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Funeral service, Park Avenue Synagogue [2]. 6 July 1992.

Georgette Bennett:

In contrast to younger men I have known, my husband showers me with unexpected adorations. His is the unconstrained love of someone who has been around long enough to welcome finding the missing piece in his life. The noncompetitive giving of a mature man who has reached the peak of his professional powers and is not threatened by a still aspiring wife. Marrying an older man at the midpoint of my life has meant that I must cherish the present because I cannot take the future for granted. I fervently hope that my husband's vigor, youthfulness and spirit will enable him to beat the actuarial odds. But if not, our love is such a celebration of life that its memory can sustain me for the rest of my days. [01:00]

John O' Connor:

I am in large measure responsible to you for two of the highlights of my tenure as archbishop of New York. First, you so generously invited me here to address your congregation, and now you include me in this very special service. Georgette, knowing the enormous number of friends that your husband had, I was literally touched to tears when you asked me if I would make

remarks. I have here two letters. [02:00] One is addressed to me, and that I will not read, signed by Marc Tanenbaum. The other is addressed to Mrs. Georgette Bennett. And I trust she will permit me to read at least a portion of it. It's from the personal representative of Pope John Paul II. Reads, "Dear Ms. Bennett, as the apostolic pro-nuncio to the United States representing His Holiness Pope John Paul II, I wish to join the many who mourn the loss of your dear husband, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum in expressing my heartfelt condolences to you and to your family. Indeed your husband will be missed by so many who have come to know his countless efforts to help people work together in love [03:00] and in peace for the good of all in the family of God. In a special way I recall his ongoing communication with the Holy See to foster Jewish-Christian dialogue and the genuine devotion with which he pursued this endeavor. You can be assured that his memory will always endure in the hearts of men and women of goodwill who continue his work of accomplishing unity among peoples. May God remain close to you and your family now and always. May he grant to you his cherished gifts of peace and joy in knowing that one of your own has served him so faithfully. May Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum rest in that peace which he himself sought to create among his brothers and sisters in this life. [04:00] Prayerful best wishes and cordial regards. I remain sincerely yours, Agostino

Cacciavillan, personal representative of Pope John Paul II." The second handwritten letter addressed to me and signed by Marc is precious. I will not read it because it's too flattering. It was typical of the gentleness, the graciousness, the kindness with which he not infrequently wrote to me. I did not bring with me those letters which were filled with criticism [05:00] and a significant degree of harshness. Rabbi Tanenbaum wrote to me and spoke with me on so many occasions. I knew him for many years before I came here to be the archbishop of New York. Because he was a friend, he would speak with gentleness when he believed that gentleness was appropriate. And he would speak with critical firmness when he believed that critical firmness was appropriate. I'm not sure that I have ever had a relationship with anyone with whom [06:00] I was able more amicably to disagree. Or with anyone whose disagreements with me I found to be so amicable. Overall I am very deeply grateful that he seemed to find it in his heart to say an almost infinite number of kind things to more than counterbalance that rare comment which he felt in integrity and professionally he felt that I deserved. Or that my sponsors deserved. I am so happy [07:00] that you are naming your son Joshua-Marc. To me, Joshua, the Jewish scriptures, and I think to most scholars, was the bridge between the Pentateuch of Moses and all of the Jewish history that was to follow. The first historian after Moses. And how fitting that

the son of Marc Tanenbaum would bear the name of the one who in his person exemplifies this continuity, this tradition, this Pentateuch [08:00] into the future of all Jewish history. And secondly it was Joshua who fought the battle of Jericho that caused the walls to come tumbling down. And if ever a man of any religious persuasion spent a lifetime to bringing it about that walls would come tumbling down, it was Rabbi Tanenbaum. Finally, it was Joshua who was commanded to do what Moses could not do. To lead the Israelites into the promised land. [09:00] In my theology, and in the Jewish scriptures, the promised land is where the lion and the lamb lie down together in peace. May it please God that through the life and in God's mysterious ways through the death of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum without daring to suggest which is the lion or which is the lamb soon, please God soon, Israel and Rome will lie down together in peace. [10:00]

Roy Goodman:

