

Notes on Dad, 2014

Dad died 38 years ago; I wanted to write down some memories of him for Leon and Aaron.

Dad's Family

I never knew much about Dad's family. His mother, Frieda Schapiro, died of breast cancer (Dad always said it was bone cancer), before I was born. His father, Jacob, was very quiet, and died in 1966 (I didn't know it was suicide until 10 years later).



In 2018, my cousin Ronit Lorberbaum wrote me the names of this photo, taken Dec 15, 1922: The family used Katz instead of Stier as their family name, because their mother (Jetta) and father (Israel Menache Stier) had only a religious wedding, not a civil one.

Jacob Stier, Bertha Held, and David Stier had already left for the US.

Standing, from left to right: Betty (Yosef Hayim's daughter and later Shlomo's wife), Tzili (Salo's wife), Salo, Yosef Minster (Fanni's husband), Mordechi

Center row (left to right): Tzipora, wife of Yosef Hayim), Yosef Hayim, Israel Menashe Stier, Wollf, Regina (Wollf's wife), Klara (Moritz-Mordechi's wife).

Bottom row: Regina with Tutzia-Tamar, Shlomo, Sima with Ditta

The family tree is in Ancestry, called **Descendants and Relations of Max and Kate Greenman**

From Grandfather's naturalization papers, he was born 15 Feb 1895 in Rostoky, Bukovina (now Ukraine), a cluster of houses along the River Cheremosh that had a Jewish population of 160 in 1880. He left Hamburg and arrived in New York alone on the President Lincoln on 10 Jan 1914.

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He was “held for special inquiry” on arrival. He understated his age, hoping to avoid the draft for WWI (which caused him problems when he wanted to retire at age 65).

The 1920 census lists him as a boarder with the family of Jacob Lauber, in the Bronx. Jacob Lauber appears as character witness in Jacob Stier’s Feb 1921 petition for citizenship, which was denied because he was “not well disposed to our institutions”. Jacob Stier’s naturalization petition was approved December 30, 1926. He worked as an “operator” in factories making women’s dresses.

My grandmother, Frieda, was born Jan 8, 1901 in Kimpolung (also Bukovina, now in Romania, Jewish population 1,200 in 1900) and arrived in New York on July 26, 1913 with her mother (Babcie in some documents, Rebecca in others) and her brothers Leib, Herzel, and Moishe. On the 1915 New York census, the boys are named Leo, Harry, and Murray. Their father, Joseph, who immigrated in 1907, worked as a cloak-presser. Frieda is also listed in the 1920 US census as an operator in a women’s dress factory.

Frieda and Jacob were married June 18, 1921 – their wedding picture shows him in white tie and tails and her carrying a huge bouquet of roses, with a floor length veil.



Dad’s early years

Dad was born May 2, 1922. He was an only child.

The 1930 census shows the family in Brooklyn, but by 1940 they lived on Creston Ave, in the Bronx.

Dad graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School in 1939 and entered City College of New York, studying economics, and intending to be a lawyer. He used to tell stories about how students of different political persuasions each frequented different alcoves of the CCNY cafeteria. He was a Trotskyite until the Hitler Stalin pact; considered himself a Socialist even after.

He dropped out of CCNY – his Army separation papers show coursework at the New School of Social Research.

He was 6’ tall, with red hair.

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Kathy Manos and Linda London (cousins of Mom's) remember Dad teaching them a song from those days

Leon Trotsky was a Nazi;
Oh, we knew it for a fact.
Pravda said it; we all read It,
BEFORE the Stalin-Hitler Pact.

Oh, my darling, oh, my darling,
Oh, my darling party line;
Oh, I never will desert you,
For I love this life of mine.

Once a Nazi would be shot, see,
That was then the Party Line;
Now a Nazi's hotsy-totsy,
Trotsky's laying British mines.

Now the Nazis and the Fuehrer
Stand within the Party Line,
All the Russians love the Prussians,
Volga boatmen sail the Rhine.

He enlisted on Sept 7th 1942, was promoted to Tech Sargent, and served as a radar mechanic in the 37th Troop Carrier Squadron in Sicily, Naples, Rome, Normandy, and the Rhineland. Although he parachuted at least in his early career, most of his responsibilities were on the ground.



Dad's on the left

I remember Dad loved to sing “Up we go, into the wild blue yonder” in the car. He had a few Army stories – about the small water ration in North Africa, about finding himself in Sicily with canned rations but no can opener.

Mom and Dad met in Madison, WI in an elevator in the Student Union. Dad was at a nearby airfield for a radio mechanics course; Mom was in college. Mom remembers

My roommate was with me and she thought he was smitten with her. She went out with many men from Camp Truax..

They wrote to each other throughout the war.

Frieda developed breast cancer while Dad was overseas—he didn't learn of it until he returned in September of 45. She died a year later, aged 45. Jack remarried three months later, to Sophie, who we called “Grandmother”.

Mom and Dad were married quietly in Washington DC in December 1946.

