

I TOO HAVE A HERO

EDDIE JACOBSON'S  
Menswear  
Valentine 3506  
Main at 39th Street  
Kansas City 2, Missouri

Mar[ch] 30, 1952

Dr. Josef Cohn  
c/o Industrial Institute of Israel  
15 East 58th Street  
New York 22, New York

Dear Josef:

I am sorry I was forced to delay giving you the information you requested on the part which I through fate played from about the middle of February in 1948 to June of the same year, insofar as Dr. Weizmann is concerned. From the moment I received your request, I thought that I would find ample time to carefully prepare a statement which would be absolutely accurate, but I haven't been able to find the necessary time. So I at last decided to take my notes and give you a somewhat rambling account of those historic days. What I will be putting down in this letter will not be in the form I wanted it to be, but I hope it will serve your purposes, and I am going to do my best to be as accurate as the pressure of time will permit.

Here is my story:

To begin with, perhaps I should note that I never had been a Zionist in the sense that I never belonged to any Zionist organization. This statement I can make even today. But I was always deeply interested in the welfare of my suffering people across the seas and hoped that the day would come when they would have a homeland of their own. I think you know that, up to the time which I will later mention, I had never met Dr. Weizmann.

A telephone call from Frank Goldman, President of B'nai B'rith, on February 20, 1948, was the first incident which led to my eventual meeting with wonderful Dr. Weizmann. On that day he called me and said that President Truman had been turning down all the political leaders in New York City who had been begging him to see Dr. Weizmann. Goldman told me that on that day or a day or so earlier, he, the President, even turned down Mr. Ed Flynn, and that the President was very, very bitter against Zionist leaders for unbecoming conduct and unusual discourtesies. This call came in the middle of the night and got me out of bed. In short, Frank wanted me to charter a plane in order to see President Truman before his departure to Key West, and to beg him to see Dr. Weizmann, who, I was also told, came to the United States especially to see the President, and every effort had failed and that I was the last hope. Unfortunately, it was too late for me to make the necessary arrangements to see the President before his departure, and so I did the next best thing by wiring Mr. Matt Connelly, Appointment Secretary to the President. . . .

I waited impatiently for a reply, which came in the form of a letter from the President, mailed from the Submarine Base, Key West, Florida, on February 27, 1948. . . . Knowing the President as I did, the letter gave me a feeling that he would not change his mind. I decided that the best thing to do was to wait until the President returned to the White House.

My anxiety increased during these intervening days, because I briefed myself in preparing to see the President. I soon realized that the British were hoping for an Arab victory which would drive the Jews into the sea. It also seemed that, when the British would withdraw from Palestine on May 15, the settlements in the Negev and other spots might be wiped out by the Arabs and also expose Haifa to danger. The situation facing my people in Palestine was extremely dangerous even to my inexperienced eye, and so I determined to do all that I could as soon as possible.

It seemed ages until the President returned to the White House, but at last he did. On Friday, March 12, 1948, I left for Washington. As usual, I do not think I made an appointment, but took my chances. I came to the White House on Saturday, March 13, and was greeted by Mr. Matt Connelly, who advised and urged and begged me not to discuss Palestine with the President. I quickly told Matt that that's what I came to Washington for, and that I was determined to discuss this very subject with the President. When I entered the President's office, I noticed with pleasure that he looked well, that his trip to Florida did him much good. For a few minutes we discussed our families, my business in which he has always shown a brother's interest, and other personal things.

