

Bonner Meets I.B. Singer

By Richard M. Yellin

BOSTON — Yelena G. Bonner, the wife of Andrei D. Sakharov, had always expressed a desire to meet Isaac Bashevis Singer. She had read, with difficulty, several of his books in English and several short stories that had been translated in the Soviet Union in samizdat, the secret journals passed from hand to hand.

After a meeting between Anatoly B. Shcharansky and Miss Bonner in New York City, I accompanied Miss Bonner to Mr. Singer's. Mr. Singer, in his 80's, looking frail, rose expectantly to greet her. Initially, he chose his words haltingly, but after she assured him how privileged she was to be with him, a tearful, emotional calm transfixed Mr. Singer's face. They talked about the pomp and the ceremony of Nobel Prize ceremonies. They shared stories of Mr. Singer's fame and reputation in the Soviet Union. The dialogue went this way:

Mr. Singer: Let me tell you, I'm very proud to have you here and to have you as a reader of mine.

Miss Bonner: In Gorky (where Mr. Sakharov is in internal exile), your portrait from the journal "America" is hanging in our home.

Mr. Singer: Thank you. I want to tell you, my friend, there was a Russian writer for children and also for grownups whose name was (Kornei) Chukovsky. This writer was visited by a reporter from the United States by the name of Schneiderman, and this Schneiderman told me that he came to Chukovsky's house and he saw my portrait there. I said, "My portrait — how does he dare to do such a thing?" Schneiderman said, "He's an old man; he's not afraid anymore."

Miss Bonner: I first heard your name a number of years before your Nobel Prize in that

house of Chukovsky.

Mr. Singer: Yes, and when he told me that he's an old man and he's not afraid, I said to myself, I'm also an old man and I am afraid.

Miss Bonner: I'm afraid now because I must go to my husband and I am afraid, but my husband is not.

Mr. Singer: My dear lady, nothing will happen to you. We will all pray for you. We will pray that the Almighty will take care of this great lady.

Rabbi Yellin: Mr. Singer, one of the things that Yelena Bonner said when she was in Newton, and visited the Synagogue, was that she wasn't religious. She also wanted to know whether you were religious?

'Proud to have you' as a reader

Mr. Singer: I'm very religious. Not that I keep all the laws, but I believe there is a power which knows us, helps us sometimes, betrays us sometimes, but He's always there. I believe in God that He's here. I have great quarrels with Him. But I can never deny Him. I'm a vegetarian. If you're not allowed to kill a man, you're not allowed to kill a fish.

Miss Bonner: I make a Jewish dish at home made of fruits and vegetables. When I make it, my husband says to me, you want to turn me into an I. B. Singer?

Mr. Singer: Let him be what he is. He's better to be what he is than to be Singer, because he's a man of great courage. I'm almost a coward. I would like that there should be many people like you, with your courage, with your husband's courage, with your power of conviction. I would not dare to go to Russia to say that I'm against Stalin or against Gorbachev. I wouldn't dare to do it, but I dare to do it here where nobody arrests me. So, I'm not really a courageous

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man, but I love people who have courage, because behind this courage there is faith. I almost call it faith in God and humanity, although humanity does not deserve to be trusted so much as you do. You are a person of deeds and I am only a man of words, and deeds are more important than words, you must admit this.

Miss Bonner: The word is the deed. You don't know which came first, the word or the deed.

Mr. Singer: Give to Dr. Sakharov my very best greeting and tell him that we all hope to see him some day in the United States, if it's possible.

Miss Bonner: I promise that if we come we'll come to you.

Mr. Singer: It would be the greatest day of my life.

Miss Bonner has returned to the Soviet Union. Like I. B. Singer, we all know that painful decision and agonizing challenge compose the greatest stories ever told. So long, Miss Bonner. Prayer and courage will certainly bring you back to your friends in America.

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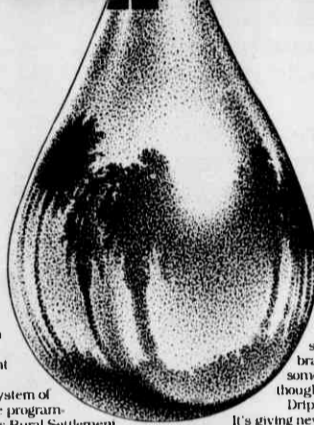
Dedication Weekend

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facilities in the Blumenthal Education Building will be the focus as all the children from the Temples and Academy join in the festivities. Among the plans is the creation of a living circle of parents and children extending around the entire facility including the Leon and Sandra Levine Jewish Community Center Building. This mini-version of Hands Across America will be called "Shalom Circle" and symbolize the sense of unity which pervades Shalom Park and its facilities.

Sunday afternoon will see the Jewish Community Center take center stage as it carries out a series of activities designed to actively involve children and adults of all ages. The J's goal is to create a festive atmosphere which will set the tone for its wide variety of year round programs and classes. Dedication Weekend is designed to celebrate the completion of Shalom Park Phase I and the start of the first full season of programs for the institutions.

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