

C-7386 Transcription

Weinberg, Neil. Slide presentation, "Echoes of the Past." 1969.

Neil Weinberg:

Hello, my name is Neil Weinberg. Last year, I was fortunate enough to be one of the forty boys chosen in this country to go on the United Jewish Appeal University Study Mission. In our trip we visited such countries as Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Romania, France, and of course, Israel. We were able to see for ourselves what had happened to the Jews in Europe during World War II, and from this destruction, why it was necessary for Israel to exist today. From the past, we were able to see the present and future of Israel, a country of life and hope. So today, we are going to follow the history of the Jewish people, from the ovens of the concentration camps in Europe to the struggle for existence in Israel. What happened in Nazi Germany is like ancient history. It is unbelievable that such atrocities could occur in modern civilization. We, the young, [01:00] take for granted the suffering our people had to endure, and tend to leave the horrors of the concentration camps to textbooks. To understand our identities as Jews, it is necessary to see what happened to our people over twenty five years ago. My

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presentation is in two parts. First, we will examine what happened to our people in the concentration camps in Europe. The second part will continue showing the problems the Jews face today.

Last summer, I visited two concentration camps, Dachau in Germany, and Mauthausen in Austria. This visit affected me very deeply, and I felt I should try to convey the feelings I felt to my fellow students on my return. So trying something creative, I made this film. I took some poems from the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, and wrote background music, and used the pictures I took last summer. These poems are not my words, [02:00] but the words of children over twenty-five years ago in concentration camps in Europe, who, of course, did not survive. But their voices can still be heard rising from the ovens of these death camps. And so now I present to you, my film *Echoes of the past, 1942...*

[Clock ticking, replaced by piano music]

M1 [child]:

God, the sun rose this morning. In England, the people are eating their breakfast. In Germany, the soldiers are changing

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the watches. In Bergen-Belsen [03:00], my mother died. "*Shema Yisrael!*" chant the people, shuffling into boxcars to meet their deaths

[Men singing] *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad*

M2:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

M1:

Fools! Those fools! There is no God!

[Music ends; drums with discordant piano]

M2:

[04:00] We got used to standing in line at seven o'clock in the morning, at twelve noon, and again at seven o'clock in the evening. We stood in a long line with a plate in our hands into which they ladled a little warmed up water with a salty or a coffee flavor, or else they gave us a few potatoes. We got used to sleeping without a bed, to saluting every uniform, not to walk on the sidewalks, and then again to walk on the sidewalks.

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We got used to undeserved slaps, blows, and executions. We got accustomed to seeing people die in their own excrement, to seeing piled up coffins full of corpses, to seeing the sick amidst dirt and filth [05:00], and to seeing the helpless doctors. We got used to it that, from time to time, one thousand unhappy souls would come here, and that, from time to time, another thousand unhappy souls would go away.

[Drums end; piano music]

F1:

That bit of filth in dirty walls.
And all around barbed wire,
And 30,000 souls who sleep
Who once will wake
And once will see their own blood spilled.

[06:00] I was once a little child,
Three years ago,
That child who longed for other worlds.

But now I am no more a child
For I have learned to hate.
I am a grown-up person now,

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I have known fear.

But anyway, I still believe I only sleep today,
That I'll wake up, a child again, and start to laugh and play.
I'll go back to childhood sweet like a briar rose,
Like a bell which wakes us from dream,
Like a mother with an ailing child,
Loves him with aching woman's love,
How tragic, then, is youth which lives
With enemies, with gallows ropes,
How tragic, then, for children [07:00] on your lap
To say: this for the good, that for the bad.

Somewhere, far away out there, childhood sweetly sleeps,
Along that path among the trees,
There o'er that house
Which was once my pride and joy.
There my mother gave me birth into this world
So I could weep...

In the flame of candles by my bed, I sleep
And once perhaps I'll understand

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That I was such a little thing,
As little as this song.

These 30,000 souls who sleep
Among the trees will wake,
Open an eye

And because they see
A lot

They fall asleep again... [08:00]

[Men singing] *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad*

M2:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

M1:

Fools! Those fools! There is no God!

[Piano music ends; violin music]

M1:

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A God wouldn't let this happen. A God wouldn't look down and let this suffering exist. There is no mercy. There is no hope. There is no God. [09:00] There is no reason to live.

