



FRED WAITZKIN

AUTHOR OF SEARCHING FOR BOBBY FISCHER

**MORTAL
GAMES**

**THE TURBULENT
GENIUS OF
GARRY
KASPAROV**



Also by Fred Waitzkin

Searching for Bobby Fischer
The Last Marlin
The Dream Merchant

MORTAL GAMES

**THE TURBULENT GENIUS OF GARRY
KASPAROV**

FRED WAITZKIN

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For Stella, Bonnie, Katya and Josh

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BEGINNINGS

In late September, 1990, world chess champion Garry Kasparov and I were walking along the broad South Beach of Martha's Vineyard Island off the coast of Massachusetts. It was a sunny morning that was both warm and chilly, depending on the blustery ocean breeze, and the air was so clear that Noman's Island, nine miles to the south, seemed to be sitting just off the beach. Kasparov, on the shore side of medium height, shirtless and muscular, walked along the water's edge at a pace that was nearly a run. He had been smiling for the past few minutes, enjoying an idea.

"I'm going to crush him this time," he said.

In ten days the world champion would begin a three-month intellectual and emotional battle against a man he considered morally and politically evil, "a symbol of the communist system." He pronounced the name slowly, rolling the "r," "K-A-R-R-R-P-O-V," so that it dripped with disgust, as if the challenger, one of the great players in chess history, were something vile and foul-smelling. "He is a creature of darkness," Kasparov said, with Miltonic distaste.

The fifth title match between these two chess giants would begin in New York in ten days and would conclude in Lyon, France, at Christmastime. Kasparov's strategy going in was rather simple: "I want to kill him immediately." To this end, Kasparov was planning to begin the match with "blitzkrieg," a first-round knockout. In the early games he intended to use several lethal new opening ideas that he had developed on Martha's Vineyard; chess players call them "novelties." After overwhelming Karpov, a former world champion and defensive genius, in two or three of the early games, the champion predicted that the challenger would be unable to recover psychologically. "K-A-R-R-R-P-O-V." He repeated the name with disdain, but this time flashed a mischievous smile.

As I struggled to keep up with him on the soft sand, Kasparov savored his victory as if it were a *fait accompli* and Karpov were already squashed like a roach, once and for all out of his life. Sea gulls wheeled overhead, yapping and diving for sand eels. Kasparov waved at them like a heedless child and then inhaled the sea air deeply and theatrically as if it were great French food. This past month on Martha's Vineyard, the hard work and island living had brought a feeling of renewal and confidence. For the last few weeks, he had been saying to close friends that he would win by a lopsided margin. But, privately, his friends were uneasy about the match.

Political changes in the Soviet Union had distracted Kasparov from chess and he had not trained nearly as much as he had planned. Objectively, there was no reason to expect that the match would be easy. Kasparov had been unable to overwhelm Anatoly Karpov in their previous four championship bouts, each of them exhausting and very competitive, which in aggregate encompassed 120 games about 600 hours of play—if you can call it play to plot the demise of another man's spiritual and psychological well-being. In 120 games, Kasparov had managed to win only a single game more than

Karpov. Incredible. There had never been such a competition in all of professional sports: so many encounters, so many hours, so much on the line, so much hatred seeping from a game into life and then back into a game.

On Martha's Vineyard, it seemed to Kasparov that he had spent half of his twenty-seven years and sacrificed much of his life's joy trying to rid himself of this sallow, physically frail man who stuck to him like a shadow. Half a lifetime sitting across from Karpov, whom he loathed, toes practically touching, conceiving his finest ideas—which chess players would surely revere 100 years from today—while smelling Karpov's smells, listening to his digestion or to the incanting sound of Karpov counting while he calculated variations, glimpsing the quivering of Karpov's stretched, nerve-wracked face when he was losing, or his preening, apple-cheeked self-admiration when he was winning. Half a lifetime watching closely for Karpov's mood swings as crucial clues to the game and to Kasparov's own well-being, for if Kasparov won he would feel like a god afterwards, and if he lost, his dejection, the blackness and rage closing upon him, would resist all forms of consolation from his friends, his wife, his mother. Such depths of despair and humiliation! After losing a game, Kasparov seemed to shrink in size. Then, as he wrestled with self-doubt, he would be vulnerable in the next game. Karpov would know this, of course, and would be ready to pounce.

In ten days, the fifth world championship match between them would begin, and Kasparov would strain to sense the meaning of Karpov's body English, the blankness of his face, his twitches and devious relaxations. For five hours in the evening, these two men would feel each other's hidden meanings as keenly as any two lovers while all the while hating one another, but not so loudly that it might interfere with the flow of ideas.

Eight months before coming to this island, Kasparov, whose father was Jewish and mother was Armenian, had been forced to flee from his training camp in Baku, the city where he had been born and raised, when Azerbaijani hooligans had begun systematically slaughtering Armenians. He had experienced this nightmare not merely as the loss of home and training camp but as the loss of his heritage, part of himself. The event had shaken him, at least for a time dislodging the fundamental order in his life. When he had returned to Moscow, feeling, as he put it, "like a refugee," chess had not seemed important anymore. This game which had made him wealthy and powerful, which had been the center of his life for twenty years and at which he had become arguably greater than any other man in history, had suddenly felt trivial to him.

In Moscow, with the match growing closer, there had been a choice to make each day: to study openings in preparation for Karpov, or to attend a political rally or an organizational meeting for a new political party, or to debate the policies of Gorbachev with visiting Western journalists. Chess was never his choice. According to his closest friends, prior to the loss of his home, his interest in the politics of his country, his anticommunist bias, had been somewhat cerebral and theoretical. But in January of 1990 the new Russian revolution had taken possession of his imagination. Soviet history was suddenly evolving at the speed of light after decades of bleak, punishing stasis. It was thrilling to Kasparov, who sensed that the end of communism was close. He told this to skeptical Western journalists and warned that support of Gorbachev's reactionary politics could force a bloody civil war. He felt most purposeful when writing political columns for Soviet and Western newspapers or giving rousing speeches in front of large crowds. When he thought about it, it seemed odd that he wasn't nervous before his speeches, though he wasn't exactly sure what he would say until he began. This life came easily to him, as though he had spent his years in the political trenches instead of leaning over a chessboard quietly calculating variations. In the fight against communism he felt connected with his passionately anticommunist father, who had died when he was seven, and found himself thinking back twenty years to nightly political discussions at the dinner table with his grandfather, who had been a staunch Party member for nearly fifty years.

But the winter and spring of 1990, a year before the fall of communism, was an injudicious time for the world champion to be plunging into frontline Moscow politics. Each political meeting, each interview, pushed him a little farther from chess. “Chess is not important now,” he had said to friends and to his nervous manager, Andrew Page, who wanted him to begin his training for Karpov. It was a confusing and emotional time. Turning his back on chess was both liberating and frightening. Kasparov felt depressed, homeless, and yet he was wholly committed.

