loyola working with priest and nuns was this great sense of spirituality and religiosity that we shared. I did a Seder for them, a Passover meal, and they just responded so positively to it. I saw the wonderful side of sharing the texts. I saw things in Matthew that they wouldn't see because they weren't Jewish. And this was a book written for Jewish people about a Jewish person. So, once we initiated those conversations, it was just high-level interfaith understanding. So, those times at Loyola were really wonderful. And the military and this intellectual background helped me, and I think was the impetus for writing the book and for founding the nonprofit [the Jewish-Christian Discovery Center].

TS: Yes. Now your PhD is in American and ethnic history?

AS: Yes. I majored in ethnic history. When I teach, I introduce concepts about different ethnic groups coming to America and how many decided to go back. For example, the Italians went back at 50 percent. They came over. They worked, built things, and they were saving enough money to go back to Italy to buy a villa and live happily ever after. Jews coming from Russia-Poland hardly went back. I mean, under 1 percent of them—the pogroms and Cossacks, etc. So, all those differences. So, I did ethnic history, and my dissertation was on history of rabbis in the military, which ultimately became my first book, *The Fighting Rabbis* [1999].

- TS: Yes, I love that title. New York University Press.
- AS: Yes, and it was funded by the Jewish Chapel at West Point because they said, “We need a book to help us get future rabbis into the military.” So, my book was used as a recruiting tool.
- TS: You said 1 or 2 percent of the people in the Navy are Jewish. What about chaplains?
- AS: Also, the same. When I was in the Navy, we had a thousand chaplains of all faiths, predominantly Christian, one or two Muslims, ten rabbis. So, if I do the math, that’s 1 percent. It was wonderful. Our insignia, by the way, was the Ten Commandments. Initially, when I entered the Navy it was Roman numerals, one through ten, and then it was changed to Hebrew and the Jewish star, and I was actually opposed to that.
- TS: You were?
- AS: Yes. I didn’t like the change because who knew from the Hebrew? People would always ask me, “Are you in the Israeli Navy?” But I will say that that the military was a wonderful laboratory for educating people. Once people got to know you, and they felt comfortable, they would ask you questions. I would be in the gym changing, and some officer that I worked out with would say, “You know, I’ve always had this question. What did the Jews believe about Jesus?” Our official job was to take care of the Jewish personnel and be a chaplain. But I always found that secondarily, there was this whole group of people wanting to talk with you and ask questions. If you’re open to that, I think you developed a reputation. My reputation in the Navy was I was willing to work with everybody and anybody and educate and do it not in any condescending or inappropriate way, just in a nice way.
- TS: What kind of problems do sailors have that they bring to a chaplain: their relationship with their officers or what?
- AS: Well, that’s a big area. I’ll just give you a little overview. My initial assignment at the Great Lakes Naval Base was filling in for a chaplain on leave. We have a boot camp and then an initial training center. You go to boot camp about twelve weeks. You learn how to be in the Navy. Then you go to the other side of the base for your initial training. So, I was in one of those buildings of the initial training when I got there. Again, this is not my permanent assignment, but just when I got on the base. I walk in on a Monday morning, and there’s a line of sailors all the way down the hallway. I had somebody helping me. I said, “What’s going on? Is there a program or something?” So, the person assisting me said, “Sir, they’re here to see you.” I said, “Yes, but this is my first day. I’m new to the base. So, what’s going on?” “They’re not happy. They want to get out of the Navy. They’re having problems with being in the Navy, and it wasn’t what they signed up for.” So, I spent a good part of my time, particularly at Great Lakes, just trying to be an encourager of people, and telling them they could get through.”
- TS: It was a little late to decide they don’t want to be there.

AS: Yes. I mean, again, you're talking about eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds. Some of them were going to show their parents they were adults; so, they went and signed up. Or they'd had an argument with a boyfriend or girlfriend, whatever it was, or college wasn't for them. You're right; you can get out, but it's not that easy. And so, we did a lot of encouraging them to hang in there.

Again, they're away from home. They're not sure what's going on. When you leave boot camp, you might have agreed when you first came in that you were going to be x, whatever x is. You took a test, and you didn't test well. So, the Navy says, "Okay. You're not going to be x. You're going to be something else." So, all that uncertainty for eighteen- or nineteen-year-olds away from home for the first time. I would also have to counsel with marriages. People were lonely, and they were meeting other people who were lonely, and they said, "Let's get married." "Well, let's run it by the chaplain first" because, "Why are you doing that and are you realizing that this is supposed to be a decision for your whole life?" because the Navy would assign people together. So, "Yes, you would be able to maintain your friendship, but do you need to get married for that?" That sort of thing would keep us busy. At the Naval Academy, if you were going to resign your commission, you had to see a chaplain first. So, we had a lot of good talking with people and trying to help them through some of these crises.

TS: So, all these guys standing in line, would you say that the vast majority didn't care whether the chaplain was Christian or Jewish when they came for counseling?

AS: Absolutely correct. Our insignia was up here what we were. Most of the Christians wore a cross. That was the symbol of Christian chaplains. Muslims wore a crescent moon. We were what I told you before with the Ten Commandments. But our rank was up here, and 99 times out of a 100, you looked at the rank, because that would let them know where we were in the pecking order and how much power.

TS: Well, you went through the ranks pretty fast to be a captain by the time you got out, didn't you?

AS: I was absolutely blessed. I will say for the non-military people, it's hard to understand, but when you're in the military, achieving rank is sort of like Mount Sinai. I mean, so much of the military experience is defined by rank. Even though we're chaplains, we're clergy or doctors or dentists or lawyers, you're in that environment where rank has so much meaning. I sat on a few promotion boards, for example, and there was a Catholic priest that I knew who didn't get promoted. I was on that board whether he should be promoted or not. When I came back, we were assigned to Charleston. He asked me to stop by his office, and he just berated me for half an hour. He cursed me up and down.

TS: He didn't know how you voted.

