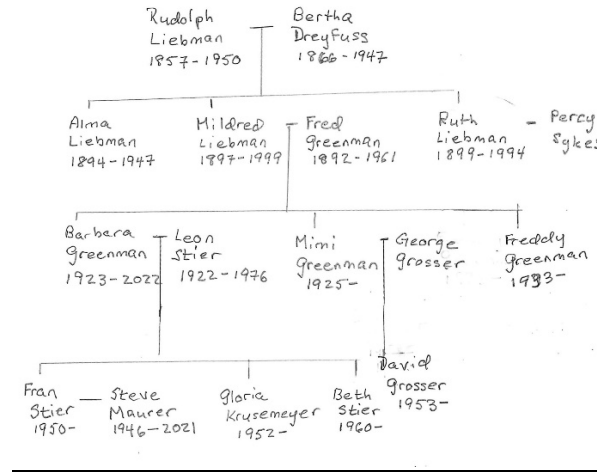


Mom – Barbara Greenman Stier Pollack -- died a year ago; I wanted to write down some memories. Here is a (crooked) family tree showing Mom, her grandparents & children.



Mom’s Family

I never knew much about Dad’s family, but I knew more about Mom’s. She wrote recollections and Mimi (her younger sister) wrote essays about her and Mom’s father, Frederick Francis Greenman (Fred), maternal aunt, Ruth Sykes, and childhood at 135 Central Park West.

The French passport of Mom’s maternal great-grandmother, Sara Aaron Dreyfuss, dated 1859, hung in Mom’s hallway (it now hangs over my bed). Sara Dreyfuss and two children travelled to Shreveport, LA, where her husband, Henry, ran a dry-goods store. Sara and Henry’s daughter, Bertha Dreyfuss (my great-grandmother), married Rudolph Liebman of Dallas, who ran a coarse-paper factory (coarse-paper meant boxes). They had 3 daughters: Alma, Mildred, and Ruth.

Mildred, Mom’s mother, is shown below in kindergarten, second from the right in the front row.



Here are the 3 girls in Colorado, where the family travelled each summer to escape the Dallas heat.



Rudolph Liebman was president of (Reform) Temple Emanuel 1901-1903 and 1904-1912; the family was very assimilated.

Mildred's family enrolled her in the Hockaday School; she was its first graduate in 1915.

(The Hockaday alumni office reached out in 2011 through Ancestry.com to learn more about its first graduate, sending social page newspaper clippings about Mildred's family, describing the dresses and flowers at each gathering).

The school faculty urged Mildred to enroll at Wellesley, two long days by train from Dallas. It was a big adjustment, but she persevered and graduated.

Fred (FF Greenman, Harvard 1914 Phi Beta Kappa, and Harvard Law 1919) was sent to Dallas by his law firm to represent a client, who introduced the young lawyer to Mildred, then a Wellesley graduate. They were married November 1921.

Grandpa came from a large, Orthodox Brooklyn family, Mildred's family was Reform, she knew nothing about Jewish dietary laws.

Imagine, then, her reaction when, shortly before their wedding, Dad remarked that she would have to keep a kosher house or his mother would never come to visit. The hysterical scene that followed set the pattern for our family relationships: no kosher household; no visiting paternal grandparents (my grandmother entered our house only once, at my wedding, and she ate not a bite). (from Mimi's essay about Grandpa.)

They saw much less of Fred's family in Brooklyn than of Mildred's family in Dallas. Fred was one of 7 children: 4 daughters and 3 sons. The sons were very assimilated; the daughters' families were Orthodox.

Once a year, for Pesach, Fred and Mildred visited Fred's parents for Seder. Mom remembers travelling on the El, looking into other households preparing for the holiday. Once in Brooklyn, Mom, Mimi, and Freddy were absorbed into the crowd of children and Fred was summoned to the kitchen to eat chicken livers, to restore his

strength from the long trip from Brooklyn. (70 years later, at a family reunion, the descendants of the daughters (who'd spent the day preparing the meal) remembered that Fred got the chicken livers, and their foremothers didn't).

