

Baba & Saba

Recollections of How We Arrived at Where We Are

Marilyn and Stanley Katz

with
Peter Weisz



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Baba & Saba; Recollections of How We Arrived at Where We Are

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Marilyn & Stanley Katz

Dedication

To our children,
grandchildren, great-grandchildren and beyond.

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Baba & Saba

Introduction

Marilyn and Stanley Katz are actually our parents, but they took on the moniker “Baba & Saba” (*grandma and grandpa in Hebrew*) when they became grandparents, and the names have stuck. These names have become part of who they are: loving grandparents who are fulfilled and who work together so well. Of course, she is Baba and he is Saba, but all three of us children—as well as their grandkids and great-grandkids—think of them as the endearing and enduring entity known as “Baba & Saba.”

Our parents have in many ways gone above and beyond. They grew up in modest households in the Bronx with similar Jewish values centered around family, work, responsibility, and most significantly, philanthropy. Our mother’s parents, the Resnicks, having achieved a level of financial comfort, allowed Mom and Dad to start their own family in New Rochelle and to then take on what they had to in order for us to enjoy our childhoods in Scarsdale.

Their 1953 marriage and their subsequent partnership has served as a solid cornerstone of our

family structure. As unique individuals, they both share a love and devotion to each other that stands as a visible example to us and our spouses (Bonnie and Bruce, Roni and Stuey, and Amy and Neil) as well as to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Baba & Saba never shy away from expressing their love for each other in public, sometimes to the embarrassment (and enjoyment) of the rest of us.

Dad has always preached about getting “results” and communicating with one another throughout the course of our lives. He has lived by these mottos: “No room for excuses or poor preparation.” “Figure it out and get results.” “Having an issue? Let’s talk about it. Communicate!”

Age has never factored into his relationships with people who may be his senior or those who are a few generations younger. Dad is the most “engage-able” and genuinely interested person you could ever meet. Never afraid to share his opinion—even if it involves criticism—he invariably delivers it in a direct but supportive way. Age has also not factored into his brilliance at playing gin or affected his golf game. As expected, Dad has, at this point, managed to successfully emulate the

seemingly ageless older club members he has always admired.

When he sets his mind to something, he almost always achieves it. Some notable examples among many you'll read about in this book include being admitted to practice law in Florida, deciding to start painting and sculpting at age 65, and his devotion to personal fitness that will cause him to work diligently on losing five pounds if his weight should ever creep up a little.

Mom has had many loves in her life. These include her parents and siblings, and naturally, all of her children and our families. We would, of course, be remiss if we left "Frankie" (Ol' Blue Eyes) off this list of lovable, but perhaps none of her numerous affections is deeper than the one felt for Dad. The sparkle in her multicolored eyes has only grown over the years whenever they are together.

We have also been inspired by her involvement in so many philanthropic causes and social organizations as well as her deep passion for literature. We all recall how Mom, a fabulous and seriously underrated cook, would schedule each of our weekly meals at home to make sure we had enough healthy and nutritional variety in our diet. Mom has also hosted too many wonderful parties and

stunning social events to count. Each one creating a memory that has lasted a lifetime.

Shining examples, exemplary role models, Baba & Saba remain a stellar couple who have always stepped up to the plate and thereby inspired others to do the same. They have done so, not only on behalf of our growing family, but also for their friends and for so many others in their communities of both Westchester and Palm Beach. They continue to show us the value of working hard and giving back philanthropically both in terms of their financial support and through their leadership positions at many organizations that serve to improve the lives of others. From supporting research at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine to their lifelong support of various temples and federations. From the Hebrew Home in Riverdale and Morse-Life in West Palm Beach to supporting Israel in so many meaningful ways, Baba & Saba have left few stones unturned. Their involvement has been amplified by their unwavering commitment and stewardship of those and other organizations. As you will discover in the pages of this book, while their names may adorn lofty campuses and deanships, they are personally close with and supportive of

caddies, doormen, valets, caregivers, and so many others whose lives they have touched.