AS: Well, he was disappointed that he had not been promoted, and he thought I would be his advocate. This was after Desert Storm/ Desert Shield. He was up against people who

had been in a war situation. So, they were going to have an advantage. I let him vent for about a half hour. But it is hard. I don't think people fully appreciate that. Even now, I've been out twenty or twenty-two years. I recently ran into somebody who knew another one of the rabbis. He said, "Oh, I visited Rabbi So and So, and we just talked a little bit." He said, "Yes, he got out as a commander, which is O-5." Well, I didn't need to know that. This man who was telling me this story was an O-5. So, I'm an O-6. Even now, in services, he will say, "Good morning, Captain." I mean, I don't ask him for that, but the rank is so important. So, it's interesting emotionally and intellectually that you know that. You're there as clergy people, and rank shouldn't be important, but it is. It is.

And I will add a PS just because it's relevant. Think of this interesting dynamic: as a chaplain or a doctor or a lawyer, any one of the staff corps—there's the staff corps, then there's the line. The line are the people who do the fighting; the staff corps officers are the people who assist them. But imagine you go to a base, and you're a new person in the military or moving along, and your senior person is a captain. And the captain says, "Okay. Here's your job." And at the end of this whole speech, he says, "By the way, you know, I'm a minister. You can come to me with any personal problems you have." No. The chances of that happening are close to zero. Why? Because you're not going to go to the person who is writing what we call a fitness report and say, "By the way, I'm not happy in my marriage," or "I feel stressed out," or "I don't know if I can do this," because that shows weakness, and that shows vulnerability.

So, even among the chaplains in that environment, it was a real challenge. In other words, you had a friend; then you would talk. But that dynamic of going back to the person who's going to write about you was almost an impossibility. So, therefore, the senior person would rarely know something was going on unless it was egregious, you got arrested or something like that. So, this sort of insight—people from the outside wouldn't even be aware of that dynamic. But even for us, who were clergy, it could be challenging if things were not going well.

TS: Right. So, it's late 1980s that you're assigned to the Naval Academy. And you've got your [Naval Academy] hat today. How did that come about? How many chaplains do they have at the Naval Academy?

AS: They have four or five.

TS: And where would you have been in the four or five?

AS: Well, we have to do a little history. At the Naval Academy for the first 120 or 130 years with the Jewish midshipmen, they would on a Sunday morning march them into town to the local synagogue, and they would have Sunday morning services, have some refreshments, spend time with the congregation, and then return to the Academy. So, in some fashion, the needs of the Jewish Midshipmen were met. What happened was, people in the military and outside the military started asking the Navy, "Why isn't there a rabbi at the Naval Academy, a full-time rabbi?"

TS: And there hadn't been one?

AS: There hadn't been one all this time. There had been at West Point. I'm not sure about the Air Force. Their academy is relatively later. But we never had a full-time rabbi. So, the academy kept on saying, "Well, we're meeting the needs of the Jewish people." But then the question changed. So, the question now became, "Well, that's nice, but how could a rabbi serve everyone?" So, once the question was changed, then, the academy decided that, "Okay. We'll try it." So, my predecessor was the first rabbi at the Naval Academy [1985-1989]. He's passed on, and they call him R1. I'm R2. Now they're up to like R12 or something. R1 was my friend.

His name is [Commander Norman] Norm Auerbach, but he was ill a little bit. But he started a new program; and so, I knew that the tour at the Naval Academy was not like any other tour because I think it was still an experiment that had it not gone well, the Navy simply could have said, "Okay. We don't need a rabbi at the academy. We'll send in another Catholic priest or a Protestant minister. So, I was aware of that dynamic, and it fit perfectly. We ended up having big Holocaust programs, not for the Jewish community, but for, they call it the Brigade of Midshipmen [the entire student body]. We had trips to Israel, not for the Jewish community, but for everybody. I was finishing my PhD, so I taught in the history department at the academy.

TS: I was wondering about that.

AS: Yes, and I was asked one year to pray for the football team. They had Protestants and Catholics, and they had one Jewish guy. He was the punter. I said, "I'll take him out to lunch." So, I passed on the first season. Second season, I thought about it. I said, "Why not?" So, before a game, I went to—the stadium is in Annapolis, and forty big guys, and we spoke about Moses and conquering adversity and fighting for your beliefs. And we won the game. So, I was very much integrated into the fabric of the academy, and I think, historically, they came to like having a rabbi there. So, there's been no break in that, which is fairly fascinating because in many ways, it is a luxury. You'd technically want a rabbi overseas. But it was wonderful in the academy. If you've never been there, it's a wonderful place to see, just to look at. And so, I really felt, again, blessed to be there.

TS: I was googling *Navy Times* [May 2, 2023] a little while before the interview started and came across an article explaining they have recently renamed the superintendent's quarters at the Naval Academy to Farragut House after [Admiral] David [Glasgow] Farragut of Civil War fame for the Battle of Mobile Bay and what have you. I'm partial towards Farragut because he was from Knoxville, Tennessee, and that's where I grew up. There is a community of Farragut [west of town] and the Farragut High School and so on. But they bumped a Confederate officer named [Admiral] Franklin Buchanan from the name of the house.

AS: We should do that.

TS: Yes. Buchanan was the Naval Academy's first superintendent, and they had named the house for him. Not that long ago. I figured that if they were going to name something for a Confederate officer, they would have done it in the early 20th century. But the naming occurred in 1976 according to *Navy Times*. [Ironically, he was wounded and surrendered to Admiral Farragut at the Battle of Mobile Bay.] It became Buchanan House, and now it's Farragut House.

AS: Wow. By the way, just as a side note, it's interesting that to get into the Naval Academy, like any of these service academies, it's very hard. You need a congressional or senatorial or presidential appointment. And, as I mentioned before, you can resign. You can drop out in your first two years, and you had to see a chaplain as part of that interview, and that was a very difficult time because I would get calls from parents, back then mostly fathers, who were in quite high positions, even military officers, who had not had the opportunity for the academy. And now their children were for their own reasons wanting to drop out. There were enormous family dynamics, and pressure that I had people saying to me, "You convince my son (or my daughter) to stay in." And just because of the needs of the parent to be able to say, "My son (or my daughter) is at the Naval Academy,"

I don't think people from the outside realize, when I wear this [Naval Academy] hat, I'm stopped all the time, and they say, "Did you go there?" I say, "No, I was on staff." And so, like, "Okay." But when you're there, it's, "What year did you go there?" You don't say, "Oh, it was in the 1950s or 1960s or whatever. It's the exact year. And that's a separate group of people. It was a wonderful experience for me. I had a few problems with some laypeople, but my daughter became a bat mitzvah there, the first bat mitzvah ever at the Naval Academy, and it was an historic opportunity to integrate rabbis into a place that had never had it before.

