

The Bar Sagi Young Poets Prize Ceremony

Voices Israel

27 October 2020

We are truly happy to acknowledge that Voices, Israel did more than all others combined to honour the legacy of our beloved grand-daughter Bar Sagi. It is thus a great pleasure to thank former President Susan Olsburgh who consented to the prize.

Particular thanks to Wendy Dickstein as prize organizer, Wendy Blumfield for her review in the Jerusalem Report and to all of you for your presence here.

Finally may I congratulate your new President Judy Koren and thank Susan Bell, for accepting to be the new prize organizer.

Next year the prize is going international, but judging by this year's winners, competitors from abroad will meet a very tough challenge.

In this I would like to congratulate this year's winners Ester Belokurov, Yaara Heller, Haya Moukouri, as well as honourable mention Liraz Eliszda. Their wonderful poems have set the prize off to a very worthy beginning.

Hopefully the prize will be promoted in the UK by Jewish Renaissance, whose editor Rebecca Taylor was the first in answering my pleas to bring attention to Bar's work.

Now a few words on our late grand-daughter Bar Sagi and her legacy.

Bar struggled through 30 months of debilitating pain from cancer originating in her right knee. When finally able to walk freely, Bar announced to us that she was writing a book.

Bar was just thirteen and we were astonished. Not just one book mind you but a trilogy, called Dreamworld, about a Prince from the fabled land of Atlantis.

Bar died at just 15 being just able to fondle the page proofs of the first volume. Thanks to her paternal grandfather Aharon Sagi, the first volume is available on Amazon and the second will appear shortly.

The second volume is astonishingly deep touching on a host of burning issues, including the Palestinian problem, the right to use fearful weapons which an adversary does not possess, treachery by supposed allies, jealousy and hatred. Sadly the third and final volume only exists in tiny fragments.

However the real surprise to me was the treasure trove of deeply emotive poetry in Bar's school notebooks. I received them from my daughter Yael Sagi just after Bar's death. It seems Bar was not paying too much attention in class, at the "warm (and boring) school of DeShalit".

The poems give the reader an insight, deeply disturbing at times, of Bar's struggles with cancer.

In them we learn of Bar's beliefs: that her soul, which she implores to remember her, would fly to heaven. That she would be reincarnated hale and hearty, though with the inconvenience of having all of her former life forgotten, despite her pleas.

The second video, which will be projected shortly, is based on these beliefs.

The words are those of her last poem, set to music by Lior Soltz, sung by Tzlil Rubenstein and animated by Gili Shaanan.

Let me describe the story it is to portray.

At first we find a happy child gathering flowers in the light of a full moon. The child now a young girl carries the flowers which transform into a babe-in-arms. Then a storm begins to brew and rain lashes down, signifying the onset of cancer. Clutching the baby to shield it from the storm, the girl desperately limps towards the distant light of a café. It represents her last hope of recovery. She stumbles inside with the baby now a small boy.

The back doors of the café open wide. The girl fades away relinquishing her soul to a heron winging its way to the heavens.

The heron returns at dawn bequeathing the girl's soul to the boy. The boy transforms to a supremely healthy youth whose face resembles that of the young girl. He looks out to that life of fulfillment and happiness from which Bar was prematurely deprived.

May you all, especially our young contestants, step out bravely and thankfully to enjoy in perfect health the wonders of the world around us.

Anthony Joseph