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My Architect: A Son's Journey

By Unknown

Louis I. Kahn,
whose strong forms of brick and concrete
influenced a generation
of architects and made him,
in the opinion of most
architectural scholars,
America's foremost living architect,
died Sunday evening
apparently of a heart attack
in Pennsylvania Station.
He was 73 years old.
Besides his wife, Mr. Kahn
leaves a daughter, Sue Ann.
When I first read that obituary,
I have to admit I was
looking for my own name.
I was his child too, his only son.
I didn't know my father very well.
He never married my mother,
and he never lived with us.
But I can still remember every detail
of the few times we spent
a whole day together.
On this afternoon, we had a picnic.
He painted with watercolors,
and my mother snapped these pictures.
He died when I was 11.
The circumstances of his death
have always fascinated me.
He was bankrupt and alone on
his way back home from India.
He collapsed in the
downstairs men's room
in Penn Station, New York.
The police couldn't identify him,
because, for some unknown reason,
he crossed out the
address on his passport.
They took him to the city morgue,
where he lay unclaimed for three days.
What was he thinking at the end?
Had he seen anyone?
Had he talked to anyone?
Had he really decided to leave his wife

and come and live with
us like my mother said?
For years, I struggled to be satisfied
with the little piece
of my father's life
I'd been allowed to see.
But it wasn't enough.
I needed to know him.
I needed to find out who he really was,
so I set out on a journey
to see his buildings
and to find whatever was
left of him out there.
It would take me to the
other side of the world
looking for the man who left
me with so many questions.
My father had been dead 25 years,
so there wasn't much time left
if I wanted to meet
any of his colleagues.
I figured I'd start at the top:
the guy with the glasses.
- Mr. Johnson.
- Good to meet you.
- Oh, it's a pleasure to meet you.
- You're Lou's son?
Yes.
Generations go by quickly, don't they?
I've just decided Lou was
the most beloved architect of our time.
- Really?
- Yeah... Well, think of anybody else.
Frank Lloyd Wright was
too cantankerous to love.
Mies van der Rohe wasn't...
you couldn't talk to him at all.
Corbusier was mean.
But Lou, now, there was a man.
All my buildings don't add up
to what his three or four buildings,
because he, when he
did get a client...
however he ever got any

clients is a mystery,
because artists don't get jobs.
Every time I've tried to do art,
I've ended up with a...
I've made much less.
Nothing to be ashamed of, naturally.
I do it the other way.
I do it by numbers and...
and public fame and all that.
But Lou did it by being an artist.
He'd sit and work on art, see?
And I always wished... I think he
did too... wished he knew me better,
and I always wished I knew him better.

- Why?

- Well, you know,
there's some things
that don't go into words.
It's animal
attraction...
his mind, really,
because his person...
to look at him wasn't much a pleasure.

- It wasn't?

- It couldn't be.

See, he was so scarred.
Funny, he never talked to me
as directly as he should have.

- Who?

- Lou.

He never came here, though.

- Didn't he ever come here?

- To the glass house?

That's strange, 'cause
I built it in '49.

Possible. Possible.

Do you think Lou would
have liked this house?

- No.

- Why?

Oh, rigid boxes, you know. He...

He was his own artist.

He was free compared to me.

The first time I'd gotten

a real sense of Lou's legacy
was when I was a student up the road
at Yale University.
My father was only 5'6"
but he cast a long shadow in New Haven.
He built his first and
last major buildings here:
the Yale Art Gallery in 1953;
and right across the street,
the British Art Center,
finished after his death.
I used to wander around in
those buildings on weekends.
They were silent and mysterious,
and I half expected Lou to just appear
from around the next corner.
There were rows of books
about his work in the library.
He hadn't built very many buildings,
but apparently they had changed
the course of architecture:
the Salk Institute,
the Kimbell Art Museum,
the Exeter Library,
the Capital of Bangladesh.
My art history
professor, Vincent Scully,
had been a friend of Lou's,
but he always talked about him
like some long-dead ancient hero.
It was unsettling.
From the very beginning he was after
symmetry, order, geometric clarity,
primitive power,
enormous weight...
as much as he could get,
like this great monster that stands
in the middle of this space.
You know as I said too, I think, before:
enduring monuments.
He wants his materials to kind of last,
which is a permanent work in the world.
That's what he's after.
You know, it was such a wonderful thing

to be close to somebody
who really was changing everything.
You said at one point that
he wanted to make everything right.
- He wanted to make it perfect.
- Perfect.
You know, in Jewish mysticism,
which I know almost
nothing about, but...
God can only be known
through His works, right?
And since the messiah
hasn't come yet, hmm,
the works of any Jewish architect
might be the works of God.
And you take those pictures of Louie
when he's looking into the light
and when he's enjoying
silence like this,
it's... it makes
the hair stand up,
because it really is like that, as if
he's in some way communicating
with this fundamental thing, that
God is in the work.
So it has to be perfect, you see.
It has to be perfect.
It can't be impatient.
It's timeless.
I wanted to ask you.
Do you think...
did anybody know
that Lou had three families all at once?
No, I didn't.
As a matter of fact, for years
I didn't know Lou was married.
- Really?
- Yeah.
That was part of his mystery.
My mother and I lived on
the outskirts of Philadelphia
at the end of a secluded road.
Lou would visit every once in a while,
mostly at night.

We never knew quite when it would be.
He'd call at the last minute
and say he was on his way.
My mother would frantically
whip up a five-course meal
and have a Martini in a
frozen glass waiting for him.
I got to stay up late,
and Lou would tell me
wonderful stories about India
and elephants and tigers.
In the middle of the night,
we'd all bundle into the car
and drive him back downtown.
I'd lie in the backseat.
We were all silent.
When I asked my mother why
we couldn't all live together,
she explained that his wife
wouldn't give him a divorce.
Why didn't he just run away?
We'd stop at the end of Clinton Street
and let him out.
He'd walk down the block
and disappear into the dark house,
his wife's house.
Her name was Esther.
They had a daughter named Sue,
who was 20 years older than me.
When I was in first grade,
I found out I had
another half sister, Alex.
Her mother was a lady named Anne.
Then there was my mother and me.
Lou was 61 when I was born.
All three families lived within
several miles of each other,
but we never crossed
paths until Lou's funeral.

- Do you remember this guy?
- Hell of a man.
- Sure, I remember him.
- Did he ever ride in your cab?

20, 40 times. Who knows?

He was a cab rider, strictly cab rider.

- Yeah, he didn't drive?

- Never. He used to sit in front.

- He sat in front?

- Oh, yeah.

- Really?

- Yeah. That was your dad,
world-famous architect.

Yeah, that was your father.

- Do you remember him at all?

- A little bit, vaguely.

- Did he ever ride in your cab?

- Vaguely. He loved the women.

Not the young ones,
but he loved the women.

Do you remember what
he looked like or...

His face was pointed.

Yeah, and his hair was...

his hair was, you know,
very thin, like a blond.

- Like a what?

- Like it was blond. Yeah.

Oh, blond, uh-huh.

Do you remember that he
had scars on his face?

Oh, sure.

It would look like he was burned.

Yeah.

This is where your
father had his office,
right there, where it
says tickets, upstairs.

That's 1501. That's
where he was, right here.

The office at 1501 Walnut Street
was the last place I saw my father.

My mother would bring me here sometimes
after hours and on weekends.

Lou would lean out the top floor window
and toss down a key wrapped in
yellow tracing paper, to let us in.

When I went to high school,
I had a teacher in the arts

who was head of the
department, Central High:
William Gray.

And he gave a course in architecture,
the only course... in any
high school, I'm sure...
in Greek, Roman, Renaissance, Egyptian,
and Gothic architecture.

