

**What Do You Do With A *bleep*ing Nazi?
By Brent Leibowitz**

At Rise: (Lights up on the NARRATOR. They sit in a chair in an open space. The actor playing the NARRATOR can feel free to stand up, explore the space, use/move the chair how they want. Let the feelings move them and don't be afraid to be big. The NARRATOR is comfortable. Too comfortable. But that is out of desperation, not safety.)

NARRATOR

Thanks for letting me come here. I know it's kind of short notice so I really do appreciate it. I did wanna let you know that I did switch providers. But we can deal with that later, cool? Cool. Yeah, again, sorry for being so last minute but this has just been... really on my mind, like really just... in there, y'know? Like, it's haunting me. Like a ghost or... yeah. I don't let things stick in my mind. There's a lot of stuff that I'd rather not have in there so.... that really means something. I don't get haunted. Except now.

So I guess I should start with some context and stuff. This happened on Halloween, well not actually Halloween, it was Halloweekend. That's the whole weekend that Halloween is on. Or like the weekends before and after if it's during the week. Sorry if I just explained something that you already know or- whatever, I just assumed you didn't cuz you're... alright, I'm getting off track. You remember, like, three or four sessions ago, where I was talking about how I felt my life was... stagnant. And you talked about how maybe I just need to add events into my life. You know, big occasions. But there really haven't been any that have come up. Until Halloweekend. That was it, my chance to break out of this- this funk. I get a big group of people I know together, a squad, and we

plan out the night. A whole Halloween bar crawl. Right up North Kent til you hit Liqr Store nightclub. Charlie wasn't with me cuz... you know, doesn't matter. But you know what? It was the most fun I've had in a while. In maybe a year? Plus? Definitely since... the world went crazy.

But at this point, on Halloweekend, it was like we were going beyond all that. I felt good. Really really good. After the year I've had it was... a big deal for me. The world felt alive again, united in celebration. Can't remember the last time that was the case. Everyone's in costumes, the alcohol is flowing, the DJ is playing their remix of Thriller but even if it's kind of bad, it still rocks cuz, duh, it's Thriller! We drank and laughed and talked and drank and danced and did I mention we drank? I completely forgot about the past year, that's how much fun I had.

For once, everything that happened wasn't weighing on my mind. It wasn't when we were out. When we went our separate ways, started to head home, it still wasn't. Even when I was by myself just walking to the train station, all I felt was... happy. I wish that I had a remote for life, kind of like that Adam Sandler movie, Click, and I could just press the pause button on that moment. I'm just walking down a street, a little bit of snow falling and flecking my skin with its soft touch. I have this huge grin on, just smiling at nothing yet everything. I smile even wider when someone compliments my costume. I live for when people compliment my Halloween costumes. I mean, it's the best part of Halloween, right? Everyone dresses up as something they're not and yet... they're more themselves than any other day of the year.

Oh yeah, I didn't even tell you my costume! It was awesome, it was- you know the movie Inglorious Basterds? It's great, Quentin Tarantino, it's in World War II era Europe. And there's this American black ops group that's sent in to take out Nazis and they team up with this French Jewish lady and German actress and they kill Hitler and it's amazing. Honestly, it's kind of a comfort movie of mine. I was Brad Pitt's character in it, he's a real badass and has a whole speech about "killin nazis", it's great. The idea just... came to me, you know? I guess it was kinda a protest for me. What the Nazis did is one of the first things I learned about in Hebrew School. They really go right out of the gate with it. It's like, boom, this happened, 6 million dead and for no reason other than they were Jewish. And you're like 6 or 7 years old trying to wrap your tiny, innocent mind around such a terrible thing and it... kind of leaves a mark. A message that's just stuck in the back of your brain forever that says "You are not safe and it is because people hate you for who you are". So for there to be a whole movie where we not only fight back, we **win**... maybe it's more than just comfort. Maybe it's empowerment. A response to that message in the back of your brain. One that says "Screw you, I am stronger than them and if they try to mess with me, I will crush them into paste". Yeah, that's why I chose the costume.

