

GURI LIE ZECKENDORF  
SPEAKS AT THE UNITED NATIONS MEDITATION GROUP  
(Tr. by Malika)

Guri: I always seem to be mentioned as my father's daughter, but I'm equally proud to be my mother's daughter. She was, I suppose you could call her more of a homebody, but she certainly contributed a great, great deal to the United Nations. She was more like Nemi's mother and Joan's mother. They preferred more to stay at home, than the official life. My mother hated having her picture taken. She couldn't stand it. You're going to see a video later, and, well, I stayed behind in the United States after my parents went back to Norway. I loved New York City. It had made me feel at home and I've never been an athlete. So as you'll see from the video, I was left alone. I had been my father's and mother's daughter. I had been treated like a little princess everywhere. And when my parents left, that May Day, I was down on the boat, which you'll also see, with Mr. Hammarskjold, and I asked him on the way back to the United Nations, in Norwegian, since of course he understood Norwegian, "Do you think you could lend me the car? Because we forgot to empty the safe in Forest Hills. Well, there wasn't that much in the safe, but my father had given me orders. And Mr. Hammarskjold was terribly kind, so he said, "Of course." So we arrived, as you know the front entrance there. In the car was Mr. Hammarskjold, two UN employees, and the chauffeur. Well the minute the car stopped the three ran after Mr. Hammarskjold and left me, all by myself, standing there. They were so eager, you know, the king is dead, long live the king. And so when he told them, I mean he saw them behind him, "Well, you're supposed to take Guri out to Forest Hills to empty the

safe." Well the chauffeur was very disappointed. He had to spend another few hours with me. And I remember, and I wrote to my father about that incident. And he said, "Well, that's what happens, you're all left alone in New York." But he said, "Do be a little bit patient with those people who are in such a hurry, because they have families to support."

Well, it had been very exciting in London when my father was elected Secretary-General. I was very, very excited of course. For me it was more just fun. For him the work started immediately, more or less. He was elected on a Saturday by a vote of 46 to 3. He had been quite well known beforehand, because as Norwegian Foreign Minister, he was - well, I'm very proud to say, fought 61 days after the Germans invaded ... the longest of any of the Allied countries. So when we came to London we were very well received. In addition to that, he had been very entrenched(?) in getting the Norwegian Merchant Marine over to the Allies. That was 30,000 sailors and 1,000 ships, which was quite, well it was extremely well received. But again, on his first day, that was on a Saturday, his first defeat was a very strange one. Well, I suppose bureaucracy - this was London, 1946, and 5 years of blackout. My father said, "Well, I'd like to celebrate." After he had to go to some dinner. "I'd like to meet Guri and her boyfriend," at a nightclub called 400, which was the most exclusive nightclub. "I've lived in London 5 years and I've never had time to go to a nightclub." That was February the 2nd 1946. While I was inside with one of my boyfriends, James Gilles, and I couldn't understand my parents didn't turn up. The following morning I got, we got the sort of sad news. He had arrived with my mother, Lady Guinness(?), but he was not wearing black tie. You couldn't get in without black tie. And her ladyship had said to this man who was sitting at the desk, "But



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don't you know who this man is? He's just been appointed to the most important job in the world." And the man said, "O, but your ladyship, you know you cannot get into the 400 if you're not in black tie!" So he did not, that's why they did not turn up. But that was a great disappointment.

But on the second day was something very important that happened. And I think that it's the first time it has ever happened in United Nations history. Because there was a Thanksgiving service in St. Paul's Cathedral, and everybody came. There were 1,000 delegates from all over the world. And they all knelt there beneath the great dome of St. Paul's to pray for the success, in their mission of establishing permanent world peace, and also for the present conference. I think it is the only time. And Mr. Ackley, he read the lesson. And there were verses from the second chapter of Isaiah, "And it will come to pass, in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's House, shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills. And all nations shall flow into it." Well, that was a beautiful service. I went with my father, and we got outside and photographers were all over. And the next day, the picture appeared in the paper. And I was too shy to smile. It didn't show me, it just showed the front. And it did not show that I was wearing a hat. In those days you had to wear a hat if you went to church. And I had actually worn, what you call in Norwegian a "Peer Gynt" (?) here you call it a skull cap. But it didn't show on the pictures in the papers. Well, the protocol office of the United Nations very gently said to me, "Don't you know you can't go to church without a hat?" Well, of course I knew, but it just didn't show in the pictures. And by my girlfriends whom I'd gone to school with, they were absolutely shocked. "How could you do such a thing?" And in addition to that, they said, "How could you have your picture in such an absolutely

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scad (?) sheet as the Daily Sketch?" You know, the press, I was not responsible for that at all.

So we arrived in the United States in March. Almost immediately we started to look for a permanent site. First the only thing was a few offices at Rockefeller Centre that had been used by the United Nations Information Service Organisation, it was called. Then we had a few rooms at the Waldorf Astoria. And then Hunter College, had decided, or condescended to lend the Security Council the gymnasium and some classrooms, and they put a roof over the swimming pool and they met there. Now, this was only months or two after my father had taken office. And I think that something that must be kept in mind, many people said things happened too fast in his days, but the League of Nations didn't have a meeting for almost two years after they went into business. So after one week here we were firmly established at Hunter College. And then they got a lease on Lake Success from July the 1st of '46, and I think they stayed, we were there until this the permanent Headquarters. To me it's always a miracle when I come here and see everything that happened, because there was absolutely nothing here at all when we first came. And fortunately my father had known, had been active in municipal affairs in Norway so he got on extremely well with the Mayor here, Mayor O'Dwyer(?) and was able to get the city - all this talk about money, it hasn't changed - he was very fortunate that the Rockefeller family could give 8 and 1/2 million dollars for this site, the US Government lent 65 million dollars, which went interest free over three years, which was quite an achievement. And the city itself paid 50 (15?) million to beautiful the area all around. And he was very happy when he could lay the cornerstone



here.

