# **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:)

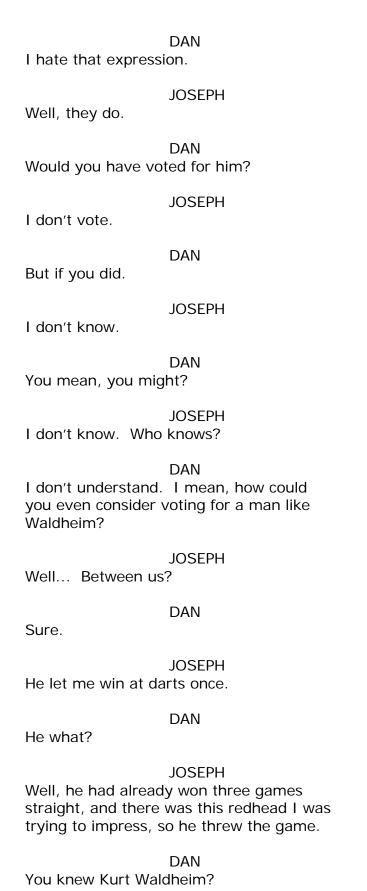
 videotape, I learned two lessons. One, never use the film stock as a toothpick, and two, never have an opinion. Because I learned these lessons, I've never been fired, and my teeth are pearly white.

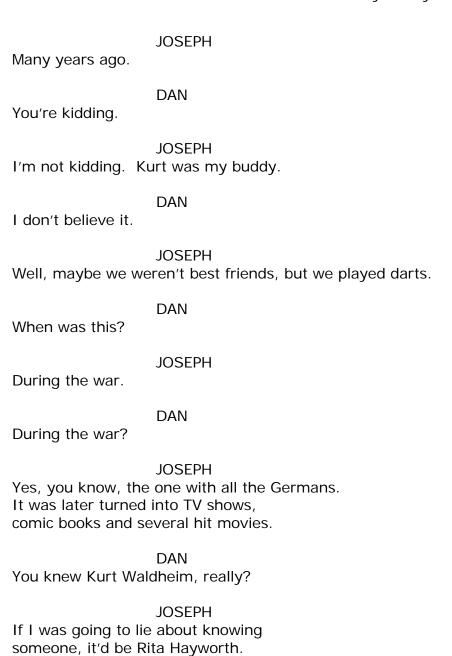
DAN

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

**JOSEPH** 

JOSEPH

(cordial and conversational)

I didn't know you kept secrets.

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

Did you work with him?

Oh, no. We were... social.

**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

How did you know him?

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.

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.

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.