

MEMORIES OF MY MOTHER

I am 88 years old. My mother died at 62. I have lived 26 years more than my mother. I attribute this to the fact that I was born in the US, and my mother was born in Romania. My mother saw to it that I had a nutritious diet, and a healthy environment, which she certainly did not have. My mother's parents were poor, and she was apprenticed to a tailor when she was 6. Not a day of schooling, until she found someone to teach her to read Yiddish when she was in her twenties. After she married, she went to night school to learn to read and write English.

My mother died in March 1951. A long time ago; longer than her life-span. She had looked forward to her retirement, to collecting her pension and social security, to visiting the new State of Israel, to seeing me married and to having grandchildren. None of that was to be.

The following are a variety of recollections. Some of them, I may have written about before.

RITUALS From my earliest days, perhaps as early as two or three, whenever I went to bed—initially, when my mother put me to bed—she would say to me “Shloff gezinterheyt” and I would reply “Shtey off gezinterheyt.” (Sleep well; Get up well. Or sleep in good health.) I suspect, in the early years, she would kiss me goodnight, a time-honored custom. And would you believe, she never kissed me on the lips. I am sure that she had heard that kissing on the lips transmitted germs, and she did not want to be responsible for making her little boy sick. (And that is why I have managed to live to 88.)

We continued the practice of saying “shlof gezint, shtey off gezint” to the very end. Through high school, college, and in the year that I was with the ILGWU. By this time, I was usually out late, my mother was in bed when I came home, but I would go into her bedroom and say to her, whether she was awake or asleep, shlof gezinterheit, and she would reply, whether she was awake or asleep, shtey off gezinterheyt. It became a sacred act. Early on, I may have thought something bad might happen if I had skipped this ritual. And I have tried to replicate it with my children.

I believe when I left the house, or went on a trip, my mother may have said, “Foor gezinterheyt, and Koom gezinterheyt” and I carried that with me, until today. This has turned into a family joke. When my children went on a trip, I would say to them, Foor gezinterheyt, (which they heard as four goes into eight) and they would reply “Two times.” A bit of a connection to their grandmother.

BLESSINGS Fran has, from the time David was little, said the traditional blessing of children every Friday night, after lighting the candles. She would place her hands on his head and say the blessing in Hebrew and English: Y'simcha Elohim...May God bless you etc. My mother would light the candles every Friday night, we would say Git Shabbes, and she would then serve dinner. No blessings. However, from the time I was

little, my mother would repeat her wish for me. I am sure she made it up. It was more humorous than religious. She said it so often, that it has become imprinted in my brain: “Mazel, brukha, parnussa, gedilla, khaye, veltn, un millionen mit geltn.” “Luck, blessing, income, prosperity, long life, the world, and wealth (millions).” It had a lilt, and it rhymed: veltn with geltn. I thought it was cool.

BATHING Another very early memory is of my being given a bath. I used to have a great time in the bathtub. I don't believe I had bathtub toys, no rubber duckies or boats, but a wash cloth and a bar of soap, and I made lots of bubbles. Initially, my mother washed me. Then I insisted on washing myself. But when the bath was over, my mother came in and insisted that I stand under the shower, to wash off the soapy bath water. She would then take me out of the bathtub, stand me on the toilet seat cover on which she had placed a towel, and dry me, with a warm bath towel.

When I became self-conscious, having my mother see me naked, I insisted that I would bathe and dry myself. I did not need my mother helping me bathe any more. And so when the bath was over, (I no longer played with soap bubbles), I exited the bathtub, minus the shower, and took a towel which I placed on the toilet, and a bath towel, and standing on the toilet, dried myself. It was a few years later that I realized that I did not have to stand on the toilet. I felt foolish, realizing that I was replicating my mother's actions, that people actually stand on the floor and dry themselves (which I have been doing ever since.)