So I'm waiting for my train, thinking I'm the only one there. But then I heard it. Humming.

(NARRATOR hums the tune to "What Will We Do With A Drunken Sailor".)

This guy steps forward. He's a white man, no more than 10 years older than me. I see from a distance, his costume, it looks like some army fatigues. Same as mine. His head turns and from all the way down the platform our eyes connect, only for a second.

That's when he begins to move toward me. Just slowly closing the gap between us. And the closer he gets the more clear the details on his costume become. The boots are black. The hair is slicked back. And there's an armband on it. Red. With- with- it was on it. The moment I saw it... my stomach dropped. My heart skipped a beat, nearly stopped. Whatever smile I was wearing was gone. I froze. For how long, I've got no idea. But for that moment... I just stood there staring at this man in a Nazi costume. But- but is it really a costume? What if he's serious? What if he's an actual nazi and is using tonight as an excuse to hide out and find victims and- and- and these things are going through my head at light speed, faster than light speed, all these ideas, all this fear and terror, pouring in at once and my fight or flight kicks in and oh my god did it say fly!

So I hid behind a pole. If I can't see him, he can't see me, right? I know, it's weird but I wasn't thinking, I was reacting. I prayed he didn't notice me. Like actually talking to god in my head, promising I'd do anything if I just survived this. I hadn't done that in so long, not since... doesn't matter. If I can't see him, he can't see me. Now that I'm thinking about it in hindsight, how could he know? Like how could he know, just by a glance, that I was Jewish? I wasn't rocking a yarmulke, didn't really have the hasidic look going on, maybe he would've guessed based on the costume but something tells me he wouldn't be a fan of the movie. This movie... That's when it clicked inside me. I couldn't just hide, I had to **do** something. I wanted to do something since- since, god, the 2016 election?

Maybe before that? I had read things. Saw things on the news. The internet. Things that scared me. And not in a “I’m all alone in the dark and there’s a sudden loud noise” scared. Like deep, deep dread. Like you’re watching a horror movie and the character walks down a hallway and you know the killer’s right behind them but you’re just a passive observer and can’t do a thing to save them. Except in this case, the killer is these Nazis, and we don’t have to be passive observers... but there’s some people that think “It’s fine, you’re overreacting”.

I get told that a lot. Not just about this. And yeah, maybe they’re right. Sometimes. You helped me realize that. So thank you. But in this particular instance they’re wrong. I know they’re wrong, in the deepest recesses of my soul, I know. And it stings when I hear it, like a slap in the face from a giant hand. “Nothing really bad will happen”. “Don’t catastrophize”. “History will judge them”. That one... that one always gets me fired up. History will judge them? When will that happen? I want some judgment now! Why wait when we can do it now and save us all the trouble of explaining to our kids and grandkids why we thought “it’s fine”. My mom’s a Hebrew school teacher and the day after the 6th, the kids in her class were asking all these questions. Questions she couldn’t answer and soon that’s gonna be all of us and... we can’t be in that position. And anyone who downplays the need for action is just as responsible when it becomes too late. I don’t think that’s unreasonable, right? Charlie did. That’s what we broke up over. After the 6th happened, we had... fights about it. They were shocked by it, of course. But they said something that really just... set me off. “How could anyone know it was going to be this bad?”

How? How? Were you not paying attention at all! The campaign, the Proud Boys, Charlottesville, the dogwhistles, the threats, it was all there, right in front of our faces, I saw it everytime, I totally knew, why didn't you?! The night we knew who won, I had to tell Charlie I couldn't stay over because... well, I was so afraid that these Nazis would attack, come for revenge against everyone and everything that they suspected was responsible. So I kept a knife under my pillow. Just in case. I know that may seem irrational... we all do crazy little things so we feel safe. But the fact that Charlie couldn't understand how it got this bad... that didn't make me feel safe. I could tell they felt bad, uneasy, but I felt worse. A lot worse. Seeing the swastika hung from the capitol... a place that my great-great grandparents had escaped to with nothing but the clothes on their back... it broke me. Broke whatever faith I had left in this place. In humanity. But more importantly... it broke my ancestors' dreams. Why they escaped wasn't for their benefit, not entirely. They fled so that their descendants could live a life free of fear and persecution. But on January 6th... that dream was shattered.