TS: How many years were you there?

AS: I was there three years [1989-1992], which is a normal tour.

TS: I want to ask you at least one more question about your naval time. You've got a great story about being on a submarine right at Passover and Easter one year [1994] and the Matzah bread, which I think must have been the inspiration for one of your children's books [*The Matzah that Saved Easter* (2022)].

AS: Yes. A friend of mine [R. Bruce Pierce] was a chaplain at the King's Bay, Georgia, which is our submarine base. I mentioned earlier interfaith programs. So, we always had Seders for Christians. And we had the Haggadah [a Biblical text for Passover] and Matzah, wine. I had done that on his base, and he said to me, "Do you have time?" I said, [tentatively] "Yeah"; I always had to get permission from my boss. "There's an opening on a sub. You want to go on a sub for five days?" I had nothing scheduled, and

Passover was still two or three days. I said, “Let me see if I can get permission.” I called back to my senior person. He said, “Sure. It’s a great experience.”

So, when I came down to do the Seder, I packed a bag and went on the sub, and it was just a whole world there. A whole world! You had to wear a little gadget because it had so many weapons, and they were nuclear weapons. And so, if you were in that area too long the gadget would show that you were getting too much radiation. I was only on there for five days, but they said, “No. Keep an eye on it.” It was a fast attack sub, the U.S.S. *Maryland*. So, as you know, for Passover, you’re not supposed to eat any products with leaven. So, I brought my Matzah on—pieces of the Matzah. Picture, the submarine is on the surface off Jacksonville. We go out a few miles. You see fish jumping over the front of the ship—dolphins.

Then he said, “Okay. We’re going down six hundred feet, and we’re going to stay underwater for five days.” Now that was nothing. Some of them you go for sixty, ninety days, just routinely. I was the only chaplain on the ship—on the boat they call it. And a lot of them wanted to talk with me about marriages and how difficult it was. By the way, the ship is not supposed to surface unless there’s an emergency because it’s an attack ship. It’s supposed to be floating somewhere. So, if your house burned to the ground, they were not going to send you a message; or God forbid, a car accident unless it was something major or life changing. Because what were they going to do? I mean, what would be the point of getting you that information underwater.

TS: Nothing.

AS: Right? It would really break your morale. Somebody [would say], “Oh, my God, something horrible is going on!” So, unless it was an emergency for them like a medical emergency, and they couldn’t handle it, you were gone and just lost from sixty or ninety days, lost to the world. So, even though I was on for only those few days, a lot of them spoke with me about how difficult it was to maintain a relationship. So, I did counseling there. Again, on a submarine, something they look forward to is eating. So, the cooks there baked fresh bread, pastries, and cookies. I wasn’t eating it because it was Passover, and I wasn’t supposed to eat leavened products. So, I had my Matzah, and they were kind of keeping a track on me. Like, “Are you eating? What are you eating?”

So, there’s a little bit of a running joke one night they asked me to choose [a movie]. It was back in 1994, so they had DVDs. Young people don’t know what they are—big things, and you put them in a machine, and you saw a movie. So, they said, “Pick the movie for tonight.” So, I picked Mel Brooks, *Men in Tights*. It has all sorts of jokes in Yiddish. We’re watching this, and I’m laughing. Nobody else is laughing. So, I was explaining it to them. So, Saturday, the captain of the ship comes. He says, “Do you know what tomorrow is?” I said, “Sunday.” He said, “Yes, but it’s also Easter Sunday. We have Protestants and Catholics on the ship. And there are people who offer special holiday prayers, but I want you to give the main sermon. I want you to speak.” And I said, “You know, I’m a rabbi.” He said, “Yes, but you’re also a Navy chaplain, and you’re here, and we’re here, and it’s Sunday.”

TS: And you're the only one?

AS: Yes. Now, the interesting thing is whatever trash you have, you don't dispose of. Whatever is trash, you save, and then they compress it. When you get back, they're offloaded; so, they don't pollute the ocean. I had finished the Matzah and started eating food containing leaven, and I had a plastic bag left with crumbs, basically. It's just flour and water, and over time, it's just going to deteriorate. There was no place to throw it out. So, I kept it.

If you see the picture in the book [of the Easter service using the remainder of the Matzah (*A New Look at Rabbi Jesus*, p. 122)], I said, "Okay. We're going to talk about the unleavened bread of Matzah." Then, I linked it up to the Lord's Supper, and I spoke about that. And it represented making sacrifices because here we were at Easter, and they were away from home. And I spoke about what the Matzah represented, and I spoke about belief in God and overcoming adversity. Then, at the end of my speaking, I said, "How many of you would like to have a piece of Matzah, of this unleavened bread?" So, they formed a line just as at communion, and they came up and cupped their hands, and I put the Matzah in their hand. So, if you were just taking a picture, it would look like communion. But for me, I was just sharing my Matzah.

So, it really was a special moment, and I wish that we could have more moments like that in the outside world. By the way, I got off after five days. What people don't realize is you go out for five days, and you return, then you go out for three weeks, then you're back, and then you go out for sixty, ninety days. You work up to that in steps. But I'm sure when they were asked about their Easter service, they said, "Yes, we had this rabbi and special holy bread, and nobody turned it down." We had a room of both Catholics and Protestants, and that was a high religious moment underwater six hundred feet.

By the way, just as a total side note, there are redundant oxygen systems on the submarine. So, if there's a fire on board, they don't surface. You have to know where your breathing material is. Where I slept was almost on the floor. Literally, above my head four inches up was a mask to put on. I thought I was going to abruptly wake up and knock my head. But they taught us that there are three levels of redundancy for oxygen. So, even if there's a fire on board that submarine [you stay under water] because it's an attack submarine, and if you surface, you're likely destroyed in the war. So, I mean, things that we would never think of!