READING My mother was an avid reader of the Yiddish newspaper, *The Day* (*Der Tog*). As I mentioned above, my mother did not learn to read Yiddish until she was almost 30. She told me that soon after the 1910 Cloakmakers' Strike, she took an active role in her union, Local 9, Cloak finishers, ILGWU. She was elected shop chairlady, and attended union meetings, frequently taking the floor and forcefully expressing her position. The meetings were in Yiddish, and her spoken Yiddish was impressive. After one meeting, another union member asked her if she was familiar with a writer whose position was similar to hers. My mother answered that she was not familiar with his writings. The next day, she found a “melamed,” a teacher, to teach her to read Yiddish.

From my earliest days, I never remember her being without *Der Tog*. Reading the paper every day was very important to her. We were in the “depths of the depression” but my mother bought the newspaper regularly. (I have a vivid memory of the newsstand outside each candy store, with the papers laid out: *News*, *Mirror*, *Times*, *Herald Tribune*, *Worker*, and the Yiddish and other foreign language papers. And the magazines!) My mother read her paper “from cover to cover.” This was the period of clearly, politically aligned, Yiddish press: *The Forward* was Socialist, *the Freiheit* was Communist, *the Morning Journal* was Orthodox-Republican, and *The Day* was New Deal Democrat. My mother pressed me to read her *Der Tog*, and would call different articles to my attention, but I demurred. Reading Yiddish was too difficult for me, so my mother compromised. She insisted that I read the English column by Dr. Samuel Margoshes, which appeared every day in the left hand column on the front page. Not only did I have to read it, but most of the time, I had to read it aloud to her.

RADIO Just as she insisted that I listen with her to Zvi Schooler, the Grammeister, whose rhymed commentary on the news, concluded the Forward Hour Sundays on WEVD. We shared a lot of radio listening from the first days of my mother's purchase in 1936, of this awesome invention. Radio had been around for several years, but what motivated my mother to buy one was her desire to hear President Roosevelt. He was our hero. And we listened spellbound to his campaign speeches and to his Fireside Chats. Everyone my age has fond memories of the radio programs of the 1930s and 1940s. A common refrain throughout my junior high school and high school days was my mother's reproach: "Don't do your homework with the radio on!" She was convinced that I needed to concentrate on my homework, and the radio was a distraction. She was right.

Early Sunday morning, I would listen to a couple of children's programs. I believe one of them was "Let's Pretend." At 11 am, my mother took over, and the radio dial went from 880 (WCBS) to 1330 (WEVD). At the conclusion of the Forward Hour, there was news in Yiddish, and at 12:30 pm we switched over to WEAJ for "The Eternal Light." Again, my mother and I would sit, side by side, frequently in tears, brought on by the dramatizations of Jewish historical and contemporary stories by writers like Morton Wishengrad. It was presented by the Jewish Theological Seminary. I had no idea what the Jewish Theological Seminary was, but I was deeply grateful to them for presenting it. Immediately following, was "The Lutheran Hour: Bringing Christ to the Nation" which we immediately turned off, and had lunch.

My mother and I loved Sunday evening radio, especially one dramatic, and three comedy programs. The drama was "One Man's Family" by Carleton E. Morse. It was high class soap opera, and we listened to it religiously, following Father Barber and his remarkable family. Real Americana. We hit the comedy jackpot Sundays with Jack Benny, Fred Allen and Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. When they were on, my mother listened with half an ear and resumed reading her paper. She got the jokes. She had a great sense of humor.

JOKES My mother was one of the few grown-ups that I knew, who actually told jokes. It seems contradictory that someone whose life was so hard—she frequently said, "mayn leybn iz azoi shver"—would nevertheless relate humorous stories. She knew the Khelm stories and Sholem Aleichem's humorous writings, and was the first to tell me that he was referred to as the Jewish Mark Twain. She loved Molly Picon, but was also critical of the slapstick humor of the Second Avenue Yiddish musical theatre, shund. Her favorite motion picture comedy performer was Charlie Chaplin.