I then brought up the Palestine subject. He immediately became tense in appearance, abrupt in speech, and very bitter in the words he was throwing my way. In all the years of our friendship, he never talked to

me in this manner or in any way even approaching it. He made it almost impossible for me to continue when he said sharply that he didn't want to discuss Palestine or the Jews or the Arabs or the British; that he was satisfied to let these subjects take their course through the United Nations. I then actually argued with him, and I am now surprised at myself that I had the nerve to do that. I argued with him from every possible angle, reminding him of his feelings for Dr. Weizmann, which he often expressed to me, telling him that I could not understand why he wouldn't see him; [I] told him that Dr. Weizmann, an old and a sick man, had made his long journey to the United States especially to see the President of the United States. I probably used other arguments which now escape me. But the President remained immovable. He replied how disrespectful and how mean certain Jewish leaders\* had been to him. I suddenly found myself thinking that my dear friend, the President of the United States, was at that moment as close to being an anti-Semite as a man could possibly be, and I was shocked that some of our own Jewish leaders should be responsible for Mr. Truman's attitude. I could not think of any arguments to give him in order to soften his anger, because, after all, he had been slandered and libeled by some of the leaders of my people whom he had tried to help while he was in the Senate and from the moment he stepped into the White House. His turn down of my request, firmly and in anger, left me completely crushed, and then, believe it or not, I happened to rest my eyes on a beautiful model of a statue of Andrew Jackson mounted on a horse which I had noted passingly the many previous times I had been to the White House. I then found myself saying this to the President, almost word for word:

Harry, all your life you have had a hero. You are probably the best read man in America on the life of Andrew Jackson. I remember when we had our store together and you were always reading books and papers and pamphlets on this great American. When you built the new Jackson County Court House in Kansas City, you put this very statue, lifesize, on the lawn right in front of the new Court House, where it still stands. Well, Harry, I too have a hero, a man I never met, but who is, I think, the greatest Jew who ever lived. I too have studied his past and I agree with you, as you have often told me, that he is a gentleman and a great statesman as well. I am talking about Chaim Weizmann; he is a very sick man, almost broken in health, but he travelled thousands and thousands of miles just to see you and plead the cause of my people. Now you refuse to see him because you were insulted by some of our American Jewish leaders, even though

\* I am deliberately withholding the names of these "leaders," but I will furnish them to you on request.

you know that Weizmann had absolutely nothing to do with these insults and would be the last man to be a party to them. It doesn't sound like you, Harry, because I thought that you could take this stuff they have been handing out to you. I wouldn't be here if I didn't know that, if you will see him, you will be properly and accurately informed on the situation as it exists in Palestine, and yet you refuse to see him.

Just as I finished, I noticed that the President began drumming on his desk with his fingers, and as I stopped talking, he abruptly turned around while still sitting in his swivel chair and started looking out the window into what in the summer is a beautiful rose garden, gazing out the window just over the pictures of his mother, his wife, and his daughter. I knew the sign. I knew that he was changing his mind. I don't know how many seconds passed in silence, but it seemed like centuries. All of a sudden he swiveled himself around again, facing his desk, looked me straight in the eyes and then said the most endearing words I had ever heard from his lips and this is what he said word for word:

You win, you baldheaded — — — ——. I will see him. Tell Matt\* to arrange this meeting as soon as possible after I return from New York on March 17.\*\*

But as I was telling him goodbye, he pressed the button for Matt and himself told him that he would see Dr. Weizmann and requested Matt to make the proper arrangements for the meeting, which, I might say here, was to be off the record and on condition that the press and public would know absolutely nothing about it.

When I left the White House, I was excited and very nervous. I started for my hotel where Frank Goldman and [B'nai B'rith National Secretary] Maurice Bisgyer were waiting for the President's verdict. I walked to the hotel, because it was only a few blocks away. I now remember how the fresh air refreshed me. I was still nervous and excited when I reached the Statler, and before I knew it, I found myself at the bar and drank

\* Meaning Mr. Matt Connelly, his Appointment Secretary.

\*\* The President was going to New York to make an address at a Saint Patrick's Day dinner at the Astor Hotel. He had invited me to come to a reception and cocktail party on the afternoon of the coming Wednesday, which happened to be Saint Patrick's Day. I remember asking him what business a Jew has at a Saint Patrick's Day party, and, characteristically, he replied that a Jew had the same business there as he, a Baptist, had. I accepted the invitation.