[Piano music resumes]. Today I weighed in at 83 pounds, yet every time they hit me, I resist. Fight back! Live! Don't let these animals beat you! Don't let them win! But it is so hard, so difficult. And if there were a God, a God who loves and cares for his people, we wouldn't be here. My mother wouldn't have died. Four million wouldn't be dead. And if there is a God, I hate him! Because he allowed this to happen. [10:00]

The sun rose this morning. In England, the people are eating their breakfast. In Germany, the soldiers are changing the watches. In Bergen-Belsen, my mother died. [Piano music ends]

God? Go to hell!

[Clock ticking, followed by silence] [11:00]

Neil Weinberg:

What happened twenty-five years ago in Europe still lingers on today. During the presentation, you saw a picture of a Jewish graveyard. That was once the bustling Jewish population of

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Eisenstaedt, Austria. This old man, today, is all that remains. He is the only Jew in this town. He is in his eighties and keeps the only synagogue. When he dies, that will be it. That will be the end of the Jewish population of Eisenstaedt. And this is what is happening throughout Europe. After the war, there was such destruction that Jewish communities just died. I remember when we visited the Jewish community center in Germany. There was not one young person there, only old and ailing [12:00] concentration camp survivors. After returning to the States, I was surprised to read in the paper that this Jewish community center had been blown up by terrorists, and many of these old people killed. Even today, these people can live in peace.

[Bell rings] These are Russian Jews. It's a well-kept secret that among Jews of the world that the Russians are letting Jews out of their country, but the Soviets are not letting them out free, or in great quantities. There is a price on their head. It costs thousands and thousands of dollars to get these Jews out. There have been times when the United Jewish Appeal would pay these thousands in advance, and still the Iron Curtain country would not release their Jews, but it is a gamble we must make to save our brethren. Of course, because of political reasons, these Jews can't go to Israel directly from

Russia [13:00]. So before going to their promised land, the stop over at the settlement called Schoenau, near Vienna. Here they are given food, clothing, lessons in Hebrew, and other aid.

[Bell rings] I had many human experiences on this trip, and this was one. We were having lunch with the people when suddenly I heard some violin music. Interested in music, I followed the sound. Listening through the door, a friend who plays violin and I agreed that whoever was playing was artistically skilled. I pictured an old man who had been playing for years and years, but to our surprise when we opened the door we found this little, eleven year old girl. She was truly a child prodigy. Her older sister was able to speak some English, and we asked her parents questions through her. Her father told us about his life in Russia [14:00]. Ten years ago, he requested permission to leave Russia and go to Israel. He immediately lost his job, his home, and found it difficult to live. So for ten years he waited. And this is what is happening to Jews in these Iron Curtain countries. Many of them are refused permission to go. Some are thrown into prisons. Others are considered sick and sent to mental hospitals. Saving Soviet Jews is a major problem that we, as free Jews, must face and do something about. I remember as we left the room, the young girl started to play the

Israeli national anthem, "Hatikvah," and her parents started crying for their dream to come to Israel was finally coming true.

[Bell rings] Our group was the first young Jews group to be allowed into the communist country of Romania in over forty years. In the city [15:00] of Bucharest, it was important for us to see what was happening to the Jewish population, for like in other communist countries, Judaism is dying and the young Jews are being assimilated.

[Bell rings] There are only three rabbis left in Romania. The man in the center is the chief rabbi. This man told us that communism is good for the Jews, for under a democracy a Hitler could be elected, but we saw things otherwise. [Bell rings] Lines, long lines of Jews waiting to receive clothing and food packages. Many of these old Jews don't fit into the system, so many of them starve or freeze during the cold winter. They don't give these packages to every Jew. The person must be an extreme hardship case, and okayed by the chief rabbi. So by the funds of the JDC, the Joint Distribution Committee [16:00], these people are given the necessities to keep them alive.

[Bell rings] Old synagogues, no longer used for worship, are used as centers to pass out these packages. I remember

passing through these long lines of ragged old Jews who hoped to get a little food. I didn't know any Romanian and they didn't know any English, but all I knew was the word of *shalom*, the word that Jews throughout the world know. When I came upon this old man, and said "Shalom" to him, he held onto me and started crying. He knew that I, the young, would bring a bit of him in my memory to Israel, the land he would never see himself.