Naturally, I wanted action. I wanted these seditious, racist, fear-mongering monsters punished with the full force of the law. Well, when that came up in my argument with Charlie... a whole new can of worms burst open. See, they describe themselves as a hardcore prison abolitionist. They were inspired by this concept in Judaism, this big mandate to repair the world. Tikkun Olam. It's great, really. I'm proud of them. They volunteer at all the jail support orgs in the city, they donate to bail funds regularly, the whole nine yards. This dedication to fixing the world, it's based in empathy, an

all-encompassing belief that everyone is human and should be treated as such. But I think some people don't deserve empathy. Some people, people who's only ideology is the destruction of others, should be placed in the deepest, darkest hole they can find and the key should be thrown away. Charlie felt that ran counter to everything they believe, everything they do. We apparently need to show everyone can be redeemed. Prison would just further entrench them in their ideology, create gangs, vectors where ideas and plans can be shared. And if we split them all up, put them in solitary, that's just inhumane. But you know what's inhumane? Despising a group of people for who they are, orchestrating a mass killing, saying it wasn't enough, and trying to do it again in America! That's inhumane! I mean, do you even know what it was like to see that flag fly? Charlie said there wasn't even a swastika. But I swore there was. I remembered it, my memories can't be wrong. Can they? Among the nooses, confederate flags, alt-right symbols... does it even matter? It still happened. I still felt what I felt. I was at work, **at work** that day and the world... kept on turning. But not mine. Nobody seemed to care. We just went into work and kept on working and I sat there feeling a thousand pound weight on my entire being, feeling my eyes hollow out as I sat at my desk and stared at my screen. I had to pretend nothing was wrong despite the reality right in front of our face! I mean, come on, you know what it's like to be Jewish right now, right? And... that's when Charlie told me I wasn't really Jewish. That I hadn't practiced in years.

Truth be told, I hadn't stepped foot inside a synagogue since my brother's bar mitzvah. I'd always say, when someone asked, that I was "Jew-ish". You know, my fondest memories of Hebrew school wasn't the Torah stories or the values they preach, it was

the time spent with my friends. We'd all carpool there, make our jokes in the back of the classroom, pass notes, whatever, then our parents would take us to the local Dairy Queen after class. We ate so much ice cream we thought we'd throw up. I wasn't very popular in actual school. Found it very hard to, you know, make connections. So being able to go over to this other school, this other world and know you belonged, that it was essentially your birthright... that's what I liked about Judaism. The community. You can find someone who is Jewish anywhere. There's actually a song I was taught in Hebrew school all about that. It goes kinda like:

(Song: WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE JEWISH)

Wherever you go, there's always someone Jewish

You're never alone, when you say you're a Jew

So when you're not home, and you're somewhere kinda newish

The odds are, don't look far, cuz they're Jewish too

NARRATOR

That was the only thing that truly stuck with me from that time. Charlie was right. Judaism wasn't a part of my identity. It was just a way for me to meet people, to stave off loneliness, like an ice cream social or a facebook group. What good am I sitting at a table for Passover if I can't even remember any of the prayers? I'm just- just a poser and- and if this is true, then where's my rage at the Nazis coming from? You know, if I'm not really Jewish, then why would I care about feeling unsafe, about my ancestors' dream for me, about any of it? Am I just... looking for an enemy? I mean, my costume,

the love for that movie, it's not about caring right? It's about displacing my emotions and- when Charlie said that, I broke this old vase their mom gave them. Just... threw it across the room. They kicked me out of their apartment and that was the last time I saw them. That night replays in my mind nonstop. I could've chosen something else, anything else... instead I chose hate.