*two double* Bourbons alone, something I never did before in my life. But even then I didn't go up to my room, but went outdoors and walked around for another ten minutes and then went up to the room. I remember that, as I entered, Maurice Bisgyer was sitting on a chair and Frank Goldman was pacing the floor. When I told them the good news that the President would see Dr. Weizmann, Frank Goldman ran over and kissed me, and Maurice Bisgyer was absolutely speechless — for Maurice to be speechless under any circumstances was to me quite a miracle!

When the excitement died down a little, we made arrangements to leave for New York to see Dr. Weizmann at the Waldorf. We arrived in New York the next morning. You arranged the meeting. I remember that Sunday, March 14, very well, because that is the first time I met you and Dr. Weizmann.

The dear Doctor was in bed when I was introduced to him by you. When I told him of the success of my mission, he gave me the sweetest smile I have ever seen. When I told him that the meeting was arranged, so that it would not be too much of a strain on his health, he replied that he was ready to go at any time. But I told him there was no hurry, because we could not see the President until after Saint Patrick's Day, so that he would have several days to recover his strength for the journey to Washington; on that day I met Mrs. Weizmann for the first time, a very lovable and gracious lady, and she was also very appreciative of what I had done and assured me that she would have the Doctor in good shape to make his important trip. I was invited to have tea with Dr. Weizmann the next day, Monday, at 11:00 o'clock in the morning. At this meeting, over a cup, I was inspired by Dr. Weizmann to do everything I could for this great man and the great cause he was representing. My feeling now is that not another person in the whole world could have "sold" me as Dr. Weizmann did that day. I say now that, as a non-Zionist, I needed the inspiration which I received that day over a cup of tea. We were together only about half an hour. We were alone, and yet this half hour is indelibly stamped on my mind.

On Monday — which was March 15 — I called Matt Connelly from New York, and the meeting between the President and Dr. Weizmann was set for Thursday, March 18, with the strict understanding that it would be off the record. So that Dr. Weizmann would not be seen by representatives of the press, I was instructed to see to it that he would enter the White House through the East gate rather than the Northwest gate. I then had tea with the Doctor after this call, and he was most happy to have the appointment definitely set. The Doctor wanted me to come along with him. But this idea was abandoned for several good reasons. The major reason was due to the fact that I was well known to the representatives of the press and had to guard against being seen going into the White House even through the East gate. Someone furnished another reason

which I did not consider very important, and that was that I should be “saved” to see the President again in case, God forbid, the meeting between the President and Dr. Weizmann did not turn out well. As things turned out, I couldn’t have come to Washington anyway, because on Wednesday I received a call that my brother, A[be]. D. Jacobson, had been taken to the Menorah Hospital, which alarming news made it absolutely necessary for me to return to Kansas City immediately. But I am a little ahead of my story.

On Wednesday I went to the reception for the President. Matt was there, and that is when Matt was good enough to suggest that I shouldn’t come along with Dr. Weizmann because of the possibility that I might be spotted by the press. To avoid obvious complications, everyone was anxious to abide by the President’s expressed wish that his meeting with the Doctor should be strictly off the record. I was grateful to Matt for his advice.

I left for Kansas City and arrived there on Thursday, March 18, completely exhausted and very much worried about my brother, A. D. Naturally, I went to the hospital and then went home to catch up on my loss of sleep and to recover from the tensions which almost made a wreck of me.

While I was at home resting, Maurice Bisgyer tried to reach me Thursday morning. I finally got to talk to him late on that day when he told me the good news that Dr. Weizmann was happy and gratified after seeing the President.\*

When I reached home on Thursday night — that was March 18 — it took me a long time to go to sleep even though I was a thoroughly exhausted human. Bluma, my wife, knowing of my condition, let me sleep until very late on Friday. When I reached my store at about noon, I was rested and happy. But about 5:30 in the afternoon of that day — Black Friday, it will always remain — [Kansas City lawyer] A. J. Granoff called me on the telephone and told me of our country’s reversal of position at the United Nations as announced that afternoon by [our ambassador] Mr. Warren Austin. I was speechless and could not believe what I had just heard. I was as dazed as a man could be. Almost immediately calls

