

## *The Final Word*

*by: York W. Porter, Immortalist Society President*

### **Bobby Fischer and Me.....**

Around 1964, give or take a year or two, I went by the home of a dear childhood friend. It was a beautiful and sunny day with the temperature “just right”. It was the sort of day that one gives thanks just to be alive. Sitting on the front porch of his parent's home, my friend had stretched out before him what I immediately recognized as a checker board. On the board, however, instead of the usual checker pieces which I, like every other twelve year old, readily recognized, were some plastic pieces in several strange and funny shapes. Clambering up the steps and looking down for a moment, I asked my friend what sort of game he was playing. In his response was the first time I ever recall hearing the lovely word “Chess”.

After watching him move the pieces several times as he was only playing a game against himself, he invited me to sit down and offered to teach me the game, or at least as much as he knew of it as he had not been playing long himself. For the next half hour I struggled to understand as much as my thirsty young mind could drink in. It sure was different from checkers and I tried to follow as he explained such facts that the pawns could move one or two spaces forward on their first move but only one space forward after they had been moved that first time. I learned what “castling” was and how your pawns, if they could reach the last row on the board, could magically become “promoted” into other types of pieces. Other rules followed and over that summer I began to “catch on” to what would, during my adolescence, be one of my most pleasant pastimes. The “Clintwood, Va. In-The-House-Just-Behind-The-Post-Office” chess club met on an irregular basis and in various locations ranging from my friends house to my house to just about anyplace else where we were otherwise bored to death.

It was a glorious time as I was growing from a boy to a young man and I look back with deep fondness on both those days and my dear friend. There is no way I can adequately thank him for that simple act of kindness in teaching

me one of the most outstanding games ever devised by the mind of man. Down through the years, the game brought me many hours of pleasure until, as I got older, the press of adult life gradually took over and my limited time meant that some of my pastimes would have to be put “on hold”. Even now I look, from time to time, wistfully at my chessboard, set up and “ready to go”, as its owner makes himself the usual promise of “Some day, when I get time....”

It was during those adolescent years that I first became vaguely aware of another young man, somewhat older than me, for whom chess wasn't just, as it was for me, a pastime, but an obsession. Robert James Fischer, to be known to the world as Bobby Fischer, was going to be recognized by some as the greatest chess player that ever lived. While my friend and I, in our adolescent fantasies, dreamed, among other things, of becoming great chess champions and while my friend did go on to be the “fourth board” at East Tennessee State University, no small feat in and of itself, Bobby Fischer was the “real deal”. Ruggedly handsome, he took on all comers, whomping other chess players, good and bad, with great regularity. For us chess was still a game, albeit one we loved very, very dearly. For us it was a way to escape the tedium of day in, day out life and the “unreasonable” demands of our teachers and parents that we learn the lessons in school which they so diligently prepared and paid for and that we tried to make something out of ourselves in the “real” game of life. For Fischer, chess was “war” and, as he put it in an interview later, “I like it when you break a man's ego”.

Later in his life, Fischer rose to more general prominence than he had among those of us who knew about the mysterious game called chess. In 1972 he took on Boris Spassky in a fight for the world championship. After many antics, including at least one time on which Fischer didn't bother to show up at all, he beat Mr. Spassky after several games. This was, for those that remember, a time when the “Cold War” was still a phrase in vogue and, to some

of us in the West, Mr. Fischer's victory wasn't just a victory over another grandmaster (the term for an expert player of the game). It was another example of beating the “big, bad Ruski's” at their own game.

This last paragraph gives me pause. It reminds me how easy it is to “dehumanize” people. I'm sure Mr. Spassky, who now lives in Paris, probably is a very nice man. On top of that, I look and follow, as best as I can, the efforts of our dear friends in KrioRus as they labor to insure that Robert Ettinger's world changing concept indeed becomes “world wide” in it's presence. It reminds me that, as my Mother used to try to teach me, people are just people everywhere you go.

Alas, Bobby Fischer, with all his great chess intellect, for whatever reason, couldn't seem to wrap his mind around that simple concept as easily as he could wrap his mind around some of the other intricate aspects of the great game of chess. In his later years, he descended into what I can only think of as madness as he began living in a world of paranoia with words spewing from his mouth that I could only ascribe to the looniest of folks I know. He applauded the attacks on 9/11. It turns out that he apparently had expressed anti Semitic remarks and thoughts throughout his career that many of us were unaware of. Near the end of his life, he expounded anti Semitic remarks that sickened me with their crudeness and vulgarity, let alone the basic stupidity of the position itself in any form.

Bobby Fischer, in spite of his intelligence, had a blind spot. For that matter, he had more than one. The world is much the same. It has a “blind spot” that has led to us not being able to push cryonics as quickly as we all would like. The good news is that, unlike in changing the opinions of someone like Fischer, who died a short while back, we are gradually, inexorably, and inevitably gaining ground in our fight to make this life saving concept a day to day reality. All of us in cryonics must continue these efforts. As I've said before, you don't have to do “great things” but just think about what contribution that you can make and act on it. It's too late for Bobby Fischer, for not for you and me and those that we both love and cherish..