



Marcy Goldberg's story of

Reita



One of my earliest memories of my mother is how she would put in my contact lens (named “Mike”) every morning when I was three years old. How I would endlessly tell her, “I think I lost Mike,” whereupon she would search my eye and say, “look up, look down” until my eye would begin to water and she would say, “Don’t worry, it’s okay, Mike’s just taking a bath”. I would continuously lose Mike; my mother would continuously search. And inevitably she would find Mike. That is my mom – always there when you need her and doing whatever it takes for family and friends alike. When my mom was born she was given a Jewish name after her deceased grandmother. Since my grandparents spoke little English (having recently arrived from Europe to escape Russian pogroms), a family member suggested Rebecca as an English translation in order to register her for a Birth Certificate. Until she started school (age 5) she was always called by her Jewish name Reevelah. During the interim her Birth Certificate was lost so when the time came to register her for school the translated name was forgotten and a different name was used. She was called Reita. She did not discover this mix-up until she was eighteen. Reita with an ei not an ie she would often say. Born May 4th in Vancouver to Abe and Rose Gurevich, Reita was the oldest of three daughters. Though far from wealthy my mother grew up in a home steeped in lots of love and Jewish Tradition.

Her Father frequently went to the country to bring home live chickens for his family and neighbours. A “shached” (which is the Jewish word for a person trained in the ritual slaughtering of animals) would come to their house and in the basement slaughter the chicken in accordance to the Jewish law. In my Mother’s words: “It is very humane”. They would then hang the chicken by the feet on the clothesline, pluck the feathers and singe the pin feathers with a match. When my mother got married my grandfather continued to bring my mom a chicken every week. The job of cleaning the chicken took hours. Growing up I would often see on a Friday morning, before heading off to school, a kosher chicken bathing in water in the sink, in preparation for the chore of tweezing out the pinfeathers. By the time we arrived back from school the smell of a traditional Friday night dinner had taken over our house. We all appreciated the gift of a great Kosher chicken and my Mom would often say “They do taste different you know”.

My mom’s father peddled for a living. One day he came across a violin that would have fetched him a good profit. He had many offers but decided to give it to my mother who had never played one before. Immediately, at age ten, she began to take lessons and by the time she was thirteen she was teaching. Although she did not aspire to be a violinist she did enjoy the music and being part of an orchestra. By the time she was fourteen her best friend (a pianist) and my mom were asked to perform as the entertainment for various organizations – the Shara Tzedek Sisterhood, Pioneer Women, B’nai Brith. These would be for luncheons and special meetings. They would have to find their own way there and back and as a reward were often given an embroidered handkerchief – she still has a couple.

During the holiday of Purim honouring Queen Esther, a Jewess (unknown to the King) who saved the lives of her brethren from one of the evil advisors to the King, it was customary to have a contest among three young women for the title of Queen Esther for a year. 1950, the year my mom was asked to participate she won, much to the delight of family and friends.

On another occasion, my mom, who was in charge of arranging dates for a big dance, realized too late she forgot to get a date for herself. A friend remembered a relative who was not socially involved with any acquaintances and he graciously agreed to escort her. The rest is history. My mother married my father Myer Goldberg. “Dad, what does your name Myer mean?” “Mud” he would reply and I would laugh hysterically. Then my mom would say “ Oh, Marcy you have more nerve than Dick Tracy”. I just thought

that was so funny. Well, Reita married Mud at twenty one and they are now celebrating their 53rd wedding anniversary.

My mother's hobby of the violin was put on the back burner for ten years as she raised her family of five children. Her proudest accomplishment -: five creative children. Once the fifth child settled in school my mother took on a part time job which gave her the skills to manage her own business, a successful business that provided her children and their friends with part time jobs. My mom took over a well known gift shop where the owners were having difficulties making a profit. My mom subleased the store from 1985 -1989. During that time she took a little store with a spoon and a Canadian flag in the window and turned it into a growing concern. Under her wing this shop took flight. So much so that the owners decided they wanted it back. Despite how hard it was to watch my mom lose something she had worked so hard for, I was so proud, impressed and inspired by her business skills and ethics. I learned a lot from her and have been able to use some of those skills in my work.

My mom presently belongs to the Philharmonic Orchestra, a community group performing 5 concerts a year, and the Elgar strings that entertains at Senior Centers, Nursing Homes, Hospitals etc. throughout the year. A walker, bridge player, baker, golfer and active member in the community, she donates her time for various events. My mother – a wife, a sister, a proud grandmother of six amazing grandchildren – remains extremely committed to family. Growing up we too were steeped in Jewish tradition and culture. My mother maintains a kosher home and yes she makes the best chicken soup. To this day my mother's house remains the hub of Jewish holiday dinners and family gatherings. The memory of waking up to the sound of my mother's violin will resonate in me forever with a deep sense of family, comfort, love and creativity.