To distance himself, finally, from what he considered the charade of *perestroika*, from the daily heart-rending sight of Armenian refugees wandering Moscow streets, from the constant snare of his telephone and from the intoxication over what he sensed were the dying days of communism, Kasparov had chosen Martha’s Vineyard for the final month of preparation for the world championship match.

“This time it will be easy,” Kasparov said to friends who visited him on the island. Andrew Page, Kasparov’s closest friend in the West, grimaced and bit his tongue when Garry boasted that he would destroy Karpov. Page worried that Garry was putting additional pressure on himself and that if he couldn’t live up to his inflated claims, he might fall apart altogether. Page had his fingers crossed that Garry could eke out a win against the former world champion, who had been training for months without distraction.

On the beach, Kasparov tried to put Karpov out of his mind: thinking about his enduring enemy was a blight on this postcard-perfect morning. The ocean air was clear, the sky wonderfully blue, and just offshore fishing boats slowly dragged their nets. As we walked at his furious pace, we began talking about his grand plans for the chess world after he won the match. “The public must come to see that chess is a violent sport,” he said. “The stakes are very high in an important chess game. When you beat your opponent you destroy his ego; for a time you make him lose confidence in himself as a person. If the general public understood that chess players were plotting to crush one another, don’t you think they’d be interested? In this match you’ll feel it. The two greatest intellects in the chess world trying to destroy one another. People in the theater will be shivering.”

Piqued by the gorgeous day, and the closeness of the match, ideas gushed out of him. We must do away with dry, technical games between grandmasters, he argued, gesturing with his hands as if before an audience. Grandmasters must play on the edge, risk defeat in order to create masterpieces. We were both sweating from our long walk and from the conversation, which held a sense of urgency and importance, but which also seemed a little absurd to me. Yes, yes, I nodded, as if I were an ambitious young grandmaster. No more dry grandmaster games. This must be changed. “Look,” Garry insisted. “This is the way I play. I always search for the best move, but this way there is a chance to lose. A chance for greatness and a chance for disaster.”

A chance for greatness and a chance for disaster. This is the kind of chess I love as well. It reminded me of the great basketball in the NCAA tournament, when players dive and bleed for each point. It was the kind of uncompromising chess that I wanted my thirteen-year-old son Joshua to play, though I could not begin to play it myself. Likewise, I have always believed that great writing involves taking risks. I was about to say this, but Kasparov’s mind had suddenly moved somewhere else—maybe he was thinking about Gorbachev, maybe about a novelty in the King’s Indian defense.

When I talk to Kasparov about chess, there are moments when I cannot get past the hilarity of my situation. I think, isn’t our dialogue at least as farfetched as if I were chatting about encyclicals with the pope or about military strategy with Norman Schwarzkopf? Yet, since we met in the fall of 1988, there have been many afternoons when Kasparov and I have sat at the chess board and he has shown me all the variations that he might have played in games cherished around the world: attacks, intricate

parries, chessic paradoxes, wondrous possibilities that chess lovers will never see. I have felt fretful even guilty, while he showed me his magnificent ideas. I have wanted to write them down for the world, but his delicate fingers moved much too quickly and the pieces squirted around the board like animated characters. They rushed ahead, demonstrating an attack that failed, then a slightly different attack. "Better," he said quietly, and nodded his head. Better, but why was it better? I could not begin to figure it out. Maybe if I had a month. Once while I was trying to understand one position, he set up another and asked absently if I recalled this from a game in 1968. I grunted. I felt like an idiot. Clearly, everyone should remember this position from '68. "Fred, this is really incredible," and the pieces squirted around. Somehow I could feel that it was incredible.

While trying to follow Kasparov's moves, I have caught myself marveling at the wild and unexpected turn my life had taken. I am not a tournament player myself, and relative to a chess professional, I know little about the game, but in the last half-dozen years, chess has come to dominate my life. I love to watch chess more than almost anything and to talk about exciting games and the quirky habits and hang-ups of players during evening walks around Washington Square Park with my patzer friends, but mostly I love to talk chess with my son, who is a chess master, and with the world chess champion, Garry Kasparov, who knows that I understand very little about grandmaster-level tactics and modern opening theory but doesn't seem bothered by it. To the contrary, attempting to transform deep and often highly technical ideas into ordinary language seems to engage his imagination. Sometimes Garry calls my apartment from Europe to tell me about a tournament or some game he has just played against Ivanchuk or Anand. He is a good storyteller, and I feel as if I am in his skin, sweating, plunging ahead into a promising but dangerous position. My chess life is very rich.

In the summer of 1972, like many Americans, I fell under the spell of the Bobby Fischer–Boris Spassky match for the chess world championship. Several times a week, my friends and I sat glued to my television, as national master Shelby Lyman duplicated the moves that Fischer and Spassky were making in Reykjavik, Iceland. I hardly knew how to move the chess pieces, but Shelby Lyman had a gift for simplifying the game's complex strategies and tactics. With boyish charm, he convinced millions of chess-apatetic Americans that, by trying a little, not only could they appreciate Bobby and Boris's games, but—who knows?—within weeks they might be playing such masterpieces themselves.

After a few of Shelby's shows, everyone I knew wanted to play like Bobby Fischer, who spoke of the game as intellectual warfare and said shyly that he loved to crush his opponent's ego. Almost overnight, chess clubs began cropping up across America, Little League kids were pleading for chess sets, young men were deciding to forgo college for careers as chess masters. Bobby was a role model: a chess player loved for his smile, his secret power, for moves that were thrilling and sexy. There were chess groupies who craved Bobby but settled for sallow preoccupied masters who spent their days poring over dense books in clubs and coffee shops. It was the time of Muhammed Ali, Joe Namath, the Beatles and Bobby Fischer. Imagine, a chess genius holding the land in thrall like a rock star. Bobby was on the cover of *Time*, *Life* and *Newsweek*. Commercial sponsors were lined up to give him millions. He had singlehandedly taken on the Soviet chess establishment, which during the Cold War seemed like taking on the Soviet Union itself. The Central Sports Committee had virtually all of the top chess minds in the Soviet Union working on plans to help Spassky defeat Fischer, who worked by himself at night in his room in Iceland and matter-of-factly told the world that he would win. . . Bobby, the chess monk who once refused a hotel room with a scenic view because it might distract him from his work. Bobby thrilled us with ideas we could never understand, with a chess victory that

felt like a political and moral triumph.

