E Commie”

Guest: Gene Epstein

EPSTEIN: Tom, I'm very proud to have a week named after me on *The Tom Woods Show*. And I think you've done it for three others. Two of them were also Ashkenazi Jews, I think, Michael Malice and Dave Smith. And then the great historian — is this your fourth devoted week, Tom? I'm trying to remember.

WOODS: I did do a Scott Horton week also.

EPSTEIN: Oh, of course, of course. How can I forget that?

WOODS: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: Absolutely, the great Scott Horton, who is the 21st century's libertarian answer to Noam Chomsky. And so I am so honored to be a part of that illustrious company.

WOODS: Well, it's very good of you to say. I mean, really, it's just a lot of unpaid labor when you get right down to it [laughing].

EPSTEIN: Well, there you go. And then the tribute to Tom Woods that I do have to file at the end of 2019 — what, you started this five days a week, right from the get-go, isn't that right, Tom?

WOODS: That is right.

EPSTEIN: And that was how many years ago?

WOODS: Six years ago.

EPSTEIN: Six years ago. And my son, Jim, who has been on your show, who is actually a rising star at the Reason Foundation, expressed personal admiration for you because he said, you know, the most ecumenical podcast out there is *The Tom Woods Show*, and I give Tom a lot of credit for that. I said, well, okay, I give Tom a lot of credit for that, as well, personally, because that obviously defines him as a person. But just the dynamic is that if you're going to fill content five days a week, you have to throw a broad net, that it's unavoidable —

WOODS: Right.

EPSTEIN: — unless Tom wants to keep recycling the same 15 people. And of course, occasionally he gives me a little bit more attention than others, and Michael Malice, but he's got to be out there looking for talent. And so we could do parodies of Tom Woods. Tom Woods would have Benito Mussolini on and say, "Benito, I disagree with you about most things, but I invited you on the show to discuss the libertarian element" — Tom is going to reach out to almost anybody. If you want to be on *The Tom Woods Show*, I think no matter who you are, I think you can probably get on as long as you tell Tom: I can speak about something of interest to libertarians. So you have a right to be very proud of that fact, Tom. And so again, that's one of the reasons why I'm honored to be on your show once again.

WOODS: Well, I'm glad you say that, Gene, because I think that's something that only a select few have even noticed about *The Tom Woods Show*.

EPSTEIN: Really? Well, it's interesting, interesting that they haven't noticed almost —

WOODS: Well, I think partly it's that not everybody knows as well as you and I do all the different factions and rivalries and whatever, and *The Tom Woods Show* transcends them all,

as you're trying to say, because I genuinely want to learn from everybody who has something to teach me, who hasn't called me a name. I mean, those are my two qualifications [laughing].

EPSTEIN: [laughing] And I don't even know about the second one, Tom. I just wonder —

WOODS: Yeah, if they're really smart and they've called me a name, I'll have to think, *Well, yeah, all right, maybe I'll do it*.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, I'll do it for the good of the listener. And indeed, the factionalism is unfortunate, and here's where, of course, I talk about the Epstein Nexus. And the Epstein Nexus is, I use the word *Epstein* because I am now getting from the great self-appointed comedians on social media, I get about two jokes a week on my cousin Jeffrey, and did I kill anybody or did I kill myself? And so that's been a little bit unsettling, but I don't really mind it. I guess my free market cousins Alex Epstein and Richard Epstein, who are both free market, maybe they get the same jokes.

But the Epstein Nexus that I speak of is, indeed, that my son, Jim, who's in his early 40s — of course, I stun myself when I say that — he was raised on Rothbard, so to speak, "raised." When he graduated from Wesleyan, he was not really a libertarian, and I said, "Please read Noam Chomsky and Murray Rothbard." Or maybe I said that even before he graduated. Anyway, so he came back to me, and he said, "Dad, one out of two ain't bad. Chomsky doesn't turn me on, but Rothbard certainly does." And so we Epsteins, we have the distinction of having said, how did we get converted to libertarianism? Well, by one guy. That was by Rothbard.

