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Muir book traces hidden past of a father and a country

It was a chance encounter with a fellow graduate student at Stanford University that gave Dr. Sharona Muir the first glimpse into her father's hidden life and psyche.

Muir, creative writing and English, is the daughter of Itzhak Bentov: Slovakian immigrant, narrow escaper of the Holocaust, successful medical inventor, popular New Age author and—she was to discover—the creator of Israel's first rocket.

In her memoir, *The Telling: Tracing the Secret of My Father's Lives*, to be published in June by Schocken Books (an imprint of Random House), Muir relates how a remark by a young man she had just met—that their fathers had served together in Israel's secret Science Corps—led to the excavation of her father's life before and during Israel's war of independence. Her investigations also brought to light a chapter in that country's history that has not been previously explored.

"I chose to call the book a memoir instead of a history because I think of history as the skin: It has to stand up to the harsh winds of fact. But a memoir is like the dermis. It lies underneath the skin, deeper and closer to our memories, our personal life, our emotions and our imagination," Muir says.

However, for the straight history portion of the story—that of the Science Corps, or Hemmed, and the Israeli war—she was careful to adhere strictly to fact, based on her interviews with her father's former colleagues and others during a summer in Israel while researching the book, as well as her reading of current histories.

The war for independence is the subject of much debate now in Israel, she says, and its history is being revised and re-examined as more information comes out and the context in which the war was fought becomes better understood. "I had to be absolutely accurate about that," Muir said.

While the official Hemmed files remain classified, she was able to meet with and even attend a reunion of the group in 1999, to mutual amazement—her existence was as much a surprise to them as theirs was to her. Though the members asked to remain anonymous in her memoir, they shared their memories of the exhilarating but terrifying time when Israel felt it was fighting for its very right to life.

A past obscured

Until 1985, six years after her father's death, Muir knew none of Hemmed's history. Born in Massachusetts following Bentov's immigration to the United States, Muir grew up seeing him mostly on Saturday afternoons after her parents divorced. "He would take me to the park or on other outings, and he would talk to me about science," she said. Never one to discuss mundane matters or make small talk, Bentov seemed driven by a passion for discovery.

Working in his small basement laboratory, he made such inventions as a heart catheter, versions of which are still being used to save lives today, Muir writes. In his heavy Slovakian accent, he would joke, "I'm just a Yankee tinkerer," while describing to her the advances that were being made with lasers and holograms.

"He never, ever talked to me about his family," she said, and, being a sensitive only child, she understood that she should not question him. Then in 1979, when Muir was 22, he died in a plane crash and the door to her father's past seemed closed. Later, she was to learn that his silence on personal and other matters was very common to those of his generation who had undergone the experiences of the war and the Holocaust.

"We were a generation that did not talk," one former Hemmed scientist told her.

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But, as is acted out in the traditional Passover seder meal, Muir says, there is a time when it is important to tell one's history, and she felt that, for herself and for the world, now is the time to recount the story of that time. "I don't want to make a glorified history, but I want to convey what it felt like to them then." And to explain how a generation's experiences can affect even a father's relationship with his only child.

Researching the book, meeting her father's former colleagues and seeing firsthand the places he had lived "helped me understand who he was as a father," she said. "It opened a lot of doors in my heart."

Rising to the defense

What she was able to piece together was how a group of young scientists and engineers, many like her father with little training, was able to design the weapons that eventually assisted Israel's defeat of the Arabs following the British withdrawal from what had been called Palestine.

After traveling with a Zionist youth movement group to Israel from Slovakia after the Nazi invasion in 1940, Bentov lived on a remote kibbutz in the Negev. The area was then under British rule and encompassed Jews and Arabs in an uneasy living arrangement. Following a United Nations Security Council decision that the land should be divided into two states, side by side, the British announced they would leave in May 1948. But the previous November, civil unrest reached a boiling point and riots broke out among the Palestinian community.

Seeing the civil war coming, the group that was to become Hemmed began meeting clandestinely in Tel Aviv apartments and storefronts to design weapons for the Jews—in defiance of the strict British ban on Jews or Arabs owning weapons, Muir writes. Hearing rumors of the group's existence, the young Bentov came to Tel Aviv, wishing to contribute his natural scientific talents to the effort.

It is important to understand the context in which they were working, Muir notes. Following the Holocaust and then Britain's seeming favoritism toward the Arabs, the scientists and really all Jews truly felt their survival was at stake.

When the British finally left in May 1948 and David Ben-Gurion officially declared the state of Israel and created the army, he also funded the Science Corps with the then-astounding sum of \$3,000. Hemmed's first official headquarters was in a shed on the roof of a Tel Aviv apartment building.