Some anecdotes that she told me, I still remember. And others may come back to me. The first is about a little boy who needed his mother's help to urinate. (That is the premise of the joke.) Whenever he had to pee, he would go to his mother and say, "I have to pee." One day, when his mother was entertaining guests, he announced he had to pee, which she found embarrassing. She told him that, in the future, he should say, I have to whisper. And that is what he did. The following week his grandfather was visiting, and his mother was out. His grandfather was lying on the couch, when the little

boy had to pee. He went to his grandfather and said, as he was told, I have to whisper, and the grandfather said to the little boy, whisper in my ear. Ta da!

My mother also told me the origin of the name of the state of Massachusetts. Seems one of the colonists was exploring New England in the company of his loyal black slave. He was impressed with this land that ran from the ocean all the way west, and he asked his loyal black slave what the land should be called. His loyal black slave demurred, and said, "Massa choose it." And that is how, according to my mother, Massachusetts got its name. Ta da!

In 1916, the presidential election was very close. It was a hard-fought campaign. Charles Evans Hughes was the Republican candidate and Woodrow Wilson was the Democratic nominee. When the final results came in, one Republican turned to the other and said, "It's no Hughes." Ta da!

And then there is this story about me that she enjoyed: I was two or three. We lived on Beck Street in a lovely apartment. We had a telephone. I loved playing with the telephone. However, this was the time when there was no direct dialing. You lifted the receiver, the operator answered, and you gave the operator the number. On several occasions, the operator called our home to ask that the child not touch the phone. My mother told me not to play with the phone. I continued to play with the phone. My mother came up with the solution; she bought me a toy phone, and explained that this is my phone, the other phone is hers, and I should not touch it. Some days later, the operator called to tell my mother that the child was still lifting the receiver. My mother, upset, reprimanded me, and asked why was I touching her phone when I have one of my own. My answer: "My phone doesn't say, 'number please.'"

She also told jokes in Yiddish. Kiev has been in the news recently, and the following which is more of an aphorism, came to mind with the trouble in Ukraine and the constant references to Kiev: "A kee geyt tsum Kiev, un kimt fun Kiev, un blaybt a kee." A cow goes to Kiev and returns from Kiev and remains a cow. What was the context? It was a derisive observation regarding the nouveau riche and their luxury trips to Paris and London. To Eastern European Jews, Kiev was a large metropolis, and a center of art, culture and learning. A trip to Kiev by a seeker of knowledge would be transforming, but to a cow...

POLITICS My mother was very political, which always impressed me. It is clear that, in addition to my blue eyes, I inherited her politics, and I suspect she inherited her politics from her union. Or maybe, before. She left Romania at 16, and though there were the beginnings of a political awakening, I would suspect she was too young and too removed, to have been exposed to it. It is possible that politics—Marxism, workers' rights, anti-Semitism and pogroms, the franchise—were discussed by her fellow-"fees-gayers" as they walked across Europe to the ports from which they boarded ships for the New World. But what would an illiterate girl of 16 know of those things?

I do know that, early on, she had a sense of herself as a person, a Jew, a worker, a woman. Someone who demanded justice. No book-learning. She just had it, early on. That is why she joined the union, was active in the historic 1910 cloakmakers strike, was elected shop chairlady, and a member of the local's executive board. And when she married, and became a citizen, she also voted Socialist. Her early heroes were Meyer London and Meyer Berger and Eugene Debs. She also admired Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Blum in France. By the early 30s, being a realist, she looked to President Roosevelt, Governor Lehman and Mayor LaGuardia. She still admired Norman Thomas, but she considered herself a small "s" socialist.

The ILGWU was a "socialist union." Like my mother, it moved from Socialist to socialist. In 1936, it went all out for FDR's reelection, abandoning Norman Thomas. Knowing that a large number of its member would not vote for a capitalist party (and the Democratic party was a capitalist party), it helped form the American Labor Party. My mother became a loyal member of the ALP. However, by the early 40s, the Communists, as part of their popular front strategy, took over the ALP. So the ILGWU and the Hatters Union formed the Liberal Party. My mother became a loyal member of the Liberal Party.

