

Book Reviews

BOSTON BOY. A Memoir by Nat Hentoff. Knopf, 1986. 176 pp. \$15.95.

Nat Hentoff is that notorious troublemaker who has, through a long and turbulent career in *The New Yorker*, *The Village Voice* and numerous other publications of a similar ilk, stood up for the underdog, gone into battle on behalf of civil liberties, and taken on demagogues of all persuasions even when it was plainly unfashionable to do so. And sometimes even dangerous. How in heaven's name did a nice Jewish boy get this way?

It wasn't from his mother who warned him never to trust the *goyim*; couldn't understand why a boy of 19 would ever want to leave home; refused, along with her spouse, to attend her son's wedding to a *shiksa*, and gave the general impression of being a disgruntled and defeated woman. Except that in her youth, the lady was a remarkable free spirit, an adversary of the status quo of her day. What changed her? Hentoff can only guess.

It wasn't from his father, a one-time haberdasher turned traveling salesman who spent most of his evenings at the card table. Although the elder Hentoff did have a well-developed sense of social justice. When his son organized a union in the candy store where he worked after school and the boss complained, dad told him off.

But the truth is that Hentoff, as he himself readily acknowledges, never felt really at home with his parents. Certainly not as at home as in the jazz club he patronized. And while he graduated from the prestigious Boston Latin School and at the top of his class at Northeastern University, his actual alma mater was the Savoy Cafe. The names of jazz luminaries are sprinkled throughout the pages of this memoir, but these folks are only partially to blame for the author's wayward beliefs.

Blame the environment, a radical Jewish enclave surrounded by sometimes hostile gentiles. Blame Frances Sweeny, Catholic editor of the muckraking *Boston City Reporter*, staunch foe of anti-Semitism and another of Hentoff's unofficial universi-

ties; she gave him his first job as investigative reporter (unsalaried, of course).

But a kid who will eat a salami sandwich on his front porch as his neighbors head off to *shule* on Yom Kippur, and then turn up in *shule* himself, is probably a born troublemaker. One of a whole line of Jewish troublemakers, which is, after all, a Jewish tradition, too.

Boston Boy, about growing up Jewish in Boston in the thirties and forties, is full of marvelous anecdotes unique to this time and place. (The chapters devoted to political boss Michael Curley — you can catch Spencer Tracy's version of the man in *The Last Hurrah* on the late show — are gems.) But in broad outline, the author's grappling with his ethnic and American selves, his struggle to forge an identity, is by now a sort of classic tale which whole generations can lay claim to. Hentoff's, however, offers an invigorating twist.

When, as a young man, he was taken to see Aldino Felicani, the legendary socialist printer told him: "You know, this thing of being for others, of taking apart the whole damn system, is for a lifetime. Or it's no good. People who work only in here" — he tapped his forehead — "they forget."

"I won't forget, Mr. Felicani," Hentoff promised, feeling foolish.

And strangely enough, he didn't.

— Isidore Haiblum

THE FIFTH HEAVEN. By Rachel Eytan. Translated from the Hebrew by Philip Simpson. The Jewish Publication Society, 1985. Originally published in 1962 by Am Oved. 444 pp. \$15.95.

Almost a quarter of a century ago, a very young novelist, Rachel Eytan, published a remarkable novel, *The Fifth Heaven*, that astounded readers and critics in Israel, as it related the story of childhood in a rapidly changing world of war, in a Palestine teeming with refugees from the Hitler nightmare and undergoing an explosive struggle for Jewish statehood.

As more and more children from broken homes required shelter and a chance to grow up, an increasing num-

ber lived lives completely remote from their dreams. In the early years of World War II, kibbutzim provided shelters as did Moetzet Hapoalet, the forerunner of Na'amat, in Palestine. Children's settlements and villages provided humane and loving treatment, but they were not able to absorb all of those who needed help, as many sources of funds from Europe were brutally cut off by the war. Meanwhile the needs rose overwhelmingly.

Rachel Eytan describes the less fortunate children who found themselves in run-down institutions, poorly administered and inadequately funded. Her ability to portray the lonely, tormented world of the seeking adolescent, the hurt and bewildered child, the cruelties and the premature sexual longings and aggressions is matched by her superb style, which is at once raw with realism and tender with poetic vision. Her opening sentence predicts what will follow: "It's a pity that we are not water. Water bears everything in silence." Truly, we are not silent throughout this novel.

We see and feel the children's home, The Fifth Heaven, through the young protagonist Maya. It is she who sets the tone with her unsentimental accounts of adult insensitivity and of the comedy of the "heretics and believers." As she accepts refuge in The Fifth Heaven, she accepts no compromise with what she sees, and the reader can do no less. Maya "plays the game" when she must in order to survive, and uses her ability to tell stories to deflect the hostility and merciless teasing of the other children. Maya understands that even malice must have its own innocence, and the stories provide her safety.