~~Bobby. Poor Bobby. In a few years he would be standing on street corners in Pasadena, disguised with a beard, wearing a shabby overcoat and the same shoes he had worn in the brilliant 1971 candidate match against Tigran Petrosian, handing out anti-Semitic literature. After deciding not to defend his title against the young Anatoly Karpov, Fischer went underground for two decades, living in grimy rooming houses in Pasadena and Los Angeles. The grandmaster Pal Benko, who visited him in one of his hideouts, said that he believed Bobby was afraid that if he had defended against Karpov in 1971 the Russians would have had him murdered. Fischer showed Benko, who had spent more than a year in a Nazi labor camp in Hungary, his treasured color photograph of Adolf Hitler. To his close friends, who were directed never to discuss him with the press, he expounded upon the illusion of the Holocaust. It was the Jews who had driven him out of chess, he claimed to one friend, who kept hoping Fischer would rid himself of this obsession and return to chess. Bobby dressed in disguises and cursed the Jews in buses and cheap Chinese restaurants, and sought out the newest anti-Semitic classics as he had once accumulated volumes on the chess openings.~~

But who could imagine this ugliness from Bobby at a time when grandmaster chess seemed as American as rock and roll? Who could imagine that Fischer, half Jewish himself, would drop out of chess to live for two decades in poverty, isolation and delusion after his stirring victory against Spassky? And who could ever imagine that twenty years after the great match, in September, 1991 Fischer, by now much more legend than man, would emerge from our dreams once again to push world chess against Spassky, this time earning millions? That he would show us a time-weakened version of his clean and deceptively simple game, while seizing the opportunity of a handy international press corps to lambast the Jews, Israel and Garry, whom he labeled a fraud and a cheater? But this is jumping ahead of the story.

In 1972, Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky had played in a league above all other players in the world, but the deepest meaning of that, translated as it was by Fischer's John Wayne shyness and macho one-liners, and by Lyman's charm, excitement and determination to make chess popular, had been lost for most Americans, including me and my friends who were off buying chessboards and fancy wooden pieces in order to enter the international chess wars. It seems now as if Shelby had intuited that the Fischer phenomenon would be chess's big chance in America, a country too slick and fast for the royal game. While Bobby had taken a half-hour contemplating his position, Shelby and his guests had spoken reassuringly, hyping how accessible this game was: maybe he would move the knight, maybe the bishop—it hardly seemed to matter—there were many good moves. Inspired by their patter, I quickly decided how I would play and couldn't figure out why the two grandmasters were taking so long.

Years later, I would learn that at the highest level chess demands a staggering amount of homework and that during games a vast library of knowledge is referred to and sometimes inventively rejected. World champions have learned numerous positions, axioms and exceptions. By memory they can play over thousands of games, and can set up positions that they happened to have glanced at years before. Many grandmasters study six or seven hours a day. I know one who studies twelve hours a day, who takes his meals in front of a computer screen while he ponders games played the day before in Europe. There are many thousands of books and journals containing opening analysis, known as "theory," and this information is constantly added to by grandmasters working around the world to improve upon it or to refute old ideas. A chess world champion must know both the old and the newest theory, or he stands the risk of being beaten before the game begins.

In addition to a considerable advantage in knowledge, a world champion's mind works differently from mine, which virtually aches from the effort of trying to peer one or two moves ahead while the pieces keep swimming off their squares (Waitzkin, years ago, that ought to have been the clue). The

strongest grandmasters are truly intellectual wizards. In certain positions with few pieces on the board, they can look ten or even fifteen moves ahead, accurately calculating and evaluating the entire intricate tree of possible variations. According to chess master Bruce Pandolfini, Lyman's regular guest on the PBS Fischer-Spassky broadcast and today a leading chess author, the deepest calculations of the world's best players are the equivalent of doing a Sunday *New York Times* crossword puzzle on one's head.

But to listen to Kasparov, the question of how many moves one can see ahead—a question which the world champion is asked again and again—is misleading and simplistic. The great player does not think only linearly. The highest art in chess takes place in the creating and evaluating of unbalanced positions—when, let us say, one player has less material than the other but his smaller army is attacking more effectively than the larger, when less is actually more. To conceive of such dynamic imbalances, according to Kasparov, a player must think of the game in three dimensions, and during the course of play continually invent and reject chessic constructions of enormous complexity and beauty. To do this, he must be something of an artist, trusting intuition and aesthetic judgment at least as much as raw calculating ability. “This is too beautiful to be true,” a grandmaster fretted to me recently, about an inspired middlegame tactic. He couldn't calculate whether the move was sound or only a pretty illusion. “Intuition and profound ideas win chess games at the highest level, not counting,” says Kasparov.

After the 1972 Fischer-Spassky match was over, I studied a little, and even tried my hand in a couple of chess clubs. But without the soothing voice of Shelby I didn't seem to be the same player. I couldn't rearrange the pieces in my head as Bobby could. Without Shelby's gentle nudging, I didn't know where to place them to initiate my attacks. After losing ignominiously one afternoon to a pimply adolescent who read the newspaper while I strained and sweated, I retired as an active player. I put my elegant wooden pieces on a top shelf and didn't touch them for ten years, until the afternoon my six-year-old son Josh begged me to take them down. That was the beginning of a great adventure in my life.

As fate would have it, my three-foot son could see where his father was blind. Within days, it was clear that Josh could calculate more quickly and more accurately than I could. He had a sense of where to place his knights and bishops so that they worked together to make threats. Try as hard as I might, my pieces were simply here and there, weak isolated soldiers fighting to survive, while Josh's were helping one another and ultimately closing in on my king—it felt like my throat. Clever combinations played themselves out beneath Josh's dimpled hand while I strained to defend. Within weeks, my six-year-old was beating me and my friends, the same crew that a decade earlier had been ready to follow Bobby to the top.

Soon my little boy began to take chess lessons with Bruce Pandolfini and to play experienced adults in Washington Square Park and in chess clubs in New York. It was clear to chess masters who observed him that Josh was a special little player. By the age of seven, he was winning most of his games in scholastic tournaments. By nine, he was the strongest for his age in the United States, the winner of the national scholastic primary championship for third grade and under.

During the early years of my son's chess life, my emotional investment was very large, almost as if I were playing the games and not he. When Josh played poorly, I felt hopeless and absurd for having allowed, no, for having urged him to devote so much of his young life to a board game. But when he was inspired, sacrificing his pieces and mating elegantly, it felt as if Josh and I were shadowing Fischer and Kasparov and all the other great ones—Alekhine, Botvinnik, Capablanca, Karpov, Keres, Korchnoi, Petrosian—names that Josh struggled to pronounce, but which coursed through my head.

like old friends. While other fathers fantasized big-time careers for their boys in baseball and basketball, I dreamed of my son becoming a grandmaster.