And then Jim went on to become a researcher at *Reason*. He's now been there for 12 years. And so he believes in reaching out. In my case, as well, I was at *Barron's* for a quarter of a century, and I was just grateful for the fact that there were an enormous number of people I could call on at the Mises Institute, at the Cato Institute, at *Reason*. I'm proud of the fact that, of course, I was behind enemy lines, so to speak. As book review editor, I've published book reviews by Walter Block and Bob Murphy.

And so my point is that that we can help with this reaching out and with this ecumenism, and not make too much out of the differences that divide us. I only draw the line, I should emphasize, on foreign policy. And that's where you and I have a lot of free market fellow travelers, Tom, and you've had many of them on the show. You've wanted to have Thomas Sowell on, who has done great work on the free market, but clearly is not a libertarian in that strict sense.

So I do define libertarianism I believe fairly rigorously, so I insist on that, but I do believe that there are libertarians at Cato Institute, there are libertarians at *Reason*, there are libertarians at the Independent Institute and at the Mises Institute, and they come in with different emphasis and they teach me different things, and you've had a whole assortment of those people on your show. And again, I congratulate you for that. But I'm only saying that the Epstein Nexus is going to continue to endorse this point that *The Tom Woods Show* is an ecumenical place to go to, and that by and large, we should emphasize what we have in common and augment each other rather than have petty squabbles.

WOODS: One more quick thing before we actually dive into our subject matter, and that involves your son, Jim.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: And I played for the audience the last time you were on the program, the audio of the little video I sent for your 75th birthday party, which was recorded at the Vienna airport, and it took poked fun at Gene but from the position of somebody who thinks very highly of you and holds you in very high regard.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Yes.

WOODS: So anyway, I sent that to Jim. This was all being done behind your back, of course. And he said — this is part of the email he sent. He said, "Thanks, Tom," because one of the things that I pointed out was how you will point out to Bob or to me any of the errors we might have made on the show. And sometimes they might be very narrow or whatever, so Jim says, "Your remarks are spot on, particularly regarding his 'let nothing go on mentioned' style of criticism. I have no idea how I survived my childhood."

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Okay, well, that's fair enough, Tom. And look, I'm proud of the fact that Jim not only survived his childhood; he has a good 20-year head start on me, because as you know, I came to my libertarianism relatively late in my life in my late 20s. And of course, anytime my son Jim is mentioned, I burst with that word called *nachis*. *Nachis* — you have to learn how to pronounce it with *ch* — and that's the Yiddish word, mainly means the pride and pleasure you take in your children. And I know that you, Tom, of course know what *nachis* is all about with those five daughters, whom you occasionally blame for the fact that you're not the 21st century answer to Murray Rothbard.

WOODS: [laughing]

EPSTEIN: When in doubt, blame the kids, Tom. I know. But who knows what Regina had your — she's your oldest, Regina?

WOODS: She is.

EPSTEIN: — what she has to say about that. So indeed, all fair —and by the way, I love those jokes. I loved the way you made fun of me, and it does apply a little bit to the next five days. As you said, I ask Gene a question and then I can go downstairs, make a sandwich, vacuum the rugs, come back upstairs, and Gene is saying, "Now, to get to the question."

WOODS: [laughing]

EPSTEIN: But what that means to me, Tom, is that I occasionally filibuster my interviewers, and so I'm going to guard against doing that. I mean, I'm going to make sure you're not intimidated by a guy who's got so many years on you like I have, Tom, and make sure that you get a word in what transpires over the next five days.

WOODS: All right, that's going to be my aim, as well. So actually, that is a pretty good segue into the topic of our first episode, because the topic the first episode, Gene, is you.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

WOODS: And we're going to talk about where Gene Epstein came from, and I mean intellectually, in terms of your intellectual development and some episodes in your life, because you — I mean, I had the most boring conversion — I hate the word *conversion story*, because this is not a religion. But still, you know what I mean? I mean, what other word are we going to use? Compared to yours, mine is like nothing. You've got a really interesting one. And Bob Murphy started to get at some of it in an episode he did with you, and I want to pick up on that and go a bit farther. So let's start from the very beginning. Gene Epstein was born where? Born in New York City?