I am not sure where her antipathy to the Communists came from. She obviously was familiar with their role within the internal politics of the ILGWU. They almost destroyed the union in 1926, but my mother was no longer a member. Nevertheless she must have read about the struggle in the Yiddish press. She also read about the rigged Moscow trials in the mid 30s. She felt that the American Communist party was more loyal to the Soviet Union than to the US, and this was confirmed by its initial opposition to "lend-lease," after the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed in 1940. When Hitler invaded Russia, the Communists became super-patriots.

My mother obsessed about war and killing. How could civilized people do such things? She supported Debs in his opposition to World War I, and she supported Wilson in his effort to have the US ratify the League of Nations. She told me that she had no faith that World War I would be the war to end all wars. However, if out of it came an organization that would settle disputes without people killing each other, it would have been worth it. Being opposed to killing, she was opposed to capital punishment. And she was opposed to guns. I certainly could not have a toy gun.

World War II was another story.

PHOTOGRAPHS The first photograph I have of my mother was taken in 1908 in Pittsburgh. She was seated on the arm of a chair, and another young woman was standing beside her, right hand on hip, and left elbow on my mother's shoulder. My mother had her left hand on her hip, and was holding a small bouquet of flowers in her right hand, on her lap. They were two very pretty young women. On the back was written my mother's name: Cilia Goldstein, and the other woman's name, Jon Orenstein (?).

This was followed by two photographs taken at Levin's Studio, 333 Grand Street in New York. My guess is that they were taken around 1911, or 1912. One was to serve as a Jewish New Year greeting, and my mother's hair was up. In the other photograph, my mother hair was down. It appears that my mother had become a big fan of the professional photography studio. Displayed prominently in our apartment when I was a child were two different large wedding photographs. The one I still have is sepia colored, 14 by 18 inches, in a polished mahogany frame. My parents look serious, my father in a dark suit and vest, a tie with a stickpin, head tilted toward my mother, who has a slight smile, bobbed hair, a dark dress with a scooped neckline and a lot of hand needlework. Their wedding in 1916 was not in a synagogue. There was no wedding dress for my mother or tuxedo for my father. They were married by a Rabbi. I have a copy of their Ketubah. Smaller copies of their wedding picture were mailed to family. There is another photograph of my parents, and over the next several years, photographs of my mother. She took a series of photos in June 1921, according to the date on the back. In one she is posed as a religious woman with her hair covered. In another, she is examining her hair, and in Yiddish she wrote, a gray hair? A third was labeled, In doubt.

When I was born, in December 1927, she was 39, which is quite old to have your first child. She had pictures taken a few weeks before she gave birth. It bothered me when she said she did not know if she would survive the pregnancy, so she wanted a record of how happy she was then. My mother did not want amateurs taking her picture. One summer in the mid-twenties, my parents went away on vacation and someone had a camera. My mother refused to have her picture taken, but fortunately the amateur photographer took one as she was reading her newspaper, and another with my father. There are several of my father in knickers.

When I was born, she went wild with picture-taking. There were photographs of my mother with me, and photographs of my father with me. And there were photographs of me in traditional baby poses every few months until I was one year old. Then every year on my birthday, until I was four. The depression hit when I was two. Still, we had to have a photographic record of my turning two, then three. My father died when I was three and a half. Still, my mother took me to the photographer's at four. Those were the last pictures, until I graduated from junior high, ten years later.

CLOTHES The early photographs of my mother revealed an attractive woman. She was short, 4 feet 11 inches, and weighed about 130 pounds, large busted. A pleasing face, blue eyes, a lovely smile. Initially, she wore her brown, wavy hair long, but when it became too much trouble, had it cut short. She had long fingers and fingernails. She told me that her ears had been pierced as a child, but she seldom wore earrings; only on special occasions. She loved necklaces. Her only ring was her white gold wedding band.