Do you know the worst thing about hate? You can't pin it down. It morphs, changes forms. Like this man with the Nazi costume. But this man was proof positive that the hatred I had been so afraid of was real. And here, I could actually **do** something. Maybe, finally, lift off all that weight on me. I stepped out from behind the pole. I see him, still standing there, not a care in the world, as if what he's doing is completely normal. It's all so damn normal to everyone. I began to make my way over to him. He could hear my footsteps, sense my presence. He turned his head to me and for a second everything in my body was screaming, begging me to stop. My whole being froze. But freezing was weakness. I had to stay strong. I plowed on ahead, moving toward him. The way he was looking at me was... oddly neutral. As if he didn't know what he'd done wrong. As if he didn't know who I was, what I was intending to do. So I made my intentions crystal clear. Hey! It was the loudest, most aggressive "hey" I've ever uttered. Instantly, I see him tense up. I've got him right where I want him. And I'm ready to just fire away, just obliterate this guy. I tell him that there's no reason one should be dressing up as a group that committed genocide, that to celebrate this group in any form is to only further normalize such horrific actions, that if you believe in the things that your costume stands for there are millions who don't, who will oppose you,

who will crush you just like we did in WWII, just like we did in Inglorious Basterds, your worldview is one in decline, you and your party will be forever relegated to annals of history as failed monsters, if you have any common sense, burn the uniform, swastika and all, and never, ever come back to it!

I wish I had said all that. Here's what I actually said. "Your costume kinda sucks". Not that it is hurtful, racist... I took my shot and I missed by a mile. He just looks me up and down, like a lion would its prey. And he goes "and who the fuck are you supposed to be?" I- I- I'm- I was at a loss for words. All the confidence, all the power I thought I had evaporated in an instant. And here I was, face to face with an angry Nazi. He steps forward. Get close. Real close. Enough that I can smell the ounces of whiskey in his breath. "Who are you to talk to me like that, huh?". If I truly was committed to what I believe in, truly ready to take action, I would have slugged him in the face right there. Instead, my body froze. Again. Weakness. He could see it. And he grabs me by the collar and pulls me closer. "You can't tell me nothing!" and he shakes me and right then I realize how close I am to the edge of the platform. I hear the familiar chug of the approaching train. Is this how I die? Alone, at the hands of a Nazi? Trying so hard to stand up for everything I feel, everything I believed in, only to falter at the last second? It was then I knew why Inglourious Basterds ended the way it did. With Hitler and his party destroyed and the Jews victorious in their vengeance. It's because that would never happen in real life. That movie isn't empowerment, it isn't displacement, it's... an escape. If you stare into the abyss of what this world can do too long... you become hollow, hollow like I was after the 6th. Hollow like I was the day I failed to do something.

The best way, no, the easiest way to fill that void... was rage. And I couldn't get there when it mattered the most.

The Nazi let me go. No push, nothing. "Get outta here". Didn't have to tell me twice. We got on separate train cars and that was the last time I saw him. That night I- I dreamt about it. The grab. The smell of the whiskey breath. The terror that I felt inside. The shame. That's what's haunted me. This spectre of shame that's always behind me no matter how fast, how far I run. I could've punched him out. Pushed him onto the tracks. He could've actually killed me and I would've died a victim. Anything but me... shriveling. And I was so so so angry at myself. When I feel this way... my rage needs places to go. Like Charlie's vase. Since I was the one I was angry at, I...

(NARRATOR lifts their shirt to reveal bruises underneath on their body.)

I don't want to live like this. Angry that I could be so- so- I couldn't do it! I couldn't do anything! I don't know, maybe I've been so- so sheltered, so distanced, from real hatred, you know, with everything that I've read and watched and- when I was confronted with it personally the first time, right in front of my eyes, all I could do was... nothing. Just like everyone that day at the capital. So shocked that such a thing can happen that it just steamrolls you. It's like you're alone in the ocean, pulled beneath the depths by the water. You're caught in the reality of the situation, the crushing truth of your own helplessness. And then you're haunted. So haunted by the shame that you can't control your own thoughts, your actions, makes you tear yourself apart! And I thought I was

different, that I just needed my actions to assure me of my purpose but what I really need is- is... I need help. Who can help me? Can you? Can you do something? Can anyone do something?

CURTAIN