There were many things during his term that he loved, but particularly his 20 year programme for peace, was rather strong programme, and it included high level meetings of the Security Council to be attended by Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers instead of the routine delegates, a new attempt towards an agreement on international control of atomic energy, a fresh start on the problem of ... armaments, additional efforts to reach agreement on the UN forces ... the Charter, admission of 14 countries, rather universal admission application to the United Nations, and also general respect for the Specialised Agencies, and above all, to respect the Declaration of Human Rights which had been adopted in 1948. Well, it was received extremely well, but particularly I think the letter from Albert Einstein was the one that gave him the most pleasure. It came in a handwritten envelope from Princeton with a 3 cent stamp on it. It was written in German. I don't know what happened to the original letter I only have the photostat of it. But he did say, "I feel I must wish you luck and success with your great initiative. You are among the very few who amidst the bewilderment and confusion of our time has succeeded in keeping his vision clear, and whose urge to help remains undeterred by obstacles and narrow allegiances. May your concrete proposal succeed in showing us a way out of the present tension, occasioned as it is more by emotional factors than by material forces, and by providing a solution advantageous to all concerned, even relatively small successes in the direction of economic cooperation should soon improve and stabilise the political and emotional situation. As one of many whose thoughts accompanied you, with gratitude, Albert Einstein." That was received extremely well and published all over. But then this

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was in May, and then came when the North Koreans attacked South Korea. You all know that, so I won't go into all the details. The Korean Question had been on the agenda since 1947. And my father immediately called for a meeting of the Security Council, and he felt that the Charter had been violated. And it was unfortunate or fortunate, whichever way you look at it, that Russia was not on the Security Council at the moment. They had boycotted the Council because they wanted Chinese representation. And the first draft resolution to establish collective security was June the 25th. And I'm very proud of my father, something he did on June the 27th. They had a luncheon before the second meeting of the Security Council. And he did go up to Mr. Malik, the Russian representative, and said, "Well, why don't you come back to the Council?" In other words, communication in those days was so terribly bad that I'm sure something like this could never happen before. The Security Council had accepted a proposal by 9 to, well, one absence and the USSR(?) had abstained. However, it was collective security and 17 nations sent armed forces, and then field hospitals from Sweden and Denmark, and the Indians sent an ambulance. There were many other accomplishments I think during those days. One of the happiest ones was when Joan's father, Dr. Bunche, received the Nobel Peace Prize for his effort in Palestine. That was, we needed something to cheer us up in those days, after all the attacks on Korea and the Russians. But he became a controversial figure but he had a very clear conscience. He felt he had done the right thing, the Russians started to boycott him, and he just felt he had to resign. And as a matter of fact I have part, I have his original speech right here in front of me. When he resigned in '52 he said, "First of all I ask you to remember that I wanted to retire in 1950 at the end of my five-year term. I agreed to continue only because the



aggression in Korea created circumstances that put me under an obligation to carry on. Now I feel the situation is different. The United Nations has thrown back aggression in Korea. There could be an armistice if the Soviet Union, the Chinese People's Republic and the North Koreans are sincere in their wish to end the fighting. If they are sincere then a new Secretary-General who is the unanimous choice of the five great Powers and of the General Assembly may be much helpful than I could be. On the other hand, if the world situation should go from bad to worse, at least I would not want the position of Secretary-General to hinder in the slightest degree any hope of reaching any understanding that would prevent world disaster." And I think these were his honest and real feelings. He just felt that he - he was also, I must admit, a little homesick for Norway. He'd spent five years in London and then five years here. And for someone who loved the outdoors, he missed Norway terribly. But he believed in the United Nations, peace, and he just felt that it was better to try and get somebody else. And they did, they finally decided on Mr. Hammarskjold. And so now here I am standing after four more Secretaries-General succeeded my father. And I think the United Nations has done a magnificent job, and you can all be very proud to work for it. You are all contributing to world peace. Thank you.

MC: Guri, thank you very much. That was very interesting. Guri had agreed to accept a couple of questions, and I'd like to take the liberty of asking the first question. When we spoke on the phone a few days ago, and I said that we would start with a meditation, you expressed an interest, and you said that your father had an interest in meditation. I wonder if

you'd be willing to share with us what you told me the other day about meditation at the opening of the United Nations.

Guri: Well, he believed in meditation and he thought it was extremely important. You have a meditation room right here. During those early days, I mentioned the only time everybody has all gone to church was in London at St. Paul's. That was before people started to think about all these different religions we were just so grateful that we were alive. So he decided that they should have one minute before each opening of the Assembly.

Question: You mentioned that you don't know where the original Einstein letter was. Is there a collection anywhere in the world making public these statements?

Guri: No. His papers are in the University Library in Oslo, and also at the Ford office. And all I have of that letter is a photostatic copy. I wish I had the envelope too. It just disappeared. An awful lot of things disappeared at the beginning. I remember Chagall had sent one of my sisters a lovely, my youngest sister, a painting and somebody who opened the mail thought it was just a nut who had sent it - it disappeared. I wish we had it today. ... about those things. We just had an organisation that had to work, and we all had to work for it.

Question: The film we're going to see, where's it from?

Guri: O, the film that you are going to see, it's just a little film. I



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had a boyfriend called Jacques Levien, and on his first date with me, he was the editor of <sup>Pathe</sup>~~Pathe~~ News, and he had assembled clips, and when the Video Club asked me I said, well I could show you this film. I've had it around for 35 years. And they looked at it and they quite liked it, so we'll all see it now in a few minutes. Anything else?