Being the father of a chess prodigy was thrilling but also disturbing. By the time he was seven, I had started writing about the chess world in magazines and later in a book, *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, which chronicled my chess adventures with Josh and was made into a movie by Paramount. I had discovered that in the eighties in America, chess professionals were a tiny underclass, a group of brilliant men who could not support themselves at their life's work, and who, by and large, were not respected for their gifts of mind. The Fischer phenomenon had been short-lived. When Bobby retired to begin his dark political work, chess seemed to dry up in the United States. The chess clubs quickly shrank in size or disappeared altogether. Without Bobby, chess was no longer on television or in our national magazines, and many tournaments were played in out-of-the-way places offering the most meager prize funds, only a few hundred dollars. Whereas in Europe and the communist countries, top players made a good living and were sought out for autographs and venerated by fans as celebrities, the United States players simply couldn't make it, and some of our best were forced to give up the game in their prime in order to try to earn a living at something else. Those who continued to try to survive as professionals were bitter about their lot in life. When they couldn't earn enough from tournaments, some took menial part-time jobs and others spent their days in parks like Washington Square near our home in New York City, hustling games against passersby for a dollar or two in order to eat.

I suspect that such romanticism and excessive devotion to my son's chess would never have evolved without Fischer. I could never quite get over him. I kept thinking that Bobby would show up some day soon, cured of his problem, to stride onto a stage and contemptuously push ahead his king's pawn against this Kasparov fellow (who would ever have guessed that war-torn Yugoslavia, hideously dotted with concentration camps, would be Bobby's venue of choice for his second coming against Boris Spassky?). The idea of Bobby's crushing Garry Kasparov gave me goosebumps. At the time Kasparov was only a Russian name to me, and great as he surely was, I was convinced that he held center stage only because Bobby Fischer was temporarily indisposed.

Then Garry Kasparov came into my chess life. On Monday, February 22, 1988, the world champion visited the South Bronx to play a simultaneous exhibition against fifty-nine school kids, to promote the introduction of chess into the public school system by the newly-created Manhattan Chess School. The gym of P.S. 132 was near-bursting with little players and their parents readying cameras for Kasparov, who was late. There was considerable media interest in the world champion's first appearance in the United States. Scores of serious-looking journalists from New York papers and national magazines vied with TV crews from the three networks and several cable channels for interviews with nervous kids. Shelby Lyman, bathed in lights, grayer and a little more portly than during those Bobby Fischer afternoons, was angling with one of the organizers for an interview with the world champion. At least for this afternoon, chess was big-time again.

Kasparov came into the gymnasium surrounded by an austere group of men—his business manager and several friends from the Russian-American community—but at the time I didn't know who they were. Their faces were joyless, all business, as was his, and I fancied that they were his bodyguards, maybe even KGB. Kasparov was solidly built, like a soccer player, handsome, unsmiling. He talked seriously for a few moments with the organizer about rules. He wore a stylish sweater and a green scarf hung around his neck, suggesting that the match against fifty-nine little ones would be over before it began and then he would be flying off to the chill and gloom of Russia to continue his inexorable struggle against Karpov and the Russian chess establishment.

During the introductory speeches, Kasparov looked distracted, bored. When the crowd applauded his smile was forced. ~~The man must be all chess, I thought, a hard core of chess variations and unbeatable ideas. No emotions, no love, no humor. In truth, I was not a calm and detached observer. For me, the events of that afternoon were distorted by years of thinking about all the great players and by my rooting for my son. Kasparov was the man who was maybe better than Bobby Fischer, and my kid, wearing a yellow and blue polo shirt, telling NBC News that he wasn't nervous, would soon be playing against him. It would probably be the only time in his life Josh would play the world champion. My heart was pounding in my ears.~~

The exhibition began and Kasparov seemed to explode from his detachment. He progressed from one chessboard to the next in a kind of choppy run, pushing his pieces ahead in a flash. The children had been instructed to move at precisely the moment that the world champion appeared in front of them, but he was there and gone so quickly that some kids, shaking with anticipation and worry, toppled their pieces trying to accomplish a move. Kasparov would re-create the position from memory and move instantly. He was all pace and action, banging a pawn ahead while looking at the next board, racing around the room grabbing material, his scarf swinging from his neck. He was tailed around and around by a jangling slew of TV sound booms, cameras and cables. Some of the kids became stag-struck when he stood impatiently before them, the forbidding attacker they had seen on the cover of chess magazines. They couldn't move, although they had decided what the move should be. Kasparov understood his effect and rapped hard with his knuckle on the table three times and said sharply "Move, move." When he hesitated at a board where the position had become complicated, everyone in the gymnasium felt this power stopped in place like a roped horse.

I shall never forget the moment when he first paused in front of my son. Garry bent over the board until his head was only a few inches from Joshua's, and then after about a half a minute he stood up straight and made a funny expression with the corners of his mouth turned down, what do we have here? Then he rocked from side to side, calculating, considering. The noisy gym became very quiet. What is Kasparov doing? He smiled a little and looked at Josh, who peeked up at him. Then he scratched his head and rocked some more, and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. Kasparov recognized that Josh had successfully fended off his attack and that their positions, after many moves, were equal. After that, each time he came around the room to Josh, he considered the board deeply, rocking, scratching his head, appraising Josh with an affectionate glance that said, a clever defense. This little kid is a player. After a few more moves, Josh offered the world champion a draw, and Kasparov accepted with a terrific smile. And after Kasparov had raced off from Josh, winning games with one hand while he scribbled autographs with the other, Josh pumped his fist in the air as if he had just scored the winning shot for his basketball team. The world champion won fifty-seven games and drew two that afternoon.

* * *

In October of 1989, I attended a party for Kasparov in the Upper East Side apartment of Olga Capablanca, the widow of the former world champion, Jose Raul Capablanca. This unusual place was crammed with chess players and well-to-do patrons of the game who hoped for a handshake and a word with the champion. Kasparov, who earlier in the evening had easily beaten the fifteen-year-old prodigy Gata Kamsky in an exhibition, spoke earnestly to Mrs. Capablanca. She was nearly ninety and wore red lipstick and a faded flowing gown from wonderful parties long ago. Doubtless, they exchanged words about Capablanca, who like Garry had been an unusually gifted prodigy, known for his uncanny intuitive play and lightning-fast vision of the board. There were other similarities between the two great world champions. Capablanca had been a moody man and, according to his

wife, had a talent not only for seeing deeply into a chess position, but for correctly predicting even in the future. Kasparov prided himself on the ability to predict political developments.

They talked for quite a while. Mrs. Capablanca held Kasparov's hand, and they seemed to be measuring one another, the champion perhaps looking for intimations of his future, the lady for a fresh scent of the past. I knew that she would tell Kasparov about the afternoon almost sixty years before when she had berated another world champion, Alexander Alekhine, Kasparov's favorite player, for refusing to give her frustrated husband a rematch after taking the championship from Capablanca ten years before. I wondered if the world champion would find her story quaint or disturbing.

Olga Capablanca peered into Kasparov's eyes as they spoke. What a bewitching beauty she had been. Sitting on an end table beside them was a photograph of her in the twenties, when she had looked like a young Marlene Dietrich. I wondered if Garry also reminded her of her first husband, a physical powerhouse, a horseman and adventurer, a descendant, she liked to say, of Genghis Khan. Like Garry, this dashing young man had championed the cause of Armenians. In the 1920s he had been a pioneer aviator in the Caucasus, and had eventually taken over the fledgling air force of Armenia at a time when the Turks had been slaughtering Armenians by the thousands.