\* It might be interesting to note that Dr. Weizmann made his trip to Washington incognito, accompanied by Maurice Bisgyer and a Kansas Citian who happened by coincidence to be in New York. It is perhaps also interesting to note here that Dr. Weizmann had requested and received twenty-five minutes for an interview with the President. On finding this time to be insufficient, the President graciously and kindly extended it. The meeting lasted approximately forty-five minutes. In practically no time, I found out that President Truman pledged Dr. Weizmann *his word* that the Negev would become and remain a part of the Jewish State, a pledge he kept regardless of the many, many pressures for him to either modify or abandon it.

and wires started coming in from all over America, all telling me what a terrible traitor my friend, Harry S. Truman, turned out to be, and how he betrayed the Jewish people and how he had violated his promises. This bombardment kept on throughout the weekend. There wasn't one human being in Kansas City or elsewhere during those terrible days who expressed faith and confidence in the word of the President of the United States. No one would listen to me, and all blamed Truman for Austin's statement, made scarcely twenty-four hours after Dr. Weizmann walked out of the Oval Room. I told them all that I had explicit faith in my friend and that that faith would remain unshaken until he, himself, told me differently with his own lips. I kept on telling all who would listen that I would not and could not believe that President Truman knew or had any reason whatever to believe on Thursday what Mr. Warren Austin was going to say on Friday. I have thanked God many times for being absolutely right in the faith I had in the word of Harry Truman.

Heartsick and worried, I stayed home all day Saturday and all day Sunday — in bed — wondering what had happened from the time Dr. Weizmann walked out of the President's office to the time, on the very next day, when Austin got up to speak at the United Nations and made his sensational announcement, which would reverse United States policy on Palestine. On Monday I went to the store and there received a call from you, announcing that Dr. Weizmann wanted to speak to me. This telephone call I shall never forget as long as I live, because it not only proved Dr. Weizmann to be a great statesman, but, as it turned out, he was the only human being outside of myself who expressed the utmost faith in the word of President Truman. Our telephone conversation was so unforgettable that here, too, I believe I can set down what the good Doctor said to me, practically word for word. As I listened, here is what he said:

Mr. Jacobson,\* don't be disappointed and do not feel badly. I do not believe that President Truman knew what was going to happen in the United Nations on Friday when he talked to me the day before. I am seventy-two years old, and all my life I have had one disappointment after another. This is just another letdown for me. Don't forget for a single moment that Harry S. Truman is the most powerful single man in the world. You have a job to do; so keep the White House doors open.

How right he was!! In the first place, he told me something that no other man in the world in those dark days even thought of. He was kind, he had no resentment against anyone. He criticized no one. He had the

\* He got to calling me "Eddie" later on.

fullest faith in the word of Harry S. Truman, "the most powerful single man in the world." He recognized the need for retaining and maintaining my relationship to the White House, because the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children depended upon it. Even now I cannot speak without emotion. My gratitude to Dr. Weizmann for his faith in President Truman cannot be described in words; nor can I properly express my admiration for the bigness of his soul and for his foresight. When the telephone conversation was finished, I knew I was not alone in believing in the President. You cannot imagine how this encouraged me to go on with the work which fate put on my shoulders.

I next saw Dr. Weizmann in New York on April 11. Up to that time I had not heard from President Truman, I had not tried to contact him, and of course did not see him. Of course, in the meantime it did not take me long to find out that President Truman was in *no* way responsible for the Austin statement and he had known *absolutely nothing* about it until it was publicly announced.

