

An excerpt from

**KURT WAS MY BUDDY** (from **JUDGMENT DAYS**)

a play in one act

by Rich Orloff

*Time:* The week of Sunday, June 8, 1986.

*Place:* The 35th largest TV market in the United States.  
The office of a television news anchorman.

*Characters:* DAN FOSTER, anchorman, early thirties, intelligent and ambitious  
NANCY PHELPS, early thirties, weekend newscast producer,  
easy-going but sharp  
JOSEPH SCHULTZ, late sixties, weekend teleprompter operator,  
German accent, a survivor

In this excerpt from the play, DAN FOSTER, a polished and ambitious TV news anchorman in a small market, has been relaxing in his office with JOSEPH SCHULTZ, an elderly German teleprompter operator of whom Dan is quite fond. So far they've been chatting about sports and Dan's ex-affair with Nancy.

It's June 8, 1986, the day Kurt Waldheim was elected president of Austria.

DAN

Joseph, you're German, right?

JOSEPH

Actually, I'm from Pakistan, but  
I never cared for the accent.

DAN

You're German, aren't you?

JOSEPH

I'm an American.

DAN

But you're from Germany.

JOSEPH

A long time ago.

DAN

Maybe you could explain something to me.

JOSEPH

If I can, I will.

DAN

Have you been following the election in Austria?

JOSEPH

Only when it comes up on the teleprompter.

DAN

Tell me this: How can the people of Austria elect a man president who had documented ties to the Nazis?

JOSEPH

Maybe the other guy was a jerk.

DAN

He wasn't.

JOSEPH

Then I don't know.

DAN

Well, what do you think?

JOSEPH

I have no opinion.

DAN

Sure, you do.

JOSEPH

When I was a TV news film editor, years ago, in the dark ages when they still used film, instead of –  
(said with disdain:)  
– videotape, I learned two lessons. One, never use the film stock as a toothpick, and two, never have an opinion. Because I learned these lessons, I've never been fired, and my teeth are pearly white.

DAN

Yeah, well, I can't see how anyone couldn't have an opinion on this. I mean, what was going through people's heads?

JOSEPH

Who knows? These things happen.

DAN

I hate that expression.

JOSEPH

Well, they do.

DAN

Would you have voted for him?

JOSEPH

I don't vote.

DAN

But if you did.

JOSEPH

I don't know.

DAN

You mean, you might?

JOSEPH

I don't know. Who knows?

DAN

I don't understand. I mean, how could you even consider voting for a man like Waldheim?

JOSEPH

Well... Between us?

DAN

Sure.

JOSEPH

He let me win at darts once.

DAN

He what?

JOSEPH

Well, he had already won three games straight, and there was this redhead I was trying to impress, so he threw the game.

DAN

You knew Kurt Waldheim?

JOSEPH

Many years ago.

DAN

You're kidding.

JOSEPH

I'm not kidding. Kurt was my buddy.

DAN

I don't believe it.

JOSEPH

Well, maybe we weren't best friends, but we played darts.

DAN

When was this?

JOSEPH

During the war.

DAN

During the war?

JOSEPH

Yes, you know, the one with all the Germans.  
It was later turned into TV shows,  
comic books and several hit movies.

DAN

You knew Kurt Waldheim, really?

JOSEPH

If I was going to lie about knowing  
someone, it'd be Rita Hayworth.

DAN

I didn't know you kept secrets.

JOSEPH

It's not a secret; it's just history.

DAN

(cordial and conversational)

Did you work with him?

JOSEPH

Oh, no. We were... social.

DAN

How did you know him?

JOSEPH

We were both stationed in the Balkans  
in, oh, I guess it was 1941?

DAN

He was there in '42 and '43.

JOSEPH

Then I guess it was '42.

DAN

But you didn't work with him.

JOSEPH

No.

DAN

What'd you do?

JOSEPH

I was a typist.

DAN

What'd you type?

JOSEPH

Forms.

DAN

What kind of forms?

JOSEPH

Boring forms.

DAN

What kind of –

JOSEPH

Dan, I assure you, you'll get  
no good war stories from me.

DAN

So how'd you two meet?

JOSEPH

We met in a dry goods shop.

DAN

And you both just started chatting?

JOSEPH

Oh, no. Corporals do not just start chatting with lieutenants. He overheard me make some comments to a friend, and I guess he was amused by them. So we started to talk.

DAN

What did you say?

JOSEPH

Oh, it was just something about the toilet paper.

DAN

What?

JOSEPH

I just said, "Leave it to the Nazis to make one paper that's good for both wiping one's ass and getting the rust off motorbikes."

DAN

From that you started a friendship?

JOSEPH

What can I say? It was war.

DAN

Well, this is something, really something. I bet you never thought he'd become a world-famous diplomat and U.N. secretary-general.

JOSEPH

Oh, no. On the contrary. We all saw a bright future for him.

DAN

You did?

JOSEPH

Oh, yes. Kurt was a real kiss-ass.

DAN

We should put you on the news.

JOSEPH

No. Nothing newsworthy has ever happened to me.

DAN

Kurt Waldheim was your buddy.

JOSEPH

He had lots of buddies.

DAN

Still –

JOSEPH

Please, Danny, I'm telling this to you. Just you.

DAN

What was he like?

JOSEPH

What was he like?

DAN

Yes.

JOSEPH

Well... he was a lot like you.

DAN

That's not funny, Joseph.

JOSEPH

I didn't mean it to be funny.

DAN

What could he and I possibly have in common?

JOSEPH

Well, for one thing, you're both natty dressers. Also, like you, he was young, ambitious, clever, good-looking, and very likeable.

DAN

I'm not a Nazi.

JOSEPH

I'm not saying you two are exactly the same.

DAN

Well, I'm glad to hear that.

JOSEPH

He was much taller. Also, you are not a kiss-ass.

DAN

Thank you for noticing.

JOSEPH

You'd never make it as a diplomat.

DAN

I also think our moral codes are considerably different.

JOSEPH

He and I never discussed moral codes. We played darts, we drank bad beer, and we lied about our sex lives.

DAN

Well, if you *had* discussed moral codes, I think you'd find that his and mine have nothing in common.

JOSEPH

Maybe, but who knows? If you had been born in Austria when he was born, maybe you would've ended up just like him.

DAN

I don't think I would've become an intelligence officer for the Nazis.

JOSEPH

He was just a bureaucrat.

DAN

And I don't think I would've helped with the deportation of 40,000 Greek Jews to concentration camps.

JOSEPH

He was a paper-pusher. He didn't make any decisions; he just signed some papers, that's all.



DAN

Joseph, I, I can't believe you're apologizing for him. He's a symbol of the most – barbarous act of the twentieth century.

JOSEPH

Well, maybe that's it. I never met the symbol; I only knew the man. He was doing the best he could to survive a difficult situation.

DAN

And for the last forty years, he's tried to cover that up.

JOSEPH

A little amnesia is a great survival tool.

DAN

Well, thank you, Joseph. Now I can understand how the Austrians elected Waldheim. They probably trivialized the whole war, just like you.

JOSEPH

*I have not trivialized the war...* Maybe we should stick to discussing sports and sex.

DAN

Maybe we should.

JOSEPH

See what I told you? I don't like having opinions.