

[How does she come to him?]

Belief and Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview 8

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Spector

ADDRESS 701 Crotona Park N. New York City

DATE December 14, 1938

SUBJECT HOW DOES SHE COME TO HIM?

1. Date and time of interview December 12, 1938
2. Place of interview 1370 Clinton Ave.
3. Name and address of informant Sam Goldstein, 1370 Clinton Ave.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

(See interview of 12/12/38 — “O Happy distances.” — for full information.)

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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NAME OF WORKER HERMAN SPECTOR

ADDRESS 701 Crotona Park N. New York City

DATE DECEMBER 14, 1938

SUBJECT HOW DOES SHE COME TO HIM?

JOE EINSTEIN WAS NOT WHAT YOU WOULD CALL WACKY, but he wasn't anything like his famous namesake either. He was just one of the kids in my old gang around Brook Avenue, and I remember playing baseball and handball with him when we were both around fourteen or fifteen. When we grew up, though, we travelled different paths. He was the type of a guy who wasn't bad at heart, but he would get in with these different gangs. I knew that he was connected with some little gang around Mc Kinley Square, and then all of a sudden I heard that he got arrested for stealing an auto. On top of that, and this is what kills me, I heard that he's got a gun on him and when they call on him to stop, he starts putting on speed instead and fires back at the cops.

I really couldn't understand it at the time; it's not at all like him. It just happens, too, that there's a lot of petty crimes being committed in the neighborhood, and the judge wants to make an example of somebody, so the kid is sent up for five or six years, I don't know which. He came out when he was about twenty-two; the rest of us were all grown up and had gone out with women and everything, and when I saw him I was surprised again to see that he seemed to be better educated when he came out of the can than before.

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He'd had time to read, you see, and he had a better viewpoint on things: wanted to pick up at school 2 and make something of himself. But in no time he gets mixed up with a gang again and finally winds up with Dutch Schultz. Maybe the going was too tough for a feller without a trade, maybe the cops were spotting him everywhere he went, maybe he couldn't resist easy money...anyhow, he changed back again pretty quick.

This is during Prohibition. I owned a store on Claremont way, renting out tuxedos, and whenever Joe is in the neighborhood he drops in to see me. I wasn't very anxious to have him around, knowing the racket he was in, but it seems he took a grudge against all his old pals except me; he figured he could trust me, I guess, and he used to tell me all his troubles. At that time he went around with a car collecting beer bills; a job for a real tough guy, and Joe had to make out he was a lot tougher than he really was.

He kept flashing a roll and telling me to go around to the speaks with him: Come on, it's all on the house, he would say. The way it worked was like this. When he collected, say two hundred bucks in one place, he'd leave about ten there. Gimme a beer, he'd tell the owner, or just let him ring it up like that. The Dutchman figured it was a good policy; every businessman gives out a / little something to keep goodwill, something like a discount. Naturally, Joe couldn't take it all out in drinks; he needed a little help. Besides, it gave him a chance to prove to me what a bigshot he was, and he always liked to show off.

One day he persuaded me, against my better instincts, to make the rounds with him. It wasn't busy that day and I had lots of time; I guess that's why I let him take me along. So we hop into his car and we're off. Then I notice that while he's driving, he looks out at both sides, and every once in a while he sort of ducks. When we pass the light at Webster he does the same thing. "What's the matter, Joe?" I ask. "Oh," he says, as if it's nothing, "the crazy mick is out again. He'll bump anyone who belongs to the Schultz mob." That's what they used to call Vincent Coll- "the crazy mick" - and this was the 3 time he and the Dutchman were on the outs. "Say, let me out of here!" I yelled, I've got things to

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do!" But Joe insisted everything would be alright and he drives over to a certain place in Eastchester.

It's a regular speak there; after he collects the dough that's coming to him he throws down a ten-spot. Give us a couple of drinks, he says - and [?] [Keep?] the change. So we're drinking, and it's pretty good stuff, too, and then the storekeeper opens up with his troubles. He's sick of the feud, and he wants Joe to get the Dutchman to patch things up. "I can't keep refusing to buy from the mick", he tells him. "He'll bust up my joint. I got a wife and family. I can't afford to take chances." You're taking beer from the Dutchman, Joe tells him, and that's all you gotta know. He's treating you right, ain't he? So don't be foolish. - And he signals to me, and out we walk.

I'm shaking in my shoes all the time, understand. If one of those Coll babies came across us, I'd have been cooked. So when we get outside I turn to Joe: "For chrissakes, this ain't no joke! It's alright for / you maybe, this is your bread and butter, but it doesn't mean a cent to me. I've got a mother to take care of, and she's expecting me home tonight." And I made him take me over to the Morris Park trolley line, and I got into a trolley-car and went home, and believe me, I felt I had escaped from the jaws of death. I don't care how much dough this guy makes, I said to myself, from now on I stick to my own business.