Our parents also have developed their personal routines over the years and it's been our joy to watch them do things "their way." In terms of favored libations, hers is Johnnie Walker Black and his is Tito's on the rocks (which replaced CC and ginger)—always with an extra glass of ice. They love certain dishes prepared just the way they specify, and those who have had the pleasure of dining with Marilyn and Stan have become used to the way their dinner order is invariably placed: "Grilled branzino with olive oil and extra garlic ... burnt, burnt, burnt." Salads and pizzas with "chopped onions ... extra, extra onions." At Too-Jay's, a South Florida deli, the wait staff has grown accustomed to receiving a small strip of paper from them as they submit their brunch order. It is printed out with a list of the required ingredients to include in their shared omelet plus a request for a pumpernickel bagel, scooped out and gently toasted.

As for the three of us, the "Next Generation," we started out as firstborn, only daughter, and the baby, and have singularly or together had the good fortune of sharing artistic experiences, golf games,

vacations, family milestones, business partnerships, and so very much more. We are blessed to have been the beneficiaries of their wisdom, love, and support for all of our various endeavors. While we are always looking forward, we never do so without a deep appreciation of the past. We were blessed with incredible grandparents of our own, and our Mom and Dad, who have become Baba & Saba to the entire family, are a blessing we cherish greatly among all of the others. We lovingly reflect upon the stories that involved our own lives, and we share them with our children and friends so that these precious memories may be carried on for future generations.

Now, thanks to their decision to record some highlights from their extraordinary lives in this book, you will be able to share them as well.

Thank you for letting us introduce you to our Baba & Saba. We know that you'll find getting to know them a truly amazing experience.

With love and affection,
Bruce Katz, Roni Doppelt, Neil Katz
December 2022

Authors' Foreword

I've heard it said that the memoir book is the most popular form of modern fiction. Or, as writer and ambassador Clare Boothe Luce put it: "All autobiographies are *alibi-ographies*." Well, if that's the truth, then this one is different. No alibis. No fantasies. No excuses. Just a collection of recollections. Recounted in the way we honestly remember them.

Here are a few other things that make this book different from your run-of-the-mill memoir. First of all, such books are normally about a single person. This one is about both of us, Marilyn and Stanley. That's why it's written in the third person. We didn't want to say, "I moved into the Decatur Avenue neighborhood when I was five years old," and then have to explain whether it was Marilyn or Stanley doing the talking. So instead, it reads: "Marilyn moved into the Decatur Avenue neighborhood when she was five years old."

Secondly, most memoir books are produced with no greater purpose than to chronicle a person's life story. By contrast, this one has a mission, and it's this: to explain to the coming generations

exactly how we arrived where we are. We feel it's important that they gain some perspective about the road we traveled. You can't really blame them for being unaware, since our descendants arrived on the scene surrounded by all the wonderful blessings that our family has been fortunate to enjoy. It's important that they understand that it hasn't always been like this.

As the senior members of this wonderful family, we feel an obligation to impart to them not only our family's history, but also our cherished values and principles. It is in order to preserve and pass on this legacy that we wrote this book.

For the most part, writing this book has been an exciting and enjoyable experience. It has allowed us to relive many beloved memories from our younger days. And although at times revisiting long-forgotten past challenges could be harrowing, we nevertheless recommend doing it. Writing your memoirs will likely create the most valuable asset you leave behind for your heirs.

But, it was not just for our heirs that we wrote this book. It was also to create a record—albeit incomplete—of the many lives who have touched ours over the decades. It is to these people, some no longer living, that we owe so much. This book

is our way of saying “Thank you” and “We’ll never forget you.”

Finally, we’d like to mention a few things that did NOT prompt us to write this book. It was not done to extol our virtues or herald our accomplishments. We are by no means paragons of humility, but we have both received sufficient accolades and recognition over the years that our egos are not hungry for any more.

While we would like to see this book reach a wide audience, we harbor no ambitions of it becoming a best-seller or being adapted into a major motion picture. Like a sculpture or an oil painting, we’d prefer to think of this book as not only a work of art, but also as a work of the heart.

Thank you for agreeing to take this literary look at our lives. We promise that you’ll find the journey interesting, intriguing, and, at times, surprising. At this point, as they say, our lives are in your hands.