EPSTEIN: Born in New York City, and the point I want to pursue is this: that what I'm about to talk about is, of course, going to relate to the question you've raised, which is how does somebody raised in bolshevism, as I was — mommy was a commie — come to become a libertarian? And of course, there will be an unending mystery in that, because in my debate with Richard Wolff I characterize myself as a bleeding-heart, freedom-loving capitalist.

And yet some of it relates to the personal, because what also happened when I was recently on Dave Smith's show was that — I listened to it just this morning and I'm wondering why did I bring that up? It sort of came up. Dave and I were talking about communism and bolshevism, and I somehow had to tell Dave the story about how my mother lost custody of me and my brother because my father was able to expose the fact that she was a member of the Communist Party. Now, *had been*, actually. She quit the Communist Party because she was

trying to get custody of me and my brother, and she realized that being a CP member was not exactly good for her chances. He was able to prove that she had been a member of the Communist Party, a card-carrying member, and secondly, that she had been having affairs with black guys in the party. And this was in the early 1950s.

And so I told this story, and then it provoked a lot of questions from people, mainly on Dave's show, *Part of the Problem* Facebook, and so those things came up. So I'm going to go into that a little bit in order to just answer the questions that did come up. They do relate to politics, but I guess they also relate to me personally.

But further, I want to frame it by saying something else. Because, look, Tom, I know you've spoken about certain painful things in your own youth, got bullied by somebody and then you talked about how it was sort of cleansing to meet that same person I believe you said at a reunion and sort of come to terms with him.

WOODS: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, and so all of that does happen to us. But I want to frame it by saying that I did, indeed, think of myself as having the mark of Cain, so to speak, the mark of Cain on me for the rather crazy childhood I had. It was especially crazy because this happened in the 1950s. But then once I was in college — and you might even say the best sort of education I got out of college was all of the times I'd spent staying up until four in the morning, trading stories with women and men both, young guys and young women, about our backgrounds and what we had gone through. And then I came to realize that I'm not so special. Obviously, some of the circumstances of my background are special, but everybody has had his issues, and that I'm not such an outlier. And that, of course, that probably cleansed me a little bit of self-pity about my background.

But getting to the point about how I was born, I'm going to dramatically characterize it as sort of like the stuff of myth in the Bible, that there's sort of the tradition that people who go on to do great things — not that I actually did great things in life, but when you go on to do great things, you often have a very odd way of coming into the world. And this was at a time, in 1944, when my father was already planning to divorce my mother. That I know, because I did a deep dive into documents. I know a lot about what really went on. And he was already having an active affair with the woman he was going to marry and replace my mother with. And then on top of everything else, this woman had been married to my mother's brother. She had been married to my mother's brother. She had been my mother's sister-in-law, and she became my stepmother.

So the odd thing is that they already had a son, my older brother, born in 1941. And I know my brother was born in September of '41, and I know that my father tried to enlist in the army. Pearl Harbor happened in December of '41, so it must have been '42. Like so many men, he was trying to get away from his family. He tried to enlist in the war, even though he would have had an exemption by virtue of being a father at that time. But he didn't get in. He was not admitted to the army. I don't know what else he could have done, but that's because he was nearsighted and wore glasses. I was always interested in that, because I know that during the Vietnam War, which relates to my own background, glasses didn't help you at all. You just carried a second pair of glasses if you were going to be a soldier.

