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Larry David: My Dinner With Adolf

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Imagine my surprise when in the spring of 1939 a letter arrived at my house inviting me to dinner at the Old Chancellery with the world's most reviled man, Adolf Hitler. I had been a vocal critic of his on the radio from the beginning, pretty much predicting everything he was going to do on the road to dictatorship. No one I knew encouraged me to go. "He's Hitler. He's a monster." But eventually I concluded that hate gets us nowhere. I knew I couldn't change his views, but we need to talk to the other side — even if it has invaded and annexed other countries and committed unspeakable crimes against humanity.

Two weeks later, I found myself on the front steps of the Old Chancellery and was led into an opulent living room, where a few of the Führer's most vocal supporters had gathered: Himmler, Göring, Leni Riefenstahl and the Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VIII. We talked about some of the beautiful art on the walls that had been taken from the homes of Jews. But our conversation ended abruptly when we heard loud footsteps coming down the hallway. Everyone stiffened as Hitler entered the room.



He was wearing a tan suit with a swastika armband and gave me an enthusiastic greeting that caught me off guard. Frankly, it was a warmer greeting than I normally get from my parents, and it was accompanied by a slap on my back. I found the whole thing quite disarming. I joked that I was surprised to see him in a tan suit because if he wore that out, it would be perceived as un-Führer-like. That amused him to no end, and I realized I'd never seen him laugh before. Suddenly he seemed so human. Here I was, prepared to meet Hitler, the one I'd seen and heard — the public Hitler. But this private Hitler was a completely different animal. And oddly enough, this one seemed more authentic, like this was the real Hitler. The whole thing had my head spinning.

He said he was starving and led us into the dining room, where he gestured for me to sit next to him. Göring immediately grabbed a slice of pumpernickel, whereupon Hitler turned to me, gave me an eye roll, then whispered, "Watch. He'll be done with his entire meal before you've taken two bites." That one really got me. Göring, with his mouth full, asked what was so funny, and Hitler said, "I was just telling him about the time my dog had diarrhea in the Reichstag." Göring remembered. How could he forget? He loved that story, especially the part where Hitler shot the dog before it got back into the car. Then a beaming Hitler said, "Hey, if I can kill Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals, I can certainly kill a dog!" That perhaps got the biggest laugh of the night — and believe me, there were plenty.

But it wasn't just a one-way street, with the Führer dominating the conversation. He was quite inquisitive and asked me a lot of questions about myself. I told him I had just gone through a brutal breakup with my girlfriend because every time I went someplace without her, she was always insistent that I tell her everything I talked about. I can't stand having to remember every detail of every conversation. Hitler said he could relate — he hated that, too. "What am I, a secretary?" He advised me it was best not to have any more contact with her or else I'd be right back where I started and eventually I'd have to go through the whole thing all over again. I said it must be easy for a dictator to go through a breakup. He said, "You'd be surprised. There are still feelings." Hmm ...

there are still feelings. That really resonated with me. We're not that different, after all. I thought that if only the world could see this side of him, people might have a completely different opinion.

Two hours later, the dinner was over, and the Führer escorted me to the door. "I am so glad to have met you. I hope I'm no longer the monster you thought I was." "I must say, mein Führer, I'm so thankful I came. Although we disagree on many issues, it doesn't mean that we have to hate each other." And with that, I gave him a Nazi salute and walked out into the night.

Larry David is a comedian, writer and actor who created "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and was a co-creator of "Seinfeld."

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