Sincerely,
Baba & Saba
(Marilyn and Stanley Katz)
December 2022



*“We must not only give what we have;
we must also give who we are.”*

“WHO WE ARE.” As a Jewish community, these three simple words are woven through the tapestry of our lives and dictate all that we do.

We have been fortunate to live an incredible journey... a journey that has taught us the true meaning of
“Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother.”

Thank you to all our friends who have joined us along the way. Together, we inspire and encourage others to dare to dream of a brighter tomorrow for all our Fathers and Mothers.

Marilyn & Stanley M. Katz

Message from Marilyn and Stanley in Jewish Federation Tribute Journal.
2002.

Chapter One

When Marilyn Met Stanley

“A soul mate is the one person who knew you and believed in you before you even believed in yourself.”

—Dawson Leery

Stanley Katz was incredulous. He simply couldn't believe it. He had just learned from his two best chums, Larry Weinstein and Stanley's cousin, Mel Katz, that the two had been invited to Marilyn Resnick's Sweet Sixteen party this coming Saturday. But Stanley had not received an invitation. The trio always went to these sorts of shindigs together. How could this have happened?

Stanley's pace picked up speed as he trod down Bronx's Grand Concourse toward his job at his Uncle Joe's facility, Senate Caterers. Although he was fuming, he knew he would have to conceal his emotions once guests began arriving to the hall for whatever event had been scheduled that day. Oh yes, he remembered now. The Edelman Bar Mitzvah. It was Stanley's job to greet each guest at the door, identify them, and then hand them a printed seating card. He had been working at Senate Caterers since his own Bar Mitzvah

some four years earlier. Uncle Joe had trained him to always extend a firm handshake and a warm smile to each arriving guest.

“These people pay your salary,” he lectured Stanley sternly. “So greet them, seat them, and treat them just like you would royalty.” Stanley set to work, and although he was doing an admirable job of keeping his emotions from erupting, he was smoldering and seething on the inside. Somehow, he got through the event, and by the time he was sweeping up afterwards, he had managed to more or less banish Marilyn’s affront from his mind.

In the late 1940s, Sweet Sixteen parties were almost an obligatory coming-of-age ritual for the many teenage Jewish girls who populated the Bronx. While cotillions and coming-out galas may have been the rule for the debutantes and dilettantes of Westchester County, here in the Bronx things were a bit more pedestrian. In those days before Bat Mitzvahs became customary, Jewish girls considered their Sweet Sixteen parties as the counterpart of the boys’ Bar Mitzvah celebrations.

Actually, when Marilyn Resnick put together her guest list, she had no intention of snubbing Stanley at all. She hardly knew him. While they had both attended PS 94 and had probably seen each other in the wintertime down at the end of Decatur Avenue when all the kids from the neighborhood would gather on Gun Hill Road to go sledding, they now attended different high schools. She at Evander Childs and he at DeWitt Clinton. She had invited Stanley’s buddies only because both Mel and Larry were dating Marilyn’s girlfriends. Since she wanted the girls to attend her big party, she had to invite their paramours. But this was not the case with Stanley. Stanley was

popular with the girls, but he had not settled on anyone steady. Not yet, at least.

Marilyn had moved into the Decatur Avenue neighborhood when she was five years old. A few years later her family again moved into a nearby apartment at 323 East Gun Hill Road, near Hull Avenue. Stanley, who was two years older than Marilyn, had likewise lived in the neighborhood since he was five years old. After PS 94, both went to different middle schools, he to PS 80 and she to Junior High School 115. At this point, the only time they were likely to cross paths was when their two high schools—long-standing sports rivals—would play against each other. As things turned out, a Clinton vs. Evander football game was slated for the Saturday after Marilyn's Sweet Sixteen party.

The party itself had been a splendid affair that saw Marilyn freely flitting from guest to guest unencumbered. This was because her boyfriend at the time, Roy Silverman, was attending the University of Miami and could not make it home for the event. Marilyn had heard that Mel and Larry's mothers had both encouraged their sons to hook up with her rather than with her girlfriends. This knowledge gave her the confidence to become friendly with both boys. Word of this no doubt got back to the missing member of the teenage trio.

