

THE SOVIET JEWISH EXPERIENCE

WASHINGTON STATE STORIES

Protest Power
Beth Huppín
Spokane '74



“I was in high school in Spokane in the early ‘70s, and I remember thinking that this could be the next Holocaust,” says Beth Huppín, who now works at Jewish Family Service in Seattle. “But what could we do from Spokane? Then we found out a Soviet delegation would be coming for the World’s Fair, and we thought, we’re going to tell them, ‘**Let our people go!**’”

“There was a rule that you couldn’t have any posters or signs on the exhibit grounds. So we put our message on T-shirts. We walked in the front door and out the back door and back in the front door in circles, and the Soviets thought there were hundreds of us! That was basically my job that summer, to go through the exhibit in my T-shirt every day as many times as I could.”

Later, Beth was one many students who went to the USSR to report on the treatment of Refuseniks. “In Vinnytsia, the first town we got to in the Ukraine, it was Chanukah. We knocked on the door and this guy answered and he said, ‘Shalom.’ He showed us, in his closet, a hatchet. There’d been a pogrom in the next village and he wanted to be able to protect his family. This was the kind of fear that people were living with. They couldn’t buy a menorah, so he had a piece of wood with coins on it, and he had candles but he didn’t know the blessings, so we taught them the blessings.

“When I called home, the first thing I said to my dad was, ‘Tell grandpa, thank you for leaving.’ They wouldn’t let these people go because if they let the Jews out everyone would want to leave. And that’s exactly what happened. Nobody wants to live under oppression. Humans want to be free.”