Learned and distinguished rabbis, Your Eminence, Georgette. When I spoke with you on Saturday after having been dealt a blow to the solar plexus on the reading of the obituary page in the *New York Times*, we spoke. You honored me with your invitation to come here today which I would never have missed. And you said something which is perhaps the only thing you've ever said with which I would respectfully take a degree of disagreement. You

said, "Being pregnant and being on the verge of bearing a child in my eighth month of pregnancy, I feel a profound sense of sadness [11:00] and regret because my child will never know his father." Georgette, your child will indeed know his father. He will learn much of him from the legions of great admirers whom your father attracted for so many reasons. And for the balance of my brief remarks I'd like to speak to Joshua. I'd like him to know that his father was a man of enormous brains, dignity, courage, and an unselfish dedication to the needs of other people. He was a very very wealthy man in the psychic capital which he built over a career and a lifetime of concern for the plight of others. [12:00] Whether it was the Jews in the Holocaust, whether it was the refugees and the boat people in Cambodia to whose border he journeyed to meet Elie Wiesel to say the kaddish, whether it was those who were suffering in any part of the world where unjust occurrences had brought them to their knees, where human rights were in danger. Joshua, your father was there. A commanding presence, a man whose words were weapons. But not weapons of hate, but rather weapons of deep understanding between people. For reasons that can never be clearly understood, in a world in which hatred and divisiveness are all too common, [13:00] he chose to devote his life, the son of a Baltimore grocer, to acquiring the vast armamentarium of tools which enabled him to intervene on behalf of humanity. What

caused this to happen, Joshua? Will it happen to you? I first knew of Marc Tanenbaum when I used to shave in the morning and would turn on my radio and tune in WINS and hear his commentaries. For a quarter of a century they enlightened the American people. Then came the lucky day, Joshua, when I was at a dinner party and sat with both of your parents, newly married, and we fell in love. Now, Joshua, I would shift my gaze for just a moment from your father to your mother. What a fabulous, fey, witty, brilliant, unique personality she is. [14:00] And how she and your father blended in a way that is simply indescribable. Another miracle of human relations. For together they were young lovers recapturing the sentiment that is so rare to find in any lovers, but especially those young in spirit, irrespective of a gap in age. And to go to their home, to eat the carefully selected low cholesterol but nonetheless delicious diet so lovingly foisted upon your father, who pretended to think it was the greatest cuisine in the world, and to sit and exchange anecdotes and serious thoughts with a variety of people. I think the last time I was in this home was with the police commissioner of the city of New York, where Georgette, who had known him for many many years, wanted to bring together a group of people who were involved in trying to make the streets safer. [15:00] And to Marc this was something of enormous significance. And it was to all at the table. And it is to the city of New

York. Joshua, the traditions blended together are simply indescribably beautiful. And I should only like to say to you, young man, I can't wait to meet you. I can't wait to watch you grow up. I can't wait to have you learn what a remarkably lucky young man you are.

Ari Goldman:

Like many reporters, when I'm finished with an article, I throw away the notebook and all the faxes and all the messages that I used in writing the story. It's old news. On to the next article. But there has been a notebook, this notebook, that I couldn't throw away. [16:00] It has been sitting on my desk for three years now. It is marked August 1989 and it says simply Marc and Wolfe. Inside are the notes from a joint interview I did with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, *zecher tzadik livracha*, and Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, *zecher tzadik livracha*, on the occasion of their coincidentally timed retirements from the American Jewish Committee and the Rabbinical Assembly. Marc and Wolfe had been roommates 40 years earlier as students at the Jewish Theological Seminary. And from there each had gone on to extraordinary careers [17:00] that changed worlds. The Jewish world and the Christian world. Each in his own way. We met that summer day at the seminary for lunch but found that the cafeteria for some reason that I can't remember was closed. So the three of us