TS: Right. Sure.

AS: So, it was a great experience.

TS: Okay. So, twenty years in the Navy; why didn't you stay longer? I know twenty years is a good time to retire in the Navy, but you didn't want to be an admiral?

AS: No, it would be very hard. There are only two admirals in the chaplain corps, and the Navy has never had an active-duty rabbi as an admiral. But interestingly, we're paid rank over time, whatever your rank is over time. And after twenty years, you don't get any more over time increases. So, the signal is, what? "Out you go." If you stay really long, like twenty-six years, you get a bump. But that was part of it, and, also they wanted to send me to Guam. I said, "Where would you send me?" They said, "To Guam." "What?" I felt I had my doctorate at the time, and I figured I'd be young enough—I was forty-eight—to start a second career. That's when we decided to come to Atlanta, Marietta.

TS: And why Atlanta-Marietta?

AS: I had relatives here; so did my wife.

TS: You did?

AS: Yes. I had a cousin here, first cousin. And Gail's relatives lived in the area—the Marcuses.

TS: Oh, the Marcuses, of course. So, how did teaching at Kennesaw come about?

AS: It was again, another blessing. I saw her recently, Ann Pullen. I spoke up in Rome in a Temple up there, and she was in the audience. She came up and said, "Hello."

TS: Former chair of the history department [Department of History & Philosophy].

AS: Former chair of the history department. I came up here [to the Kennesaw campus]. Of course, this was before 90 percent of this campus that's here now. I went into Ann, and my book, *The Fighting Rabbis* had just been published. I said, "Here's my book. Can I teach here?" She said, "Yes." It was as simple as that. Then, I filled out papers, one of which asked me if I'd ever been a member of the Communist Party.

TS: You still had to do that, really?

AS: I had to do it back then.

TS: Now what year are we talking about?

AS: In 1999. I signed the paper, and I put, sort of jokingly, "No. I was in the U.S. Navy." She hired me, and it's been twenty-three years now teaching mostly part time, sometimes full.

TS: So, you've been post-Navy longer than you were in the Navy.

AS: That's exactly right. And then there was a congregation starting in Alpharetta.

TS: Oh, I wanted to ask about that. Go ahead and tell about it.

AS: There was a small group of people that were starting a Conservative congregation in a house, and they hired me part time. We lived in Marietta, and I commuted here [to the Kennesaw campus] and to Alpharetta. So, I was a lot of time on the road. Just picture, when I left the Navy, I was an O-6, a captain, and also the senior chaplain at the Naval Air Station. So, we had on any given weekend Muslims, Christians, Wiccans, [etc.] Whatever they were, I was responsible for their religious services. We had a staff of about twenty people, chaplains and enlisted people, taking care of tens of thousands of people. Then I get up to this house in Alpharetta, and we're holding services in a room smaller than this one, like in the garage. The change from, I mean, a month ago, here I was in uniform, and all these people working for me, just to have kids running around, and it was an abrupt change. But it was good, and I stayed there ten years part time. It got big enough to have their own building now.

TS: What is the name of the synagogue?

AS: It's called Gesher L'Torah. It's off Kimball Bridge Road and State Bridge Road. Gesher is bridge, and Torah [the law revealed to Moses].

TS: The first five books [of the Bible].

AS: Right. So, we got out, and I had the two part time jobs, and I did some teaching. There's a program for Jewish adults called the Melton program. You could google it. There was an [inventor and activist named Florence Zacks] Melton [1911-2007], who basically sponsored this higher education for Jewish adults. They produced their own curriculum on Jewish history, Jewish holidays, and so I was teaching that at the Jewish Community Center.

TS: Now, you were full time for a while at least at Kennesaw.

AS: Here, one or two years; not a lot. Frankly, there were a few positions I tried for, but the department had people that they had sort of figured out who was going to go in them. But it worked out fine.

TS: Well, now, you were saying that the campus was about a tenth of what it is now. That's a little exaggeration, but we didn't have residence halls in 1999. It was 2002 before that happened. I wanted to ask you your impression of Kennesaw State when you came here.

AS: Well, I was always impressed not too much with the physical layout, although that was impressive too, but with the students. I was always impressed that most of them worked; and I like that.

TS: Yes. We've changed big time in terms of the campus culture, I think, in that regard. The average student is a lot younger now than in 1999.

AS: Right. I would have second-career people. Again, I enjoyed it because being part time, you're just teaching. You don't have to worry about what committee are you on or this dean or that dean.

TS: That's a blessing.

AS: Right. And Betty Siegel, God bless her, called me over a few times to sit in her office. She wanted to set up a Jewish studies program. I mean, I had done some initial work for that. It never got to fruition, but I had a nice relationship with her. We spoke earlier about being a rabbi and teaching. It's kind of you're doing the same thing. You're just imparting information. I enjoyed it and still do. I find teaching online a bit of a challenge because you don't have the immediacy of being able to go into students and say, "Oh, what happened last night? Let's process it," or whatever.

TS: What have you been teaching: American history, any World history?

AS: Mostly 2112, which is United States history, post-Civil War. I've taught World occasionally, and Colonial as well. But our adult children, Rachel, Aaron, Leah, and Ilana are all married with families and live in the area. It is such a pleasure to see your children becoming parents. We are a blended family with our daughter Rachel, helping her raise her two sons, one of whom is autistic. Our son Aaron lives near Rome, Georgia.

TS: He was in Cave Springs.

AS: Cave Springs. He's still there. He works for Home Depot, and his wife does. And that's a whole separate—not about Home Depot, but his journey.

TS: Well, I know the story, so you don't need to [tell more than you want to].

AS: I don't know if you know the conclusion of the story.

TS: No.

AS: Well, it's his story. We've mentioned he was adopted, and, like a lot of adopted people I have a stepfather, so I know to some extent. He always wondered about his biological mother. The father was, like, not in the picture. He tracked her down. He moved out to Arkansas to be with her. She was Christian. He met Kati, they married, and I think he wanted to follow that path more of Christianity than Judaism. After a number of years, he decided to come back to Georgia, joined a local church, became well versed in the church and became a minister of the Church of God. A number of years later—and we would always discuss the Bible, the provenance of the Bible—he came to me, and he studied Hebrew extensively. He said, "I've been reading the prophecies, and I think I'm beginning to see them in a Jewish way, not in a Christian way, anymore." Eventually he decided to come back to Judaism as well.

