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Speaking Freely: My Life in Publishing and Human Rights

Robert L. Bernstein

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What do Dr. Seuss, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Andrei Sakharov, and James Michener have in common? They were all published by Bob Bernstein during his twenty-five-year run as president of Random House, before he brought the dissidents Liu Binyan, Jacobo Timerman, Natan Sharansky, and Václav Havel to worldwide attention in his role as the father of modern human rights.

Starting as an office boy at Simon & Schuster in 1946, Bernstein moved to Random House in 1956 and succeeded Bennett Cerf as president ten years later. The rest is publishing and human rights history.

In a charming and self-effacing work, Bernstein reflects for the first time on his fairy tale publishing career, hobnobbing with Truman Capote and E.L. Doctorow; conspiring with Kay Thompson on the Eloise series; attending a rally for Random House author George McGovern with film star Claudette Colbert; and working with publishing luminaries including Dick Simon, Alfred Knopf, Robert Gottlieb, André Schiffrin, Peter Osnos, Susan Peterson, and Jason Epstein as Bernstein grew Random House from a $40 million to an $800 million–plus “money making juggernaut,” as Thomas Maier called it in his biography of Random House owner Si Newhouse. In a book sure to be savored by anyone who has worked in the publishing industry, fought for human rights, or wondered how Theodor Geisel became Dr. Seuss, *Speaking Freely* beautifully captures a bygone era in the book industry and the first crucial years of a worldwide movement to protect free speech and challenge tyranny around the globe.

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William Pak:

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