And at that point, two of
my colleagues and myself
realized that only
architecture would be my life.

How accidental our
existences are, really,
and how full of
influence by circumstance.

Here at the University of Pennsylvania,
one of the world's great architects,
Professor Louis Kahn,
teaches and creates.

This is his Richards
Medical Research Building,
called by the Museum of
Modern Art in New York City
probably the single most
consequential building
constructed in the United
States since World War II.
It is principled, vigorous,
fundamental, and exhilarating.

This building is Kahn's
greatest achievement.

People come by all the
time with their cameras
taking pictures of this
awesome architectural wonder,
and we just sit upstairs in
the window and laugh at them,
because it's not a good place to work.

I don't feel comfortable
in my room, in my lab.

The temperature is not constant.

- The temperature is not constant?

- Yeah.

I don't like that birds
fly into the windows
and get killed.
It's not a pretty building.
You know what I mean?
It doesn't have a good-looking
architectural to it. You know what I mean?
It needs face, something
different... Maybe paint the pillars
a different color than the
building or something. You know,
I mean, something to
give it a little pizzazz
instead of, like I said,
look like a bomb shelter.
This was Lou's only major
building in Philadelphia,
and I wanted to like it.
But I had to agree it
was kind of disappointing.
Around this time, an article appeared
in the Philadelphia
Inquirer about my search.
It quoted me as saying that I
wanted to hug my father's buildings,
which was very embarrassing,
but it stirred things up.
I got several letters,
including one from a relative
of Lou's who was a rabbi.
He said that he'd officiated
at Lou Kahn's funeral
and Lou Kahn didn't have a son.
Hello?
- Is this Rabbi Kramer?
- Yes.
Yeah, hi. This is
Nathaniel Kahn calling.
God in heavens, the whole
world opened up, my friend.
What are you talking about?
I mean, gosh, I've been
raising hell with the Inquirer.
I said, "Find that man."

You're raising hell with the Inquirer?

- Why are you doing that?

- To find you, sir.

Oh, well, I'm glad you did find me.

Look, don't forget Lou

Kahn's my first cousin.

Lou Kahn is your first cousin?

And my parents was his godparents.

Wow, I didn't know that.

Well, I knew Lou very well.

With all due respect, I

hear Lou fooled around.

Well,

you know...

Anyway, I'm here, so

that's a good thing.

What would you do with

the film once you...

Oh, it'll be on... it'll

be on TV, you know.

- Wow.

- Yeah, so...

I'd like to come and interview you.

- I'm photogenic.

- Oh, you're photogenic, okay.

Let's see if anybody's home.

Just calling for you.

Oh, that was kind of you.

No camera, please.

- No camera?

- No camera.

No, I understand. I

know you were skeptical,

so I wanted to show you

my birth certificate,

which, um,

you know...

My bris certificate?

I don't have that.

What do they do?

That's okay, I understand.

Not that I'm proud of

being... but I'm trying...

'74, right, and you...

the two of you were there
at his funeral, right?
But people in the family
really didn't know that he was
an internationally known
architect, did they?
Does that mean no money to
show for it, you mean, or what?
Why did they think
that he traveled the world
and he didn't amount to anything?
I grew up not knowing
anything about Lou's family
and the Jewish half of my background.
I'd hoped so much that
Kramer would fill in
that part of the story for
me, but I was disappointed.
In this society, how you made it
is now like the dust has cleared.
Something else was happening, though.
Details about my father
were coming back to me:
his voice, the rough feel of his scars.
That was one of my favorite stories.
I made him tell it to me over and over.
He was three years old back in Estonia.
There were coals glowing in a stove.
He was captivated by the light.
He took the coals out
and put them in his apron.
It caught fire, and the
flames seared his face
and the backs of his hands.
His father thought it
would be better if he died,
but his mother said he would grow up
to be a great man because of it.
I first met your
father... some AIA affairs.
And I sat right next to Lou.
And I praised him, on
the Richards Laboratory.
I thought that was really a

marvelous group of buildings.

And it was then that
he told me, "You know,
"go to Scotland."

- Really?

- Know that?

No.

The Scottish castle
gave him the inspiration.

- For Richards?

- Yes.

And I said, "That group of buildings
are really one of your best."

And he said, "Well, the
best is yet to come."

That was Salk.

So then he told me about
his relationship with Salk.

He said, "I have the best client."

And he said, "Well, I view somehow
that this will be an
important piece of work."

And as it turned out to be.

I consider it to be
a masterpiece of his.

The two of you have varying degrees
of success with clients.

You seem to have succeeded very well.

I am... I am, but I'm a
little bit more able to...

a little more patient, perhaps,
because of my being Chinese.

If my client... let's say a
person did not agree with me,
I'll let it pass,

and I'll come back another day.

I don't think Lou would do that.

Lou would probably...
push it right through.

And then when he found a
client that is sympathetic,
it's a client for life, huh?

And I don't think I could claim that.

On the other

hand, I probably...
lost fewer clients than he did.
Oh, way fewer. I think
you've built way more.
You've had way more success rate
- in terms of your buildings...
- Building doesn't mean success.
- No?
- Building...
three or four masterpieces are more
important than 50, 60 buildings.
Quality, not quantity.
Architecture has to
have the element of time.
How can you judge a work today,
let's say a work by anyone
of these modern architects
that you know about that's
exciting and wonderful.
And then what'll happen
to it 20, 50 years later?
That's the measure.
That's why that Salk
Center will always be
as perfect as it was conceived.
The teakwood may fade away.
It probably
did... or has.
But the spirituality of
that project will remain.
Now, that building will
stand the test of time.
No question about it.
There is something
spiritual about this space.
For the first time since he died,
I felt I was getting
closer to my father.
The scientists told me
the building is not only
beautiful, but it works.
Unlike the Richards medical towers,
where the labs are small,
these labs are totally open,

spanning the full
length of the building,
and each scientist has a
study with an unobstructed view
of the Pacific Ocean.

Lou was 65 when Salk was finished.
He said it was the first building
he was really happy with.

I looked up one of the men
who worked with him on the project,
a guy named Jack MacAllister.
Jack moved out here during construction
and never left.

I was in charge of this
project when I was 25.
You had an incredible responsibility.
Unbelievable.

That was one of the things that he had:
enormous trust in young people.

Lou put me in charge and
gave me his checkbook.

And he said, you know,
"You distribute the fees."

And I grew a beard because
I wanted to look older.

I'm serious.

How old were you when Lou died?

- I was 11.

- That's what I thought.

- I was 11, yeah.

- Did you know him well?

- I have a sense for him.

- Right.

And I saw him, you
know, once a week, maybe.

- That's all, though?

- That's about all, yeah.

- Did you ever travel with him, or...

- No, no.

That's why I wanted to talk to you,
because you spent a
lot of time with him.

- Oh, yeah, me and my family did.

- Your family did too?