But he couldn't get into the army, and he got a job with the Internal Revenue Service during World War II. And he had a great time philandering, and of course, then he fell in love with his sister-in-law. And then how could I possibly conceive, why was he still having sexual relations with a woman who was going to leave. That's a mystery. And then, in fact, my conception — this is going to get — maybe some people want to censor to the next part of it. My conception was with protected sex. But my mother wanted to have a child and took out the diaphragm, as she told me, and I was conceived. And then my mother told me this story, that she'd told my father that she was pregnant again, and according to her, my father told her to have an abortion. And this, ironically — so to speak, ironically — wasn't true. It wasn't

until — my mother told me this story when I was a kid, that my father wanted her to have an abortion when she got pregnant with me. And it wasn't until I was in my 20s that my mother admitted that that's not the way it happened at all, that my father's immediate reaction was: let's tell everybody we planned it. Let's tell everybody we planned it.

But my only point is that I look back on the crazy irony. How could I come — I would not have been born into this world if my father had gotten into the army, and certainly, if this weren't a very early period, the 1940s and then the 1950s, when divorce was absolutely taboo, absolutely taboo among Jewish people — if you were unhappy with your spouse — I happen to know both my grandparents on both sides, I think they would have gotten divorced on both sides had it been the 1960s or '70s. But you don't get divorced. And my father was struggling with it, and so I think that's part of the reason why I got conceived.

But to get to the sort of anger and craziness that turbocharged me and the association I had with my mother's communism, is that my mother became a victim. My father, again, was able to prove that she had been a card-carrying communist, that she started to have affairs by like 1950 and late 1940s. My father had been philandering for ten years. It's the old double standard. A woman who has affairs is clearly a tramp. The man can philander. And indeed, she imbued me with the idea that, of course, black people, negros as they were called in those days, were downtrodden and the Communist Party was protecting them.

And so my father was able to, so to speak, kidnap us when was seven years old and my brother was ten. This was in 1952. And he brought about a reign of terror on my mother, and my mother fought back. Let's see, it started when I was seven, so it went on for about four years. There were three custody trials and three divorce trials, and they kept getting appealed. My mother was fighting. She was able to get communist lawyers to help her. And I appeared on the witness stand at one point to testify. Get this: I'm 11 years old, and my mother and father are sitting in the same room together, and I'm asked which one do I prefer to live with.

WOODS: Oy.

EPSTEIN: And I think back on the lunacy of the courts in those days. Do they think that an 11-year-old is going to tell the truth about who he wants to live with and what he wants to do? Well, ironically, I actually preferred my father at that point, because my mother was so impossible to be around. Well, I'm getting into the morbid part of it, but I wanted to back up and say this then colored all of my thinking. I think I told the story to Bob, that I think back on sitting in a classroom — which had to have been in the fall of 1952 because that's when the '52 presidential election was about to come up — we're reading the junior reviews, they were called, and the headline said, "One of these two men is going to be the next president of the United States: Adlai Stevenson or Dwight D. Eisenhower." I'm thinking, how could I be so smug and not believe what these people are telling me? I knew that my mother's candidate was going to be the next president of the United States and that these two losers were not going to make it. That would be Vincent Hallinan, who was then the Communist Party candidate. And I just thought that my mother is obviously going to back a winner, and it was only about a few weeks later that I asked my mother about whether she expects him to win, and I was surprised to learn that she didn't expect her candidate to win.

And sort of that — and then on top of everything else — this was before my father took us away. On top of everything else, when I saw what a victim my mother was, my father at that point had started an accounting firm. He'd been a poor kid from the Lower East Side, son of immigrants, and he went on to make millions in business. He had started an accounting firm. He had a lot of money, and so he brought a reign of terror on her and fought to get custody of his sons. And so I associated — so the whole world was, then, the capitalists preying on the communists. Bob and I were trading stories about the teams that lose, you know, root for a losing team. I learned how to root for losing teams, because my side always lost.

But on top of everything else, I saw the world in capitalist and communist colors, namely that the Giants and the Dodgers always lost to the Yankees. The Yankees, my brother told me, would not allow blacks on the team. I gather historically, it is true that they were late to the Jackie Robinson-related integration of the major leagues. And so the Yankees were not only the team that always won — those who know their baseball history know that they won five World Series in a row from '47 to '52, and then I think they won a few others later on — but they were the racist team. So all of the world was colored in that way. And so I identified with my mother.

