

The last time I glimpsed Abraham Warshaw I drove by without speaking to him. He'd retired and was living in a modest apartment in Miami Beach. He was mowing a lawn. He was wearing shorts and was deeply tanned. Even though both of us were writers, I knew we couldn't speak to each other. We'd have to say words that would have to cross the chasm that had formed between us. I'd been divorced from his daughter.

Thoreau says that most men lead lives of quiet desperation. He could have been writing about Abraham Warshaw.

Abraham Warshaw was my first father-in-law. He was a house painter. He and his wife fed their family through their hard labor. He still spoke with a Polish accent.

Also he was a chess champion. More to the point, he was a writer. He wrote in Yiddish, and his short stories were published in a Chicago Yiddish language newspaper, but he was literally scared that Yiddish would soon be a dead language, and everything which mattered to him the most—the imaginary world that he'd created—would be forgotten. Like the Jews of the Holocaust, the townspeople of his fictionalized Antipolier, Poland, would be wiped out forever.

I often say that, when I got out of the army after World War II, I should have gone to Hollywood to get a job—any job whatsoever—in a movie studio. Starting at the bottom would have been my toehold. Eventually I would write movies.

I became a lawyer, and there is a certain desperation in dedicating one's life to a noble profession but always wishing it were something different. Happiness is an intermittent phenomenon.

Abraham Warshaw had entrusted his happiness to his children and to the Yiddish language. The one was dying, and I had jeopardized the other.

I'm entrusting my happiness to myself. The English language is not going to die. Today, I'm writing a novel at 5:00 o'clock in the mornings and whenever I can whenever I can

Quiet desperation includes the consequences of not doing what you want to do. A distance springs up between yourself and your children. I know what it is to have hopes for your children and grandchildren. He'd had hopes for his children. I knew how deeply the divorce had hurt him.