TS: Oh, he did?

AS: Yes, he did.

TS: Oh, fantastic. I didn't know that.

AS: He looped all the way back. He has abilities that my wife and I don't have. He can build things that I can look at, but the minute I pick up a hammer, it is a dangerous time. He can just do things that are amazing. I think that's the nature part. But he's well spoken, well educated, still studying Hebrew. And the whole family converted. So, they're thinking about maybe going to Israel. It's amazing. Once Israel gets its act together, which is another story.

I should say, because it's being recorded, that my wife and I will be married fifty years in December. She has always been supportive all the way. She loved the military, and there were a lot of people I knew whose spouses didn't support them. And without the support of your spouse, you can't do it. I had a friend who loved the Navy, but his wife said to him, "You can only be in the Navy in the Los Angeles area." "No, you can't do that." Then she supported me through my PhD work.

To show you how life goes. I started going back to Loyola at night, and then she became pregnant with our fourth child, Ilana. So, my wife came to me one time and said, "Okay, stop school. Stop." I said, "Yes, but I just started. This is my second class." And she said, "Well, I'm pregnant. We're having a baby, and I can't handle all this." I said, "Okay, when are you due?" And she said, "May." I said, "Okay, good. Semester ends in May. Then we'll have the summer. So let's get through the baby." Now this baby is married and has her own kids. "Let's get the baby born, and we'll have the summer, and then we'll talk." I was only in the Navy ten years, but the idea was to get the doctorate, so that when I got out, it might prove to be helpful because I could teach in a place like this. So, it wasn't for me. It was for us, and she went along. And so, in writing the books, my wife is wonderful. But coming here and working in all these different places, she's been wonderfully supportive. So, she gets kudos for that.

TS: Fantastic. Okay, so *Fighting Rabbis* in 1999 was your first. Then, in 2014, *America's Other Clan* [Cognella Academic Publishing].

AS: Right. I love that title. *America's Other Clan: The United States Supreme Court*, and I spell clan with a "c."

TS: So you're saying that the Supreme Court justices were a bunch of racists through much of our history?

AS: Yes.

TS: Okay.

AS: And by the way, the genesis for that book was a student in class. We're studying the Jim Crow period. One of the students raised her hand. "Dr. Slomovitz?" "Yes." She said, "Where is the Supreme Court in all this?" The Jim Crow era is after the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. There was a Civil Rights Acts of 1870, 1875. I said, "That's a great question." Then quickly I said, "Well, they reflected the mores of the time." She said, "Okay," but it got me thinking, "Where, indeed, were they?" I started for a number of years schlepping to Emory, the law school library, and opening up these law books, and just reading the cases that they decided. What I discovered was that my thesis was pretty accurate. The court was not enforcing [the civil rights amendments and laws]. I mean, we all know Plessy...

TS: *Plessy v. Ferguson* [1896].

AS: Yes. I often quote in my class this phrase from that decision: "Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts," and there were a number of other cases that the Supreme Court was giving the imprimatur to this whole idea of social separation. So, I had a wonderful moment, which is in the book—and the book is used when I teach. One of the local synagogues—Stuart [Elliott] Eizenstat—you might know the name...

TS: Yes!

AS: Ambassador Eizenstat worked with Jimmy Carter [as issues director of Carter's 1970 gubernatorial campaign in Georgia and as executive director of the White House Domestic Policy Staff from 1977 to 1981, and later President Clinton's selection as United States Ambassador to the European Union, 1993-1996] is a member of AA [Ahavath Achim] Synagogue downtown. They invited Justice [Stephen Gerald] Breyer about seven or eight years ago when I was working on the book. So, I called the rabbi there, and I said, "Hey, I want to meet the justice." And he laughed. I said, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "Everyone wants to meet the justice, every lawyer in town, every judge." I said, "Okay." And they were having him speak at the synagogue. He said, "Come and hear him speak." I said, "Okay." And I told him I was doing research for the book. Well, it turns out that that night they had like a private dinner for Justice Breyer, twelve people. Ambassador Eizenstat, his wife, the Justice, the AA Rabbi, and a few other people, and they invited me to that. There was an empty seat next to Justice Breyer. I said, "Who's sitting there?" I figured the president of the synagogue. They said, "No," [and pointed toward the seat]. I sat in the empty seat.

TS: That's for you?

AS: He's talking to Eizenstat a little bit, and then he turns to me, and he says the following, "So, I hear you're writing a book about the Supreme Court. Inside, I'm very calm, but I'm going nuts too because here's a Supreme Court Justice speaking to me. "Who am I?" I'm like a nobody. I'm a history professor, but... Well, first of all, you know he's Jewish. So, we spoke Jewish stuff, family, wife, kids. And then I told him about the book, and

my premise was that the justices were prejudiced. And here's what he said, and I quote. He was quiet for a second. He says, "You're on to something." That's an exact quote from Justice Breyer. "You're on to something."

And then he was selling his books, and I got a few. And of all the cases he put in there, he started with the Plessy case. And there was a case—I won't go too much into the weeds—a 1968 case where the justices—this was Justice [William O.] Douglas, basically. One of the professors here at Kennesaw, not in the history department, maybe in political science, put me onto this case. It's the [*Jones v.*] *Alfred H. Meyer Co.* case, where they acknowledge my thesis that they had for a hundred years not voted for equality among people. So, the justices themselves verified my thesis. The people who published the book said they wanted to change the title. They didn't like the title. *America's Other Clan* was too...

TS: They didn't like that?

AS: No. They said, "Make it more neutral." I'm currently working on a revision with a new title: *A Lasting Legacy: Racism, Inequality, and the Supreme Court*.

TS: Now, were you writing this for students or were you writing it for the seven or eight scholars that care about it, or who was your audience?

AS: The audience is mostly students. However, I spoke once at the Holocaust Center about this topic, and it was professors. Somebody got up, and he left the room. I saw him go to the back of the room, and he was typing in his phone. So, when I was done speaking, I went to him. I said, "Is everything okay?" He said, "I never heard of some of these cases, and I teach about this; so, I was taking notes to make sure I don't lose that."