The football game took place at Evander, and by the fourth quarter it was clear that Clinton, the favorite, would once again be the victor. As Stanley, Mel, and Larry made their way down from the Visiting Team section of the bleachers, Stanley caught a glimpse of Marilyn sitting on the Home Team side.

“Wait a minute,” he said to his pals. “Isn’t that the girl who snubbed me at her Sweet Sixteen party last week? Who does she think she is, anyway? You guys go ahead. I want to ... ahem ... have a word with this snooty Miss Resnick.” As Stanley made his way around the field, he thought about what he would say to Marilyn. Never shy or reticent, he possessed a confidence born of a quick wit and an impressive physique—the result of spending his summers working as a lifeguard at Rockaway Beach in Queens. Stanley’s lifeguard escapades are recounted in Chapter Four.

Once he reached Marilyn and looked directly into her eyes, his anger and animosity evaporated like a snowdrift in the spring sun. He suddenly, and uncharacteristically, found himself tongue-tied. As Marilyn looked him up and down wearing a puzzled “what can I do for you?” expression, Stanley finally managed to get out:

“Uh, hello, Marilyn. I was just wondering if you’d like to walk home with me.” She agreed without hesitation. On the walk down Gun Hill Road they talked about everything from her boyfriend in Miami to his Uncle Joe’s catering business. Stanley never once mentioned his displeasure over being excluded from her Sweet Sixteen party. By the time they reached her door, Stanley had invited Marilyn to accompany him to a movie the following Saturday at the famed Bronx cinema aptly known as the Paradise Theater.

Located on the Grand Concourse, the Paradise was—and remains today—one of the last surviving “movie palaces” built in the 1920s in what was called the “Atmospheric style.” Once inside, the audience was provided with the illusion of a being in a sixteenth-century Italian villa courtyard under a starry night sky replete with Mediter-

anean moonlight and flickering stars embedded in the ceiling. But for the theater's teenage patrons, the most hallowed area of the vast baroque auditorium was the darkened balcony. And it was here that Stanley brought Marilyn on their first date to watch Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift in a film called *A Place in the Sun*. The plot, by happenstance, revolves around a poor young man who goes to work for his wealthy uncle and then finds love.

As they settled back, Stanley offered Marilyn some popcorn as he casually placed his arm around her shoulders. This was the standard position for the many teenage couples who dotted the dimly lit balcony. Stanley, having been well schooled in the art of heavy petting from his frequent dalliances along the boardwalk of Rockaway Beach, began to deploy the subtle tactics that he hoped might land him on first base. As his right hand embraced Marilyn's shoulder, he pointed his fingers southward and then slowly, ever so slowly, he inched it down a bit whenever the action on the screen provided a compelling distraction.

But although Marilyn was younger and less experienced in such matters, she was strong-willed and guided by a certain rectitude that did not countenance Jewish girls on first dates engaging in any such hanky-panky. She slapped his hand away after each advance. Although she would never admit it to him, Marilyn was secretly pleased that Stanley had attempted to move toward greater intimacy. It indicated that he found her attractive, and she found the gesture flattering.

Stanley, likewise, felt himself captivated by Marilyn's million-dollar smile and squeaky-clean appearance. They began seeing more of

each other, and soon Stanley could be spotted squiring Marilyn around the neighborhood in his green 1939 four-door DeSoto. Teenagers with cars were a rarity at that time and place. Abundant and affordable public transportation met the needs of most, and the costs of maintenance, insurance, and parking were beyond the means of most. Stanley was particularly pleased with the way the DeSoto enhanced his status among his high school peers, and he had to chuckle when his buddies referred to it as his “motel on wheels.”

Marilyn and Stanley’s budding relationship was not based on sex. It was based on something more powerful. A mutual respect and affection that would soon evolve into true love. This became evident when, a few months after they had started dating, Marilyn informed Stanley that her family was moving out of the neighborhood to New Rochelle in more affluent Westchester County. As the family’s fortunes rose, they said good-bye to the old neighborhood for greener pastures. But Marilyn did not find it easy to say good-bye to Stanley who, by this time, had found a secure place in her young heart.