He used to spend
Christmas with us, yeah.
- He spent Christmas with you?
- He loved Christmas, yeah.
He absolutely loved it. I can
remember him lying on our bed
watching cartoons
with the kids...
and then falling asleep,
you know? They'd just say,
"Lou's sound asleep, Daddy."
That's when we'll leave... "You
know, leave him be. He's tired."
Lou was very willful, you see?
He didn't want anything in his buildings
to look like he hadn't anticipated them.
So when something was going to happen,
instead of trying to suppress
it, he made more of it.
And that's a way of thinking
about things, you know,
- not just architecture, about anything.
- Sure.
Any adversity, any difficulty.
Instead of trying to cover it up,
you pull it out and express
it, and then you own it.
And, I mean,
you might say...
it's probably a loose
fit, but it had to do
with his own physical imperfection
- that...
- His face, you mean?
Yeah, that the scars on a building
that are produced by the way it's made
should be revealed. I think
he really believed that.
It all had to do with revealing
the process of what it was about.
And he probably learned to
think about himself that way.
I've never said the before,
and it may be bullshit, but

it's an interesting thing to think of.
You know, you can't be
stupid all your life.
You got to be smart too.
We used to use the expression,
you know, in the college...
when I went to college.
When we couldn't solve
a damn problem, you know,
because it was
so difficult and...
or you didn't study for the examination
you took that morning, you know,
we always said, "I wish we were smart
instead of good-looking."
That was the expression we used.
He was an incredible
man who we all supported
and forgave for a lot of things
because of what he was doing.
What kinds of things did
you have to forgive him for?
Oh, I once... on
very short notice
he came to me and asked
me to build a model
of a project while he was out of town.
And I went in, and I spent two
or three days working on it.
I finally finished it. I
went to bed at about midnight,
and he came in from wherever he was.
He may have been in India, I don't know.
And he came to the office

about 3:

called me at home.
"Jack, this is Lou.
That model you built is
a piece of shit." Bang.
What do you say? Maybe it was.
He could have been right, you know?
But... You know, he was capable
of that kind of thing too.

- At 3:

- Yeah, at 3:

He didn't know what time it was.

- Did you ever drink with Lou?

- Oh, yeah.

Oh, you should ask my first wife.

Hello, Mr. Katz?

This is Nathaniel Kahn

returning your call.

Yes, I would like very much to hear

what you saw that night

in Penn Station, New York.

What an incredible coincidence.

Please give me a call back

and let me know where I can meet you,

or I'll try you again

later. Thanks. Bye-bye.

Are you David?

No, I'm not David, no, sorry.

I'm supposed to meet

somebody right here.

Me too.

...a guy named Richard Katz.

What are you doing?

Actually, this guy

Richard Katz was...

my dad died 26 years ago,

and he was with my father

in Penn Station, New York.

- Is that right?

- Yeah, and

I don't know the story of what happened.

So Richard Katz is coming to tell me.

- Is that great?

- I don't know if it's great.

- It's something, anyway.

- That's... yeah.

- Yeah, I hope he shows up.

- I hope he does. I hope my guy does.

Is that... is that the guy

you're supposed to meet?

- No, maybe that's yours.

- No, I don't think so.

Are you Richard?

- How you doing?

- Hey, Richard. I'm Nathaniel.

- Yeah, I figured it'd be you.

- Nice to meet you. Right.

Right.

There was a policeman

here and a policeman here,

- and the dead man was here.

- And where were you?

I'm pretty sure that I was over here.

So when you came in,

were the policemen already there?

No, no.

I see this face of this guy,

and he didn't look very well.

Did you know he was dying?

Was it clear

to you that...

I've never seen anybody die.

So I don't think I would know that.

I've seen one or two dead men,

and they don't look like that.

They look very peaceful.

- He didn't look peaceful?

- No.

You remember that, that

he didn't look peaceful?

What was... what

was the... I mean...

He just didn't.

- Scared?

- What did he die of?

- Heart attack.

- He did?

That's a real sad story that

you didn't know your dad at all.

I have a kid who's 18 years old,

and I didn't get to see

him from the time he was 8.

So it's kind of a

different story, isn't it?

Or is that the same story?

It's a different story,
because... well, if I had died,
I guess it would have
been the same story, huh?
Why hadn't you seen him for ten years?
Oh, it was a custody case.
- Did you want to keep him?
- Sure. My kid. My son.
I mean, I don't just
feel sympathy for you.
I feel sympathy for Lou.
- Why?
- 'Cause you were his son.
A man has feelings for his son.
I know there must have been some
kind of social convention that
somehow kept you apart.
And I don't want to make excuses
for that social convention.
Whatever it was, out with
it... I mean down with it.
That's bad. Whatever it was, it was bad.
It's just sad.
How accidental our
existences are, really,
and how full of
influence by circumstance.
I wonder if I'll ever find out
exactly what happened
that night in Penn Station.
For years, I thought maybe
my father hadn't really died,
that he was out there somewhere
living a parallel life.
I suppose that was because
he left no physical evidence
that he'd ever been in our house,
not even a bow tie
hanging in the closet.
I remember my father's hands.
Sometimes that's all I could see
when he would sit on my
bed and tell me stories
about his childhood late at night.

He said he was born on an island with a castle on it off the coast of Estonia in 1901 or 1902. He wasn't sure which. He came on a steamboat to Philadelphia with his family in 1906. They were very poor, but Lou was good at art and music. His drawings won prizes, and he made money playing piano in the silent movie houses. He told me Philadelphia was a city where a small boy could find what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. I went back to the neighborhood in north Philadelphia to find the places he always talked about. The whole family lived on the top floor of a tenement. And when a wealthy lady gave Lou a piano, there was no room left for his bed. So he slept on the piano. They couldn't afford pencils for him to draw with, but that was okay, because you could make charcoal by burning sticks in the backyard. The kids teased him and called him 'Scarface', so he waited until the last bell to go to school. There was a girl he loved named Ada, but she loved someone else. The next part of the story he didn't talk about much, so I have to rely on the architecture books. He won a scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania and graduated with a degree

in architecture in 1924.
In 1930, he married Esther Israeli,
and their daughter, Sue Ann,
was born ten years later.
Esther worked in a medical lab
and supported the family
throughout the '30s and '40s
as Lou struggled to get commissions
and to find a style
he could call his own.
It was the era of the
new modern architecture:
sleek steel skyscrapers
and houses defined by walls of glass.
Lou tried to design that
way, but it never felt right.
In 1947, with Esther's help,
he started his own office
with several men and one woman.
He was almost 50 years old
and still hadn't found himself.
I wanted to show you
some sketches I made
when I was... when
I was in Rome.
Then in 1951, he was invited
to be architect in residence
at the American Academy in Rome
and to travel throughout
the ancient world.
What he saw changed his life.
These are the sketches I made
a long time ago in Egypt, you see.
Timelessness, monumentality.
That's what mattered.
When Lou got back, he finally
knew what he wanted to do:
build modern buildings that
had the feel and presence
of ancient ruins.
He'd also become deeply involved
with the woman working in the office,
a young architect named Anne Tyng.
She's the mother of

my half sister, Alex.
Lou was not a domestic person.
Let's face it. He never was. And...
He lived, really, in
the office, you know?
He had his bench where
he would take catnaps,
and he even sent his laundry
out from the office. I mean,
he was really... and,
of course, I know
that he crossed his home address
off on his... on his passport.
That's why they had a
hard time locating his...
in letting people know
that they found him dead
in 30th Street Station.
- Penn Station, New York.
- Penn Station.
My mother always said
that Lou had crossed off the address
because he planned to leave Esther and
come marry her.
I don't think he was
capable of doing that.
I mean, I'm sorry but
I really can't see him
doing something like that.
I realized he was not about to do that.
He always said that work
was the most important thing,
that you cannot depend
on human relations,
that, really, work is the
only thing you can count on.
Did you fall in love
with him right away? Lou?
- Sure, yeah.
- Why?
Well, he had tremendous charm.
I mean, he was charismatic,
and he was very accessible
and very endearing to people.