The surrounding Arab nations—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and, to some extent, Saudi Arabia—soon decided to invade Palestine and the Palestinians, though not possessing sophisticated weapons, were armed with a good supply of small arms and bombarded the Jews, Muir said. The Egyptians bombed Tel Aviv, and an atmosphere of dread reigned.

The band of scientists now worked feverishly to design weapons, using whatever materials they could find, Muir learned. With virtually no metal and no natural resources in the country, they had to cobble together whatever elements they could scavenge, toiling around the clock. "Their natural resource had to be their brains," Muir said. They gave their new weapons odd names such as the "Automatic Dog" and the "Loretta." Her father's first invention was a recoilless rifle made from steel wool and a water pipe.

The first six weeks of the war were devastating and felt like an "abyss," Muir says. The war's total casualties amounted to 1 percent of the population, and a quarter of those were sustained in that period. The total loss would be equivalent to about 2.5 million people dying in the United States today, she said, she said, and "it left a permanent mark on the Israeli psyche."

Finally, on June 11, the U.N. declared a truce. Afterwards, despite an arms embargo, Ben-Gurion managed to illegally smuggle in enough heavy weaponry to fight a war. At the same time, Bentov and his Hemmed colleagues were working on developing a prototype rocket. As the scientist who worked with him told Muir, "When it flew, we knew we had a future."

With instant feedback from the battlefield, Hemmed was able to refine its designs fairly

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quickly, and, by the end of the war a year and a half later, “they were a solid working ‘R and D’ team and had produced some very interesting technology,” Muir learned.

Future leaders

That team went on to become Israel’s national leadership. As Muir recounts in the book’s foreword, she once met Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and asked him what he thought of Hemmed. “He said they were ‘an extraordinary, brilliant group. And without a doubt, their work is at the foundation of Israel’s industrial and defense technology.’ They gave Israel her national water system, her state institute of defense research, her most visionary tycoon, her Atomic Energy Commission . . .”

“They were a very idealistic group,” Muir recounted. “They believed in the importance of using technology to help people,” just as her father turned his scientific talent to creating the technology to save lives. After the war, Hemmed became Israel’s civilian defense department. Many of its members went on to join the Weizmann Institute of Science, today one of the top-ranking multidisciplinary research institutions in the world.

“The most important thing to me about these people is that they felt they were on an island surrounded by fire, and that they had complete faith in the work they were doing, and they were at the same time very forward-looking,” Muir said.

But that re-found history could easily be lost again, Muir fears, unless it is retold for future generations. Because, as one of her father’s colleagues told her, every generation is the one that forgets, “unless,” she writes, “we invent memory anew.”

Muir is also the author of a collection of poems, *During Ceasefire*, and a scholarly study of science fiction. She has won many awards for both her poetry and her prose, including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Her work has appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Jerusalem Report* and *The Paris Review*, among other publications. She holds a Ph.D. in modern thought and literature from Stanford.

More information about the book and related material will soon be available at www.thebookoftelling.com.

Faculty couple’s art garners local, international awards

BGSU faculty members Stephan Hillerbrand and Mary Magsamen are partners in many ways—husband and wife, colleagues and collaborative artists. Their work has recently been honored with two prestigious awards.

They have received a \$5,000 Individual Excellence Award from the Ohio Arts Council in the media arts category, and Hillerbrand, visual communication technology, has been named the recipient of a Fulbright Junior Research Award for Germany, the Fulbright Commission in Berlin has announced. In keeping with their artistic working method, both will be going abroad for several months to continue their work, in Berlin and Karlsruhe, Germany.

As their Web site—maryandstephan.com—suggests, the couple functions as one artistically. They have an endless source of inspiration for their performance-based video art, they say, as their subject matter is themselves and their relationship.

“We’re using ourselves to talk about bigger issues,” said Magsamen, an adjunct faculty member in the School of Art. “We use our relationship and our lives together as a metaphor for universal ideas.”

Artistic support

The Ohio Arts Council award is a highly competitive honor given in recognition of the “exceptional merit of a body of work that advances or exemplifies the discipline and the larger artistic community,” according to the council. The awards are

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designed to support artists' growth and development and are not tied to specific projects.

The two video installations they submitted to the council were from their "hunger" series. "earth-hunger" is set in a northwest Ohio cornfield and, in a parody of reality television and a commentary on the competitiveness that can exist in relationships, shows them competing in an unwinnable race. The other piece was "air-hunger," in which the camera focuses closely on their faces as they jointly blow large bubbles from chewing gum, sharing the same air in an exploration of identity, communication, trust and sexuality.