Mildred and Fred set up housekeeping at 333 Central Park West (93rd St).

Mom

Barbara (my Mom) was born in March 1923. Her first memory was of men standing around her bed, debating how to deal with an ear infection, that kept her in bed for 3 months. Her grandparents came from Dallas to help care for her – not to do physical care – there were 2 in help for that – but for oversight. After Barbara recovered, Mildred & Fred went to Europe, with Mom's grandparents staying with her and Mimi.

Here is Mom aged 4 in Central Park, with Mimi



Here she is (at the front) in kindergarten, at Columbia Grammar school.



Mom started school at Columbia Grammar School (my only source is a photo in her album), and continued at Horace Mann, then a small girls' school connected with Columbia Teachers' College, at 120th St & Broadway.

Mildred and Fred belonged to the North Shore Country Club – both were avid golfers. The picture below is Mildred and Mom at the North Shore Country Club pool.



The family moved to 135 Central Park West in 1932 – they needed more space so Mom and Mimi, who fought a lot, could have separate rooms, and for Freddy, born that year.

Mom and Mimi remember Mildred as a somewhat remote and unengaged parent. They had much warmer feelings about Amelia Schabauti, from Croatia, who worked for years as the family's cook. The girls loved hanging out in the kitchen, tasting the food she cooked. Mimi, especially, spent a lot of time sitting on the deep kitchen windowsill, listening as servants from other households visited in the evenings.

Below is a picture of Amelia, from Mom's photo album



Mom remembers train trips to Dallas (a 2-day journey) to visit Mildred's parents, going to Rudolph's office at Texas Paper Factory, and playing with the adding machine. She remembers visiting Mildred's cousins in Shreveport, LA.

Mom was not an outstanding student. One of the stories she told about herself was having studied a Latin passage to practice translation, only to have that very passage show up on a test. She told her teacher that she'd already translated that passage, and the teacher gave her a different passage to be examined on. Mom and Mimi thought they'd taken the honorable course, but Fred was outraged, saying she should have taken advantage of the coincidence to get a better grade.

Fred was very competitive. "When we grew old enough to eat dinner with our parents", remembers Mimi, "he would often sit down, beam at us over the soup, and command 'Say something, we'll start an argument.'"

College

Mom applied to Wellesley in 1940 but was turned down, probably because of a quota for Jews. Fred was furious, and when Mimi, who had a stronger academic record, was applying to colleges, he insisted that Mimi apply to Wellesley as well as Radcliffe, where she wanted to go. Mimi was accepted at Wellesley, but turned them down for Radcliffe, and Fred felt vindicated.

Mom started college at University of Texas at Austin, but found it very Southern and social. She transferred to University of Wisconsin in Madison (neither Beth nor I remembers the reason she chose that school), and majored in sociology there.

Dad, a radar technician in the Army Air Corps, was stationed near Madison, at Camp Truax. They met in the Univ of WI Student Union and corresponded throughout the war.

After graduating from UW, Mom entered the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) – the women's Naval Reserve, formed to relieve sailors from stateside clerical jobs – in May 1944. Her discharge sheet, dated January 4, 1946, shows her as Yeoman 2c, and show her job preference as "Undecided – Secretarial"

Marriage

She and Leon had been married quietly in Washington DC in December 1945. Leon's mother was dying of breast cancer.



Mom and Leon lived at 135 Central Park West at first – Leon studying electrical engineering at City College and Mom working for the telephone company. They moved to Styvesant Town by 1949, and Mom took a masters in education at NYU.

They moved to Hicksville (a Levittown on LI) just before I was born in 1950. Gloria was born there in 1952 – she had colic those first months.

They moved to Glen Cove, LI around 1954, before I started kindergarten.

Mom volunteered with the League of Women Voters and we joined the North Shore Reformed Temple. We got a beagle named Star. (Gloria and I weren't very good about walking him.)