And when you got pregnant,
were you surprised?
Oh, yeah, it was a physical shock.
But that didn't seem to change his idea
of what he was going to
do. And he just would say,
"Well, you have to be
philosophical about it."
So, I mean, I could spend the rest
of my life being philosophical,
but there was not much
point in that. You know,
I had to do something.
And if he's not going to do
something about marrying me,
it's time I moved on.
But in spite
of myself I...
I mean, when I
left him, I didn't...
I didn't really want to.
So...
Next to arrive on track five
is the scheduled Buffalo to Trenton.
Looking at Anne on that platform,
I kept thinking of my own mother.
Neither one of them ever got married.
They both live alone.
They were both single mothers
when being a single
mother was a major scandal,
and they both believed
in my father completely.
Anne left Philadelphia in 1953
and went to Rome for a
year to have Alex in secret.
Lou wrote many letters
to her while she was away.
"Dearest Annie,
"last night, I dreamt about you.
"I was in our office telephoning.
"You walked in and mentioned to me
"that you could wait no longer.
"Your eyes somehow

were black and flashing,
"looking at me reprehensively.
"Annie, Annie, I think of you always.
"I miss so much our meetings together.
"I hope nothing changes
about our way of life."
Well, of course, it would change.
When Anne returned, she
collaborated with Lou
on a small community
center and bathhouse
in Trenton, New Jersey.
It was Lou's first chance
to fully apply his ideas
about ancient architecture.
Anne is 80 now and hasn't been
back to Trenton in 40 years.
Well, how do you go in?
- I think we go right in there, I think.
- Is this a door?
- Looks like it's boarded up.
- Was it not like that?
No, this was never closed like this.
Oh, there's a lock here.
- Hello?
- Hello?
Is it open?
Oh, hooray.
Thank you.
- Hi, I'm sorry about the holdup.
- Thank you.
- Let me get out of your way.
- Thank you very much.
Do you... do you
know Anne Tyng?
- No. Hi, Rob Frey.
- Hi, nice to meet you.
- An honor to meet you.
- Anne was the...
the architect with Lou on the project.
- Unbelievable.
- Wonderful. Wonderful. Okay.
If it's okay if we just
want to look around?

Oh, absolutely.

Gosh.

- It's painted now, huh?

- Terrible.

I mean, it's just such a shame.

"Dearest Annie,

"I must build one of the
great buildings of the time.

"You must help me build
this particular building.

"I doubt if I can do it without you.

"Just think how low
architecture has gotten down.

"We, Anne, you and I, are
going to show them the way.

"All my love, Lou."

Do you think this building
was very important for Lou?

Well, he says so himself,
you know, that the world discovered him
when he built the Richards building,
but he had discovered
himself when he built
that little concrete-block
bathhouse in Trenton.

So that... that says it,
I think, right there
how significant he felt it was.

Do you think about him a lot now?

Well, he's kind of there, you know?

Don't need to think about him.

- Part of you?

- Well, he's there.

He's there in you, he's in Alex, you know...

He's in his buildings. And...

And I think the ideas
that you work on together
connect you always somehow, you know?

Lou split up with Anne
when Alex was about three
and then got involved with my mother
a few years later in 1959.

In spite of everything,
Anne has always felt

that we're all connected
and that we are, in some
strange way, a family.
I wonder if Lou thought of it that way.
Or was each relationship
an entirely new beginning?
The question is often
asked, "Why isn't Lou Kahn
"working directly in the work
which the government is doing
in the actual rebuilding of
Philadelphia at this moment?"
I see it still as being
the most useful plan,
yes, and the most expressive.
It's the most expressive
and the most useful.
Uh, yes.
Expressive.
I repeatedly made the effort
to involve Lou directly
in our work in Philadelphia,
but it's turned out that
the special quality of his genius
could not be brought together
with the reality of the problem.
I'd always heard that Ed Bacon
was Lou's nemesis in Philadelphia.
Bacon was in charge of rebuilding
the entire downtown area
in the '50s and '60s,
and he hired Lou to come up with plans
for how the job should be done.
But something had gone very wrong.
We started work, and
I wanted to communicate
to the stupid public
in the most acerbic
fashion I possibly could
the essence of the idea.
And Lou would say,
"Wouldn't it be nice to
put a curving stairway here?
Or how about kind of

a little tower here?"
And suddenly, I realized that the purity
of my communication was being encrusted
by Lou's fantasies.
So Lou didn't get it?
Lou didn't understand what you wanted?
He didn't understand it.
He did not understand it.
And so he was angry as could be angry.
And he got nice ladies to give tease,
where they would complain about me
not using Lou Kahn for this purpose.
By the way, there's not a single shred
of any way in which
Lou influenced downtown Philadelphia.
Nothing, I know.
Isn't that a tragedy?
Well, I tell you one thing.
It's... thank... would have
been an incredible tragedy
if they had built one single thing
that Lou proposed for
downtown Philadelphia.
They were all brutal,
totally insensitive,
totally impractical. The whole idea
of doing circular garages
up on Vine Street...
Yeah, but the idea of leaving
the cars outside the city
and then letting people
walk into the city...
- it was a great idea, don't you think?
- No!
It absolutely wasn't.
It wouldn't have worked for a damn.
So ultimately, isn't
it just two strong men...
two strong egos that don't get together?
God damn it, no.
It's an absolutely pure ignorance
on Lou's part, and it's
the same damn ignorance
as the American Institute of

Architects is based on now,
that you have no responsibility
to preparing the way
for a system on the larger order,
and you only do the little
things that come along.
So you simply have not
understood a word I've said.
Watch where you're going!
Some of Lou's ideas were utopian
and impractical,
but this was the '60s.
And like a lot of people then,
he was questioning the way we live.
Do we really want the
skyline of every American city
to look more or less the same?
Why can't people leave their cars
outside the city and walk instead?
To express is to drive.
And when you want to
give something presence,
you have to consult nature.
And there is where design comes in.
If you think of brick, for instance,
you say to brick, "What
do you want, brick?"
And brick says to you,
"I'd like an arch."
And if you say to brick,
"Look, arches are expensive,
"and I can use a
concrete lintel over you.
"What do you think of that, brick?"
Brick says, "I'd like an arch."
And it's important, you see,
that you honor the
material which you use.
You don't bandy it
around as though you said,
"Well, we have a lot of material around.
We can do it one way;
we can do it another."
It's not true.

You can only do it
if you honor the brick
and glorify the brick
instead of just shortchanging it.
I remember hearing him talk at Penn.
And I came home, and I said
to my father and mother,
"I just met this man.
"He doesn't have much work, and he's
"sort of ugly... funny voice,
"and he's a teacher at school.
"I know you've never heard of him,
"but just mark this day
"that someday you will hear of him,
"because he's really an amazing man."
Tell me the story of Philadelphia.
What was it that stopped
Lou from building more there,
from being more successful there?
Because he spoke his truth.
And he was not controllable,
and he wouldn't have been controllable
by the powers that be
that really wanted control
of the image of Philadelphia.
They wanted to have
Philadelphia bask in their image
or be connected to it
or get credit for it in some way.
But really fundamentally why?
It's all the obvious stuff.
Blood was important in Philadelphia.
And I think Lou's blood
had a yellow armband.
- Jewish?
- Yes.
I really think so.
I think that was important,
even though they might
not even have known it was,
maybe consciously, I felt it.
I felt it. I felt it.
Frustration and failure
are really the things that make you.