Stanley was equally emotionally attached to Marilyn and so, over the next several years, as Stanley went on to NYU and then Brooklyn Law School, he could be seen tooling his big green DeSoto on the half-hour drive from the Bronx to New Rochelle. In this way the romance continued to flourish and grow ever stronger over the ensuing years. As if to symbolize this strengthening relationship, Stan presented Marilyn with a bangle charm bracelet as an emblem of their emotional attachment.

Eventually, Stanley could see his way clear to seriously consider building a life together with Marilyn. It was during his second year

in law school that Stanley decided the time was right to pop the question. But he did not direct the question to Marilyn. No, first he needed to consult with both Marilyn's mother and his own. When both women gave him the thumbs up, he asked them to accompany him to Canal Street in Manhattan to help him pick out an engagement ring. They did so gladly.

But Stanley was still not quite ready to propose. There was an important formality that had to be carried out first. One evening Stanley pulled up in front of the Resnicks' home as usual to pick up Marilyn for the evening. Upon entering, Stanley found—also as usual—that Marilyn was still upstairs getting prepared for their date. He spotted her father, Jack Resnick, seated in an easy chair in the living room, reading a newspaper and puffing on a thick cigar. Stanley mustered up his courage and approached the man. He cleared his throat loudly, and that prompted Mr. Resnick to lower the newspaper and give him a quizzical look, complete with raised eyebrows. Stanley made his case and gratefully received the desired response.

As soon as Jack bestowed his blessings on the match, Stanley rushed up the stairs and entered Marilyn's bedroom. A down-on-one-knee proposal followed as Stanley presented her with the Canal Street engagement ring. Marilyn, not one to tarry, said "Yes" at once. It was the question she had been hoping to hear for some time.

Marilyn Resnick and Stanley Katz were wed on May 30, 1953, Memorial Day weekend, in the grand ballroom of Manhattan's posh Essex House Hotel. The *chuppah* ceremony was followed by a magical black-tie affair that put to shame the many weddings that Stanley had worked at during his teenage employment at Senate Caterers.

The newlyweds joined the ranks of Club 53. This was a friendly group of eight couples who all tied the knot within six months of each other in 1953. The couples have stayed in touch with each other and remained good friends ever since.

Vivian and Fred Lewis were members of Club 53, having undergone their nuptials on May 31, the day after Stanley and Marilyn's wedding. On the Monday following the celebrations, Marilyn and Stanley joined Fred and Vivian in a Cadillac convertible, borrowed from Fred's father, as the two happy couples made tracks to spend the beginning of their joint honeymoon at Niagara Falls. After a few blissful days amidst the mist and majesty of the falls, the two couples returned to Manhattan and caught a Caribbean cruise ship, where they would spend the balance of their journey. Marilyn and Stan had been saving for two years to pay for this unforgettable honeymoon.

As the newlyweds sailed off into the sunset, they had no inkling that they were embarking upon a marriage that, as of this writing, would endure and flourish for nearly 70 years.

Chapter Two

Hello, Heidelberg

“The Army is God’s way of teaching Americans geography.”

—Ambrose Bierce

It was six months after Stanley and Marilyn’s first wedding anniversary, in November 1954, that they received the good news. No, not from the stork, but from the New York Bar Association. Stanley had passed the bar exam and was now officially a freshly minted New York lawyer. This called for some sort of celebration. And since money was tight—the couple was still living with Marilyn’s parents—a road trip seemed like the best option.

“You know it’s well before Christmas,” Stanley pointed out. “so the hotel rooms in Miami should be cheap and plentiful. Let’s head to Florida.” And, securing the use of Marilyn’s mother’s sedan, that’s exactly what they did.

It was a fun-filled journey that delivered them to the Sunshine State after two days on the open road. When they arrived in St. Augustine, Stanley determined that they could make it to Miami by sun-

set, and so he began phoning hotels to find a room. He was in for a shock.

Yes, early November was a slow period, but it was also a time when trade conventions would descend on the city. Hence, as they called one hotel after another, each one reported that it was full to capacity. “Maybe they just don’t like to take reservations until they’ve had a look at you,” Stanley thought to himself. So, the intrepid couple pushed on toward Miami.