Now, the mystery really is that — and now, I want to mention, Tom, your conversation with Lew Rockwell recently fascinated me. I forgive the great Lew Rockwell for saying libertarians who come from the right are just much better, they're the best.

WOODS: [laughing]

EPSTEIN: No, he said that. And I came from the hard left, Lew. What about me, you know?

WOODS: No, there have actually been some really great people who have come from the left, so you're right.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Thanks, Tom. I wrote a note about this on the Tom Woods Elite Facebook, and then a number of people answered by saying, hey, look, I'm a libertarian who came to the left. I evoke a big reaction from those who came from the left.

But in a way, there is a kind of mystery in it, which is that you have to be somebody who cares about individual rights. You have to be more than somebody who's just a bleeding heart, who cares about the poor. I guess, obviously, if you care about the poor, as I've said, obviously, you have to care about capitalism, but that takes a little bit of education. You have to transcend the limits of socialist economics. But beyond that, you do have to have a fire in the belly. You do have to hate the state. And I would imagine it's a little bit more difficult for people to come from the left to learn, so to speak, how to hate the state.

But I mentioned school, and I think back on something else. I was such, so to speak, a deluded kid, that when I was enrolled in public school, for quite a while, I'm sure it was like at least into the second or third grade, I literally did not get what school was all about. I literally thought that school was just a place where grownups yelled at you and where they marched you around. I thought of it as a kind of prison, literally. And I had a startling moment when a teacher was yelling at us, and she then said, "Now, I don't like to scold you. I don't like to scold you." And I was taken aback. Ignoramus that I was, I was taken aback and I said, "Well, what else are you supposed to do? I thought scolding us was the whole point of this."

WOODS: [laughing]

EPSTEIN: And I think that's partly because I know I learned how to read by just reading the signs on a bus in the Bronx. I knew how to read before I started school, even though I wasn't really formally helped by my mother or brother, but I was rattling off the words. And I thought, well, that's just performing. They're not really teaching me anything. And I'm not even sure about math, so I mean, it helped that I sort of knew the basics that school was supposed to teach me already. So it just didn't really compute for me that this is what school is all about.

Now, why do I mentioned that? I guess because it indicates something about my objection to oppression, something about my capacity to hate the state, that I was able to feel this way. I guess it's also true about my mother, and this is perhaps a sorry commentary on her, because when I told Dave Smith about how she was victimized and how I have difficulty condemning people who are sympathetic to bolshevism, Communism with a capital C, in the 1950s it's certainly true that many of your listeners could come down on me. You know, how do you not condemn these people? They were supporting — if they had eyes to see, if they were the least bit interested in what's going on in the world by the 1950s, they should have understood that

even if you want to be a socialist, that you can't support the Soviet Union. You can't support Joe Stalin. My mother was actually telling me that Joe Stalin was poorly understood, poorly appreciated. I even had fantasies, grandiose fantasies of meeting Joe Stalin, and telling him that I understood how he was being underappreciated. I wasn't exactly researching what was really going on in the Soviet Union. So these people were pretty deluded.

And there was a wave of people — you know your history, Tom — when Nikita Khrushchev took over — Stalin died, what, in '53? Nikita Khrushchev rose to power, and in 1956, he delivered what was called the secret speech about Stalin. But of course, it was no secret at all. He roundly condemned Stalin, and that caused a number of defections from the Communist Party. But not from my mother. Not from my mother, even though — what I'm about to get to is that even though whenever my mother would see newsreels of communist parades, marching in lockstep, she was appalled. She had a certain sort of basic feeling for individual rights, but not enough to sort of carry her through to insights about the world. I guess it was really that she felt something or other about having lived through the 1930s, associating the failure of high unemployment and the difficulties that poor people had, that the working class had in the 1930s with capitalism, and she couldn't get past that.