Maybe he was made by
being short and ugly
and Jewish and having a bad voice
and not wanting to be good
with people, or whatever.
Maybe he was made by that,
because it made him go internal.
So you can't just say,
"Oh, isn't it a shame he
didn't build more buildings?"
"Isn't it a shame he
wasn't this or that person?"
We're made by those things.
I think he had trouble,
because he was a mystic,
and he wouldn't be
able to talk the lingo
of the business world.
You know, architecture is so passionless
in the modern movement.
There was no sense of... I
mean, it was all mechanical.
And that's why the
postmodern thing happened,
because people couldn't handle it.
It was just so cold and formless.
And Lou was kind of the breath
of fresh air in that, I mean,
in America.
And my first works
came out of my reverence for him.
Good night.
When Lou's ideas about
architecture finally caught on,
he had ten years left to live.
Maybe he knew time was running out.
He never said no to a lecture invitation
or a possible job, no
matter how tired he was
or how far he had to go.
If they wanted him, he was there.
One night when Lou came to visit,
he made a little book with

me:

There was a boat made out of a spoon
and one made out of a biscuit,
and there was a sausage boat
with toothpicks stuck in it
to keep it upright in the water.
At the time, I had no idea
that he was going to build a crazy boat.
It's a weird-looking thing.
Yeah, we saw that coming in yesterday.
"What the hell is that thing?"
Yeah, it looks like sort of
a, you know, Jules Verne thing.
Lou built this boat out of steel.
It's a music barge
that motors up to small
towns all over the world
and opens up into a concert stage.
It was commissioned by a
man named Robert Boudreau,
who is both the ship's captain
and the orchestra conductor.
I didn't tell him that I was Lou's son.

- Hi.

- Hi, Robert. Hi.

- Nice to see you.

- Hi, there.

What are you up to?

Put that damn thing down.

- Yeah, how are you?

- Hi, nice to meet you.

- Quite a boat you have here.

- Thanks.

This is that symphony boat to
that cruiser in front of us.

I think it might be a good
idea if you just moved out
until we went in to dock
and then came back in.

So, Robert, this boat
is very futuristic.

Oh, yeah, people say
this thing's from Mars, you know?
You know, I love this boat.

This is my boat, I created it,
with Lou.

- So you loved him?

- Oh, yeah.

That's a Louie Kahn

doorway for sure, isn't it?

You don't get 'em any better than that.

Isn't that amazing?

Well, take a look.

Take a look over there.

They're having all this

light come right through that.

Do you have to go now?

Can you come back, or no?

- No, no, I'm going to go.

- Okay, well, did you know why

I came to see you today?

Well, I'm making a film about Lou.

- Well, I knew that.

- You knew that.

- I knew that.

- But... I'm Lou's son.

God.

I saw you when you were six years old.

I saw you at the wake.

I saw you with your mother.

You remember that day?

What a crazy world.

You are Lou.

Have a nice concert.

- Where's Nathaniel?

- Why'd you get so upset?

Gosh, you love a man...

and I knew Lou had a son,

and I was told never to

tell that Lou had a son.

I don't know.

Lou was... didn't talk

about his family much,

except about his daughter.

He didn't talk about that.

Men don't talk about those things.

That was his, that was

his very personal thing.

We all have those personal things.

Thanks.

"Dear Harriet, I keep thinking

"how your sweet words have helped me

"during these trying days

of advice and criticism.

"What will happen is

all I still don't know...

"I mean, the hatred of your brothers,

"Abbot and Willie.

"My only hope is that

the beauty of new love

"will in some way make them understand.

"Now over me is a heaviness

of quiet and incompleteness,

"and I'm still very discouraged

by the feeling of ineptness.

"Lou."

Well, we were soul mates,

I would say, and inspired each other

so that it was an equal

exchange in many ways.

And I was a critic.

I do think that I brought

the sense of nature

and another sight to Lou's work.

Where did you work in the office?

I worked in a room, and

sometimes it was locked.

Why?

Well, because of his wife,

who would come in, drop by sometimes.

Sounds fairly...

fairly nerve-wracking.

It was nerve-wracking.

It was humiliating in some ways.

When the buildings were

created and finished and...

for example, the Kimbell Museum.

Everyone went out to the opening,

but I was not invited.

I was not allowed to come.

Is it partly because you were a woman

or that you were involved with him?

Yes, I think all of those things, yeah.
Didn't you ever say to him,
"Well, why don't you respect me more?
"Why don't you include
me in these things
"or make me a
part of your"...
Well, you see,
I felt so...
so happy and delighted
to work on things.
I mean, to work on something like this
was just... was
just thrilling.
And when... when we were
working on projects,
we were just completely
absorbed with the ideas.
And... and... and there
was just great freedom
and love of what we were doing.
And so that was the price that I paid.
It was worth it, you know?
My parents met by chance
at a party in Philadelphia.
My mother was 32,
and Lou was almost 60.
Her family was appalled
by the relationship.
And when she got pregnant,
she decided to disappear for a while.
She went to stay with her friends,
Charles and Susannah Jones.
They offered to adopt me
if she had to give me up.
I was amazed to see this little man
that she was so taken with.
And I didn't quite get
his number, I have to say.
I mean, he turned on the charm.
And I was sort of a Yankee,
and it didn't rub off.
I mean, I didn't get it.
And then it revolved

that she was pregnant
and that her family
really resented that and...
- didn't accept...
- No, they didn't.
They didn't accept that.
And time went by, and I said to Charles,
"You know, what's she going to do?
"She hasn't made arrangements,
"and the family isn't coming through.
"They're making it difficult.
"I really think we should do something."
And there was one sister, Edwina,
who did stand by her and
said, "You know what I can do?
"I can provide a man
to stand up with you
"and get married and
give a name to that child,
"and then you just can get
divorced two weeks later."
And Charles and I said, "No way.
"We don't want to have
anything to do with that.
"That's such a travesty of marriage.
"Just go ahead with
it and have this baby.
"It's going to be all right.
"Let him keep his name if you want,
"or have him take your name.
Don't worry about that."
And I also have to say
that you had to recognize it
right at the beginning
from Harriet's point of view
as a very true love,
an immense love...
and that it would be a lifelong love,
which I think it has been.
And you can't judge that,
because that kind of love
is on the side of life
and is a good thing.
My uncles, Abbot and Willie,

never bought that
romantic love affair idea.
They hated my father
and refused to ever
even mention his name.
Maybe if he'd married my mother,
it would have been different.
But even as her husband,
Lou would not exactly
have been their idea
of an Episcopalian gentleman.
My mothers' sisters, however,
would talk with me about him.
Did the family feel that
she needed to get away
from... from everybody
for a while?
I don't think our family
had anything to do with it.
I mean, I think it was your father
who determined that Harriet should go.
- Ask her sometime.
- Really?
But she... but
you didn't think
she should come to the
vineyard with you to live?
I couldn't at the time.
I wasn't in a position to have her.
And she didn't want to
come to New York with me,
'cause I told her that she could come
to New York with me.
And she chose not to,
which was fine. I don't...
And Abbot came to me, and he said,
"I think she should have an abortion".
I said abs... I
said no.
I'm glad she did because
you're here, Nathaniel.
I said, "It's... it's
none of our business.
That's for Harriet to determine."

I said, "I will not go along with that."

And I didn't. Oh, he was furious.

- Uncle Abbot?

- Yeah.

There is a certain romanticism
in your mother that...

Drives me up a wall.

All of us, because

there's a lack of realism.

- She's so impractical.

- So impractical.

- But she does...

- Drive me wild.

But even at the time of
settling, mother's estate
mother's attorney was shocked to learn
that Nathaniel
was a bastard...

"Dear Lou, I never wrote
you a letter before, did I?"

"I've been thinking
about all those summers
"you promised to come to
Maine and then didn't show up.

"At the time, I thought it
was just because of your work.

"But obviously, there were other reasons.

"Did you ever really have
any intention of coming,
"or did you just say you would
to get my mother off the phone?"

"Because we
waited for you...

"and waited and waited and waited."

Well, howdy there.

This is Classic Country,
Dallas-Fort Worth,
with a daily tidbit.

Construction is well underway
on the Kimbell Art Museum
in the heart of the cultural district.