Gloria's speech was indistinct; Mom took her to speech therapy for years.

Mom had many friends in Glen Cove. She was especially close to a near neighbor, Mary Pepper, who was a math teacher (?) married to a physicist, who had sons Francis, Dickie, and Phillip the ages of Gloria and me. Mom and Mary were among the few Moms who breastfed their babies.

Here are Gloria and myself, aged maybe 4 & 6, in custom-made velvet dresses Mildred brought back from Paris. Gloria's was red and mine was blue.



Mom's and Mildred's photo albums for these years are full of standard school pictures of Gloria and me. There are pictures with friends, pictures at the beach.

There are pictures of me and of Mimi's son David in Craftsbury Common VT dated 1958, each holding a small fish (per Mom, David and I were holding the same fish).



Many years later, Mom said she had been considering leaving Dad. She had packed Gloria and me into the car, and driven to Mimi's summer house in VT. She didn't talk to Mimi about it at the time. In those days, before I91 was constructed, Craftsbury Common was a long, long drive, not lightly undertaken.

I can only guess what the issues would have been from Mom's later comments. Dad expected to be waited on the way Fred was (Mom said it was a pity they had lived at 135 CPW for so many years); he was prone to sulk; he wasn't good at explicitly arguing through differences. He also wasn't always truthful.

Beth (below) was born in June 1960. She developed asthma, probably a result of Leon's smoking.



Leon had joined a contracting firm, Duskin Electric, that was located on Staten Island in June 1959, and we moved in 1960 to Maplewood, NJ, to be nearer to his office. He was hospitalized for 10 days in September for diabetes and resigned from Duskin Electric in November. Duskin Electric did not remit employees' withholding taxes to the IRS in the last quarter of 1960. Legal proceedings over the nonpayment of withholding tax dragged on into 1966, when the IRS found Leon uninvolved in the nonpayment.

I was told Leon went bankrupt at that time, but I don't now think that was true; I don't see records in Mom's papers (and she kept everything).

Mom got a job teaching school in Montville to pay the bills. I was in 5th grade; Gloria was in 3rd. South Orange – Maplewood school district wasn't at all accommodating to working Moms in those days; students went home for lunch. Mom had to hire a housekeeper to take care of Beth and to feed us lunch.

Making friends in Maplewood was hard for all of us. We never developed the support network we'd had in Glen Cove.

Dad found a job in Manhattan, commuting by train and tube from Maplewood.

We joined Temple B'nai Jeshurun; Mom had to hurry back from work to take Gloria and me to Hebrew School (we complained bitterly about waiting for her). It was a huge, impersonal congregation.

Fred Greenman died unexpectedly in June 1961, aged 68. It was, of course, especially a shock for Mildred. Charlie, a friend of Freddy's, came to live with her at 135 CPW.

Mom and Dad often went into NYC with us to visit her. Some of my fondest memories are of family gathered in the library at 135, eating chopped chicken livers, with the grownups talking about the Con-Ed rate case (I guess Freddy was involved with it), and myself looking out the window at Central Park in the dusk.

When Mom was home, she always seemed to be carrying trays up or down stairs. She carried a breakfast tray up to her room for Leon, herself, and Beth. She carried trays down the steep basement steps for Leon to barbeque in the back yard. She used to dream of having a deck out back, so she wouldn't need to navigate the steps, but it never happened.

Dad loved to lead Seders, which meant Mom preparing the festive meal for every relative who could be lured to Maplewood. She also put on Thanksgiving in those years.

We often got Chinese takeout on Sundays—shrimp with lobster sauce and roast pork fried rice seemed exotic in those days-- eating it in the Sagamore Rd. library. Leon had a huge record collection – he loved to play Bach concerti on his hi-fi.