So perhaps I've spoken enough about that part of my background. And then, sequentially, I guess I've been over some of the other aspects of it, which is that by the time I was a teenager, I was sort of arguing with both sides. I would argue socialism with my father. My father was really an FDR liberal in terms of his politics, but certainly, the things he said in defense of capitalism actually made some sense, even though he wasn't very good in the end in being able to defend his position. And also, many discussions I had with him was when he was constantly defending US foreign policy. And then my mother and her boyfriends and then the guy she married, both of whom were Stalinists — my mother, they were Stalinists. They were basically bolshevist, but of course, they had a point about certain aspects of American imperialism.

And then my mother became active with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and she met Fidel Castro, she went down to Cuba. But the one thing that she did that I, by and large, respect her for was she became active in the peace movement of the 1950s and '60s. She was for a while, at least, on the San Francisco-Moscow Peace March against nuclear war. And I think, by and large, those people had a point.

When there were air raid drills in the 1950s against nuclear war, my mother and her group would commit civil disobedience and refuse to participate in the air raid drills. And I had difficulty defending their point of view, but I could do so now. I mean, it might have been true up to a point that if you ducked and covered, you went under your desk or went into a basement or did something or other, maybe that would make sense if a nuclear bomb were dropped. I don't know that. But I mean, that's even less important to discuss and get into the nitty-gritty of than the simple point that if our government is going to prepare us for nuclear war, then we should stand up and object. We should expect a little bit more from our government than to court nuclear war.

And then, of course, if you learn the history of the nuclear bomb, you recognize that the US government could have done a lot more in the late 1940s to stop nuclear proliferation. And so, therefore, it really was a failure of government, and it really was a legitimate act of civil disobedience to hate the state for telling us: be ready for nuclear war. Perhaps you know about the history of the fallout shelters? Nelson Rockefeller wanted us to build fallout shelters. John F. Kennedy even endorsed it. *Get prepared for nuclear war*. And that was truly ugly. I at least honor my mother's memory for that sort of position that she took, which she continued into her old age, even though, by the way, once the Soviet Union fell, once it unraveled and her husband had died, no longer there to defend her, over the few years by the time she hit her late 80s, she began to rethink her commitment to socialism.

WOODS: All right, wait, wait. Hold on a minute. I have to ask you some stuff here.

EPSTEIN: Thank you, Tom, please.

WOODS: All right, because to me, the key thing I want to know about what it would be like growing up in a communist household — I mean, I get that your mother made some arguments that maybe if she were to look at them again today might not make them, like about Stalin and whatever. I guess what I want to know is, to what extent did you feel propagandized? And was this like a regular basis? You'd sit at the dinner table and somebody in the family would denounce what was going on in the world? Or was it just kind of in the background, and if you inquired about something, you'd get the communist answer?

EPSTEIN: Well, okay, let me put your answer in the crazy context of my crazy childhood. By the time I was seven years old, my father had kidnapped us and kept custody of us. We lived in Manhattan for a while, and then he moved us to White Plains. And then I was being raised then by my father and my stepmother, who had been my aunt, who had been married to my mother's brother. And so I was living in that household and visiting my mother on weekends. She was a bit of a horror show to visit. That's another matter.

But in a way, sort of that gave her an advantage, so to speak, because it was difficult for me, in certainly my single-digit ages and in my early teens, to overcome this confusion in my mind with the fact that she had been victimized by the capitalists, that she was a communist victimized by the capitalists. And then my anger toward my father, I guess, was confused in my mind with my attitude toward capitalists. And so I guess that's the reason why I didn't so much feel propagandized, is I was being subjected to an alternative world that was of some interest and that it was a way to rebel against my father.

Very possibly, Tom, now that I think about it, when you envision me coming to the dinner table every evening and being subjected to some lecture, then I might have rebelled against that. But I guess it was because of the odd circumstances of my life and my childhood that I only got the sermons on weekends from my mother, and then I would go back and argue with my father, and that it was confused. That's why I guess my best excuse for the fact that I was stunted intellectually is that I was confusing all of this with my mother's battle against my father.