Mom and Dad



They lived with Mom's parents and then in Stuyvesant Town while Mom worked for the telephone company, then got a masters in teaching at NYU and Dad studied electrical engineering at CCNY on the GI bill, graduating in 1949.

Mimi remembers Dad telling the family that Mom wasn't much of a housekeeper – he'd dropped a pair of socks on the floor and they remained there for some days. Mimi replied that if the socks bothered him, he should have picked them up himself.

When Dad first met Mom's family, he claimed he'd already graduated from college, Phi Beta Kappa. Mom's father ("Grandpa"), who had graduated magna cum laude from Harvard and Phi Beta Kappa, can't have been happy to find out Dad wasn't telling the truth.

Grandpa was a Republican, Dad was a Socialist. Grandpa had been on the Harvard debating team. His watchword was: "Say something. We'll start an argument". My recollection is that Dad wasn't quick in argument, that he got

tongue-tied and was prone to sulk, but I may be projecting myself onto my father.

Dad worked for Fishbach and Moore, in Manhattan on the UN building 1949-51. Mom and Dad moved to Levittown on Long Island when Mom was pregnant with me in 1950, and then to Glen Cove, further out on Long Island around 1955 after Gloria was born.

Dad made a set of doll house appliances out of blocks of wood, with pencil drawings and small screws for the knobs.

Gloria's speech was indistinct – she had years of therapy—it was hard for her.

Mom's and Dad's marriage didn't always go smoothly, even in those early years. Our photo albums have pictures of me (aged 7 or so) Gloria (aged 5), and our cousin David (4) proudly holding tiny perches we'd caught in the lake by my aunt's house in VT. I didn't know until years later that Mom had driven us up to VT out of frustration with Dad.

Mom got involved in the Glen Cove League of Women Voters, eventually serving as president, helped with starting North Country Reform Temple, was active with my Brownie troop.

Nanny and Grandpa (Mildred and Fred Greenman) rented houses on Long Island ("in the country"), near the North Shore Country Club (where they were avid golfers). Gloria and I stayed with them when Mom and Dad went on vacation – to Havana, Cuba, to Nova Scotia, to Bar Harbor, ME.

Life in NJ

Grandpa died suddenly in June 1961, of complications from surgery to repair a hernia.

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Beth had been born by then, and we had moved to a bigger house, in Maplewood, New Jersey, that was near the contracting business on Staten Island (Acme Electric) that Dad owned part of. Dad developed diabetes that year, the contracting business failed, and he declared bankruptcy. Mom started teaching in the Montville elementary schools to make ends meet (Dad always claimed she earned “pin money”).

Dad went to work for Jack Stone, a consulting engineer, on buildings for SUNY Genesco, and then for Slocum & Fuller on the IBM headquarters building in Armonk, NY. The commute to Manhattan from NJ in those days was long – a train ride to Hoboken, and then the PATH tubes to 33rd St.

We joined B’nai Jeshurun (a huge reform temple in Newark). I remember Dad teaching me the Hebrew letters out of a brown primer – baw, bah, bah, baw—so I could catch up with the other 5th graders.

After Grandpa’s death, Dad started leading the family seders, and switched from the Union Haggadah to a more traditional version, that included, for example, dipping wine out of our cups as we enumerated the 10 plagues. He loved Passover, he loved leading the Seders, but he couldn’t sing in tune like Grandpa.

Dad loved to grill steaks in the back yard—we ate lots of rare, red meat in those days. For Mom, cookouts meant carrying trays of food and dishes down a steep flight of stairs, through the basement, and out to the back yard. She longed for a deck, or a patio nearer the kitchen, but it never happened.

Beth remembers: Dad loved lima beans and tongue (yuck). Mom would cook separate dishes for each of us—I would get spaghetti and meatballs, Dad would have steak, and Mom would have scallops.

If we’d been in New York on Saturday night—we saw a lot of plays and concerts-- we’d stop in Irvington on the way home for smoked fish and bagels – I loved to watch the bakers scoop the bagels from vats of boiling water onto metal trays, and gather them onto wooden boards to bake. (From Beth): The best was using the bag of warm bagels as a pillow for the rest of the drive home. I remember spending hours on Sunday mornings sitting around the round, white, formica-covered table in the kitchen, eating and talking.

Dad would drive me (Beth) to and from the secular Jewish school I attended on Sunday mornings in Whippany NJ. (The curriculum included Yiddish, literature, history and music (including many Pete Seeger songs). One morning he hid presents for Mom within the grocery bags he brought home so that she unpacked the lox along with a gold chain and silver necklace.

Dad had a huge record collection, and loved to play classical records while we ate dinner. He loved Bach’s Brandenburgs, the Schubert Trout, Beethoven quartets while we ate dinner.

Dad’s office in Manhattan was near the Chrysler building. He’d take Gloria and me to the Automat, where for \$.65 you could buy franks & beans, milk, and apple pie. He bought his suits from a tailor in the garment district who made real buttonholes on the cuffs, and we got glasses at a Manhattan optometrist who’d known Dad for years.