It looks a little bit like
a cement cattle barn to me,
but they say the inside

is going to be gorgeous,
lit entirely by our Texas sun.
Well, good luck.
Well, let's get back to music right now.
One of our favorite

stars:

And he arrives kind of
unannounced on the job
and with these plans, these sketches
showing how he wanted something.
Then I said, "Is this...
what are these, Mr. Kahn?"
He says, "Well, this is how I want you to
do that detailing."
And I tore 'em up and
threw 'em in the trash can,
and I says, "Too late,
sorry. We're too late."
You know, he'd get an idea,
kind of like a wife,
he'd get an idea and...
it may have been
a good idea yesterday,
but it was too late today.
We would spend hours deciding
whether we were going to use
a hex head cap nut screw
or a Phillips head
or a socket pit or whatever, you know?
You'd ask Lou a question,
and you'd get a lecture.
You never would get an answer.
You'd get a dissertation
on the philosophy behind the thought.
He was just an artist, you know?
And most artists don't
have any discipline.
They just keep on going.
- Like the Energizer bunny.
- Yeah.
He just keeps beating that drum.
What was that?
Just like the Energizer

bunny, you know, on television.
He just keeps beating that drum
till the battery runs out.
To have approval on
a new element is...
is a great feeling.
It's because it isn't just a copy
of what has been thought
to be what's necessary
and what is accepted.
It... it feels as though
you're an architect.
A work of art
is not a living thing as...
that walks or runs;
but the making of a life, that
which gives you a reaction.
To some, it is the
wonder of man's fingers.
To some, it is the wonder of the mind.
To some, it is the wonder of technique.
And to some, it is how real it is;
to some how transcendent it is.
Like the 5th Symphony,
it presents itself with
a feeling that you know it
if you've heard it once.
And you look for it.
Though you know it,
you must hear it again.
Though you know it,
you must see it again.
Truly, a work of art
is one that tells us
that nature cannot
make what man can make.
Don't put him up on some
gigantic pedestal up there.
He was in the trenches.
The stories would come
out of his office...
it would be guys would have their wives
in final moments of labor,
and he wouldn't let them go home

or take them to the hospital
'cause they were working
on a project, you know?
And he didn't know day from night.
You know, and he
had no kind of...
I mean, I think that most architects
who are intensely
involved in their practice
have this problem, but I think
he had a really big problem.
And I think he was very unhappy
about not being selected
- for the John F. Kennedy library.
- Sure.
I mean, you can just see Jackie
going into I. M. Pei's
office on Madison Avenue,
or wherever it was in New York,
and there would be
flowers lining the corridor.
And, you know, you'd go to Lou's office,
and there'd be an old pastrami
sandwich sitting on somebody's desk.
I mean, don't think that he was
always trying to be a prince.
He was very much trying to be a player.
He wanted work.
He wanted recognition.
He wanted...
Doesn't every architect want?
I can't speak for every
architect, no. I don't know.
I think most
architects who are...
he was success oriented.
At the time of his death,
Lou was \$ million in debt.
Here he is chatting with
some prospective clients
as if he has all the time in the world.
And in the meantime,
he must know he's going bankrupt.
The office lost money on every project,

except the Salk Institute.
And the list of jobs that fell through,
and didn't get built, kept
getting longer and longer:
the Dominican Sisters Convent,
the U.S. Consulate in Luanda, Angola,
the City Tower project,
the Pocono Arts Center
with seating for 9,000,
the Fleischer House,
the Morris House,
the house for cheerful living,
the Baltimore Inner
Harbor Development Project,
the Kansas City Office Tower,
the Roosevelt Memorial in New York City,
the Palazzo dei Congressi in Venice,
the Abbas Abad development
in Tehran, Iran,
and two that must have really hurt:
the Mikveh Israel
Synagogue in Philadelphia;
and in Jerusalem, the Hurva Synagogue,
a building that would
have shared the spotlight
with the great monuments
of the holy city.
That was the commission of a lifetime.
There is a flight at 1:00
at night, in the morning.
Yeah, in the morning.
So I don't think we'll finish, you see.
I don't either.
When I arrived in Jerusalem,
I found myself surrounded by pilgrims.
Everybody comes here
looking for something,
so I fit right in.
The synagogue Lou was
commissioned to build
would have overlooked the mosque
known as the Dome of the Rock
and the Wailing Wall.
My father never talked

to me about being Jewish.
I don't know how he felt about it.
But when he stood here
looking at the remnants
of the temple of his ancestors,
he must have felt a connection.
It was impossible not to,
even for a half-breed like me.
Thank you.

Saulie cannot come in by himself.
When was the first time you met Lou?

- Do you remember?

- Can I offer you one?

I'd love one.

Is this satisfactory?

Teddy Kollek is the legendary
former mayor of Jerusalem.
He and Lou worked together
on the synagogue project
for seven years.

Look, first of all, I'm 90 years old.

And my memory has gone altogether.

I remember single
items but not...

you came a little too
late for me on that.

What was it that made it
not possible to build it?

Ruthie?

'Cause unfortunately he died so soon.

No, you had nobody...

you had nobody who dared to
take the plans of your father
- and to complete them.

- No, that's right,

His death stopped it in the middle,
although we didn't have
the funds yet to do it.

But I'm sure we could get the money needed.

But unfortunately, he died
before he completed it.

Now it's a million times
more difficult to create it,
because the whole idea of the Hurva

was to serve the entire city and to be
a cultural and spiritual center.
And to do that today
in the Jewish Quarter
- will be very, very difficult.
- Why?
Because, uh, the...
Because the Jews are quarreling.
Jews are quarreling and...
Why is that,
Teddy, because...
The Jews are quarreling.
People around thought it was too big
and politically it
was trying to compete
with the mosque, and...
Was that... is that wrong?
That... some
people thought it's
it'd create a political
problem with the Muslim, and...
We decided it shouldn't be
higher than the mosque.
- That was the idea.
- That was the decision.
But he redesigned it and I think...
He did redesign; there was...
The two... there were
three schemes in all.
He had a lot more freedom to decide
without any interference
from the public at the time.
I mean, I still hope we'll
be able to do it one day.
So they... who blew it up?
The Jordanians blew it up?
- Yes, in '48.
- In '48? And it was never...
it was never rebuilt?
It was just left this way?
Yes, they thought about
it, but they decided
they are going to keep it that way.
What do you think?

- They should keep it that way.

- Keep it this way?

Not... not

rebuild it. Why?

Because it's something in

our past, in our history.

And we have to remember this.

Many soldiers died in this war.

- So better to leave it?

- Yeah.

- Thank you.

- Thanks.

- Bye.

- Bye.

Actually, Lou agreed with the soldier.

The ruins should be left as a monument.

He wanted to build the new synagogue

in the adjacent plaza instead.

So much has changed since then.

Would he have designed

the same thing now?

Would they have thought

Lou an idealistic dreamer

for wanting to unite

the Jews of the world

with a single building?

Do you think Lou had a

strong sense of being Jewish

and what that meant?

You know, I think it's been overplayed.

Lou was a very spiritual person,

but I don't think that was rooted

necessarily in Judaism.

I think it was as much

rooted in Christianity

and in Buddhism

and in all kinds of myth

that he knew a lot about.

And he felt just at home

doing a mosque in Dhaka

as he was doing the Hurva.

But I think that when he

came here something happened.

Mikveh Israel didn't get built.

He must have been bitter about that.
You know, he must have been aware that
as a Jewish architect he'd done
no great Jewish buildings.
Philadelphia had Frank Lloyd
Wright's synagogue, or temple.
And I think when he came here,
he felt that the Jews
entrusted him to do this.
And I think he wanted very
much to have it realized.
But, you know, he was a real nomad.
And, you know, when I was in the office,
he would come in from a trip,
and he would be in the office
for two or three days intensely.
And he would pack up and go.
And there was this kind of
sense of the nomad in him.
I mean, you know, as
tragic as his death was
in a railway station, it was
so consistent with his life.
You know, I mean, I often think
I'm going to die in a plane
or I'm going to die in an airport
or, you know, die jogging
without an identification on me.
I don't know why I sort of carry that
from that memory of
his, the way he died.
But he was sort of a nomad at heart.
I remember now that Lou had
a little carpet in the office
that he'd roll out in
the floor and sleep on
when he was too tired to keep working.
Maybe he never felt settled anywhere.
He was a wanderer from the beginning.
His family moved 17 times
in their first two years in America.
And it turns out Kahn
wasn't even his real name.
It was Shmalowsky.