Once they reached famed Collins Avenue in the Miami Beach area, they began the arduous task of going from one hotel to the next in an attempt to book a room for the night. Stanley soon discovered that if he pulled his car up to the front door of the hotel, he would be required to tip the valet parking attendant. So, instead, he would leave the car parked along the curb as he and Marilyn trudged to the front desk and vainly asked for a room. After the fourth such futile foray, they returned to their car and were in for another shock.

The driver’s side window had been smashed and the contents of the car’s backseat, which included most of Marilyn’s wardrobe, had been stolen. Marilyn had not wished to leave her clothes crumpled in the trunk during their long journey, so she had placed her things lying flat in the backseat compartment.

Stanley called the police, who informed him that they would need to come to the precinct house to file a report. They cleared away the broken glass and drove a short distance to the station, where they spent the next hour filling out forms and reporting the crime to a Miami police detective. The sergeant was taken aback when he asked Marilyn if she could describe the clothing articles that had been

stolen and she reached into her purse and pulled out a handwritten list. It contained a description of every missing garment. The cop eyed the list skeptically as if to say, “Hmmm. How convenient. She just happens to have an exact list of the allegedly stolen goods.”

In fact, Marilyn was a chronic list-maker. She habitually made checklists and thereby kept her life highly organized. This was one of the features that Stanley loved about her. Marilyn simply wanted to make sure that she had everything she needed to wear in Florida and so had prepared a checklist as she was packing. The police officer appeared to accept this explanation.

As they were leaving the police station, Marilyn and Stan realized that they still had not booked a hotel for the night. When they pointed this out to the police officer who had filed the robbery report, he kindly made a few phone calls, securing them a room at another of the hotels that lined Collins Avenue.

By the time they had checked in, given their car to the hotel valet, gone upstairs to their room and unpacked Stanley’s suitcase, they were both exhausted and went straight to bed. Stanley rose early and got dressed. At least *he*, unlike Marilyn still had some clothes to put on.

“I’m going to get that car window fixed,” Stanley told Marilyn as he headed down to the lobby. “The hotel manager gave me the name of a place nearby that will do it while I wait. Be back soon.”

Stanley was becoming impatient as he stood on the curb in front of the hotel waiting for the valet to bring him his car. After fifteen minutes, the valet had still not arrived with his car. Finally, the valet

showed up on foot and the grim expression on the young man's face was not a good sign.

"I am sorry, Mr. Katz," he said through his pained features. "I cannot find your car. It must have been stolen during the night."

"My God! What sort of town is this?" Stanley thought. "First they steal your clothes and now they steal your car! What's next?"

Stanley immediately phoned the police station again.

"This is Stanley Katz again," he blurted out. "Last night I reported the theft of the contents of my car. I'm calling to let you know that I am now reporting the theft of the entire car itself." He was once again advised to come to the police station in order to report the crime. So, after alerting Marilyn and instructing her to put on what clothes she had and join him, the couple traveled—by taxi this time—back to the precinct house to spend another few hours with Miami's finest.

Dejectedly returning to their hotel and wondering if this nightmare would ever end, they were met with some good news from the hotel manager.

"Mr. Katz, I'm happy to inform you that your car was not stolen," he explained with a polished smile. "Evidently your car keys had gotten mixed up with those from a rental car by the parking attendant, who gave your car to another guest by mistake. My sincere apologies."

"But why did the other guest accept a car that was not his?" Stanley naturally inquired.

"Because his was a rental car and he was not familiar with it. He got in and drove off before you came downstairs. And then, while

you were at the police station, he returned and wanted to know why we gave him the wrong car. It's all straightened out now, Mr. Katz," said the manager obsequiously. "Please accept our sincere apologies."

Things remained blessedly uneventful over the next few days as the couple shopped for a new wardrobe for Marilyn and enjoyed the sunny beaches and sparkling nightlife of 1950s Miami Beach. And then they got the phone call.

It was from Marilyn's mother, who reported that an official-looking letter had arrived from the US government addressed to Stanley. She had opened it, and sure enough, it began with that feared and famous word: "Greetings." It was, in fact, Stanley's draft notice instructing him to report to Whitehall Street for his Army induction physical. He was to report on a day of infamy, December 7, 1954. As an undergraduate and while attending law school, Stanley had enjoyed a student deferment that had postponed this day of reckoning. But now, to no one's surprise, here it was.