[Bell rings] Moe Levine [?], head of the JDC in Romania, explained to us about the contents of these packages. They're only given to these hardship cases three times a year [17:00], but sometimes one of these packages can save a life. Before leaving Romania, I, of course, spoke to a number of young Jews. Once I asked a boy who had followed us to the Yiddish theatre if he was Jewish. He told me his parents and grandparents were Jewish, but he was not. He was a communist and an atheist. And when followed me into the synagogue, he looked around at the strange old men and listened to the ancient language of Hebrew. And so this is what is happening to the people in these communist countries. Many of them are becoming assimilated and forgetting their heritage as Jews. But I did meet some young people who still cling on to the hope of going to Israel. Our last night in Romania we had a party with these kids, singing

Hebrew songs, and it was a time a joy for temporarily we were transplanted in Israel as Jews together. But the next morning, we had to face reality. We were able to leave to go to Israel [18:00] and they were not.

[Bell rings] And so we arrive in Israel. After seeing the concentration camps of Europe, and the suppression of Jews in Iron Curtain countries, we were so happy to be in Israel we danced the hora on the airport runway. But after World War II, Jews were not as lucky as we. When the British ruled Palestine, there was a Jewish quota. Coming from the death camps of Europe, the Jews hoped to enter their promised land, so they can in droves and boats like these, only to be turned back. Many risked their lives by jumping overboard to try to reach the land, but the British sent these Jews to Cyprus, and after coming from the concentration camps, the were put into detention camps.

[Bell rings] In 1948, Palestine became the State of Israel [19:00] and the gates of these detention camps were opened, and the Jews flowed into their promised homeland. This is the Western Wall, a symbol of hope that one day the Kingdom of Israel would return. After years of saying "Next year in Jerusalem," these Jews were in Jerusalem.

[Bell rings] Israel is a country of many interests. One of the most important is archaeology. This is a scale model of Jerusalem in the year of 1 AD. The large structure is the temple. On the left of the temple is the complete Western Wall. The arches near the wall is called Robinson's Arch. When we were in Israel, the archaeologists began digging up these arches.

[Bell rings] It was really amazing to see these arches being dug up. There were Hebrew inscriptions on the arches, and because Hebrew is still a living language [20:00] we were able to interpret them. And that is the excitement of archaeology: to uncover and discover Israel's past history and heritage.

[bell rings] Before Schoenau, you saw Russian Jews ready to go to Israel. Well now they're finally coming, and they're flying here to Lod Airport in Tel Aviv. The relatives of the immigrants are waiting for their families. No one tells these relatives that their families are coming, but somehow they come and they wait. I wanted to get into the midst of the people and get some good pictures, but then the busses carrying the immigrants came and I was swirled up in the excitement and enthusiasm of the people. [bell rings] And the came off the busses, children, parents, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters. People who haven't seen each other for years and years. [bell

rings] And it was total love, people finally getting together again after years of separation [21:00]. It was beautiful.

[bell rings] As soon as a Jew from anywhere in the world steps onto the soil of Israel, he can, if he wants, be automatically made a citizen. Israel is the only country in the world that allows such citizenship. Now these immigrants are helped by the Jewish Agency, which helps settle Jews in Israel. The Jewish Agency gives these Jews a home, a job, and money, and later on when they are integrated in the country, they can pay back the Jewish Agency. [bell rings] These new immigrants are provided with apartments by the Jewish agency. For some of these Jews, these apartments are like palaces in comparison to the homes they came from. Some day when they can make more money, they can move into homes of their own. [bell rings] Because so many immigrants are entering Israel [22:00], there is a shortage of housing. Out of the desert bloom new housing developments. The United Jewish Appeal helps pay the cost of these housing projects. [bell rings] Many of these Jews who enter do not know Hebrew, so they go to the *ulpan*. Here new citizens stay for six months and study Hebrew intensively, so that they might integrate into Israel's society more easily. All this is free and also supported by the UJA.

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[bell rings] This soldier at the Wall tells the whole story of Israel today. It's a country caught between war and peace.

[bell rings] This mountain, Masada, near the Dead Sea, is a symbol to Israelis today, for it was on this mountaintop that Jews resisted attack from the invading Romans [23:00]. Rather than submit, they did something they've never done in their history: they committed mass suicide. An old woman who hid was able to tell Josephus, the Roman scribe, the whole story. So it means a lot to the Israelis today because they don't want Masada to fall again. They want Israel to live.

