

**The
Real
Bobby Fischer**

A Year with the Chess Genius

Petra Dautov

Foreword by Dr. Frank Brady



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The Real Bobby Fischer
A Year with the Chess Genius

by Petra Dautov

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<http://www.russell-enterprises.com>
info@russell-enterprises.com

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Foreword | 7 |
| | |
| Part I | |
| Background | 12 |
| Chapter 1 Bobby Gets in Touch | 14 |
| Chapter 2 First Meeting | 23 |
| Chapter 3 Surprises | 27 |
| Chapter 4 Differences of Opinion | 39 |
| Chapter 5 Bobby as Tour Guide | 54 |
| Chapter 6 The Queen Mary | 77 |
| Chapter 7 Departure | 85 |
| | |
| Part II | |
| Chapter 8 A Nocturnal Call | 92 |
| Chapter 9 Comeback Plans | 96 |
| Chapter 10 Bobby in Wiesbaden | 100 |

| | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter 11 | Bobby Comes to Seeheim | 111 |
| Chapter 12 | Bobby at the Chess Store | 114 |
| Chapter 13 | From Hotel to Hotel | 119 |
| Chapter 14 | Bobby at My Home | 125 |
| Chapter 15 | Everyday Life with Bobby | 133 |
| Chapter 16 | Bobby Plans an Interview | 143 |
| Chapter 17 | Two World Champions in Seeheim | 148 |
| Chapter 18 | Endless Differences | 156 |
| Chapter 19 | Bobby on Chess | 162 |
| Chapter 20 | Unexpected Diversions | 168 |
| Chapter 21 | An Unusual Afternoon | 174 |
| Chapter 22 | Bobby on the Warpath | 178 |
| Chapter 23 | Change of Scenery | 182 |
| Chapter 24 | Bobby's Comeback | 188 |
| About the Author | | 191 |

Introduction

Much has been written about the *chess phenomenon* that is *Bobby Fischer*. But my personal experiences taught me that very little, beyond annotations of his chess games, came anywhere near the truth.

Some things in this book may seem implausible or exaggerated – but I can assure the reader that the events and conversations narrated here have been described truthfully and as objectively as possible.

Bobby Fischer lived in Germany for almost a year from April 1990; most of that time in my home town of Seeheim (approximately 15 km south of Darmstadt) and in the immediate vicinity. At this point I would like to thank all those who at that time knew where he was living and, without exception, did not disclose his whereabouts.

There will perhaps be some readers who think that my manner towards the *great Bobby Fischer* was not tolerant enough, and for that I would like to ask for their understanding. Even with Bobby I always strove to be candid – and as a result differences of opinion were inevitable.

Another comment on the publication of this book. Some of it I told Bobby about *before* its publication, other parts I only decided to include *after* he entered the public eye again. My most important reason for writing this book was to dispel the countless rumors that circulated about Bobby Fischer and which in most cases were completely divorced from reality. My intention in describing the experiences in this book was to show the human side of the chess genius and allow everyone to make up their own minds.

If any of these descriptions do not meet with Bobby's satisfaction,
then I would like to ask for his forgiveness!

Petra Dautov

Seeheim 1994

Foreword

From a literary perspective, it is difficult to categorize this book, *The Real Bobby Fischer: A Year with the Chess Genius*, since it is neither a biography, nor a memoir, nor an essay, but a kind of a remembrance in long-form non-fiction. It fits into a unique niche of the massive body of work of over one hundred books concerning Fischer which continues to grow every year.

Since a great deal of the book is written with extensive quotations between Bobby Fischer and his friend Petra Stadler, it has the flavor of a screenplay, and the result is a lively reading experience through the authentic dialog captured by the author.

A polymath who could speak six languages, Petra was a trained classical pianist and an amateur chessplayer and avid spectator at international and other high-level tournaments, where she had the opportunity to meet and befriend many chess personalities.