But the story I wanted to tell you is about later on, after repeal, when Joe and I went into business together. Of course, the bottom fell out of his racket at that time, and I wasn't doing anything either. I met Joe, and he seemed to be on the up-and-up, so I thought it would be a good idea to use his experience and contacts and go into the liquor business in a small way, and maybe work it up to something big. It sounded alright, and I still think we could have made out if Joe had attended to business. We bought a car on partnership, an old Hupmobile, and we figured we'd go back to Joe's old 4 customers, who were selling the stuff legitimate, and we'd get an order for a case here and a case there, and we'd make a living on commissions.

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About this time Joe became infatuated with some girl; a real nice girl - nice face, nice figure - I don't know how she comes to Joe. He knew her from before, when he was earning and spending big money in the racket, and maybe that's what attracted her. In the beginning, I understand, he didn't have more use for /her than for any other skirt; women were just something you picked up for awhile, got a little pleasure out of, and forgot about. He used to treat her lousy at first, but she stuck to him. Then one day she decided to give him up, and his whole feeling about her changed. He became nuts about her, and dogged her trail, but she wouldn't have anything to do with him. Funny the way those things happen...

But it was hell on the business. Instead of going out for orders with [me?], Joe would sit home moping or get drunk. I tried to go out to these places without him, but of course it was no go. Everybody gave me excuses, it was one thing and another thing, and no orders coming in. This here love-bug of Joe's was ruining me. Every evening, about the time he sobered up, he'd make me walk up and down Jerome Avenue with him until midnight, while he talked about this girl of his. He started to curse her and call her all sorts of names, but it was easy to see he couldn't [get?] along without her. He really wanted to marry the girl then, but she wouldn't take any part of him. He wanted to dig up her address, he didn't know where she was, but he knew her sister and he kept telling her that the girl was no good and he didn't want to see her go wrong. Just let me talk to her, he pleads, I'll make her see things in the right way.

It went on like that until one day I go to the garage and I see the car is missing. Then I find out that Joe took the car out about two o'clock in the morning, and nobody has seen him since. Then, the next 5 afternoon, I get a telegram; it's from him. I'm up here in Sing-Sing, he says, hurry up and get me out. So I rush up there and get the whole story. He finally dug up this girl, you see, and he took her for a ride in the car and tried to convince her to go back with him. So he keeps talking and talking to her, and she keeps saying no, nothing doing, and they keep riding and riding. And I suppose they stopped off at roadhouses on

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the way, and he got drunk. The first thing you know, he flew into a tree with the car - [our?] car, since I owned half of it - and they both got bruised up. Worse than that, as far as I'm concerned, the car was smashed. This was right near an inn, and it happened that Joe knew the proprietor, so they went there to rest up.

A couple of state troopers came along, and seeing the smashed car, they go to the inn to investigate. Joe and the girl is in a room upstairs, and the troopers go up with the owner and they ask Joe to come out; they just want to ask him routine questions about the accident. But this dumb bugger has to act tough. "I won't come out!" he yells, "you'll have to break the door down!" The troopers were sore, but the proprietor, who knows Joe, tries to get him to be reasonable. Nothing doing. Finally they try to open the door with a key, but Joe has a key too, and he's locked it on his side. By this time the cops are exasperated, and they break the door down and put Joe in the cooler.

When I get there, the girl is crying on the bed. "You're his friend," she pleads with me, 'can't you get him out? You're a legitimate guy; go up there and tell them you'll be responsible for him." I didn't like the idea at all, but I worked it out with the innkeeper, who was friendly, with the cops, and he tells them that Joe is O. K., he just likes to think he's a tough mug, and now that he's cooled off he won't make any more trouble. And, luckily enough, they don't find out anything about Joe's record, and we get him out.

But do you think he acted as if we had saved him from a rap? Of course he appreciated what I had done, but he turned sour and bitter on the girl 6 and kept calling her all kinds of names. Honest, as we stood on the platform waiting for the train to come in, he was so abusive and kept calling this girl such filthy names that I was ashamed to be seen with them. He wouldn't even sit with her in the train, so I took turns sitting beside both of them. After all, I had nothing against the girl, it wasn't my argument, and I pitied her. By the time we got to Grand Central he was sobered up, but he wouldn't say a word, and the girl went one way and Joe and I went another. That was the last I saw of her.

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And that was the end of the partnership, too; the end of the business, and the end of the car. He still owes me a hundred bucks, and if it was my money I wouldn't care so much, but it was money I had to borrow from poor people who really couldn't afford it, they gave it to me just to try to help me make a go of the business. So I'm pretty washed up as far as Joe Einstein is concerned. What is he doing now, you ask? Well, I heard conflicting reports. One says he got stabbed in a fight, which you can believe, but somebody else says he's in Florida, in some other racket, and making money hand over fist. You can take your pick.