

## The Ku Klux Klan grand dragon



Just such a story comes from Lincoln, Nebraska. On a Sunday morning in June 1991, Cantor Michael Weisser and his wife, Julie, were unpacking boxes in their new home, when the phone rang. "You will be sorry you ever moved into 5810 Randolph St., Jew boy," the voice said, and hung up. Two days later, the Weissers received a manila packet in the mail. "The KKK is watching you, Scum," read the note. Inside were pictures of Adolf Hitler, caricatures of Jews with hooked noses, blacks with gorilla heads, and

graphic depictions of dead blacks and Jews. "The Holohoax was nothing compared to what's going to happen to you," read one note.

The Weissers called the police, who said it looked like the work of Larry Trapp, the state leader, or "grand dragon," of the Ku Klux Klan. A Nazi sympathizer, he led a cadre of skinheads and klansmen responsible for terrorizing black, Asian, and Jewish families in Nebraska and nearby Iowa. "He's dangerous," the police warned. "We know he makes explosives." Although confined to a wheelchair because of late-stage diabetes, Trapp, forty-four, was a suspect in the firebombings of several African Americans' homes around Lincoln and was responsible for what he called "Operation Gooks," the March 1991 burning of the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Center in Omaha. (He later admitted to these crimes.) And Trapp was planning to blow up the synagogue where Weisser was the spiritual leader. Trapp lived alone in a drab efficiency apartment. On one wall he kept a giant Nazi flag and a double-life-sized picture of Hitler. Next to these hung his white Klan robe, with its red belt and hood. He kept assault rifles, pistols, and shotguns within instant reach for the moment when his enemies might come crashing through his door to kill him. In the rear was a secret bunker he'd built for the coming "race wars."

When Trapp launched a white supremacist TV series on a local public-access cable channel—featuring men and women saluting a burning swastika and firing automatic weapons—Michael Weisser was incensed. He called Trapp's KKK hotline and left a message on the answering machine. "Larry," he said, "do you know that the very first laws that Hitler's Nazis passed were against people like yourself who had no legs or who had physical deformities or physical handicaps? Do you realize you would have been among the first to die under Hitler? Why do you love the Nazis so much?" Then he hung up.

Weisser continued the calls to the machine. Then one day Trapp picked up. "What the f\_ do you want?" he shouted. "I just want to talk to you," said Weisser. "You black?" Trapp demanded. "Jewish," Weisser replied. "Stop harassing me," said Trapp, who demanded to know why he was calling. Weisser remembered a suggestion of his wife's. "Well, I was thinking you might need a hand with something, and I wondered if I could help," Weisser ventured. "I know you're in a wheelchair and I thought maybe I could take you to the grocery store or something."

Trapp was too stunned to speak. Then he cleared his throat.

"That's okay," he said. "That's nice of you, but I've got that covered. Thanks anyway. But don't call this number anymore. "I'll be in touch," Weisser replied. During a later call, Trapp admitted that he was "rethinking a few things." But then he went back on the radio spewing the same old hatreds. Furious, Weisser picked up the phone. "It's clear you're not rethinking anything at all!" After calling Trapp a "liar" and "hypocrite," Weisser demanded an explanation.

In a surprisingly tremulous voice, Trapp said, "I'm sorry I did that. I've been talking like that all of my life... I can't help it... I'll apologize!" That evening the cantor led his congregation in prayers for the grand dragon. The next evening the phone rang at the Weissers' home.

"I want to get out," Trapp said, "but I don't know how."

The Weissers offered to go over to Trapp's that night to "break bread." Trapp hesitated, then agreed, telling them he lived in apartment number three. When the Weissers entered Trapp's apartment, he burst into tears and tugged off his two swastika rings. Soon all three were crying, then laughing, then hugging.

Trapp resigned from all his racist organizations and wrote apologies to the many people he had threatened or abused. When, a few months later, Trapp learned that he had less than a year to live, the Weissers invited him to move into their two bedroom/three-children home. When his condition deteriorated, Julie quit her job as a nurse to care for him, sometimes at night. Six months later he converted to Judaism; three months after that he died.

(Extract from Wink, W. (1998). *The Powers that Be. Theology for a new millenium*. New York: DoubleDay, pp.172-175)