Olga Capablanca's dark apartment, cluttered with relics from her storybook past, was a place chess luminaries visited to look at photographs of Capablanca and to try to know him through his wife and her stories. She sometimes said, coquettishly, that buried in her papers she kept a Capablanca masterpiece that had never been published, a private game played in the thirties between her husband and a top grandmaster of that time. Her husband had dedicated it to her, and Olga would not show it to anyone, a Rembrandt hidden in her closet.

But Olga had her own story to tell, and the Cuban world champion was but one chapter, though she pointed out softly, "I was with him until his last breath." I wondered if, knowing Kasparov's interest in military history, she had also told him about another of her husbands, Admiral Jocko Clark, commander of the Pacific Fleet during the Second World War. I got the impression that she loved Jocko a little more than the others. On the walls and end tables, along with photographs of the Armenian aviator-freedom fighter and Capablanca smiling calmly beside his chessboard, were many photographs and oil paintings of Jocko Clark aboard his warships: the admiral heroically turning off the lights, and thus risking submarine attack, in order to save his planes from running out of fuel over the Pacific; the admiral shaking hands with Admiral Nimitz at the signing of the peace treaty with Japan. Kasparov, with his passion for history, could not help but have felt the evocative and exciting mixing of memorable events from the past. However, he and the other guests could not have suspected that at Mrs. Capablanca's there was a contemporary subtext that was both a little sinister and sad.

Just off the living room where Olga held Kasparov in thrall was a door with a brutal-looking police lock. Behind this door lived a hundred-year-old man, Hamilton Fish, and his much younger wife. Fish had been a longtime United States congressman, best known for his political battles with Franklin D. Delano Roosevelt. According to Mrs. Capablanca, he had inherited a share of this apartment from his deceased sister, to whom he had been married. Mrs. Capablanca said that over the years she and Fish had become mortal enemies, and claimed that, among other vicious things, the congressman had discarded her treasured photographs and papers, and waited for her to die so that he could take sole claim to the apartment. She was tormented by Fish. She whispered—lest he hear—that the congressman's young wife had worked in a butcher shop before entering into this unlikely relationship. Mrs. Capablanca's home, this temple of fighting men, was also a battleground on which two feisty old people were making a last stand.

Kasparov had been in New York for several days prior to the exhibition and party. I had hoped to interview him, but each time I had called Andrew Page at the Regency Hotel, he had put me off. I approached the Englishman at the party and asked for an hour in the world champion's schedule.

Page's eyelids drooped with weariness from journalists asking him for Kasparov interviews. "They all think that they are so bright, that their point of view is bold and sparkling, but they all ask the same boring questions," he told me some time later, in his British drawl. He explained that it would be impossible to talk to Garry during this trip. Kasparov was much too tired, and tomorrow they would be flying off to Europe. His demeanor reflected the weariness of living the high life, too many five-course meals at Lutèce and the Four Seasons, too many Concorde flights sipping champagne. Oxford-educated, Andrew Page is suave, handsome and eloquent in the style of Peter Jennings. At the moment he also came across as slick, smart and unreflective. Over time, though, I learned that he is very thoughtful, and not infrequently stopped in his tracks by self-doubt, but that he enjoys portraying himself as a rake and power broker. Page is apt to dismiss a proposition as impossible and then upon reflection, embrace it as utterly wonderful. Whereas Kasparov is set in his points of view like granite, Page is buffeted by his own keen sense of irony—indeed, he sometimes appears amused by his own whimsicality and crumbling convictions, and perhaps that is what makes their close relationship viable.

Just when I was thinking that here was someone who controlled a piece of greatness and wasn't going to dole it out unless he could turn a profit, Page's musical voice stopped me in my tracks. "Why don't you have a word or two with him now, while he is standing around?" At that moment, Kasparov had finished his conversation with Olga Capablanca and was approaching us, looking haggard at the end of his long day, signaling Page that he was ready to leave.

It was difficult for me to introduce myself. Where to begin after so many years of thinking about chess world champions, and wondering particularly what Garry Kasparov might have to say about Bobby Fischer and whether he regretted having devoted his childhood to the game—questions that were at the center of my life. But mainly, I felt afraid of him. During the past half-dozen years, I had derived so much happiness thinking about the chess greatness of my son, planning for the day when he would become world champion. For me, much of the fun of Joshua's chess life had to do with my preposterous daydreams, and maybe that wouldn't work so well after knowing the real thing.

"Do you recall that two years ago you gave a simultaneous exhibition in the South Bronx?" I began with a clumsy beginning. Of course he remembered, he remembered everything. Kasparov tensed with impatience or perhaps with the anticipation of another person he didn't know asking for something: an autograph, an interview, a chunk of his time for a worthy cause. "My son was the eleven-year-old who drew against you."

"Your son is Josh?" he said, suddenly interested. "You should have come right over." I was dumbstruck. How could he have recalled my son's name from a twenty-second conversation and a handshake two years before?

We left the party together and spoke for perhaps fifteen minutes. What struck me most during our first meeting was the powerful draw of his concentration. For the most part, I asked him questions about Kamsky, the fifteen-year-old defector from the Soviet Union whom he had beaten in two games a few hours before. Kamsky's life was entirely dominated by his father's dream for him to become world chess champion. This remarkably gifted teenager was not allowed to go to school, so that he could study chess twelve hours a day, and his progress had been so stunning that many predicted he would someday be a challenger for the title.

I asked, "Does a father have a right to ask his young son to study all the time, to give his childhood to chess?"

"It is a kind of risk," he said. "Later you regret the lost childhood. I have regrets. But when I was very young I knew that chess would be my profession. I felt that there was no choice and my mother said okay. I needed chess like a drug."

Kasparov's face was flushed with emotion. "You must ask your kid," he said, wiping aside the

pretense that my primary interest was journalistic, a story I was writing about this other boy. “It’s up to Josh. If he feels very strongly about it, he will do it. For some, chess is stronger than the sense of childhood.”

The following spring I traveled with the champion to research an article for *The New York Times Magazine*, and Garry and I became friends. During the ensuing months there were many dinner walks, car, plane and train rides together, scores of late-night conversations, some of them emotional and for me thrilling. As we towed off in front of the red cliffs which border the South Beach of Martha’s Vineyard, just ten days before the beginning of Karpov-Kasparov V, I remembered that twenty years before I had entertained the fantasy of being friends with Bobby Fischer.

“On the white side, I feel I’m in very good shape,” Kasparov reflected. We had just come out of the frigid water after half an hour of riding the waves, switching off on his boogie board. The surf was up this morning, and Kasparov had attacked the breakers with a persistent seriousness.

“I only wish I could have spent another month training. I would have done more preparation with the black pieces.”