Notes on Dad, 2014

The move from LI to NJ was hard. Mom, Gloria and I all had trouble putting down roots in New Jersey and finding new friends.

Working outside the home was hard for Mom; the schools in Maplewood required kids to go home for lunch. We had to have a housekeeper. Beth had asthma – Dad’s cigarette smoking can’t have helped—and had frequent bouts of bronchitis. In winter during kindergarten, Mom had to hire taxis to take Beth back and forth from school to home.

I saw a psychologist for years, then was hospitalized in early 1966 at Carrier Clinic, then came home for a few months (I’d had electro-shock therapy, which hurts short-term memory – I couldn’t deal with school), then was sent to the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital, then to one of the Devereux schools, then back to the Institute. At the time, they sometimes called it “adolescent adjustment disorder”, sometimes schizophrenia; I now think it was depression.

Grandfather (Jack Stier) had a prostate operation in 1966, and overdosed on sleeping pills as he was recovering, leaving Sophie a note saying he loved her. Dad never told my doctors about the suicide.

Gloria was hospitalized in 1969, and ran away from home several times. Mom bore the brunt of contacting doctors, finding placements, coping with our illnesses.

I started at Friends’ Select (a small, private school in Philadelphia) in late ’66, living first at the Institute, then at a half-way house, then in a boarding house for young, single women. I graduated in 1969 and went to U of MI (undergrad) and U of AZ (for grad school in anthropology). I was home only for vacations.

Dad always worried that I might not have anything to read. He was always giving me records – there was a box of Beethoven late quartets that I listened to over and over. One day, during my second year of grad school, my roommate gave me a ride to school. I didn’t put on a seat belt and went into the windshield when the car had to stop suddenly because someone ran a stop sign. I got 12 stitches. Dad worried and flew out to AZ to see me (a big deal in those days)—he wanted to be sure I saw the right doctors and got my hair styled to hide the stitches.



I never drove again without a seat belt.

Dad had his first heart attack in the spring of 1969. He (mostly, sort-of) switched from cigarettes to a pipe. He was pretty fatalistic, some ways. Per Mom, he would never wear seat belts.

From Beth: I remember his saying that he didn't need to save for retirement because he wouldn't live that long. I had worked hard to help him quit smoking and found a carton of cigarettes that I had hidden in my closet when we moved out of the

house in 1978.

Because Mom was teaching and Dad was self employed, he would drive me to doctor's appointments. I now understand his comments that it would be cheaper for me to take a taxi but I wanted him to take me....

Dad was a good ping pong player, but chest pain would interrupt the game after a few minutes.

He loved photographing water birds. We spent would make day trips to Brigantine (on the NJ shore) and he would take pictures of egrets and blue herons with a huge telephoto lens from the car.

Over the next 7 years, his health deteriorated. The diabetes affected the circulation in his legs, and he had two bypass operations to try to improve blood flow. He couldn't walk more than 1-2 Manhattan blocks before needing to rest and recoup. Commuting to Manhattan involved too much walking; Dad started working out of the basement of the house in Maplewood. There were hospitalizations when his electrolyte balance went bad, there were hospitalizations for congestive heart failure, there was another heart attack, then, finally, cardiac arrest while he was recovering from another operation to his legs.

I knew Dad was sick. I remember his internist, Dr. Cantor, explaining that he wasn't going to improve. However, it never occurred to me when I left for fieldwork in San Blas, Panama in August of 1976, that I wouldn't see him again.

Dad had given me his Brunton compass before I left, and Gloria had showed me how to survey with it, and figure out areas using double-meridian distance. Dad had given me three surveyors notebooks that I filled with sketches and calculations to figure out how much land my sample farmers cultivated. I can't bear to discard them, even after all these years.

Dad was 54 when he died. That seems so young to me now.

Notes on Dad, 2014

In late October, I was coming back from a day measuring fields and harvesting corn with my host family in Panama, when people came running up to me with a note that had arrived that morning from on the once-a-day flight from Panama City, that I should return immediately (it didn't say why). We thought perhaps the plane would make a special return trip for me, and waited in a canoe by the airfield for hours (the mosquitoes on land were fierce), but I wasn't able to fly out until the next day.

I had an Orthodox prayerbook that a man had given to me while I was in Panama City, waiting for authorization to start fieldwork – Birnbaum's Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem. I remember reading the funeral service over and over on the flight home:

Man is like a breath;
His days are like a passing shadow.
He flourishes and grows in the morning;
He fades and withers in the evening

I got home the day after Dad's funeral. I remember days of crying and talking and meals of smoked fish at irregular intervals. Mom had to buy me warm clothes. Neighbors took me on a Sierra Club hike, where I met Steve. I got his phone number so he could show Beth around Princeton (Steve maintains this was a transparent ruse; I maintain that was my sole motive).

I stayed home until TG, then returned to Panama for fieldwork.

I still get upset and cry in October, at his Hebrew-calendar Yahrzeit (4 Cheshvan). Mom and Beth get upset at his Gregorian Yahrzeit. He was terribly flawed, but we loved him.