On top of everything else, by the way, I was living a lie in White Plains. This could be interesting as a sidelight. There was so much shame. Again, I was born in 1944, so I was 16 years old in 1960. Most of my childhood was spent in the 1950s. There was so much shame and embarrassment about being the child of divorced parents that I kept it a secret, as did my brother. We disappeared every weekend, mysteriously, to visit my mother in the Bronx. We never explained to anybody where we were going. We were always visiting grandparents, crazy excuses.

I had a stepmother, and I called her Muriel, by her first name, and I pretended that she was my birth mother. And the kids in the neighborhood thought I was the weirdest kid going. It was only many years later that certain crazy kids called their parents by their first names, but I was constantly getting rid. One kid was talking to another kid and said, "What do you call your mother?" And the other kid said, "I call her mom. I call her mom." "You know what he calls his mother? He calls his mother Muriel." I was a weirdo. And so I kept that a secret, as well.

So there was so much craziness going on in my childhood, that the arguments between capitalism and socialism — and then, of course, as well, when my mother shifted the argument it had to do with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. The stupidity, of course, of the US government imposing embargoes on Fidel Castro just turned them into the bully on the block. And so there was a certain infatuation I had with that cult, the cult of Castro.

And so that's my excuse, Tom, and that's my answer. I didn't really feel sermonized most of the time. I felt as though this was like part of the dynamic and gestalt of my crazy life, which continued into my teens. I was a little bit more precocious than my brother. By the time I was

17, a senior in high school, I remember telling everybody the truth and romanticizing the fact that I actually had a mother who lived in the Bronx and that she was my real mother. In fact, some of my friends came to visit her with me. And then I befriended a guy who also came from a socialist background, and we would go to New York and go to socialist meetings, and sort of it was our way of rebelling against the respectable world of the suburban White Plains. And so that's really sort of the granular dynamic of all the craziness that went on.

But then once I went off to college, I became part in my own way of the New Left movement, as well as reading Chomsky, as well as confronting the horror of the Vietnam War. That's when I was able to sort of get up from, rise from complete depravity, and sort of become identified with the social democrats, with the democratic socialists, like Malcolm Harrington and Irving Howe and be caught up by Chomsky.

And Chomsky, by the way, had certain bona fides, by the way, certain attitudes that at least are worth defining. That first of all, he did not associate American imperialism with economics. He was not a part of the Marxist cult that declared that capitalism inevitably produces war. He called the Soviet Union a dungeon. He was pretty well attuned to the horrors of the Soviet Union, and indeed, he declared that he didn't see that the Soviet Union was immune from imperialism either. And so he was enlightened to that degree.

And then of course, where he was most refreshing is in his book of essays, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, where I was brought up short by his view that he would prefer — I think I perhaps mentioned this when I discussed Chomsky on the show awhile back. He said that he would prefer that Averell Harriman run the world. Averell Harriman, he said, has a right to run the world because his grandfather owned railroads. He's the capitalist elitist, and I would prefer Averell Harriman to the academic elitist, to the Henry Kissingers of this world, because they think they have a right to run the world because they're smart. He said, and I prefer Averell Harriman, he said, because if Averell Harriman is wrong about something, his grandfather still owned railroads, and he could admit that he's wrong. But if Henry Kissinger was wrong about something or Walt Rostow had been wrong about something, then they have to admit that maybe they're not so smart, so they're going to get more and more defensive. They're going to get more difficult about admitting that they made a mistake.

And so consider that sort of crossover. Somebody like Chomsky with socialist leanings is saying I'd rather have the capitalist elite run the world than the academicians. And so this brought me up short and, by the way, helped prepare me for my understanding and appreciation of Rothbard, my understanding of the economic Mandarins in mainstream economics who want to run the world. So Chomsky called himself a libertarian socialist, and that is indeed an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. But at least he had a strong libertarian strain to his thinking, and he still does.