TS: How about that?

AS: There's a wonderful case called *DeCuir* in 1877 [*Hall v. DeCuir*], and there's a lady of color who is on a steam ship. She has paid for a seat in the white cabin to sleep overnight. It's going from Louisiana up the Mississippi River. And on the ship, they said, "You can't spend the night in the white women's cabin"—even though it was paid for. Instead, the steward of the ship takes her to various places throughout the ship asking if she could spend the night there. And she's refusing, and she takes a lounge chair and spends a night outside the "white woman's" area. I call her the Rosa Parks of the 19th century. No one knows about her—Josephine DeCuir. That's the case. And when the court looked at the case, one of the justices said, "It's not unreasonable to separate people because when you put people of different races together, it's a repugnancy." In 1877!

So, this is the Supreme Court starting that whole line of [racist decisions]. Imagine the Plessy decision. They're saying that legislation is powerless to eradicate racial incidents. Think of that. This is the Supreme Court of the country saying laws don't matter. What matters is sort of your social sense. So, if you can't eat with somebody and you can't cut their hair, which led to all this social Jim Crow—people walking on the sidewalk, and

who moves first. And I said the court was much, much more complicit. I never get a chance to talk about this.

TS: And that was an 8 to 1 decision, about as unanimous as you could get.

AS: Right. Right.

TS: Okay. So, let's talk about the Jewish-Christian Discovery Center. When did you start thinking that we needed a center?

AS: When I wrote my third book...it's weird. I truly think this was a calling for me. In the Navy, many of the chaplains that I knew felt that they had been called by God to be in the Navy. When they recounted this calling, it seemed very direct. In my case, I was called, but in a more gradual way with a growing awareness that I needed to respond to the growing reality of anti-Semitism. I think with this book, *A New Look at Rabbi Jesus*, I was called with a small "c." You just get something in your brain that says, "You have this wonderful military background working with all people and then this academic background from Loyola University. There are not that many rabbis who have legitimate Jesuit credentials. And so, it seemed to me with all the anti-Semitism: "Write a book!" So, I wrote a commentary of the Book of Matthew. And then the book was out and you speak here and there, and then somebody said to me, "You know, the book is like a firecracker." I said, "What do you mean?" "It goes up and explodes, and you have all these colors, then it fades away.

TS: Fades away?

AS: Fades away just like a fireworks.

TS: No!

AS: I don't know about that. But I said, "What do you suggest?" He said, "You've got to do something else; great idea, great premise, educating Christians about the Jewish roots, but you can do more."

TS: Oh, I see.

AS: And that was a catalyst for forming the nonprofit Jewish-Christian Discovery Center.

TS: In other words, the book was not enough by itself.

AS: Right. Right. "You needed to do more." So, I'm seventy-two now. I was, like, sixty-seven, sixty-eight, and went online and hired a lawyer to incorporate and to do all the paperwork and just started doing things.

TS: So, this is like 2018?

AS: Yes. We've been blessed. I went to Marcus—not to Bernie, but to someone who does the day-by-day stuff. His name is Jay Kaiman. As life would have it, I knew him when I was in Pensacola, so I knew the family and knew him.

TS: So, he's the [Marcus] Foundation...

AS: President; he's the foundation president. So, I told him what I wanted to do. What they liked about it was we're proactive. We show people, we educate people about the linkages between Jews and Christians. And the whole idea is to show people that we're spiritual siblings. We're like this [two hands coming together], not this [two hands moving in opposite directions], as a way of reducing anti-Semitism. Now, we're in our fifth year—books, children's books, and activity books, and a J-Star project [Jewish Star of David Christmas tree ornaments].

We did a video. I hired a video company downtown Atlanta. It's called *The Magical Encounter*. We made a seven-minute video, which took eighteen months to complete. I'm in it. I have a little part. But cameras and lights and directors and producers and special effects, and two kids go to a library, and they're transported through time. And, again, every kid who's seen Marvel or Star Wars or whatever, that's not weird to believe that. They travel through time, and they meet Jesus as a twelve-year-old. He's reading from the Torah, preparing for his bar mitzvah. They have a conversation, then they travel back through time.

TS: And you think that's what happens for Jesus when Mary and Joseph take him to the Temple at age twelve? It's a bar mitzvah?

AS: Oh, I think so. Sure. In fact, the fourth book that is in production now is called *Jesus' Bar Mitzvah*. And in the book of Luke, I think it is Chapter 2 [Luke 2:41-50]. Jesus is studying with the rabbis, and he's twelve years old, and he's asking questions. That's kind of how you prepare for your bar mitzvah. Your twelve, you study with the rabbis, you ask questions, and you learn about new things. And even if it wasn't technically, it's a wonderful point to make.

TS: Sure. By the way, you oftentimes use the Doctor Abraham. Is Abraham like a bar mitzvah name?

AS: No, it's my Hebrew name. Every Jewish person has a secular name and a Hebrew name. So, I say Doctor Abraham. That's my Hebrew name, Abraham. So, at any rate, this nonprofit—so, now the video is made, and we're going to start taking it to schools to show kids. The producer of the video won an Emmy for something else. It's called Tomorrow Pictures. He said, "Put it in film festivals."

TS: How long is the video?

AS: Six or seven minutes. So, back to the Jewish-Christian Discovery Center, we're trying to expand. If I can loop it back to one second, this is a weird loop, but one of the authors of

the Thirteenth Amendment was a senator who said, “If you’re going to free people, it has to be practical freedom.” It can’t be theoretical. If you’re going to say to people, “You’re free,” it has to be free. And so, when I do interfaith work, I say, “Do practical interfaith work.” So, like this [holding a J-star], we give these out to hundreds of kids. There’s a little package, and we give them a star, and we ask them to put the star on the tree. Why? And the postcard says—there’s a little postcard in [the package]—“Why are you getting this?” “That’s easy because Jesus celebrated Hanukkah every Christmas.” There were no Christmases. He was Jewish, etc.