“Too bad you didn’t begin training in Moscow last January after Baku.” At the mention of his home in Azerbaijan, Garry looked as though I had struck him. His face grew dark and I could imagine his train of thought: Why are you talking to me about chess training? I have lost my home. Friends are dead or lost somewhere—I don’t know where they are. Why did you bring up Azerbaijan? Are you trying to ruin me? Kasparov pulled at his nose with his thumb and forefinger, as he does sometimes when he plays a chess position which is menacing and unclear. His prior good mood and optimism about the match were hard to recall. He looked out at the ocean, but I knew that he wasn’t seeing it. He said something or other, and he didn’t reply. We walked for about half an hour, back to the huge rented house set on a bluff above the water, without saying a word.

The world champion’s moods are very loud and entirely dominating. I have frequently seen his happiness cheer a crowded room. When he is alive with energy and ideas, I feel inspired to argue, listen or laugh with him. But his despair can make a friend feel entirely helpless and chaotic. When Kasparov is angry and brooding, the air around him seems thinner. Sometimes he turns his face away and won’t look at me, as if I had sinned, hideously sinned. At such moments, I would prefer to be anywhere else.

CHESS TRAINING AND GENOCIDE

Because Kasparov is a strikingly candid person, when he exercises reserve about an issue the effect is teasing. For the first year that I knew Garry, he wouldn't speak to me about his last days in Baku, and I knew only fragments about this harrowing time. Whenever I raised questions about the loss of his home, he became angry or silent or directed the conversation elsewhere. Then one afternoon in New York, months after Karpov-Kasparov V, he grimaced at my question, which over time had grown into something of a dare, a long oh-what-the-hell expression, and then he told the story with remarkable detail and craft. It was apparent that the events in Azerbaijan in late December, 1989, and early January, 1990, had darkly colored Kasparov's championship year. I have placed this recollection at the beginning of this narrative, long before he told it to me, so that the reader can feel something of Kasparov's state of mind as he trained and then played against Karpov.

* * *

"At the end of December 1989, two months after we met at the party in New York, I was in Moscow preparing to leave for Baku to begin my training for Karpov. However, my mother and I received disturbing phone calls from home. My aunts and cousins in Baku said that I shouldn't come: ethnic tension between Azerbaijanis and Armenians was building, it could be dangerous.

"I decided to go to Baku anyhow. I said to myself, These problems will never affect me. I am a hero there. Bad. Very bad. Sometimes being world champion makes a man lose perspective, as if he is above normal concerns. When I think now of this attitude, it makes me embarrassed.

"I left Moscow happy to be going home, looking forward to seeing my friends. I had spent much of the past year abroad giving speeches and exhibitions. I was mentally tired. I wanted to return to the Baku of my childhood. Maybe I didn't want to hear the bad news.

"During the past year, relatives of mine had been fired from their jobs, as had most Armenian friends. They were worried about violence and had decided to leave Baku. I had made arrangements for several to move to Moscow, for my cousin Eugene to transfer universities. But these problems seemed remote: their problems, not mine. I wasn't in Baku at the end of 1988, when Azerbaijani fanatics were chanting 'Death to the Armenians' in the streets. I wasn't there in 1989 when they destroyed an Armenian church. Of course I had heard accounts of the atrocities in 1988 against Armenians in Sumgait, forty kilometers to the north. But if you are far away, a pogrom is only a word. You must be there to feel it. I simply could not imagine my neighbors trying to harm me. Despite the fact that I am half Armenian by birth, the Azeris accept me as a friend—they take pride in my accomplishments. When I play matches they pray for me. I am part of that city and it is my heritage.

“But to tell the truth, the problems of the region weren’t very much in my mind. In the days before leaving Moscow, I had been embroiled in bitter disagreements within the GMA [the Grandmaster Association, the organization he had founded to improve the way of life of professional chess players around the world]. Also, throughout December, I had been attending meetings with intellectuals and political leaders in Moscow who opposed the direction of the Gorbachev government. My friends were cautioning me that I was thinking about everything but chess, and that Karpov would be studying without distraction. It was time to turn my attention to the match.

“There is a special sanitarium north of Baku that I have used for my training since 1980. I rent a block of rooms. Though a half year might pass between visits, my furniture, books and clothing are always exactly where I left them. I know every cat and dog in the place. There are doctors and therapists on hand for any problem. When I think of it now, this camp seems like a paradise. While studying, I can hear the steady sound of small waves and smell the fresh Caspian Sea, which is close to the buildings. The air is fragrant with olive, mandarin orange and pine trees. I concentrate very well there. When I need to relax in the afternoon, I take long walks along the beach.

“I planned for Baku to be the first of several training sessions for the match. Actually, it would be a pre-training session. Along with my team, I intended to devise a general strategy. We would look at some of the games Karpov had played during the past two years to see how his style had evolved since I last played him, and to get a sense for his vulnerabilities. In general terms, we would talk about which opening systems I should concentrate on for this fifth meeting. My regular crew was assembling at the camp. As always, my mother would be in charge. She has great wisdom and experience. She would establish schedules, maintain discipline and oversee the entire training session. Alexander Shkarov, who lives in Baku, would bring our computers. He has been working with me for fifteen years. Whenever I need to look at a game or an opening variation played years ago, he quickly finds it in our large data base. My friend Kadzhar Petrosean, also from Baku, would oversee many details, do some cooking and also provide a tennis sparring partner for my afternoon workout. The grandmaster Zurab Azmaiparashvili was driving from Georgia, and I was certain he had ideas to discuss with me about Karpov’s recent games. But we never got a chance to talk about them.

“When I arrived, Baku was a city of fear. All the Armenians wanted to leave, but it was hard to understand why. Nothing much was happening.

“My first day at the camp, the official ministry assigned two policemen to protect me, a major and a sergeant. I had never had protection before. These two carried handguns. They said that it would be wise for me to learn to shoot. Normally when I am in training, I run on the beach, swim or play tennis to increase my stamina for long games, but in the early days of this unusual training session I spent my time shooting bottles of sand on the beach. I became quite good at it. There were bad days ahead when I was thankful to have had this training.”

To appreciate Kasparov’s account of the events in Baku during the early days in January, 1990, the reader must understand a little about the history of ethnic violence in the region. In A.D. 301, Armenia became the first nation to accept Christianity. Under Tigran the Great, Armenia became a great power, conquering territories as far south as Palestine. Beginning in the eleventh century, however, Turkish peoples, who were fierce fighters, infiltrated the area, creating the Turkish Ottoman empire. Turks and Armenians lived side by side, but the Armenian ethnic composition of Nagorno-Karabakh, an area larger than Rhode Island in the center of what is now Azerbaijan, remained intact, because the fortresslike mountains were impenetrable to the invaders. In the eighteenth century, Russian armies operating against the Ottomans entered Transcaucasia, a bridge of land connecting Asia and Europe, which Russia coveted for military purposes, ending Ottoman domination of the region. Armenia

remained under Turkish control, but in the latter part of nineteenth century, fighting broke out between Turks and Armenians, who were impatient with Turkish rule, culminating in the massacre of a million and a half Armenians in 1915. Little notice was taken of it internationally. Kasparov pointed out with irony that when Hitler was warned in the thirties that genocide of the Jews would cause problems for Germany, Hitler remarked, "Who cares about the Armenian genocide now?"