I will, of course, freely admit that Chomsky is — he's still alive. He turned 90 — he thought that Mao's China was offering something exciting about socialism, and he was blind to a lot of what went on there. And to this day, he has not admitted the horrors of Mao Zedong's China. So that's a blot on his record. I wrote him a while back, when the Soviet Union fell, to try to correct him on his fallacies about capitalism and socialism. I talked about the controlled experiments — I had a huge correspondence with Chomsky, by the way, as did many people. And Chomsky inspired me to correspond with those who question me, as well.

So when I asked Chomsky about the controlled experiments — North Korea versus South Korea, East Germany versus West Germany, Hong Kong and Taiwan versus mainland China before China went capitalist, at least before China introduced capitalist reforms — Chomsky, to my astonishment, to my embarrassment, wrote me back that those examples were worthless, just completely tone deaf to what went on.

And by the way, Jeremy Hammond and I — Jeremy Hammond was interested in my idea for a book called *Dear Noam Chomsky*, because Jeremy Hammond — who's been on your show, a libertarian who's written a lot about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, written a very good book

about it. And Jeremy was interested in my idea of writing a book called *Dear Noam Chomsky*, in which we talk about how he taught us a lot. Hammond, by the way, Hammond's book on the Palestinian-Israeli crisis was endorsed, got a blurb from Chomsky, was endorsed by Chomsky. And Hammond talked about how Chomsky's work *The Fateful Triangle*, on the Middle East crisis, inspired him. And so it's a series of letters in which we're trying to talk about how Chomsky meant something to us, but then trying to correct him on his blindness to socialism and capitalism.

So I've continued in giving you, as usual, more answer than you bargained for. Getting beyond when you asked me about the indoctrination, as I said, difficult to get, not to mention my crazy background, but by the time I was in my teens and twenties, I was sort of liberated from the craziness that went on between my mother and father. I read all the documents. I read the transcripts. My father tapped our telephone when I was six years old. Amazingly, he had the technology to do that. So he recorded my mother's phone conversations. In fact, so all of these documents — and in fact, I went to the Bronx to look up court documents, because *Epstein v. Epstein*, as the case was called, three custody trials and three divorce trials became pretty notorious in the 1950s. So I've brought you up to the Chomsky part of my development, and maybe you want to plunge in and shoot another question or comment at me, Tom, so I don't want to filibuster, as you —

WOODS: Well, what I think we'll do, because I want to keep the effort involved in Epstein Week at a reasonable level — if we keep this episode going, I mean, we're already at 45 minutes.

EPSTEIN: Oh my God. Okay.

WOODS: We're going to have to leave this as a cliffhanger.

EPSTEIN: Okay.

WOODS: But let me give people a sense of what to expect this week, because I'm going to force Gene to get us to the point of how does he become a libertarian. We're going to get to that. But then we'll also get episodes —

EPSTEIN: Rothbard.

WOODS: Right, but I mean, most people, if I had given them a book by Rothbard, they wouldn't even read it. So we'll get into that. But we've got stuff about Gene's intellectual hobbyhorses, things that make him crazy and what's wrong with some of these ideas that a lot of people believe, books that influenced him that maybe you folks might want to read. Stuff like that is going to occupy us over the course of Gene Epstein Week.

EPSTEIN: Don't forget Tom, my three bits of wisdom, the wisdom I can impart to the world.

WOODS: The three bits of wisdom, yeah. Don't say what it is.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] I'm not going to.

WOODS: I was going to say, the marketer in me is saying no, if you say the three bits, they won't listen.

EPSTEIN: No, it's a teaser, Tom. I mean, people have got to — you don't want to miss the three bits of wisdom.

WOODS: Okay, that's true. That's true. All right, so that's also coming. So tune in for all the other episodes of Gene Epstein Week, everybody, and thanks for listening.