

Barbara Rubin



**Barbara Rubin at her
93rd Birthday party**

I was born in January 1930 at Chelsea Memorial Hospital, the child of two families whose journeys from Ukraine to Chelsea shaped my early life. My mother's family, the Glimchers, arrived from the village of Yemilchino in 1913 and settled in Chelsea after their steamship docked in Boston Harbor. My grandfather, Velvel, worked in the rag district and helped secure an observant, Yiddish-speaking household. My father's family had come earlier, in the 1890s, from Zalishchyky in southwestern Ukraine. He and his brother were born in the United States, but they kept many Old World traditions.

I grew up in a deeply observant Jewish home. My maternal grandparents led a strictly Orthodox life, attending the Third Street Shul and hosting a four-hour Hebrew Seder each year, which my grandfather led. We fasted on Yom Kippur, celebrated Sukkot in his foliage-covered Sukkah, and spent six years at Chelsea Hebrew School, five days a week, where all four Roller children sang in the choir and graduated while attending public school. While all four siblings completed the Hebrew School program, only my brother Sam had a Bar Mitzvah, because synagogues did not call girls to the Torah then. Sam conducted his entire Bar Mitzvah service at the Hebrew School, and my mother even served a term as the school's president. The school held holiday services in the auditorium, which it had transformed into a sacred space.

Yiddish filled the air whenever we visited my grandparents, who never learned English. My parents spoke it with relatives and with each other when they didn't want us to understand. My grandfather wished that Chelsea Hebrew School taught Yiddish so we could speak with him more fully. At home, though, English dominated, and we moved through several Chelsea neighborhoods: Chestnut, Shawmut, Maverick streets, and finally Washington Avenue, where my parents joined Temple Emmanuel. My father and other male relatives belonged to the LOR Club, a small Jewish boys' group that had grown into a circle of lifelong friendships.



**Parents Goldie & Ben at
Barbara's 1952 Wedding**

Chelsea itself was our world. We walked almost everywhere, took the trolley to Revere Beach in the summer, and lived among the two- and three-family houses that lined Shawmut and Maverick Streets. I attended the Shurtleff School and then Chelsea High, where I had exceptional teachers, rigorous grammar instruction, and the chance to read

classic British and French literature. Piano lessons in junior high sparked a lifelong love of classical music that stayed with me well into adulthood.

My father worked alongside non-Jews, but our social world was almost entirely Jewish. I sat next to non-Jewish classmates, but my friends, neighbors, and potential dates were all from the Jewish community. Bigotry rarely touched me, though I remember an anti-semitic assault on my brother and the sting of racist comments directed at me when I befriended African American coworkers at the post office during Christmas breaks.

My father encouraged me to attend college and become a teacher, and I took his encouragement seriously. I commuted by train with Chelsea friends to Salem State Teachers College, graduating in 1951 after making the Dean's List, assisting an English professor with grading, studying English history and literature, and even earning a letter in speed walking. My father, a bookkeeper for an electricians' union, somehow managed to send three of his four children to college. I helped pay my way by sorting mail at the post office, babysitting, coaching girls' sports at Chelsea playgrounds, and writing a bylined column on playgrounds for the *Chelsea Record*.

My siblings followed their own paths: Sam, brilliant and driven, became a civil engineer from MIT and worked on infrastructure projects in Africa and Asia; Sandy graduated from BU's Sargent College and became a physical education teacher; and Cynthia excelled in Chelsea High's commercial course and became a bookkeeper like our father.



**Barbara and Mel's
1952 Wedding Photo**

After Salem State, I began teaching fourth grade in Gloucester, where I discovered that many boys planned to become fishermen like their fathers and had no interest in college. Gloucester also brought me my future husband, Mel Rubin, an engineer with degrees from Tufts and MIT. We married in 1952 and eventually settled in Lexington, where we raised our daughter, Marla, who later earned a degree in Social Psychology from Tufts.

As Chelsea's Jewish population dispersed in the 1960s, my parents missed their lifelong friends and moved to Brookline once all four of us children were grown. By then, my own career had taken a new turn. While living in Lexington, I received a Boston University adult education fellowship, which led to a 24-year career at Middlesex Community College.

I wrote successful grants, developed curricula, taught students of all ages, and helped establish the state's first



**Barbara, Daughter, Marla (Left), &
Niece Ruth**

Gerontology program. My work earned two major honors: one from the town of Lexington for my service to the Council on Aging, and another as Massachusetts Educator of the Year.

Looking back, I credit my parents' values and my Salem State education for giving me the foundation to build a meaningful, satisfying professional life. I still donate to Salem State each year, and I always say the word "University" with emphatic delight.