So, now so interestingly, I’ve been doing this four or five years, and I had a mother who came up to me a few months ago. She said, “Rabbi, we have four or five of these.” I said, “What are you doing with them?” She said, “We put it on a wreath on the front door. We put it on the door handle. We have it all over the house,” because she has it every year. So, next year, we’re going to have menorahs the kids can take. But the whole point of this is that whatever we do, we just want to show people the connection between Judaism and Christianity. So, I’m in a Sunday school, and I tell the kids, I’m given them the star, and telling them Jesus was Jewish, and we give them a little dreidel. And now we’ve modernized, so we have this postcard with a QR code, which I just learned about, and it links back to the books we’ve written. So, this will link you back to the books.

So, I say to the kids, “Okay, any questions?” So, the kid raised his hand. He said, “Well, Jesus was Jewish. What religion were his parents, Joseph and Mary?” I said, “Okay, why don’t you think about that a second?” He’s quiet for a minute. He said, “They were Jewish too.” I mean, those are the kind of moments I live for in terms of the nonprofit because here’s the goal, and I think it’s important to have this on tape. The people who are shooting each other on the street, this violence, are twenty-, twenty-one-, twenty-two-years-old. The young people are going to churches and synagogues. And so, my thinking is the following, “If I give this to an eight-year-old or ten-year-old, and they hang it on the tree every year, the chances of them becoming radicalized and becoming violent and hateful are greatly reduced because of this little three or four dollar star. That’s my thinking.

So, everything we do, it sounds nice, but it’s kind of serious at the bottom of it. that we’re really trying to push back. I mean, how do you have a Holocaust? If you think about it—I visited Auschwitz a number of years ago. I was there, and it’s still hard to believe. I mean, how do you get hatred to that level? In the book, I write—Jesus wrote a few parables, and so I wrote my own parable. I think you remember that. I encountered Jesus, and we’re at a park bench, and he’s crying. I don’t know it’s Jesus, but it’s kind of like Jesus if you get the parable. He said, “My people have messed up.” He said, “I never intended this phase of my beliefs to lead to so much hatred and misunderstanding.” So, I think very much just about entering people’s lives and changing it in a positive way. And that’s how we make a difference. So far, we’ve gotten support from the Marcus Foundation because we don’t just condemn. We use education to reduce prejudice.

It's easy when something bad happened for all of us to say that's horrible, that shouldn't happen. The guy in Texas who just shot people at the shopping mall [in Allen, Texas, Saturday, May 6, 2023; eight people were killed by a gunman, who wore a RWDS (right wing death squad) patch on his vest], I don't know based on ethnicity or what. But how do you prevent it? Every organization in the world can condemn it. But what are you doing proactively? So far, Marcus has said to us, "You're being preemptive. You're being proactive in a preventative kind of way."

TS: We're winding up, but can you talk about "Breaking Badness, Choosing Goodness"—if you're up to it, your interfaith service?

AS: Well, it's just interesting. I'll tell you two things, big finish, unless you have a big finish for me.

TS: Okay.

AS: We're constantly thinking. It's wonderful to be an older person and let ideas just flow into your head, just whatever comes in. So, this show on, I think, Netflix, *Breaking Bad* [AMC, 2008-2013]. I never saw it because of the drugs and meth and all that, but I heard about it. So, I like that title, and I said, "Okay. We're going to do 'Breaking Badness, Choosing Goodness.'" So, I sat with—it sounds like a joke, "a priest, a minister, and a rabbi sit together"—and we created a ritual! And we hope to get it at Tom's church, where you have a piece of unleavened bread, Matzah, and as you break it apart, you say—part of our High Holy Days liturgy here is you list your sins—for the sin when I've been bad.

So, we're going to break the Matzah as we say the sins we've committed, hateful, prejudice, etc., etc. And then we're going to do that collectively, take all that unleavened bread and burn it, bury it. We're going to cleanse ourselves of our sins, and then we're going to come back into the room and take another piece of Matzah, but this is going to be the good things we do. When we're kind to people, when we let people come in front of us in traffic, and all the good stuff. And then we're going to take some honey and consume that and taste the sweetness of it, so that, when we leave that ritual, we're going to be tasting, we're going to be cleansed of our bad habits and focus on the good habits. So, we call that "Breaking Badness, Choosing Goodness," which we've done in a few churches.

But think of it, on a church level, it's good I think for the people. But for us, we're also trying to publicize it on a larger level. So, we had at this one church, a Catholic church, St. Ann's [on Roswell Road in East Cobb County], about forty, fifty people. Fox News came out that day and interviewed all of us. Father Ray [Raymond Cadran] was the one who got on, but we're trying to tally how many hundreds of thousands see Fox News at the 4:00, 5:00, and 6:00 o'clock. So, we're trying to do that.

TS: Well, the *Marietta Daily Journal* must love you because you got the front page of the *MDJ* with a bunch of pictures.

AS: Yes, they've been very good. Yes. I mean, listen. Two things: the Mishnah, which was written around the year 200 [C.E.] has a number of sayings, and one of the sayings is that when you see problems of the world, you do the best you can to solve them with the time you have. The meaning is you're not going to solve it, but you can do something. So, that's what this is. I get a very modest salary, really modest, and I'm glad to have my Navy retirement, Go Navy, and Social Security. Still solvent, but let me give you an example. Moving forward, just in the future, I don't know if this is going to pan out. Recently [October 2022], Robert [Kenneth] Kraft [owner] of the New England Patriots started an organization dealing with anti-Semitism, where anti-Semitism occurs in America [Foundation to Combat Antisemitism]. So, I contacted them, saying, "Hey, can we work with you possibly?"

And I also was down at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium a few days ago for a meeting of rabbis and heard the CEO talk about the Atlanta United soccer team and the founders, of course [Arthur Blank's AMB Sports and Entertainment Group]. They have core values, which I didn't know that. They have certain values, which they espouse, and one of them is treating everyone fairly. So, I've written an email to him. I actually spoke to him a little bit. So, we're seeing if we can incorporate sports and somehow bring in the work of the Jewish-Christian Discovery Center and wed those two together so that if you're a sports fan.... By the way, some of the soccer teams in Holland are talking about how many Jews they can gas. I mean, a horrible cheer.

