

**Conversation with Howard Reich
(March 4, 2020)**

Welcome to Oakland University, and thank you to the Holocaust Memorial Center and the Jewish Community Center of Metro Detroit for their generous sponsorship of our event.

Howard Reich is an author, documentary filmmaker and journalist.

For more than four decades, he has been an acclaimed expert on jazz, classical music and the arts. His range of subjects include Van Cliburn, Jelly Roll Morton, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday.

Some of Howard's stories have been developed into documentary films, and his reviews, interviews and commentaries published in the Chicago Tribune contribute to a critical and thoughtful perspective of American culture.

Among his most touching stories is his memoir based on the journey to trace his mother's story, and how she was one of less than 100 of 12,000 Jews in her hometown of Dubno, Poland to escape execution at the hands of the Nazis.

I have been an admirer of Howard's work for many years, and have come to view Howard as an engaging storyteller who relentlessly pursues the truth.

Nowhere is that more evident than in his conversations over four years with Elie Wiesel, one of the most remarkable and indelible literary and moral voices of our time. For many, Elie Wiesel is not only a survivor, but a force with a resounding voice who bears witness to injustice, and inspires us to speak up courageously for moral causes.

What began for Howard as a story assignment from the Chicago Tribune to interview the Nobel Peace Prize laureate turned into a deep friendship and partnership with Wiesel.

Howard's father, Robert, and Wiesel were both liberated from the Buchenwald death camp on April 11, 1945. Buchenwald was one of the first and largest concentration camps within Germany's 1937 borders, where more than 56,000 people were executed.

The conversation between Howard and Elie Wiesel documented in his book, "The Art of Inventing Hope," represents a broader dialogue between the generation with direct experiences and memories of the Holocaust, and the following generation that inherited the challenge of finding meaning and purpose as descendants of survivors.

Reich and Wiesel believed their colloquy represented a unique exchange between two generations deeply affected by a cataclysmic event. Wiesel noted of his partnership with Howard that he had never done anything like it before, and after reading Howard's manuscript, asked him not to change a word.

Learning from the past and understanding the great breadth of our ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is also the mission of the Cis Maisel Center for Judaic Studies and Community Engagement, which was created through a generous gift of our friend, Cis Maisel.

Our hope is that the center under the leadership of Michael Pytlik will encourage research and serve to broaden the public understanding of the traditions of Judaism.

Together, OU's Center for Religious Understanding and the Maisel Center foster a greater appreciation for our differences, and in a modest way, we, too, are engaged in "the art of inventing hope."

Before I turn over the conversation to Michael, I must express our thanks to Howard.

We appreciate all you have done to elevate the importance of the arts, and for contributing to an ongoing conversation about how we must learn the lessons from history.