After seeing and talking to Dr. Weizmann on the 11th, I went to Washington. That was on the next day, April 12. This time I too used the East gate, something I had never done before. I also wanted to guard against any one seeing me come to the White House. Now, for the first time, I heard from my friend's own lips what really happened (What the President of the United States told me will have to be noted later, if ever). I feel at liberty to give you only a smattering of what the President told me on this occasion. He reaffirmed, very strongly, the promises he had made to Dr. Weizmann and to me; and he gave me permission to tell Dr. Weizmann so, which I did. You will remember that at this particular time the British had already definitely decided to pull out of Palestine and had fixed a date for their withdrawal, May 15 (our time, May 14). It was at this meeting that I also discussed with the President the vital matter of recognizing the new state, and *to this he agreed with a whole heart*. History tells us now how well he kept his words. The echo of British feet had hardly died away when the United States of America recognized Israel, on Friday, May 14, 1948. Even now I cannot put down in words my feelings on Friday, May 14. After all, I did play my small part in the historic event. Maybe the day will come when I will be able to express with at least becoming modesty my part in having been able to be on the inside of the events which led to the glorious hour on May 14, 1948.

On Saturday, May 15, you called and told me that Dr. Weizmann was most anxious to see me at once. Of course, I dropped everything and left Kansas City at 2:00 o'clock in the morning of Sunday, May 16, via air. After a rough and hard flight, I arrived in New York a little late, about 8:30 in the morning. You had reserved a room for me at the Waldorf, and when I arrived, you called me to say that Dr. Weizmann would see

me at tea late that day because he was still a very sick man and it wasn't thought best to disturb him until later on. You will recall that this was the evening of the big rally in Madison Square Garden. Instead of going there, I spent a very interesting evening with the good Doctor. Since the new State of Israel had no representative in Washington as yet, Dr. Weizmann wanted me to discuss several matters with the President, as follows:

1. The Arms Embargo.
2. A Loan.
3. The British.

In other words, he wanted me to be the temporary spokesman for the baby state. I could not refuse Dr. Weizmann's request even if I wanted to, and I didn't. I promised him that I would leave for Washington early the next day, Monday, May 17, and would talk these three matters over with the President. I left very early that morning, but before I left you called and told me that Dr. Weizmann had just been elected President of the new state and as such he also wanted me to present his greetings to the President of my country. What a thrill that was! I left for Washington, arriving there in time to see President Truman about 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

The first thing I did was to deliver President Weizmann's greetings to President Truman. My friend's reaction to these greetings was such that I am sure he got as big a thrill out of the incident as did I. I then told him my reasons for coming to see him, that the new little state had no ambassador or anyone else to speak for it as yet. I then told him that Dr. Weizmann asked me to please be a sort of spokesman, this time to discuss three matters, namely, the arms embargo, a loan, and the British. I explained how badly the arms embargo was hurting Israel in its defense of its territory, that our country should in all fairness revise its policy in this important phase of the situation. I then brought up the matter of a loan, for \$100,000,000, and tried in my own limited way to explain how important it was to the survival of the new state. I urged him to assist in every proper way to see to it that the Import and Export Bank should make this loan. Then I discussed some of the pertinent facts regarding the arming of the Arabs by the British, and Britain's apparent desire to see the new little state destroyed before it even got to its feet.

All in all, the President was very patient and understanding in his discussions on these three matters. Our talks were thorough, even detailed. He was sympathetic and understanding. Characteristically, he made no definite promises, but indicated that he would do everything possible to further favorable action if he found that doing so would in no way be detrimental to the best interests of our country. This led me to say once

again, as I said many times, that I never wanted him to do anything for the oppressed Jewish people abroad if doing so would result in the slightest damage to the best interests of my country. On this subject, my friend and I could never have any disagreement because I was willing to do everything I could for the remnants of my people if my own country was not hurt in the process. I then again expressed the gratitude of President Weizmann and the Jews of the world, and as I was about to leave, he suddenly asked me when President Weizmann was planning to return to Israel. I told him he was planning to leave the following Wednesday, which was May 19, 1948. He then said he would certainly like to see the President of Israel before he went abroad. I then had to tell my friend that I wasn't familiar with protocol, and he immediately answered me that he certainly would take care of all formalities and that he would do so through Mr. David Niles, one of his administrative assistants.\*