[bell rings] While driving on the roads of Israel, it is not uncommon to see jeeps and tanks left abandoned. These are memorials to those soldiers who died in Israel's three wars.

[bell rings] The boys who fight for Israel are young. You look in their faces and see kids of 18, 19, 20, the same age you are. These boys are fighting for something they believe in, the survival of their country [bell rings] This is Israel's Arlington [24:00] Cemetery. It's amazing to walk past these tombstones and read the ages on them: 12, 14, 18. All young people who died for a belief, a belief that Jews should have a country where they can live in peace. Every day on the bus we heard news reports that told of injuries in the north, planes

shot in the south, five boys shot in the Suez. And life is very valuable to the Israelis. When you consider that it costs thousands of dollars to get one old Jew out of Russia, you can imagine how the Israelis feel when they lose one young man who might have contributed to Israel's welfare later. Each death is a personal loss to the Israelis. Believe me, they want peace very much.

[bell rings] In 1948, when Israel became a state, the United Nations charter said that all religious shrines shall be upheld [25:00]. The Israelis kept up the Christian, Moslem and Jewish shrines. This is what the Arabs did to the synagogues. They were utterly destroyed.

[bell rings] One of the most strategic areas to Israel is the Golan Heights. From these heights, the Syrians were able to look down into the valley and shoot the defenseless Israeli farmers. [bell rings] Inside the Syrian bunker we found some bullets with Russian inscriptions showing that the Russians have been playing an increasing role in the Middle East. [bell rings] From this bunker, the Syrians were able to look out at the Sea of Galilee, or Lake Kinneret, and kill the Israelis farming down below. [bell rings] Over twenty years ago, young Israelis farmed near the border of Lebanon. When the Lebanese took their land

[26:00], these farmers vowed that they would return. After the '67 war, the sons of these farmers returned to settle the land and built these settlements overnight. They risk lives every day, and some are killed, but they settled the land because they love their *eretz* [land].

[bell rings] We visited many border kibbutzim. Being on the border, there was a lot of tension in the air. Every morning before the farmers can go to the field, the ground must be checked for mines. After a hard day of work the people cannot rest, for then the shooting begins all night. So the farmer has a difficult and tense life. At night, the children sleep underground in bomb shelters. [bell rings] It's just too much to have to wake a child from his sleep every night and rush him underground. So every night they must sleep here. [27:00]

[bell rings] During our trip to Israel, we met many of the prominent figures of Israel, including foreign minister Abba Eban. He told us that he could not understand why the American left was against Israel. "When Israel was losing in 1967," he said, "they were for us. But when we were winning they were against us." He concluded by saying, "I'd rather be alive than popular."

[bell rings] Israel is a Western civilization in the midst of an ancient land. Tel Aviv is one of the largest cities, a bustling modern city. Israel's an exciting place to visit. There are a lot of young people there, and things are always happening. So I recommend that you visit Israel if you can. It will be an experience you'll never forget.

[bell rings] This young boy at the Hadassah Hospital, found a button mine [28:00] planted by an Arab terrorist group and has his face blown up. Groups like the El Fatah plant bombs in theatres and public places, and aboard planes in foreign countries, but this does not frighten Israel, for she is a brave country. And it doesn't frighten the tourists either. You would think that the tourist trade in Israel would be going down, but on the contrary. This coming summer's tourist trade is above that of last summer's. Many Arabs say that the Israelis are not treating the Palestinians well. Last summer, I spoke to an Egyptian Jew who was a number two student at Cairo University when the '67 war broke out. He was immediately arrested and thrown into prison for no reason at all. His only crime was being a Jew. In prison the Jews were subjected to the tortures out of Nazi Germany. He told me that once his mother sent him some slippers, so the Egyptians made him wear it on his ears

[29:00] and run around the courtyard. Every time they fell off, they beat him.

So the Jew today is still not free from prejudice and discrimination. Israel is important for it is the only country where Jews can go for refuge. There is a greater need today for the United Jewish Welfare Fund than ever before. Israel has the highest income tax in the world, and most of their money must go to defense, so the social needs such as immigration, housing, education, and hospitals must be provided for. So help your fellow Jew, in Israel and abroad, who is less fortunate than you, and please give today. Thank you very much.

END OF AUDIO FILE [29:45]