



Rhoda Gitenstein Sumberg

I was born on the day the Prohibition amendment was passed in 1919, in Harlem at 111th street, right opposite the park. It was a very nice middle class Jewish neighborhood. My grandmother had a big apartment there --- she had come from Traverse City, Michigan, which is unusual.

George Gershwin played Rhapsody in Blue on her Steinway piano. My uncles were friendly with that whole theatrical crowd, but mostly they were friendly with Arthur Ceasar, the fellow who wrote Tea for Two. The temple that we belonged to was in Harlem; it's still there, a beautiful Greek temple – Temple Anshe Chesed. It moved to 100th street and we moved to the West Side where there were very few Jews at the time.

We lived in a nine-room apartment on 99th St. and Riverside Drive because my father had a thing; he had to see the water. So we always lived on Riverside Drive until we moved here to Larchmont. It was very elegant. Nine rooms darling. L shaped living room. Maids room, butler's pantry. In those days we had a kosher home, we all had live-in help, usually immigrant help. It was nice, I was lucky.



I went to Joan of Arc junior high school on West End Avenue, and it was a very different kind of education than we have today. Most of the teachers in New York were Catholic, from Hunter College. It was very structured. Let me tell you, it was wonderful. Growing up in NY was wonderful. The shows – I have a collection of Playbills from 1945 on. I can show you tickets for \$1.55. We called it Beggars Heaven. But it was very cultured, it was very manageable. You didn't pay for anything at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, you went for nothing. And it was the height of culture, it was wonderful, it still is. Living in NY and going to Hunter College High School, I had all the advantages. The high school made the biggest impression on my life. It was like private school. Small classes. Dedicated teachers. I was scared all the time. The first day I got there -- the French class – they were so ahead of their time. They taught the immersion

method. The first day I got in the classroom and the teacher spoke French, I said, “I’m leaving.” Of course, I didn’t leave.



It was a very nice neighborhood on Riverside Drive—where we lived. It was very Gentile, very nice, but very snooty. My best friend in the building was an Italian girl whose father was a psychiatrist. She went to parochial school. Her father sent her back to Italy because he didn’t want her to marry an ordinary American. Just the other day, I bought some candy in the supermarket called Turoni because that was what they used to buy during Christmas. And I wrote to her for years. She married a Fascist.

New York was very different. The West Side—Broadway—was very fashionable with dress shops, jewelry shops. The grocery stores were on Amsterdam Avenue. Growing up, the West Side became a nice Jewish community. Before that, I remember my mother going back to Harlem to go to the kosher butcher. I remember that very vividly.



My husband was in the service as a captain in the Air Force, based in Columbia, South Carolina. You have to remember during World War II the troops were segregated. Do you realize that? And officers lived in officers’ quarters—always a separation from the regular enlisted men. Bernie was the only Jewish officer in the group. There is a certain way of acting as an officer. I had to learn all that from my husband. You knew your place, as they said in the South about blacks. Very respectful. It’s a whole different world and I felt it very strongly. You were always reminded of the fact that you were a Yankee. We think differently than the Southerners.

A lot of the officers were Southerners and well educated, but even though they were well educated, the prejudice was there. I can remember going on the train once, to meet my husband somewhere and I was having dinner with a Colonel from Virginia. He was very nice. And I remember what he said to me, "I like my nigras in their place."



I was the first woman in my family to graduate from college. When we lived in Florida, I taught at the Niceville school. That was some job! Fifty kids in a class --- officer's children, enlisted men's children and the natives. If I could get them to sit down I was lucky. The principal would use a whip if they weren't behaving. He said that was ok. And he said, "Mrs. Sumberg, would you?" I said no.

I taught typing, and I taught English. The biggest mistake I made was to teach the difference between lay and lie. There were a bunch of wise guys in the class, and they couldn't care less. You have to understand the mentality of the locals there was very different than the children of the officers. It made it very hard for me and the other teachers. But it was an experience.

I took the school bus home with the kids. It was bedlam, bedlam, I'm telling you! You never saw anything like it.



I was very active at the Larchmont Temple. I was the administrative secretary, that's the job that they pay Ze'ev for now. I ran the office. I had to ask people who owed money to pay. I was very good at it. Dick Heller and I worked together. I would say I'll have to refer you to Mr. Heller and he would say, Rhoda. And I said I wasn't threatening anybody. I raised \$20,000 in back dues. I took a lot of abuse. People said awful things to me. I wasn't getting the money. I said, "We have to run a temple. We have to pay

teachers, we have to pay the Rabbi.” It’s not that people weren’t nice, it was just so unpleasant to ask people to pay their dues. “Don’t tell me how to spend my money!” But it was a wonderful feeling joining the temple at that time.

Rhoda Sumberg joined the Larchmont Temple in 1950. She started the drop-in lunch and shul shuttle. She appreciates the program *At Home on the Sound*, which she learned about through the Temple. Rhoda continues to drop in.