She tells how she, eighteen years Bobby's junior, met him through the encouragement of her friend Boris Spassky, and spent weeks in 1988 in Los Angeles getting to know him. Two years later, in 1990, Bobby was invited to Belgium through the largess of the chess entrepreneur Bessel Kok, to discuss a possible return match with Spassky. Thereafter, he travelled to Germany, mainly to see and continue his relationship with Petra. They would spend a year in the city of Wiesbaden and mostly in the little town of Seeheim, her long-term residence. During this time as constant companions they spent almost every day together.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the book are the glimpses into the continuous intransigence shown by Bobby concerning matters of deep import to him, such as his abhorrent anti-Semitism and openly racial intolerance, combined with a look at his behavior in what might be considered by others as trivial or even comical: for example, his ravenous appetite – he was always hungry – gulping down a large meal and again another one a short time later. Petra described his dietary preferences, the kind of clothing he insisted on buying and the type of music he preferred.

Bobby was relentless in expressing his opinions and simply would not, *could* not it seemed, ever give in as he stubbornly returned to the subject of whatever his interest was at the moment, over and over and over again. How she learned to handle the sometimes explosive situations, and put up with his constant arguments, is a study in patience. All of this is displayed in his rhetoric of continuous diatribe. She is no submissive companion to his rants, however, and as their relationship continued, she developed into a worthy combatant to whatever he offered or hurled at her. On more than one occasion, she demanded, *pure and simple*, that he must shut up at least for a full day. And he agreed...for a few minutes or so, and then he went right back to his arrogant dicta, totally ignoring her wishes.

Whatever difficulties they had in communicating, for the time they were together she became his confidante and aide, an unusual arrangement on Bobby's behalf. Normally secretive about his chess plans, he had a narrow circle of friends to whom he might open up but rarely did he feel he could trust. But to Petra he discussed such things as why he wanted to play for another championship match, outlined who he felt were his possible worthy opponents, one by one, and asked for

her input. And when he was offered a huge amount of money to be interviewed by the leading German magazine, *Der Stern*, she helped to broker the arrangement, which he ultimately and inexplicably declined although he was desperate for money.

At times she would act as if she was his mother, cutting his food, even in restaurants.

For those readers who like to learn about the personal habits of Bobby Fischer, there are other ample examples such as the speed of the way he walked, how he spent his time, the high volume of his voice even in public, and how he went from store to store, even from town to town, to find the *exact* object he wished to purchase. *Bobby Fischer would not be refused.*

A German language edition of this book was published in 1995 when Bobby was living in Budapest. By that time, Petra had married International Grandmaster Rustem Dautov and taken his name. It is altogether possible that Bobby read the book, as his facility for the language was sharpened after his one year of living in Germany. Spassky did read it and was appalled, as it exposed Bobby in an unpleasant light that could destroy their friendship, which had deepened during their 1992 match. Spassky sent a letter to Bobby saying that he regretted that he had ever introduced the two. Bobby accepted his apology and never spoke to Petra again.

The dialog in this book rings true simply because it is authentically chronicled by Petra and it confirms in many ways what we already believed about Bobby Fischer, and now hear from his own voice: a journey into inner darkness and alienation.

Dr. Frank Brady
New York City

Chapter 12

Bobby at the Chess Store

So one afternoon we set off for Rudi Schmaus's chess store in Heidelberg. We entered the store and initially could not see anyone else there.

"This is good," exclaimed Bobby, "we can look around in peace. There is nobody here."

"Not so loud," I hissed in horror.

At this moment in time, I could not imagine that someone would not recognize him – a tall American chess enthusiast wearing a suit from the 1970s. To our misfortune, an article had appeared in *Bild* magazine at the start of May in which it was reported that Bobby was staying in Germany. I had translated it for him while we were eating dinner in a restaurant in Seeheim, and he had laughed uproariously at the outrageous content. But then he became a little worried.

"Do you think people believe this rubbish?"

"Oh, don't worry. But it is terrible the stuff they make up. I would like to know where they are looking for you. If only they knew that you were sitting here comfortably, eating and reading their article..."

This also amused him, although he was still annoyed about the lies being spread about him.

Suddenly a voice piped up: "Are you looking for anything in particular?"

“Well...,” Bobby tried to answer, but I poked him vigorously in the ribs.

“For heaven’s take, be quiet!”

“Oh, sorry, sorry, I forgot.” I wanted the ground to open up.