His father changed it in 1915.
The only constant in Lou's
life, was his wife Esther.
They were together from
when he was 28 until he died.
I don't know if he thought
of her house as home,
but it was certainly his base.
I used to say to Lou,
"You know, Lou, if you
would put some of your energy
into making money,
you'd be a billionaire."
Money was something that was there.
He would... he
kept saying...
and unfortunately, my daughter,
who's also an artist,
says the same thing.
"But, Mother, it's only money."
And he owned nothing.
He owned nothing.
He didn't believe in owning anything.
Books and neckties.
Other than that, nothing.
He would not own...
I only saw Esther once.
It was at Lou's funeral.
She looked right through me.
Unfortunately, she died
before I could talk to her,
so I have only this interview
she did with an architecture scholar.
In the terrible depression,
when friends would come over,
we couldn't afford to go anywhere.
We would put a magazine up on the piano,
and friends would stand around and say,
"Oh, Lou, play that like
Bach, or play it like Mozart,
or play it like Beethoven,
or play it in jazz."
And he would do that.
We would sing the

notes in this magazine.
And shortly before he died,
he said to me, "You know, Esther,
"I don't think I would
have been a great pianist,
but I might have been a great composer."
There's a house Lou built
outside Philadelphia.
I called up my half sisters
and got them to meet me there.
All these years, we've never talked
about our three families.
I always used to ask him,
"Why don't you design
a house for us, Daddy?"
Right, right.
And once, he explained to me
that he had this idea of a
house with many, many mullions.
And you'd look through those windows,
and you'd see a woman preparing a meal.
It was a very romantic
idea of what home was.
And he could never build it for himself.
I think his vision was just so different
from the way his
personal life really was
that there was
no way he could...
Take the two and put
them together at all.
I had a scrapbook when I was a teenager,
so I would get
little... like I'd save
every card, every
little thing, you know?
No, really, when he...
Oh, these things are two
of his famous bow ties
tied at the rakish angle
very carefully.
Fortunately, my mother
saved some of his ties.
Nice ties.

Well, I heard you guys
talking about when Lou died.
Were you saying that that
was when you first saw me?
That's right that's
when I first saw you.
I came in with my
mother, and I saw Harriet.
And I saw a toe-head, blond hair,
very nicely decked out
youth of 11... 10, 11.
And I figured that had to be you.
And I don't remember...
You were there with your mother,
but I don't remember...
I don't think we spoke.
Well, my mother...
this is what happened.
Before the funeral, my mother was called
by a friend of your mother's
and told to not show up,
because your mother
had requested to not...
she didn't want to see
my mother at the funeral.
I wonder if that's true.
That's what we were told too.
Oh, yes, she was called up
and asked that that would...
that she was carrying out the
wishes of your mother, and...
Oh, but you came anyway.
But I... my mother was
absolutely furious
and hung up the phone.
So I said, "Well, Mom,
"what's the point of being furious?
We're going anyway."
The casket was there,
and I remember being...
some arms went in front of us,
and we were pushed into the side room.
You were very... I remember
you being on the side,

because I had to search for you.
And I went deliberately to
Harriet to say something,
'cause I-I had never
met you, and I knew,
whoever you are, you must
be suffering in some way.
And she just... I
said, "Hello, Harriet."
And she just stared straight ahead.
And she didn't have
anything to do with me.
And I felt really bad about that,
because I went up with
the best of intentions
to say, "Look, I'm
not my mother," or...
- You're not, you know?
- You're not, yeah.
I had nothing to do with that.
And, you know, on the other hand,
I hadn't really made contact with her
since you were born.
And I felt badly about that,
but I knew I couldn't have handled it. But...
I guess what I've always wondered is,
are we a family?
What are your expectations
of what a family is?
I don't know the answer.
We're a family through choice. I mean,
if we care about each other,
it's because we decide to,
not because we happen to be related
through some fluke of a father
that happened to have these children.
Yeah.
What were you thinking, Lou?
I've been to most of your buildings now.
India and Bangladesh will be the last.
I like your Exeter Library.
It looks a lot like
the factory buildings
you walked by as a little boy

back in Philadelphia.
But nobody expects what you did inside.
I always believed that in the end
you'd chosen my mother and me.
That was the myth I lived on.
But you didn't really choose any of us,
did you?
Did you think that Lou would marry you?
Yes, and I didn't
expect to get pregnant,
and I was really surprised
when I told Lou,
and then his comment was,
you know, "Not again."
So I certainly thought when I told him
that he would... that
he would in some way
do something to help me.
"Not again" meaning what?
Well, that this had happened
to him before with Alex.
- You know.
- With Anne?
Yeah, with Anne.
Well, didn't you know
what you were getting into?
Oh, come on, Nathaniel.
Well, I just...
I mean, you know.
You always protect him.
That's hard, you know?
I mean,
he was...
- I did trust him. I was pretty stupid.
- You know mom, what he did to you and I
- was... was pretty bad, really.
- Yeah.
Don't you think? I mean, honestly,
are you ever angry at him?
No.
Really? You're not angry at him?
Well, I did get angry sometimes,
but not... but just... I just felt...
I don't know.

Kind of a tragedy that he
didn't work it out, isn't it?
You know, it seems almost too much
he was on the way home to
maybe come live with us.

- Yes.

- Who knows?

- You still believe that?

- I do believe it.

Do you think he crossed off his passport
on his way home to...
to show something?

Yes, to
indicate... yes.

Why else would he have done it?

Why else would he have done that?

Can you give me an explanation?

It's a good myth to have.

I don't think it's a myth.

I don't think it's a myth at all.

I mean, I have very strong
conviction about that,
because I know

what... what Lou said to me,
you know, when
we... when we parted.

What did he say?

He said he would do it.

I mean, he said... I
said that I can't...

I can't bear it any longer,
and you have to... you
have to do something,
and you have to live with us.

And he said he would.

- Really?

- Yeah.

So...

I mean, what do you think?

You think it's a myth, Nathaniel?

What's your explanation?

Is it hard being alone,
Mom, so much in your life?

Yes.

I always wondered why you
didn't find someone else
to share your life with you.
Well, I'm kind of a romantic fatalist.
Somebody comes along, you know,
and I'm kind of a loner too.
- Nathaniel?
- Yeah.
Come in.
- What?
- Lightning.
I know. I'll come in.
Do you miss him still?
Sometimes.
But not a great, great deal.
You don't think about him
as much as you used to?
No.
Is that shocking?
Before taking off for
India and Bangladesh,
I finally went back
into Lou's old office.
As it turns out,
one of the men who used to work for him
has the place now.
It was exciting times.
I must say, it was exciting being here.
I was... I can't say there
were ever times when I was...
I never quit because of anger.
I never quit because of frustration.
I quit because I
couldn't take it anymore.
I couldn't work those hours anymore.
But I felt he was
always an honorable...
thoroughly honorable guy,
except for the way he
treated the women in his life.
And that was not
honorable, but...
Do you remember thinking about that?
I mean, how the women took it?