Fulbright award

Coming up next April, the Fulbright "will allow us to collaborate in a whole different place," said Hillerbrand, who was also a Fulbright Fellow for the German Technology and Education 2004 seminar.

Hillerbrand will be doing research at the Film and Television Academy "Konrad Wolf" Potsdam-Babelsberg. It is the only art academy in the state of Brandenburg and the oldest and largest of the five media academies in Germany. He will also be researching at the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, which is noted for its response to the rapid developments in information technology and today's changing social structures, Hillerbrand said. Its work combines production and research, exhibitions and events, coordination and documentation.

"I want to explore how technology is affecting education and the arts in Germany and compare and contrast that with the United States," he said.

"Anytime we have an opportunity for someone of Stephan's caliber to have that kind of experience, we are happy to support that," said Dr. Ernest Savage, dean of the College of Technology. "He's a fine faculty member and when he has the opportunity to grow and develop his creative activity, we want to celebrate that.

"It's not just traditional scholarship but creative work that we want to support in the College of Technology," Savage added. "Visual communication technology is a creative field."

Active careers

Since joining the BGSU faculty two years ago, Magsamen and Hillerbrand have continued to frequently participate in individual and group shows and give artist's talks, both nationally and internationally. So far this year, they have been guest lecturers at Notre Dame University, and their work has appeared in shows in Los Angeles, South Bend, Ind., Woodstock, N.Y. and Toledo. They have exhibited in England, Canada, the Netherlands and across the United States. They recently completed a second residency at the Experimental Television Center in Owego, N.Y., and in 2003 were awarded the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's residency at the Woolworth Building in New York City.

Before beginning their artistic collaboration, each had numerous exhibitions. Magsamen's past exhibitions include solo shows at Momenta Art in Brooklyn and HEREArt in New York, in addition to group shows at the Anna Kustera Gallery, Florida Atlantic University, Project Gallery in Toronto and White Columns. She was the co-founder and organizer of 57hope alternative space in Williamsburg, N.Y. In addition, she has been awarded residencies from the Longwood Cyber Residency Program and the Experimental Television Center Finishing Fund.

Hillerbrand is a National Endowment for the Arts and Art Matters Grant recipient and a MacDowell Colony Fellow. He has studied in Austria, China and Germany, and has been a lecturer at the High Museum of Art, the Alliance for Community Media and New York University. His exhibitions sites have included Nexus Contemporary Art in Atlanta, Artspace in New Haven, Conn., and the Mississippi Museum of Art.

The couple met while in graduate school at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. Magsamen's background is in sculpture, video and video installation, while Hillerbrand's is in photography and photo-based installations, and new-media technology.

Though they teach in separate colleges, they find that they use the same tools. "It's a pretty

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interesting place to be now in education, art and technology,” Magsamen said. “A cross-pollination is happening, and the lines are really blurred,” she added. “Technology enables all kinds of collaborations.”

BGSU student to receive Fulbright scholarship

Sarah Ford, a BGSU student from Delaware, Ohio, has been selected as a Fulbright student grantee to Russia by the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.

Ford is one of only five students from the United States chosen to go to Russia and the first BGSU undergraduate student ever to receive a Fulbright grant.

The Fulbright Program promotes mutual understanding between the people of the United States and those in other countries through academic and bicultural exchange. More than 150 countries currently participate in the program.

Ford, a German and Russian linguistics major, has a 3.89 grade point average. She is a member of the University’s German Club, Russian Club, Delta Phi Alpha national German honor society and Cross Cultural Communication Connection, a BGSU project at that pairs native English-speaking students with foreign graduate and undergraduate students to help develop and improve their English language skills. She also volunteers at an after-school mentoring program.

Ford is no stranger to Germany and Russia. She spent eight weeks living with a family in Germany in the summer of 1999 and organized her own independent home-stay with a German family from September 2000 to May 2001. She also participated in a five-week BGSU study-abroad program in St. Petersburg, Russia, in the summer of 2003 and attended the University of Hamburg in Germany as an exchange student from October 2003 until July 2004.

While in Russia on the Fulbright scholarship, Ford plans to teach English in a Russian school. In addition to teaching, she hopes to do an independent oral history project focusing on approaches to education and teaching in Russia and how both of these have evolved in the last decade since the fall of communism.

Fulbright grants are made possible through funds appropriated annually by Congress and, in many cases, by contributions from partner countries and/or the private sector.