We had not noticed that on the side of the shop opposite the entrance a few steps led to another narrow room that contained untold books. Evidently a lady had been sitting there the entire time at a desk on which the cash register also stood, and was very aware of our presence.

I explained what we were looking for and assured her at the same time that we could certainly find our way around on our own, as I had just discovered a book about Bobby – with an old photograph of him on the cover. Bobby saw the startled look on my face and took the book in his hand. That is going to make things worse, I thought. Apparently as an afterthought he put the book where it had come from, but with the cover photo downwards. I breathed a sign of relief.

For all intents and purposes, it was a very comical situation. If the owner had known the honor that was being bestowed on him... Fortunately, he seemed not to be here at all, just the friendly lady, who hopefully was even less inclined to consider who the exceptional guest could be.

“You see,” rejoiced Bobby, “Because everyone thinks I’m in hiding, I can even walk into a chess store. Even in America nobody recognizes me.”

“Even so, I’ll feel better when we’re back outside.”

However, even here we could not find a leather-bound magnetic chess set.

“Go and ask her,” Bobby asked me, and I hurried to fulfil his request before he got the idea of inquiring himself.

“Is no longer made,” was the unfortunate message I had to relay to him.

“That’s unbelievable. But Germans value quality.” He reflected, in a disappointed tone. “Then we’ll have to find someone who can make me something like this. You’ll have to sort that out. I’ll just buy a couple of plastic sets, then it’ll just be a matter of removing the plastic and replacing it with leather. Can’t be too difficult.”

“You don’t give up, do you?” Although sometimes I had a hard time with the fact that Bobby was not to be dissuaded by anything or anyone once he got an idea or opinion in his head, on this occasion I admired his perseverance. I was less happy about his stubbornness and intolerance with respect to his political views.

Another item on Bobby’s shopping list was a couple of pairs of shoes. Of course, not normal shoes, but “sturdy shoes, made of good leather.” Once again this was an area I was completely unfamiliar with, and one he knew a lot more about than I did.

“I’m looking for shoes like these.” He lifted up his enormous feet. What he wore was not exactly to my taste.

“These shoes have lasted a very long time, but now they’re slowly falling apart. They are Birkenstock shoes,” he explained to me. “They’re very comfortable and sturdy. I couldn’t find any in my size in Wiesbaden. Do you know a good shop here?”

I only knew “normal” shoes shops, and we had to look around. As it was drizzling, we trotted through Heidelberg at double-quick time, until I suggested in a disheartened tone. “Why don’t you try a pair of other shoes? There are nice shoes everywhere – and in large sizes as well.”

“But they are never wide enough. I have very wide feet.” I would not have realized that on my own had he not pointed it out. “If you always wear such wide shoes, your feet will not be able to get used to any others. They’ll just get bigger and bigger,” I tried to make a joke, but Bobby replied concerned.

“Do you really think so? You might be right. But I definitely want to buy Birkenstocks.”

You could have told him whatever you wanted anyway, as always nothing would have dissuaded him from his plan.

Finally we found a small shop with orthopedic shoes. It actually turned out to be very difficult to find shoes in Bobby’s size, especially since he only ever wanted to have ones exactly like the ones he was wearing. In the first shop we found the right design, but not in his size. In the second shop we found the right design and size, but not the right color. Luckily, I managed to convince Bobby that they were no less nice even so. So he bought these and a similar pair in the other shop.

Oddly enough, Bobby had the habit of always walking very closely behind his companion. This was sometimes rather uncomfortable, as collisions would occur sooner or later, in which I always drew the short straw.

“Don’t always push me like that,” I asked him finally. He apologized, but soon was back to his old habits. So, I had no choice but

to avoid him, which meant we had to move diagonally through the streets. Once we got to the other side of the road, I switched to Bobby's other side and the game continued in the other direction. From a distance it must have often seemed as if we were not quite sober.

Although Bobby now had the shoes he wanted, shops that stocked his preferred brand still had an almost hypnotic effect on him. In Darmstadt he subsequently managed to purchase yet another pair. He had the descriptions of the design of the orthopedic shoes from other companies meticulously translated and took the product descriptions at their word. Over the course of time, my English vocabulary was enriched with words such as "footbed," "natural cork sole," "air cushion" and the like.