In 1918, when the Turkish empire was being partitioned after World War I, an independent Armenia was created. In 1920, however, the Red Army invaded, and Transcaucasia came under communist domination. In 1923, Stalin drew the borders of the Transcaucasian states, giving the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which was eighty-five percent Armenian, to Armenia, but then reversed his decision later in the year, leaving Karabakh to Azerbaijan. Many believe that he created this and other border disputes with the hidden agenda of keeping the nationalities at each other's throats. Over the ensuing years, the Soviet government apparently found it useful to incite pogroms to quell nationalist impulses. When they were not manipulated by the Moscow government, Armenian and Turkic people got along quite well. "I can attest to this firsthand," Kasparov says. "To this day I still count Azeris among my closest friends."

During the Russian era, many Armenians migrated from Karabakh to Baku and Sumgait because of the oil industry and the opportunities of the modern city. The Armenians did not assimilate with the Muslim populations, but rather became a prosperous, highly educated class, holding large business interests and skilled jobs. Russia regarded Transcaucasia as a "colony." Many Russians settled there and it was natural for Armenians to become allies of the Russians, who were also Christian. In Baku the better-paid jobs were, by and large, held by Russians and Armenians. The Turkic peoples of Baku directed their resentment of Russification towards the Armenians.

"After the First World War, nationalist movements were stifled in the Soviet Union by ironclad communist rule," Kasparov explained. "That changed with *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The Karabakh Armenians were the first to exercise their new freedom. At the end of 1987, Armenians living in the Nagorno-Karabakh called for reunification with Armenia. At first, Moscow seemed sympathetic and then, following outcries from Azerbaijani leaders, the central government reversed itself and jailed Armenian leaders known as the Karabakh Committee. These men were seeking democratic rule as well as the reunification of Armenia. I believe that they were sent to jail by Gorbachev because they were demanding the end of communism in their country. Many in the Russian intelligentsia, including myself, signed a letter to support the dissidents. I might add, one year later, when I visited Baku in March of 1989, I was quietly threatened for supporting them. A group of local communists came and said that unless I repudiated my support, it might not be safe for my grandmother and cousins, who lived year-round in Baku. 'Don't you care about your family anymore?' they asked. 'Something could happen to them.'

"The tragedy of genocide struck Sumgait, a short distance north of Baku, in February, 1988. Before the slaughter of Armenians by Azerbaijani hooligans began, there were well-organized rallies, headed not by Azerbaijani leaders but by men who spoke perfect Russian and claimed that Armenians were killing Azerbaijanis in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. According to eyewitness accounts, drugs, alcohol and iron bars were handed out to the crowds from trucks. Despite what you might have read about in the West, there was nothing helter-skelter about this violence. It was a well-organized campaign. For three days, Armenians were beaten, raped and murdered throughout the city, their apartments looted and burned. The mobs knew exactly which apartments to come to. All evidence indicates that the pogrom was incited, not by Azerbaijanis, but by the KGB with the knowledge of Gorbachev. While the slaughter went on, Soviet troops stood by and did nothing. Then after the entire Armenian population had been driven from the city, the troops stepped in and slaughtered Azerbaijanis and afterwards declared martial law. Why did the Soviet central government participate

in this bloody charade? To stifle a nationalist pro-democratic movement. To maintain control.”

“In the beginning of January, 1990, while we were in the training camp trying to study chess we would hear reports about the mood in Baku, forty kilometers to the southwest. The central government was paralyzed; there were no services, friends called on the phone to tell us. Buses had stopped running. Newspapers, television and radio stations were seized by nationalists, so that it was impossible to get true information. Planes were still flying from Baku, but they were filled. There were no tickets to buy. Taking a train was dangerous. You had to pass through Azerbaijani territory, and if you were Armenian, maybe you would be dragged off; no one knew.

“Armenians were in a panic. They thought that something terrible was closing in around them. For months there had been a black market business which packed the possessions of Armenians in large containers and shipped them to Moscow. All of a sudden, this business was finished. Armenians feared that this was orchestrated, part of a sinister plot. Two years before, there had been two hundred and forty thousand Armenians living in the city, but after the Sumgait massacres many had left, and now the Armenian population was down to forty thousand. Only the weakest remained, old people, poor people who couldn't afford to move, pensioners, and members of mixed families, like my mother's younger sister, who was married to an Azeri. These people were anguished. Should they abandon their possessions and try to flee the city? It is very difficult to leave home with only the clothes on your back. People didn't know what to do. They were losing their minds.

“January thirteenth was a beautiful day. There was a rainbow hanging over the sea. I will never forget it. This was the day the pogrom started. Rumors reached the camp that Armenian apartments in the city had been taken by mobs of killers. Was it true? It was difficult to accept these reports. Genocide? It must be a mistake. This was the twentieth century. We heard the news report from Moscow which described some minor dispute between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. We spoke to our friends in the police and KGB, and they assured us that everything would be fine. There was no danger. Friends of mine in Moscow wanted me to return, but I decided to stay a while.

“Gorbachev was in Vilnius, Lithuania, talking about the new federation, how Soviets had wonderful times ahead, there would be new freedoms. What a charade. Gorbachev knew what was happening. I will believe to the end of my life that he was responsible.

“We received phone calls from the city, describing unimaginable horrors. Azerbaijanis were systematically burning the apartments of Armenians. Bands of men would come to a large apartment house and break down the doors of Armenian apartments. They knew exactly which apartments to come to. Neighbors watched while flats were robbed and then burned. Armenian girls were raped and burned to death. It was Sumgait all over again. Women offering their bodies to save their families. Armenian men, women and children were bludgeoned in the courtyard, while their neighbors watched in horror. An Azeri friend came to the camp and told me of one Armenian woman who was raped and then dropped from the window of her eighth-floor apartment. This happened very close to the boulevard square in Baku. Soviet troops were guarding the square, watching. They observed this murder and did nothing.

“Many Azerbaijanis tried to save their neighbors by hiding them from the murderers. Some did nothing. If you watch the police and the army stand by idly while murder is being committed, what would you do?

“Shakarov, my old friend, was in despair. His mother, brother, and elderly uncle and aunt lived in the center of the city. They were the only Armenians in a complex of two hundred apartments. They would be the target. He tried to reach them on the phone and the line was dead. He was certain that they were murdered. All day he lay on the bed crying.