My mother knew clothes, and quality. However, she found it difficult to find clothing that fit her, so she made most of her own, both dresses and coats and jackets. She would visit Woolworth's and go through their various patterns, select one, and then go to the fabric store, and buy the necessary amount of fabric and the thread to match. Then followed several evenings of work. Though I did not admit it, I was impressed as she

laid out the fabric on the kitchen table after dinner, placed the pattern over it, and began cutting it. She did it skillfully. After the material was cut, she sat at her foot treadle Singer sewing machine and stitched the material together. Again, I was impressed by her ability to manipulate the material through the sewing machine, threading the needle, inserting the bobbin, working the treadle. The pieces came together.

My mother took out of the closet a figure that was supposed to look like her, on which she draped the garment she was working on, and then did the hand sewing. It never occurred to me that what she was doing was very difficult. A one of a kind garment, created for her figure: setting sleeves, attaching the collar, making the buttonholes, hemming, stitching, embroidering, and then pressing. Over the years, she worked her way through several thimbles, which she used to push the needle through the fabric. Her favorite was silver. My mother also made a coat for me, about which I have written. Most of the clothing that she made, as well as the clothing that she bought for herself or for me, was usually made or purchased in connection with a Jewish holiday. In the spring, Pesach, In the fall, Rosh Hashanah. In the winter, Chanukah. (The custom did not apply to Tisha B'Av in the summer).

One winter, she worked on a coat for herself. I was a teen-ager, and a know-it-all, at this time. And it was a period when I had become more and more embarrassed by my mother. I am not sure when I began being embarrassed. It is something that, over the years, I have become more and more ashamed of myself. First, I was embarrassed because my mother spoke with an accent. Then I was embarrassed because she was short. The fact is that almost all the other boys' mothers were short and spoke with an accent. This was compounded by the fact that she was an older mother, and that she walked with a limp. I have this awful memory of, whenever we went out together, I constantly walked ahead of her, and kept urging her to walk faster. How cruel!. I may have even been embarrassed by her always carrying a Jewish newspaper.

Back to the coat: She made a lovely winter coat, and found that she had some material left over. Being creative, she made herself a hat and a handbag. It was a terrific ensemble. I was embarrassed by it. I told her the hat was funny-looking. The handbag that she made was in the shape of a large envelope. Carrying forward with this idea, she embroidered a name and an address: Mr. December. The year was the street number, with a made up street name, and on the third line, New York City. She even embroidered a stamp. I shuddered, and did not want to be seen with her. I felt that store bought had to be better than home-made, and this had home-made written all over it.

AUCTION SALES I mentioned that my parents married in 1916, and as a newly married woman of the period, it would have been demeaning to my father if my mother continued working. She left the shop. My mother was a skilled cloak finisher, and an active member of Local 9. She had been both a shop chairlady and a member of the local's executive board.

She took a "withdrawal card" from the union, maintaining her membership, but not paying dues. She left the place which gave her an identity and where she was respected.

She became a homemaker. My mother had good taste, and she furnished her home with beautiful furniture and bought the finest Limoges china, 1847 Rogers Brothers silverware, Wearever aluminum cookware etc. I am sure she made my father proud. But after that, she had very little to do.

My mother told me (on the increasingly rare occasion that I listened to her) that she had learned about auction sales at this time, and was fascinated by the process. A great variety of merchandise (including works of art) were put up for sale, and people would bid on them. She decided to take part. In the process, she obtained a number of remarkable art objects, paintings, prints, sculpture, cut glass. My parents' home in the 20s must have looked like a museum. After describing the fun of going to the sales, my mother told me that she felt terrible coming home. Why? Because she was taking up space in the subway that really belonged to the workers who were returning from a hard day's work!