walked through the bright Morningside Heights sunshine to the cafeteria at the God Box. That's the headquarters of the National Council of Churches just a few blocks away on Riverside Drive. With sidelong glances at each other, we hurried past the hot food and filled up our plates at the salad bar. Marc and Wolfe were in wonderful moods. And they talked easily, like two college buddies, and not like two men about to retire. They were full of life [18:00] and plans for the future. As for me, I was in heaven. If the seminary cafeteria had been open, no doubt we would have been interrupted every other bite with well-wishers, a student, an inquiry, a *shailah*, a greeting, a question, a debate, a negotiation. But for one blissful hour, I had these two great men to myself. These two great men who had become more than just my sources but my friends and my mentors. Little did I imagine that within three years I would be called upon to write both of their obituaries. Without a doubt the hardest thing I've had to do at the *New York Times* is write these obituaries. Not because there were not good stories, not because Marc and Wolfe didn't leave us powerful inspiring lives to write about. [19:00] No, writing these obituaries was so hard because it is so hard to say goodbye. We gather today to say goodbye to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, a great man, a friend, a leader, for many of us a mentor. For all of us a giant in our time. How do we do it? How do we begin to say goodbye to a life so robust, so passionate,

so compelling? Well, for me I open up the notebook. I open up the notebook and I see Marc's words. I open up the notebook and I hear his wisdom and I feel his warmth and his friendship and his generosity. I open up the notebook and I see Marc at the end of our lunch chomping on a thick cinnamon stick, a vestige from his cigar smoking days. [20:00] "Give up that pipe and try one of these babies," he says to Wolfe. I open up the notebook and I hear Marc reminiscing about his great mentor and friend Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. These are Marc's words. "Heschel taught me that nothing -- nothing -- was alien to Judaism. Not the life of the spirit. Not Christianity. Not black people. Not the poor. Not the hungry. All of these are part of Judaism." I open up the notebook and I hear Marc talking about his life's work. The effort to help Jews and Christians understand one another. "I can't help but believe," he told me, "that if Jews and Christians in Berlin and Hamburg and Dusseldorf had had [21:00] a meaningful relationship, the Holocaust could never have happened." Interfaith understanding was not just a sideshow, an appendage, to Judaism, Marc was saying. It may just be our salvation. Each of us here today carries his own notebook and her own notebook, whether written down or committed to memory, whether heard on the radio or heard in a sermon, about the life, the incredible life of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum. Georgette's notebook is brimming with ten years of love and sharing. Sima

carries the notebook of a proud and wise sister. And Michael and Susan and Adena carry the rich and intimate and sometimes heavy notebooks of children. And on every page there is love. [22:00] How do we say goodbye to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum? I don't know. But I do know that I will keep this notebook on my desk for a long long time. *Tehi nishmato tzerurah bitzeror hachayim*. May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

Roz Goldberg:

Marc honored me by being my loving and devoted friend in the truest sense of that word. He was a man of infinite wisdom, extraordinary warmth and sensitivity, limitless kindness and compassion. And resilient -- resilient good humor. [23:00] And he bestowed these precious gifts upon me freely and lovingly. Not to aggrandize himself or to impress me with his prowess and his powers. But to enlarge and enrich my life. Despite the vast panoply of world-scale events in which he was always involved, and to which he contributed so much as we have heard toady, Marc was never too busy to talk with me about the smallest details of my life. To rejoice with me when things went well. To commiserate with me when things did not go so well. To embrace me with his love and affection. And to encourage and counsel me [24:00] over the many years of our friendship. Fortunately for me, I was able to give some of these treasures back. I counted

among my greatest achievements that I had the foresight and good judgment even if Georgette did not to introduce Marc and Georgette and thereby to add so much richly deserved happiness to both of their lives. I think I also earned significant points from Marc when I sat beside him every year at the first seder and sang the melodies while he read and interpreted the text. It's very hard for me. When I visited with him at the hospital two weeks ago, [25:00] something happened that was ultimately definitively my friend Marc. And I want to share it with you if I may. We talked for a long time that evening about lots of things. Including by the way a strategy which might enable him to deliver his High Holiday sermons at the Sutton Place Synagogue. That was one of the things we discussed. And in the course of our conversation we caught up on recent events in our lives, as we often did. And I told him that I was a bit discouraged about a personal disappointment in my life. Well, he listened quietly. Lying in his hospital bed. And then in characteristic fashion, despite his own pain and the suffering he had endured and the uncertainties that lay ahead and the stitches in his chest [26:00] which I could see over the top of the gown, this beautiful amazing man -- I'm sorry -- strove to comfort me and to dispel my disappointment with his words of affection and support. And then he hugged me and he kissed me and he told me that he loved me and I told him that I loved him

too. And I wanted to share these few words with you today, because I did not want this precious piece of Marc, his intimate humanity that made him the best friend in the world, I didn't want this piece to get lost among his legendary triumphs [27:00] and achievements on the great stages of the wider world.

