

## Slava Aidov, USSR, PoC

1966

Amnesty International solidarity action supports prisoner's family

*In 1971, the wife and daughter of the political prisoner Slava Aidov unexpectedly received a letter from two Amnesty International supporters in England. This marked the beginning of a 15-year correspondence, which continued following the release of Slava Aidov from the Soviet labour camp where he had been held since 1966. Marina, who was eight years old when the first letter arrived, described the letters as "a sign that someone cared."*

Slava Aidov was arrested in 1966 for attempting to obtain a printing-press and print leaflets denouncing the Soviet regime. At a time when freedom of expression was strictly curtailed, Slava Aidov's attempt to obtain printing equipment and produce "anti-Soviet propaganda" led to him being imprisoned in a labour camp east of Moscow. Two days' train journey away, at their home in Chisinau in present day Moldova, Slava's wife Lera and small daughter Marina were living with the daily difficulties of being associated with a political prisoner, including being shunned by neighbours and having their correspondence intercepted by the authorities.

Marina was eight years old when the first postcard arrived. It was from 73-year-old antiquarian bookseller Harold Edwards and his wife Olive, and simply read "*With love from Newbury. Berks. England. Harold and Olive.*" The couple had learned about Slava's imprisonment and his family's ordeal through Amnesty International.

*"When the first letter came it was like something from another planet"* explained Marina Aidova, speaking to Amnesty International in 2006. Lera was on hunger strike in protest over her husband's imprisonment, and was very ill. To the wife and daughter of a political prisoner, *"these letters were a sign that someone cared"*. They began a correspondence with Harold and Olive that continued after Slava's release in December 1971 and lasted for 15 years until the elderly couple died. They exchanged gifts and wrote about gardening, holidays and families; anything that wouldn't result in the letters being confiscated by the censors.

In 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Marina finally got to visit the home of Harold and Olive in Newbury, England. *"We came to Newbury and walked in their garden, looked at the apple tree and stood where the letters had been written,"* she says. Many of the letters have been preserved in the Amnesty International archive, and Lera describes the families' correspondence as *"a gift of fate"*.

A collaboration between Amnesty International, Marina Aidova and journalist Anna Horsbrugh-Porter resulted in a book documenting the families' friendship. From Newbury

With Love was published in 2006, receiving wide media attention. In 2010, a cultural exchange took place between the Newbury Youth Theatre group in the UK and pupils from the Alecu Russo secondary school in Chisinau, Moldova. This exchange was part of the From Newbury With Love theatre project, which will see a theatrical performance of the story being staged at the Corn Exchange, Newbury, to coincide with Amnesty International's 50th anniversary in 2011.

information about the theatre production:

<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=598637786#&#33;/group.php?gid=107713515945610>