I don't remember 1965 very well. I got electro-shock therapy at Carrier Clinic. I was home for a couple of months. There were plans for me to attend one of the Devereux schools, but it wasn't very academically challenging. Then I was in the Institute of the PA Hospital, and I started at Friends Select in November 1966, which worked well for me.

Gloria kept running away from home. Mom would be called in the middle of the night to come fetch her. And then Mom had to get up and go to work the next day.

Beth's asthma kept her out of school for much of first grade.

I settled in at Friends Select, living first at the Institute, then at Rebecca Gratz House, then at Coles House (a boarding house for young women). I made academic honors and continued to the Univ of MI and then started a PhD at Univ of AZ.

Leon's first heart attack was in 1968. His diabetes had never been well controlled, and he had continued smoking. His legs had poor circulation; he had a series of bypass operations. He had congestive heart failure episodes. Mom nursed him through his many health problems.

I remember her telling me that she was thinking of leaving Dad. My reaction was pure, selfish fear. If she wasn't there, I would have to help take care of him.

He died of his 3rd heart attack in 1976, aged 54. Beth was 16 and in high school. Gloria had married and was studying at Stevens Institute of Technology. I was doing field work in anthropology in Panama and didn't get home until the day after the funeral.

Widowhood

In the year after Dad died, I remember a row of library books about widowhood on the window seat by Mom's bed. She went to a support group for widows and widowers.

She started going on Elderhostels. She retired from teaching and began volunteering as a docent at Carnegie Hall. She sold the house in Maplewood and moved into a townhouse in Roseland, NJ.

Mom was adventurous. She and Beth spent Christmas with me in San Blas. She and Beth travelled to the UK, and Mom drove (on the left!) from Edinburgh to the south of England. She came to Tucson for my PhD defense. She visited me in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, West Africa, bearing a snazzy calculator capable of running multiple regressions, and travelled with me to Ouagadougou, Upper Volta (now Burkina Fasso).

When Beth, now out of college, was between jobs, she and Mom spent a couple of weeks driving around Spain on winding, 2-lane roads. Beth remembers putting the wrong gas into the rental car, stalling out, and being unable to talk with the policeman because she didn't know Spanish.

When I came home from Abidjan (in August 1982) and wanted to marry Steve in October, she pulled together a wedding for 70-odd friends and relations, in record time, engraved invitations and all.

Sid

Mom met Sid at an Elderhostel at Peabody Conservatory around 1990 – they both loved classical music and travel. Sid divorced his wife. I teased Mom mercilessly about all the years before I was married when she insisted that boyfriends sleep on the living room floor. Steve's father, Ely, darkly hinted that Sid's ex-wife could sue Mom for alienation of affection.

A few weeks before Mom and Sid were to marry, Mom fell, broke her pelvis, and was hospitalized. Sid, undeterred, figured out a way for them to be married in one of the hospital meeting-rooms.

Mom and Sid rented a small apartment in NYC, across the street from Lincoln Center, then bought a larger apartment in Lincoln Towers. They travelled to Japan, Sweden,

France, and became Elderhostel Ambassadors. They were regulars at the Metropolitan Opera and the Philharmonic.

Over time, Sid's health declined, and he relied more and more on a series of Ghanaian health aides. Mom handled the scheduling. Sid died in December 2012.

Widowhood

The picture below is from 2013, at Mohonk.



Losing Sid was hard for Mom – there was no longer anyone to travel with or talk about her day over dinner.

Mom came down with C. diff in April 2014 and was hospitalized for weeks, but pulled through. Gloria, Beth, and I all hovered over her – she had frighteningly high white blood cell counts, and ate very little. She went through rehab at Amsterdam House (across from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine) and returned to Lincoln Towers.

Mom was confined to home with a foot ulcer for a month or so. In September, she traveled to St. Louis for an Elderhostel cruise up the Mississippi but came down again with C diff – Gloria travelled to stay with her & brought her home.

I activated Mom's Power of Attorney forms and started visiting every few weeks to rummage through the pile of mail, fish out the bills and pay them.