I returned to New York immediately, by plane, very much pleased with the results of my mission which President Weizmann had asked me to undertake. When the airport limousine approached the Waldorf, I noticed a tremendous crowd in the streets, faces raised upward. I also looked up and saw the flag of Israel beside the Stars and Stripes of my own country — that was the pay-off! I went up to President Weizmann's apartment. He was awake, sitting up, and I even now remember the most beautiful collection of roses I have ever seen, sent to the new President of the new state by his friends and admirers. I lost no time in telling the Doctor of my conversation with President Truman. He was most gratified with my report. I also told him in guarded language of the President's desire to see him, but I could not tell him that he would receive an invitation because I was cautioned not to do that. However, the old gentleman was bound and determined to sail the following Wednesday, and so I had

\* It may be of interest if I recorded here a funny bit of by-play which happened as I arrived at the White House on April 12. As I entered Matt Connelly's office, he, Matt, jumped up and came towards me on those long legs of his and said, "Hello, Mr. Drew Pearson." This was his way of telling me that he had heard Drew Pearson's broadcast the Sunday before when Pearson mentioned in his broadcast that I had lately made frequent trips to Washington and that I was the one who had pressed the President of the United States to recognize Israel. How Pearson found out about it, I will never know, but I could make a good guess if I wanted to. So, when Matt opened the door of the President's office to let me in, he said with a broad grin, "Mr. President, here's Drew Pearson! !" My heart sank into my shoes because I knew then that the President and Matt must have been discussing Pearson's broadcast. But my fears immediately left me because the President, with a smile on his face, said, "Matt, you are wrong. This is not Drew Pearson. This is the ambassador from Israel." Of such little incidents, history is made. I will leave you to imagine my feelings when President Truman said that.

to hint to you, Josef, that he should postpone the trip several days. I believe it was the following day that Mr. David Niles arrived in New York with a formal invitation to the President of Israel to be the guest of the President of the United States, when of course Israel's President would be received on the same high level as all other heads of governments. You will remember how President Weizmann stayed at the Blair House, as befitted his high position. On parting, I bade the Doctor goodbye and wished him a pleasant journey home. I returned to Kansas City the following Friday, when I received a call from Dr. Weizmann, again thanking me for everything I had done for him and for the Jewish people abroad, and I remember his saying that he "was sailing with a light heart and was a very happy man."

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I think that what I have just written covers the important happenings from the moment I received the call from Frank Goldman in the middle of the night of February 20, 1948, to about June 1, of the same year. My recitation has been long, and in it I purposely put in some of my own mental and emotional reactions, very important to me, but perhaps not important to anybody else. Maybe the time will come when I will be able to sit down and write up my little part in the drama from beginning to the end. There is always the possibility that history will be interested in the part Dr. Weizmann played in the historic events which led up to the realization of a 2,000-year-old dream of a persecuted people. But I would be less than frank if I did not here note that I want eventually to write the story in my own way and in my own words, so that history will record the fact that there would be no State of Israel today except for Harry S. Truman, whose name should be daily blessed in every synagogue and every temple the world over. Did you expect this Magelah [lengthy account] when you made your harmless request for my version of Dr. Weizmann's part in the vital weeks preceding the establishment of Israel?

With kindest regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

[Eddie Jacobson]

P. S. I think I need hardly say that I withheld most of the details of my conversations with President Truman, giving the essence of some of our conversations and quoting him once or twice. I felt free to do this, and maybe the future will also permit me to be much freer in giving the other details.

ONE OF THE GREAT MEN OF THIS AGE

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

November 28, 1952

Dear Eddie:

I am certainly happy that you expect to have a Memorial Service for President Chaim Weizmann.

In my opinion, he was one of the great men of this age. He was not only a scientist but was a leader of men. He understood people and he knew how to get the most out of them for their own good and for the peace of the world.

I felt as if I had lost a close personal friend when he died. He and I have had some wonderful conversations on the world situation and the necessary remedies to meet conditions and maintain peace in the world.

I wish he could have lived longer. It would have been a great benefit to his own country and to all of the rest of us who are working for world peace.

Sincerely yours,

HARRY TRUMAN

Mr. Edward Jacobson  
Main at 39th Street  
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