“We heard from the city that the pogromists had taken the apartment of my aunt. Fortunately, she and her husband had left the apartment. They were living with my grandmother in an apartment rented by a relative who had married an Azeri man. His name was on the door, and this gave them a little safety. But the pogrom was all around them and they were terrified. My grandmother was seventy-eight and had lived her entire life in Baku. She had buried her husband here. She didn’t want to leave. She said, ‘Even if they take me, I don’t want to go.’”

“By now, of course, I knew I must leave, and I was trying to figure out how to save my family and friends. I chartered a plane from Moscow. The phone was ringing day and night. People I knew from the city were asking, ‘Save us. Please save us.’ Azeri friends were smuggling Armenians to the camp. Soon we had forty people living with us. Sleeping, crying everywhere. Everyone scared to death. It was very dangerous for the director of the sanitarium. Probably he would not have allowed us to come here, except that he had the same problem. His son had married an Armenian girl and he was thinking how to bring them from the city. Finally, I managed to get my grandmother to come to the camp. I lied to her. I said that later on we would return to town.”

“We found out that Shakarov’s family had managed to survive by a stroke of luck. When their door was beaten down by the killers, they happened to see a fax machine, which Shakarov mainly used for getting information for me from different chess tournaments. But for some reason the crowd decided that they had broken into the apartment of American spies. About that time, two of my friends from the KGB arrived, and one of them was very clever. He said, ‘Yes, yes, they are American spies. We are arresting them.’ My friends rescued Shakarov’s family from the killers. They took them to a small refugee camp and later to our training camp. But they had lost all their possessions—money, passports, everything in their lives. Soon after, these KGB guys and many others like them left the city. The situation was completely out of control. Baku was in the hands of the pogromists.”

“The night of January fifteenth was the most difficult time. I was playing cards with Kadzhar, my driver Kolia Garaev, and another chess professional who worked with me. Our two police guards sat beside us watching the game. About half past midnight, we got a phone call that killers were coming in buses to our district from the city. The pogromists had heard that the police were protecting some Armenians. I imagined them coming to us along the road I had traveled hundreds of times, the sea on one side, oil wells on the other. We kept playing cards. Everyone seemed to be pretending that this was not happening. But of course no one could sleep.”

“Some time during the night, I asked the major, ‘If they break in here, will you shoot?’ He didn’t answer, and so I dealt the cards to Kadzhar, we played a while longer. Then, I asked him again, ‘If they come, will you shoot?’”

“‘You know, I have a family. I have three daughters,’ he said quietly. He didn’t look up at me.”

“After a while, I said, ‘Will you give me your gun?’ He thought for a while, and then he answered, ‘If they come, you have to hit me on the side of the head. Make it look like you took it from me.’ It was like a scene in a gangster movie. He was a good guy and it was nice that he said he would give me the gun. Who knows if he really would have done it?”

“The crowd never reached the sanitarium. The explanation is quite interesting. The area north of the city is controlled by a kind of mafia who do a huge volume of illegal business in flowers and sturgeon caviar. This ‘fish mafia,’ as I call them, is powerful and well-armed. They have their own code of honor. They did not want the murder of Armenians taking place in their area. When they heard that the killers were on their way, they sent out patrols. The mob was intercepted, and when they saw guns they turned back. Of course the army could have done the same as the fish mafia, but it didn’t serve their purpose.”

“The next day, I drove to the city. I wanted to see my flat and maybe take a few things. I drove in one car with Kadzhar and an Azeri friend, and a special Azeri police car drove in front of us.”

supposedly providing protection. But as soon as we began driving, they sped ahead of us, way out sight. They didn't want to be connected to us. If we had been attacked, they wouldn't have known.

“Kadzhar wanted to go to his apartment to get some clothes, but when we reached his neighborhood we saw that most of the Armenian apartments had been taken. We decided not to stop. My apartment was one of the few that hadn't been broken into. It has a very strong steel door, and there were marks they had tried to pry it open. I told my friends that I wanted to collect a few of my most memorable things. They said, there's no need, you'll come back here when things settle down, but I knew I would never come back. So I took a few pictures of my mother and father, some of my chess notebooks from when I was a kid, a couple of my favorite works of literature, a chess set, a few prizes. We were there for an hour. It was a very nervous hour.

“The next day, January seventeenth, the plane arrived. The plan was for a bus to take my mother, family and friends from the sanitarium. But I was worried that something might happen along the road, so I went ahead to check. Near the airport there were troops and tanks, and after we passed we could see that the tanks had rolled onto the road and stopped. Nothing could pass by them.

“The airport was all chaos and panic. Everyone who had an Armenian member of their family, mother, a father, was trying to send them away, but all the planes were filled. Nobody knew what to do. Hundreds of Armenians were waiting for a ticket to go anywhere. They were sitting in a hangar waiting. At the same time, Azerbaijani nationalist groups were trying to send their fighters to other districts to battle against Armenians. Everything was out of control. Our chartered plane was on the ground, a small plane with sixty-eight seats, hidden among larger ones. But the crew wouldn't fly out. They were afraid. We got another crew. I convinced them to take us with money. Lots of money.

“I talked to a KGB man at the airport and told him that the bus with my family and friends was coming. I asked if he could help get them past the blockade on the road. He said, ‘Sorry, it's your problem.’ What to do? If the bus had been stopped, probably they would have been attacked by the mob. Who knows what would have happened? My mother and grandmother. All of my friends. It's better not to guess.

“Then the driver of our car remembered that there is a very old and broken road which leads to the airport. It is almost never used. You must open a gate to pass. I called the sanitarium and told them to bring the bus this way.

“The weather was very bad. It was cold and windy. It was about seven o'clock when they arrived. We were still waiting for some other people. Soon nine members of my family came from town in a small bus. Somehow they got through. It was pitiful. Two of them were very old. These confused and frightened old people were trying to take care of their granddaughter, a little girl born with Down syndrome. The driver of their bus was an Azerbaijani. A very brave man. If the bus had been stopped he might have died with his passengers.

“There had been many phone calls to the camp, and my mother was trying to figure out where people she knew might be hiding. Every time we called someone's flat, there was no answer or the line was dead. We had some free seats on the plane. Who to take? A terrible decision. Later some Armenian nationalists criticized me for taking my driver instead of someone else. It's bullshit. My driver is Armenian. He lost his flat. There are so many terrible stories. My driver often talked to me about his best friend, who was a dentist. Kolia had been staying in this friend's home before I arrived to begin my training. The man had a large house and was quite wealthy—maybe he did some shadow business, but he was a good guy. He was a perfect target for the pogromists. They came to his house and he called to them from his window, ‘Come on in. I will shoot.’ He had automatic weapons. When they saw this, they left him alone. The next morning the police came to this man's house and arrested him for illegal use of weapons. Can you imagine? Police, KGB, pogromists—they were in it together. I called the chief of police and asked the man to bring my driver's friend to the camp. The chief said

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