As a Fulbright scholarship recipient, Ford will join the ranks of more than 265,000 alumni of the program, including 35 Nobel Prize winners.

IN BRIEF

BG@100 frequently asked questions answered on Web

The BG@100 Web page at www.bgsu.edu/BG@100 provides a link to frequently asked questions about the project.

Answers to such questions as: How was the project named? What does HCM stand for? What types of testing are taking place? Who is working on the project? Will FOCUS continue to be used in PeopleSoft, and will security access be different in PeopleSoft can be found at the site.

If you have a question or would like to suggest a question to be added to the listing, email BGat100@bgsu.edu.

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Monday, May 30

Memorial Day observed. Classes canceled, offices closed.

Tuesday, May 31

Movie, "Phantom of the Opera," 6 p.m., Bowen-Thompson Student Union Theater. Sponsored by the Office of Campus Involvement.

Wednesday, June 1

Dissertation Defense, "Painted Sermons: Explanatory Rhetoric and William Holman Hunt's Inscribed Frames," by Karen D. Rowe, English, 9 a.m., 206 East Hall.

Dissertation Defense, "Re-vision: A Rhetorical Analysis of Change in the Holocaust Memorial Center," by Ramona Dunckel, English, 11 a.m., 206 East Hall.

Grilling on the Green, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.,

outside the Falcon's Nest, Union. Sponsored by University Dining Services.

Monday, June 6

Bingo, noon, Falcon's Nest, Union. Sponsored by Union Programming.

Continuing Events

Through June 10

Art Exhibition, "Cream of the Crop," award-winning student art from the spring exhibits, Union galleries. Gallery hours are 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Through July 22

Art Exhibition, photographs by Rebecca Dickerson, Little Gallery, BGSU Firelands. Gallery hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

JOB POSTINGS

FACULTY

Human Movement, Sport and Leisure Studies. Instructor and Visiting Assistant Professor (two positions). Call Linda Hamman, 2-7234. Deadline: June 10.

Popular Culture. Instructor (two positions). Call Angela Nelson, 2-2981. Deadline: June 10.

Sociology. Instructor. Call Joseph Jacoby, 2-8147. Deadline: June 10.

Mathematics and Statistics. Instructor. Call Neal Carothers, 2-7435. Deadline: June 15.

School of Art. Instructor. Call Michael Arigo, 2-9320. Deadline: June 17.

Contact the Office of Human Resources at 419-372-8421 for information regarding classified and administrative positions. Position vacancy announcements may be viewed by visiting the HR Web site at www.bgsu.edu/offices/ohr.

Employees wishing to apply for these positions must sign a "Request for Transfer" form and attach an updated resume or data sheet. This information must be turned in to Human Resources by the job deadline.

CLASSIFIED

View job descriptions at:
www.bgsu.edu/offices/ohr/employment/BGSU_only/

The deadline for employees to apply for the following position is 1 p.m. Friday, June 10.

Secretary 1 (R-027-Vf)—Residence Life. Pay grade 6. Nine-month, part-time position.

ADMINISTRATIVE

View job descriptions at:0
www.bgsu.edu/offices/ohr/employment/adm_staff/

Manager, Grants Accounting (R-045)—Finance and Administration. Administrative grade 16. Deadline: June 3.

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Marketing Coordinator (R-049)—Bowen-Thompson Student Union. Administrative grade 12. Deadline: June 17.

Sous-Chef - Residence Dining (V-050)—University Dining Services. Administrative grade 12. Deadline: June 17.

Associate Director of Residence Life (V-034)—Office of Residence Life. Administrative grade 16. Review of applications began May 16 and will continue until the position is filled.

Associate Director of Residence Life for Business Affairs (V-034)—Office of Residence Life. Administrative grade 16. Review of applications began May 13 and will continue until the position is filled.

Associate Dean of Students (V-038)—Office of Campus Involvement. Administrative grade 18. Review of applications began May 27 and will continue until the position is filled.

Director, Springboard Program (V-047)—Academic Services. Administrative grade 16. Deadline: June 3.

Psychologist (V-147)—Counseling Center liaison to the College of Arts and Sciences. Administrative grade 14 (unlicensed) or 17 (licensed). Review of applications began Feb. 18 and will continue until the position is filled.

Psychologist (V-147)—Counseling Center liaison to the Office of Residence Life. Counseling Center Outreach Coordinator. Administrative grade 14 (unlicensed) or 17 (licensed). Review of applications began Feb. 18 and will continue until the position is filled.

Residence Hall Director (V-013)—Residence Life. Administrative grade 13. Review

OBITUARY

There were no obituaries this week.