Mom was able to come to Swarthmore in 2015 for Thanksgiving – we were 17 in all. We all sat around the next day, digesting copious amounts of pie, reading, and talking. It was a beautiful weekend.

Mom told us about the Comma Queen (Mary Norris, of the New Yorker), showing up in her in-box, and we plunged into grammar: farther vs further, like vs as.

2016: She was back to her active self; we went to the opera and to Mostly Mozart. She came to Seder & Thanksgiving. She slid off her bed at the Swarthmore Inn, bruised a rib and hit her head, but soldiered on.

2017: Mom had repeated ransomware incidents. A problem because she relies on Fresh Direct for her groceries. Gloria finally got her a Chromebook, where software can't be added – v helpful. Mom had a cold at Thanksgiving, couldn't come to Swarthmore. She left the apartment less.

2018: We had a combined Seder & party for Mom's 95th in the social hall of a Russian Orthodox church where the priest (Father James) was born Yakov, grew up Jewish, and attended Yeshiva University. Food (not great) was from Zabars. But we were together and Mom was there – we did many tributes to her. Father James commented approvingly on our singing. Only in America.

TG was at a restaurant in NYC; Mom came.

2020: Mom's nursing agency was her lifeline through the pandemic. That and the Turner Classics channel. Kendal (the community where I live) had very strict quarantine rules about travel off campus – I didn't see Mom for months. When I was allowed to go, I brought Mom a webcam, and she figured out how to Zoom. Then we were back on lock-down.

2021: Once vaccinated (Feb), I could visit Mom, who signed many papers, notarized remotely. Mom fell in March, fracturing her lower femur. The trauma team at NY Presbyterian operated to repair it. Beth was with her; I'd flown to WI to see my granddaughter (born on Halloween) for the first time. The next months were full of COVID tests and visits to Mom in rehab. Mom got out of rehab in May – Beth rearranged furniture to make the apartment easier to navigate, but Mom, indignant, ordered the furniture restored to its original place.



Here is Mom with Inga, in August – Leon and Genya stopped in NYC on their way to Russia to see Genya's parents. Steve died later that month.

2022: Mom got weaker and had trouble walking. She was accepted into hospice in May. I had fractured a vertebra that April and could only creep about my apartment for weeks. Epidurals and PT helped. The last time I saw Mom was in August – she'd occasionally say a word or two. All I could do, really, was hold her hand. I spent a lot of September in WI, trying to help Leon and Genya a little after Stepan was born.

Mom died in October.

(from my journal)

10/16/2022 We buried Mom today. I was afraid we'd be only 9 at the funeral, but Ed & Eileen, 4 book group ladies, Eleanor Holtzman, Rosanne came, so it was a less paltry group than I'd feared. The service was short – ½ hr—Rabbi Sam sang the 1st 4 lines in Hebrew of the psalms and then translated. Her eulogy incorporated a lot of the things we'd talked about.

I was cramped in the back seat w/ So and Alex going to the cemetery – my legs hurt a lot getting out. Beth said, take an extra pain pill, which helped.

The graveside service was VERY short – one English reading and the kaddish. The workers had briskly lowered the coffin into the grave. We each shoveled dirt into the grave – the sound the clods make hitting the coffin is so final.

For you are dust and to dust you shall return (Gen 3:19. What DID people do before Google??)

I had to sign a form saying the grave was in the right plot before they'd bury Mom. (I signed a lot of forms that day). In fact, there were boards over the adjacent graves (the headstones were level with the ground)– I couldn't see to verify that one was Dad. Now, of course, I'm a little worried.

(I shouldn't have worried – when we unveiled her headstone, she was next to Dad.)

Closing: Mom was the kindest person I ever knew. She always considered herself last – if there was something that could be done for one of us, she would always do it.

There were terribly difficult years in the mid-1960s when I was acting out and Gloria was running away and Beth was laid up with asthma. It must have been very hard to keep going, but she did.