HEALTH Unfortunately, I only knew my mother as an "older woman" with infirmities. When I was four, she had a major hip operation. I did not know what was happening. She went into the hospital, and I went to stay with my cousins, Ruth and Arthur Kestenbaum. They had their hands full with their new daughter Barbara. Ruth's parents, Yetta and Beryl Goldstein, were living with them, as well. I called them Tanta Yetta and Uncle Beryl, even though they were not my uncle and aunt.

When my mother came home, she walked with a limp, and from that time on, had to wear corrective shoes. I remember a cane in the corner. But I do not remember her using it. What I do remember is her awareness of how important it was for her to keep walking. Almost every day, she would walk the length of our two room apartment. Back and forth; back and forth. It drove me crazy, as I got older. Pacing, pacing with her hands clasped behind her back.

Not only did she have a limp, she frequently had very painful gall stone attacks. I was told that it was brought on by something she ate. My mother would writhe in pain, and there was nothing I could do. Just watch her as she suffered, until it went away. I asked her about it when I was six or seven, and she told me that it was "gold stones." I could not get over the fact that my mother had gold stones inside her. I asked her if she would be rich if the doctors could take out the gold stones. Apparently, they could not, and she would not.

My mother's observation during the depression: Only the very rich and the very poor are receiving decent medical attention. My earliest memory of medical care for both of us was the Lincoln Hospital infirmary. I had no idea what ailments she had, but I know she went to the hospital frequently. We both had a hospital card, which I saw as similar to my library card. I visited the Lincoln Hospital less frequently, but that is where I had my tonsils taken out. There were a few occasions that required my mother to be hospitalized, and she always felt grateful for the care she received. Because it was the "Lincoln" Hospital, and it was the 1930s, the New York Department of Hospitals apparently assigned all its black nurses there. My mother was incredulous and delighted that a few

of the black nurses knew Yiddish. How wonderful, she thought, that they were able to communicate with the Yiddish speaking patients.

A SECOND MARRIAGE? Over the years, I have written dozens of pieces about my mother, and have told countless stories about her, but I have never mentioned that very brief period when I was 9 or 10, and a strange man and his son came to live with us. Whenever anyone asked me if my mother remarried, I say no. Perhaps I have been trying to repress it. I know it happened, but I really know nothing about it. I certainly don't remember my mother telling me that she is remarrying. All I know is that I came home after school one day and there were two strange people in my living room.

As I try to reconstruct the event, it is as if it took place in a dream (nightmare) that I put out of my mind and am struggling to remember. His name was Mr. Schoenbaum. I do not recall his son's name. His son was a few years older than me. I was told that they were moving in with us. Mr. Schoenbaum would be sleeping in the bedroom with my mother. His son would be sleeping on a cot next to me. How did this come about? I have no idea. Did they find each other through an ad in the paper; through a marriage broker? Did someone introduce them?

There was Mr. Schoenbaum and his son, with a valise and a violin case next to them, looking terribly uncomfortable and out of place. I was stunned, and said nothing. How did this happen? My mother never told me that she was considering marrying again. I know that when things were most desperate, she admitted that she thought of placing me in a home. But of course, she never acted on it. I was all she had, and she was all I had.

I guess Mr. Schoenbaum was in the same position. He may have lost his wife, lost his job, lost his home. Here was a woman who had a home—a two room apartment that rented for \$25 a month. If they joined forces, perhaps four can live as cheaply as two. I cannot remember what Mr. Schoenbaum or his son looked like. He certainly was taller than my mother, and his son was taller than me. All I remember was that I had almost nothing to do with either of them. I did not consider them my stepfather and stepbrother. I simply did not consider them. They must have done their thing, and I did mine.

And after what I imagine was a few weeks, they were gone! Just as they arrived. I came home and there were no Schoenbaums. All that was left was the violin in the closet. My mother may have acknowledged that they would no longer be living with us. And I may have acknowledged how happy I was that they would no longer be living with us. No discussion. Life returned to what ever it was before they came on the scene.

