

## About Sonia

(from Woman of Courage Tribute/June 6, 2010)

By Debbie Coltin

On behalf of Temple Ner Tamid and The Holocaust Center Boston North, I thank all the volunteers, family, friends and donors who planned, supported, and are in attendance of this wonderful event today. Most of all, we want to thank you, Sonia, for allowing us the privilege to honor you and to recognize your outstanding work in the field of Holocaust education and human rights awareness.

This event is a testament to the love and admiration people have for you and your work, and for both institutions that you love so much. People came from across our community and beyond to join in the celebration of Sonia, her work, and in support of Temple Ner Tamid and The Holocaust Center Boston North. A special welcome to Sonia's three children—Sandy of Peabody, Andi of Israel and Don of Texas, and to Sonia's extended family and friends--welcome. We are all so happy you could join us today to honor our beloved Sonia.

Sonia, modesty is one of your many virtues that make you the beautiful person you are. Your hesitation to accept this honor is a reflection of your personal philosophy that you do not do anything extraordinary--you simply do what was right. And, you are very smart, too. When our then-temple president Cliff Rucker met to ask you to be this year's honoree, you knew enough not to say "no". Not because Cliff cannot handle rejection, rather you knew deep down inside how important this event is to two organizations that mean so much to you, and which serve important roles in our Jewish community and beyond. As uncomfortable as you are, you handle all this attention with grace and humility.

Temple Ner Tamid and The Holocaust Center Boston North are blessed by your involvement in each one, so it was natural that together, both organizations embarked upon a successful joint fundraising event, the first of its kind for both organizations, and perhaps for the larger Jewish community. I believe we set a new standard for community collaboration today, and it is no surprise that you are at the center of it.

Sonia, you are a woman of many things-- a woman of beauty, a woman of hope, and a woman of courage. What makes you beautiful is your larger-than-life-heart, always offering words of praise, wisdom and understanding. When you speak, people listen. They listen because it is not just what you **have** to say that is important, it is how you say it. You use your gifts of giving words to the indescribable and of giving light to darkness to educate and to enlighten. You share unimaginable pain and personal suffering, not to gain pity, but to implore understanding to make the world a better place. You re-live those dark days so others will never have to. This is what makes you a woman of beauty.

Hope comes in many forms, and your poetry is a magnificent expression of hope. Though at times full of despair, your poetry has an air of hopefulness. Audiences are spell-bound by your words, and often left in disbelief by your experiences, yet, you end with a positive note, wanting those who hear to truly listen to the lessons of the Holocaust, and be full of hope that they can make the world a better place. It's not your style to hit people over the head with a list of rights and wrongs. You instill hope by challenging people, especially children and young adults, that their actions make a difference, for better or for worse. This is what makes you a woman of hope.

In my opinion, being a woman of courage surpasses them all. No doubt you are brave, Sonia, braver than most of us will ever be. Feisty? Yes, Sonia, you are definitely feisty. But what makes you a woman of courage is your ability to enable **others** to be courageous, by facing difficulty, danger or pain.

History shows that it is much too easy to be a bystander, and our young people today are constantly confronted with difficult choices. Sadly, bullying has taken center stage in our schools, making the vulnerable feel afraid and in danger. Your direct involvement in Holocaust education and human rights awareness over the decades enables others to find the courage to do what is right.

I say this because I speak from first-hand experience. A week ago, on Thursday, May 27th, at 2:15 in the afternoon, I was stopped at a red light on the corner of Mason St. and North St. in Salem. A young teen ran in front of my car, followed by two other teens, one of whom was yelling "faggot" and other mean names to this young man. In the middle of the intersection, I got out of my car, and approached the name caller, demanding that he stop, and challenging him to think about his behavior. I didn't care that drivers were honking their horns for me to move my car. I saw someone being victimized, and I had a responsibility to stop it.

You inspire me, Sonia. You taught me that I must be courageous and face difficult situations, which I did. Multiply the effect you had on me by tens of thousands, and this is the impact you have on the world. Sonia, this is what makes you a woman of courage.

Sonia, it is an honor beyond belief for me to present you with this award. As is true for everyone in this room, I love you, Sonia. We all do and we are proud and privileged to bestow this honor upon you today.