Some years ago at a Purim Ball of the New York Council of NA'AMAT USA, Rachel Eytan was the guest speaker. Some of us had read a few chapters from an earlier translation of this book. As Rachel Eytan prepared to crown the "queens," she movingly recalled the Na'amat child care centers and day-night shelters that have created a safer and happier world for children in Israel. Having spent part of her childhood in children's homes and her later years in Kibbutz Eylon, a border settlement, she spoke with affection and re-

Perpetual Scholarships

At his office in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Shimon Peres presented the NA'AMAT USA Perpetual Scholarship Fund Awards to seven women representing a cross section of recipients from all over Israel.

Attending the award ceremony were Rachel Israel from Lod, the only woman studying Nuclear Engineering at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba; Rena Shurdecker from Yeruham, a technician in Mechanical Engineering at Yad Singalovsky-ORT; Adi Ben-Yehuda from Ramat Gan, studying Molecular Biology and Genetics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; Orly Bendrihem from Kiryat Shmoneh, Chemical Engineering at the Technion in Haifa; Tamar Alon from Moshav Tomer in the Jordan Valley, Agriculture-Plant Cultivation at the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University at Rehovot; Amal Khanfi from Nazareth, Civil Engineering at the Technion; Ofra Storch from Mizpeh Rimon, Technical Education at the Technical College in Beersheba.

Over 600 scholarships were awarded to women students at institutions of higher learning this year.

Kinneret Weavers

In Shikun Daled, a poor and practically unknown part of Tiberias, ten women work at wooden hand-loom, creating one-of-a-kind wall hangings, shoulder bags, small rugs and vests. The way they manage their little industry is a model of democracy in business: The women organize their work as a group and decide among themselves as to who will do what, according to talent and preference.

The Kinneret weavers project, part of a neighborhood development effort, is run under the auspices of Project Renewal and Na'amat in Tiberias.

"Considerable thought was being given to the need for jobs for men, but the women in this area were being neglected," says Ada Mizrahi, who heads Na'amat in Tiberias.

"It was essential for the women to have jobs with hours suited to their family responsibilities and also for the

work to be satisfying," she explains. "When the course was first announced, 25 women registered, 14 started the six-month course, 12 completed it, and 10 are now working regularly. Not a bad record."

Women In Prison

Na'amat is reaching out to women prisoners through a rehabilitation program at the women's prison in Tel Aviv. Inmates receive training in skills necessary for reentering society and the job market, along with counseling by social workers and psychologists. The main objective is to help the prisoners increase their self-confidence. Upon their release, the women continue to receive help in a Na'amat program whereby they are "adopted" by families who have undergone special training and can help them adapt to a new life. There are a total of 99 women prisoners in Israel.

School for Politicians

How to run for public office and how to serve effectively once elected was the subject of a year-long course sponsored by Na'amat for Israeli women. The 40 participants recently completed this innovative course of study, which was conducted at Tel Aviv University.

"We expect that at least two-thirds of the women will become politically active, mainly on city and regional councils," says Chaya Cohen, chairperson of Na'amat's Ideological Education Department. They were chosen, she explains, on the basis of their leadership potential, education, appearance, articulateness and involvement in community affairs.

The students, ranging in age from 26 to 50, are factory workers, technicians, secretaries, teachers and other professionals, including a journalist and an actress. They were selected from among 250 applicants for the course, which was designed to speed progress toward Na'amat's longstanding goal of increasing the number of women active in Israeli politics.

The intensive one-day-a-week

course, given by the university's political science department, included instruction in organizational behavior, sociology, economics, political science, public speaking and speech-writing. A special feature was a series of seminars analyzing the individual styles of various political leaders in Israel and elsewhere.

An unusual component of the curriculum was made possible by the cooperation of nine women members of Israel's Knesset. During the second semester, groups of four or five of the would-be politicians were assigned to observe one of the M.K.s at work. The M.K.s, who discussed their Knesset activities and political experiences with the students, were Shulamit Aloni, Nava Arad, Shoshana Arbelli-Almoslino, Geula Cohen, Sarah Doron, Chaïke Grossman, Ora Namir, Amira Sartani and Edna Solodar.

The 40 participants in the Na'amat-sponsored course also engaged in public debates with various elected officials, among them Knesset Members Amnon Lin (on Israeli-Arab conflicts), Shevach Weiss (on parliamentary and constitutional issues), and Meir Shitrit, Mayor of Yavne (on municipal services).

"The students were highly satisfied with their instruction, and the women M.K.s were very enthusiastic about the program," notes Ms. Cohen. "It has been an extremely successful experiment, and we hope we will be able to make it a permanent part of our ongoing projects."

Girls Get Second Chance

Girls who have completed their army or national service but who for various economic or social reasons did not take the State matriculation examination will now have an opportunity to study for it. The *Bagrut* is a comprehensive test covering their 12 years of education.

A unique one- to two-year study program sponsored by Na'amat at the Beba Idelson Agricultural High School will prepare the students for the exam, which they must pass in order to be accepted into institutions of higher learning. The program begins this fall.