TS: You're kidding!

AS: No, I'm not kidding you. You can Google that. They got arrested actually in Holland. The police tracked people down. But apparently, they were [directed at] either Jewish backers or Jewish players, and one of the chats was, "How many of you can we gas?" Stuff like that, I mean, horrible stuff. And in a country that had Anne Frank, and taken over by Nazis. So, I just think we're in this—even with the second book about racism—in this epic battle in the world between goodness and evilness. I used to think most people were really, really good, and we didn't have to worry about that. I think now that we have to do more to help people see how things should be. So, that's what I'm doing with the Jewish-Christian Discovery Center. So far, we've been blessed. I haven't gotten a lot of really hateful negative stuff directed toward us because we say we're education based, not faith based. And the good news is that the children respond.²

² "Fans of the Dutch soccer team Vitesse chanted ' Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas' at a fan rally before a match against Ajax, an Amsterdam-based team known for its history of Jewish supporters." Cnaan Liphshiz, *The Times of Israel*, 19 April 2021. In May 2023, Amsterdam police arrested 154 AZ Alkmaar soccer fans singing anti-Semitic chants on a train taking them to a match with Ajax. The stadium was located in a part of Amsterdam where many Jews lived prior to World War II and in the past had had Jewish players and officials. Israeli flags were often displayed around the stadium, and some of the fans wore Star of David necklaces in support of the team. Claire Moses, *New York Times*, May 7, 2023; and "Over 150 Dutch Soccer Fans Arrested over Antisemitic Songs on Way to Game," *The Times of Israel*, 7 May 2023.

Big finish here: I learned about Christmas trees [for sale] at Saint Ann's. I'm a rabbi. I don't know about Christmas trees. But I now know families come, and they select the tree. One time a family came, a father, a mother, and a daughter. She pointed to the Star. So, I gave her the star, and I told her about Hanukkah and Christmas. And so, she looks at me, and then she looks at her father. She says, "Dad, is what the rabbi is saying true? Jesus is Jewish, and celebrated Hanukkah and not Christmas?" So, the dad is quiet for a second, and he kind of smiled. He said, "Yes." So, then she's quiet again. I gave her the star, and she said, "All right." And by the way, the kids decorate this [the J-star]. They color it. They put glitter on it. They put it on the tree. And I said to her, "Okay, so now that you know this, what does it mean to you?" So, I figured she was going to say, "It's okay to put it on the tree." She's quiet for a minute, and she says, "I guess it means we're all a little bit Jewish." I'm done. That was it. My work here was over. Because if that's what she concludes, then that seals the deal. If she has that insight, and she's going to take that with her, that's wonderful.

TS: Yes.

AS: So, for me, that's a win. That's a big win here. At Tom's church [Heritage Presbyterian, Acworth], I spoke a few years ago, and I had one of the older gentlemen who came up to me. He said, "I've been going to this church for decades, and I've never heard anything like you've been talking about." I said, "Okay." And he said, "You've given me something to think about." And so, that's kind of where I am, what I'm trying to do with my older age, having a good time, still trying to live life, appreciate kids and that.

TS: Want to hold up your first children's book [*The Hanukkah Miracle*]?

AS: Right. You can get this at Amazon. There are a number of other books with Spanish translations.

TS: You can get it through your website [therabbijesus.com].

AS: Yes. And on the website we also have activity books, so the kids can color, and they can write their own stories in the back. It's very educational. It's wholesome. It's entertaining. By the way, I just wrote it. I found a wonderful illustrator [Remi Bryant], and it's so colorful. So, we're very proud of these.

TS: Have you got any reactions from children to the books?

AS: Yes. I'm going to talk until you to stop me, but there's another great story.

TS: We'll stop with it.

AS: Well, let's stop. But that's a wonderful story. And thank you for listening. I gave those books out, the ones you have. Not [*The Hanukkah Miracle*] but *The Matzah that Saved Easter*. Number two.

TS: Which is connected with what you were telling about the experience with the submarine.

AS: Right. So, I had these at Mount Bethel [Church] in East Cobb last year. I did a model Seder for them, and we gave out the books to the kids, *The Matzah that Saved Easter*. A little girl, she learns how to bake Matzah. She goes to a synagogue because her friend is Jewish. They bake Matzah. She fills up her backpack and keeps it in the backpack. She goes to church on Easter Sunday. The minister says, “Sad news. Our wafers didn’t come in for Easter Sunday. We still have grape juice but no wafers. Oh, I’m sorry.” Then the girl, whose name is Kristie—kind of deliberately Kristie—Kristie says to her, mom, “Mom, I brought my backpack. It’s filled with Matzah. Can we use that?” So, they call the minister, Reverend Jamie, and the mother says, “Reverend Jamie, Reverend Jamie.” He says “What?” And the mother says, “Kristie has her bag filled with Matzah. Can we use that?” And the minister says, “Oh, my God, Kristie, you saved Easter because the Matzah was the original. unleavened bread.”

That’s the story—*The Matzah that Saved Easter*. And it illustrated. So, we did a model Seder meal at Mt. Bethel. I gave the book out to the kids. That’s Thursday. Saturday, I am in services at Etz Chaim, and one of the congregants says to me, “I have to see you after services.” After services, she says, “My son has a group of neighborhood kids, and they were in the basement. And I happen to go down and they were talking. The kid who had been to the model Seder at the church was reading the story of *The Matzah that Saved Easter* to my son. And that’s what they were talking about.”

So just picture that. These kids in the basement who were not playing video games or not outside throwing a ball were talking about that little story. That to me is how you make sure that the next generation will be filled with respect and treat each other kindly and with dignity. And that, ultimately, is what Jesus, as a Jewish child learned and embodied from the book of Leviticus, “Love your neighbor as Yourself.” That’s the actualization of that. So, little moments like that are big wins for me. I didn’t see the child. But the fact that the parent would come to me and say, “They’re all the neighborhood kids; they’re talking about Matzah and Jesus.” That’s the kind of world you want to live in.

TS: Yes. Well, I think when you see how passionate you are about what you’ve done throughout your lifetime, that when you’ve done absolutely what you were always meant to do, that to me is that small “c” calling. Thank you very much.

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