One more event from the dream: It was a Sunday, several weeks later. The doorbell rang, and in came Mr. Schoenbaum. He sat down at the kitchen table and entered into a conversation with my mother. Again, I have no idea what it was about. What I do know is that it was my job to dust the furniture, and I was in the middle of doing it. And as my mother and Mr. Schoenbaum were talking, I proceeded to wipe the dust off the chair Mr. Schoenbaum was sitting in, until my mother told me to stop and leave the room. That was the last I saw of Mr. Schonbaum. My mother and I never talked about it, ever.

NEIGHBORS I never thought of my mother as unfriendly. I was aware that she did not go in for small talk or gossip. She always greeted the people we passed in the hallway. But as far back as I can remember, there was only one neighbor who actually stepped foot into our apartment on Fox Street. It certainly was not always like this. My earliest memory of her friendship with a neighbor goes back to a visit we made to the lower east side when I was very young. It was an eye-opener for me. I had never seen a building like it. The woman was a friend from before my mother married, who apparently remained in the old neighborhood, Allen Street. We lived in an elevator house with heat and hot water. This was a cold water tenement, with the toilet in the hall. I remember how happy my mother's friend was to see her. I don't know if my mother made a return visit.

Another friend from her earliest days was Mrs. Nerenstein, with whom my mother lived when she came to New York. It was also on Allen Street. They were "lantslayt." I believe it was Mr and Mrs Nerenstein whose address my mother had when she left Vaslui. Mrs. Nerenstein was older than mother. I saw her as someone who my mother might have viewed as an older sister or an aunt. Coincidentally, the Nerensteins had moved to the Bronx, and did not live too far away from Fox Street. They lived a short trolley ride to Hoe Avenue, and we visited them often. A treat that Mrs. Nerenstein would always serve in the summer was a glass of seltzer with a spoonful of jam. As my mother and Mrs. Nerenstein talked, Mr. Nerenstein read the paper, and I played by myself under the table. Everyone was happy.

Two other neighbors who became friends, pre Fox Street, were Mrs. Getter and Mrs. Bortnick. Mrs. Getter was one of the few people who would visit my mother from time to time. Both women impressed me as intelligent, and sophisticated, and their conversations dealt with serious issues, not gossip. Mrs. Bortnick was someone my mother knew from 566 Beck Street, and she and her family moved to an apartment house around the corner from us. I remember Mrs. Bortnick's son Paul, who was a few years older than me. I enjoyed taking to him, just as my mother enjoyed talking to his mother.

However, there was no neighbor on Fox Street who became a friend. I began to wonder if it was because my mother did not reach out. Were her standards too high? I tried to encourage her to engage with my friends' mothers, but she refused. Clearly, she was a different person after my father died. Perhaps she withdrew. She constantly complained that she had no one to talk to.

The one neighbor who interacted with my mother was Mrs. Durst. She lived directly across the hall in B67; we lived in B63. She was younger than my mother, and was also a widow. She was also friendlier, and was American born. Mrs. Durst was also on relief. We had that in common. She was always up on whatever benefits were to be had by relief recipients, and told my mother how to get surplus food, and clothing. It was because of Mrs. Durst that my mother was able to get a winter coat for me. Mrs. Durst was a good looking woman, and also had a "friend." He went fishing on weekends and

he would frequently bring her large quantities of fish, mostly flounder, that he had caught, and Mrs. Durst would share it with my mother.

And it was Mrs. Durst who must have noticed on March 11, 1951, that she had not seen my mother for a while, and knocked on the door. When she received no answer, she called the police. They forced open the door, found my mother unconscious and called for an ambulance, which took her to the Lincoln Hospital, which is where she died. And it was Mrs. Durst who remembered that I worked for the ILGWU and was out of town, and called the union, to let me know that my mother died.

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