Arnold Turetsky:

If anything could be added to the tribute that was written by Ari Goldman in the *New York Times* on Saturday. He spoke of Marc's effectiveness through the instruments of charisma and passion. And Ari, and sincerity. [28:00] We're all sincere people. Marc's sincerity was his effectiveness. He meant every word he said. And you could believe everything. Marc told you of a pogrom which occurred on Erev Pesach in Russia when all the people of the village, Jews driven by Christians, found themselves at the edge of a deep lake. And Marc's grandfather's brother was pushed into the lake and his head was held down until he died. It's true because Marc told it to you. [29:00] Marc would tell you of his conversations with church people and government people and popes. Personal intimate conversations. And everything he told you was true. Marc had absolute credibility. There's a French Jew now living whose name is Pierre Sauvage. Wrote a book that became a documentary that was on television last year called *Weapons of the Spirit*. It's the

story of Pierre Sauvage's village, Le Chambon, where without long plan but on [30:00] the instinct of humaneness the entire Catholic village decided to save its Jewish population in 1943. Sauvage writes of these weapons of the spirit and his revisiting of that village, Le Chambon, with his cousin Elizabeth whom he introduces to Madame Brottes, who saved his life and his family's. And the two women embraced. And he asked his cousin Elizabeth, "Why did you cry?" She says, "Because I had this feeling." "What did you feel?" "I felt I was holding the tree. There was softness to the touch but it was strong [31:00] and stout and straight and stately and it had roots and I need those roots." Adena, Michael, Susan, last time I saw your father was in the hospital, Lenox Hill Hospital. I came in. He sat up. And I embraced him, and he hugged me. I didn't cry, knew somehow to save it. What did I feel? [32:00] I felt I was holding a tree. There was softness to the touch. It was a tree. It was strong and stout, straight and stately. And it had roots. And I needed those roots. It's been a very long weekend, Georgette, since Friday morning. I spent all of Shabbat holding that tree. I hugged it. I realized that the tree didn't stand by itself. There was a forest. There are other trees. That tree is in the company of others. Rabbis, teachers, [33:00] leaders, statesmen, churchmen, organizations, American, Jewish, American Jewish, national, international. And this tree was the giant. This tree

I was holding surpassed all. It towered over all. And it was still growing. And all the trees of the forest were looking up and reaching higher to this tallest tree. I was holding it. I was straightened, I was strengthened. [34:00] Do you know what an honor it is to be a really good personal friend of Marc Tanenbaum? Georgette. A really good personal friend. Of personal life and of work Marc and I shared all but one thing I think. And that was the one thing I learned on Friday morning. Marc had requested of his wife a while ago -- as I had requested of mine a while ago -- that we would do each for the other what I am doing today. And neither of us knew it. My beloved friend [35:00] (Hebrew), you have arrived before me. There is a prayer brought to us by rabbi emeritus of this synagogue, Rabbi Judah Nadich.

M1:

Rabbi Judah Nadich indeed has been rabbi of this synagogue for over 30 years. Retired some five years ago. I know that he was more than a dear friend of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum. We are asking him if he will give a short tribute and a word of prayer at this time. [36:00]

Judah Nadich:

Another grocer's son from Baltimore rises now not to add any more encomiums but to read a closing prayer. I grieve for my friend of many years who was associated with me in the conduct of the High Holy Day services of this congregation for four years, starting 35 years ago (Hebrew). [37:00] Our God and God of our fathers and our mothers, our rock and our redeemer, a thousand years in your sight are as a passing day, an hour of night. Our generations come and go while you endure forever. We are always in your hand, o Lord, in death as in life, trusting in your love and your judgments. O Merciful father, strengthen those who mourn the loss of Marc Tanenbaum. Help them to look beyond this moment. [38:00] Help them to realize that death cannot destroy the bonds of your everlasting love. Sustain them with the knowledge of our faith that you will not abandon our souls to the grave. That you will not allow your faithful to suffer oblivion. For you, O Lord, have taught us the way of life. Through you our refuge we gain eternity. And let us say together amen. [39:00]

M1 :

Please rise as Cantor Bigeleisen recites the memorial prayer.

(music) [40:00]-[42:49]

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