I did, because I was married,
had a wife, two children.
And I knew what that
was like, and I knew...
that's when I... that's
when I finally quit.
For the last time,
I came home and...
my Estelle was crying, and
she said, "We never see you."
And I said, "Oh, that's it. I can't...
Can't do it anymore."
But he just could juggle people's lives,
and it didn't bother him.
I don't understand it.
I don't know how he could do it.
I don't know how he had
the mental strength for it.
It would have... I would
have had a breakdown.
But he didn't. He was such a tough guy.
He really was tough as
hell, you know, I mean...
- Mentally.
- In what way?
Well, how could he juggle
three or four lives like that?
Lou was very secretive.
He liked to keep his
business to himself.
And he'd call and say,
"You know where I am,
but nobody else is to know where I am."
And I'd say, "Okay,"
because they would call looking for him.
- Who would call?
- Esther would call Saturdays and Sundays,
or Anne Tyng would call.
She would get very frustrated.
Anne, you know, lives
two blocks from my home.
I see.
And Harriet too would call.
Yes, and Harriet would call.

- And so, what would you do?
- I mean, he would be, like, MIA.
And sometimes I didn't know
where he was or what he was doing.
But he'd just say,
"I'm not in the office,
"so tell them such and such,
"or tell them you don't know where I am.
So, you know, whatever. He would
tell me what to do, and I just did it.
So you... you
remember, then,
the day that Lou left
for India the last time?
Oh, yes, yes. You were here
to see Lou off with your mother.
Yeah. How did you know that?
Well, I was in the office with you,
because we couldn't
push him out the door.
I came to the office because
I knew he wouldn't...
he'd miss his plane.
And he did the same thing.
He changed his clothes
in the room where
the Xerox machine was
and came walking out
all disheveled and left
money... foreign currency from
another country... all over the place.
And you and your mother
literally had to push
him into the taxicab.
And once he got in the
cab, then I could go home.
My own memory of that
night is somewhat different.
He was working on the model
for the Capital of Bangladesh.
We left him at the
office at around 10:00.
He waved down to me from
the top of the stairs.

The last thing I saw
of him was his hand.
"Dearest boy o' mine,
"the architecture seems like
gingerbread bakery to us.
"To the people of the East,
it's an expression of delight.
"I think of you always
and with all my love.
"Daddy.

"P.S.:

feel much like a conquering hero.
"Someday I hope to be able to teach you
to be a better man than I."
My first day in India,
I was chased by an insane monkey
and contracted dysentery.
I can't imagine how my father
made this trip so many times,
a 73-year-old man
traveling alone.
He spent most of his time here
with an architect named Doshi.
He's the one who invited
Lou to come to Ahmedabad
and build the Indian
Institute of Management.
On the day before he died,
Lou toured the building
and had his last dinner
with Doshi and his family.
It was March 16th, 1974.
For us, Lou's visit
was always a very
exciting moment...
great anxiety as well as anticipation
of learning something
more and appreciation.
There are very few people
you will find anywhere
who will talk about
matter in spiritual terms.
Nothingness mattered to him.

Silence mattered to him.
The enigma of light mattered to him.
So those... those are
not normal parlance.
Those are not normal discourses,
but these were the ones which we liked,
and he talked about it.
And when somebody understands this,
he cannot be an ordinary person.
He has to be a highly cultivated soul
whom we call guru.
We call him a yogi.
And that is why I think,
for us, he was from here.
I have a feeling that he was
really reaching, you know,
his higher level... just to reach
recognition and understanding.
In India, we always say
that nobody dies. They
go to the next world.
It's a transition.
The body dies.
The soul doesn't die.
The consciousness doesn't die.
And Kahn had... Lou
had reached that stage
of super consciousness, where, for him,
everything was alive,
and everything was in the
stage of transformation.
And as I know that you were
waiting for him to come back,
he has not come back as yet.
But he's there watching, blessing,
and wishing.
So I just feel that...
you have to...
If you go into silence,
you will hear him.
Definitely, you'll hear his voice.
I am very, very sure.
Doshi was right.
For a moment, I felt

the way I did as a kid,
that maybe he just disappeared
and that I'd see him again.
If he was anywhere, he'd be here.
I just want to make my last remark
in reverence to the
work that has been done
by architects of the past.
What was, has always been.
What is, has always been,
and what will be has always been.
Such is the nature of beginning.

I'm making a documentary film
about the building,

- about the architect.

- About the building?

We are the morning walkers
who come all the time here
and enjoy the walking,
scenic beauty, and atmosphere.

And this is the nicest
place of Bangladesh.

- We are proud of it.

- You're proud of it?

Oh, yes.

The nationality made upon this.

Do you know anything
about the architect?

- Architect?

- Mr. Lou Kahn.

I've heard... I've
heard about him.

He's a top-ranking architect.

Well, actually, I'm here
because I'm the architect's son.

He was my father.

That Louie Farrakhan.

No, not Louie Farrakhan. Louie Kahn.

Louie Kahn. Yeah,
you're the son of Kahn?

Nice to meet you.

Your father, is he alive?

No, he's been dead for 25 years.

We are very pleased to welcome you.

The parliament building
and capital complex
took 23 years to build,
the same as the Taj Mahal.
It was all done by hand,
thousands of workers carrying baskets
of concrete on their heads,
climbing up and down bamboo scaffolding.
During Bangladesh's war for independence
from Pakistan in 1971,
the enemy pilots didn't
bother bombing it,
because they thought
it was an ancient ruin.
The complex was finally
finished in 1983,
nine years after Lou
died in Penn Station.
He never saw it finished, Bob.

- He didn't?

- No.

He never saw this.

Just taking pictures?

Yeah, we've been here now for
about five days,
and... it's...

- Five days?

- Yeah.

That's a lot of pictures, then.

But do you think they'll really
capture the quality of this building
in terms of space, light, the volumes,
and the layering of his
spaces, those ambiguities?

Well, I don't know, Mr. Wares.

When you think about this film,
I probably have at the most
ten minutes.

Oh, God, this is...

this is... don't tell me that.

- Ten minutes for this building?

- Probably.

I see; I think it's...

I think it's... the

whole thing is very...
very useless, because you cannot treat
this building like this.
It was almost impossible,
a building for a country like ours.
In 30, 50 years back, it was nothing,
only paddy fields.
And since we invited him here,
he felt that he has
got a responsibility.
He wanted to be Moses here.
He gave us democracy.
He is not a political man.
But in disguise,
he has given us the
institution for democracy
from where we can rise.
And that weight is so relevant.
He didn't care
for how much money this country has
or whether he
will be able to ever...
ever finish this building.
But somehow
he has been able to
do it, build it here.
And this is the largest project he has,
got, in here,
the poorest country in
the world. So I think...
- It cost him his life.
- Yeah. He paid.
He paid his life for this,
and that is why he is great,
and we'll remember him.
But he was also human.
Now, his failure to
satisfy the family life
is an inevitable
association of great people,
but I think his son will understand this
and will have no sense of grudge
or a sense of being neglected, I think.
He cared in a very different manner,

but it takes a lot of
time to understand that.
In social aspect of his life,
he was just like a child.
He was not at all matured.
He would not say no to anything.
And that is why we got
this building today.
I have no other way to
really understand him,
but I think he has given
us this building, and...
We feel all the time for him.
That's why he has given love for us.
He could not probably give
the right kind of love for you.
But for us, he's given the people
the right kind of love.
That is important, and you
have to understand that.
He had an enormous amount of love.
He loved everybody.
To love everybody, he
sometimes did not see
the very closest ones.
And that is inevitable
for men of his stature.
On this journey, my
father became real to me...
a man, not a myth.
Now that I know him a little better,
I miss him more than ever,
and I really wish things
had been different.
But he chose the life that he wanted.
It's hard to let go.
But after all these years,
I think I found the right time and place
to say good-bye.
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