Stanley and Marilyn packed up and headed north, but misfortune was to dog their steps for a bit longer. They were stopped for speeding by a member of the North Carolina State Police. Stanley was informed he would have to appear in court the following day. He decided to pour out his tale of woe, explaining to the officer that they had been robbed in Miami and were now rushing home so he could begin his service in the US Army. Appealing to the officer's sympathies and his patriotism, Stanley convinced him to let the couple continue on their way after paying a small fine directly to him on the spot.

Stanley passed the Army physical and was soon packed off to Fort Dix to undergo basic training. Located just south of Trenton, New Jersey, Fort Dix had been training, mobilizing, and demobilizing soldiers for the US Army since World War I.

After eight weeks of basic training, and because of his accounting rather than his legal skills, Stanley was dispatched to the Army's main financial center, located at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis, Indiana. Before his departure, Stanley had been given an S&P (Scientific and Professional) rating by the Army. This meant that he took his marching orders directly from the Pentagon and was not subject to reassignment by local superior officers.

Marilyn, at this point, was working as a first-grade school teacher in New York, and when she learned that her husband was to be sent off to the wilds of the Midwest, she was determined to go with him. And thus, Marilyn and Stanley arrived in Indiana together.

Marilyn soon found work in the Indianapolis Public School system as an elementary school teacher. Her school was in an underprivileged neighborhood and populated by children from poor families who had recently immigrated from rural Kentucky. Marilyn loved to read to her students, since this was not an activity that they typically enjoyed at home. The kids loved it, too, often climbing up on her lap and resting their heads on her shoulders as she read another Grimms' Fairy Tale aloud. Of course, this practice had a distinct downside that resulted in Marilyn coming home one day infested with head lice garnered from her less than hygienic young pupils. She took each child to the school nurse for delousing, and pretty soon the problem was eliminated.

The couple did not live on the base. Instead, they found a modest one-bedroom furnished apartment on Post Road near the Finance Center. They paid the previous tenant \$250 for the door key and all the furnishings, which included a potted sweet potato plant. Marilyn was able to locate the only kosher butcher shop in Indianapolis, which enabled her to maintain a proper kosher home here in the “*galut* of the *galut*” (the diaspora of the diaspora). Marilyn also tended to the sweet potato plant, but, unlike it, the couple would not have much time to sink roots into Indiana’s fertile Hoosier soil.

Upon his arrival to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Stanley had been assigned to serve as the assistant to the commanding general of the base. His predecessor confided in Stanley and advised him as follows:

“Don’t worry about a thing. You’re secure to stay here at Fort Benjamin Harrison during your entire hitch because the general will protect you from ever getting transferred.” As things turned out, he was dead wrong.

The following May, only a few months after Stanley’s arrival, orders were received that he was to be shipped overseas to the Army’s European Finance Headquarters in Heidelberg, West Germany. Unfortunately, Stanley’s boss, the commanding general, was, at this point, off the base attending his son’s graduation from West Point Military Academy and was therefore not present to countermand Stanley’s orders to ship out. So much for the general’s *protektzia*.

So it was that Stanley, along with his buddy, Sherman Tratten, another GI who, like Stanley, held an S&P rating, found themselves a few weeks later not in Germany, but rather in the south of France! In

typical US Army SNAFU fashion, Stan and Sherm discovered that they had been shipped to the wrong base. They were supposed to report to Heidelberg, yet here they were in the Basque countryside of southwestern France. Since the local brass was not able to reassign the wayward duo, given their exalted S&P ratings, their new orders had to come from Washington, and that would take some time. The two newly minted GIs were also free from any duty since only the Pentagon was authorized to issue their job assignments. This left the pair in a sort of military limbo, with no one to report to or answer to. They found themselves with plenty of time on their hands near one of Europe's most scenic resort destinations, Biarritz.

Stanley managed to commandeer a jeep from the base motor pool, and the two took off for some exotic sightseeing. As they pulled in to Biarritz, they spotted the hotels and casinos that during the post-World War II demobilization of American troops had been converted to classrooms to prepare discharged soldiers to adapt from Army life to their new roles as civilians and college students.

For the next four weeks, the two cruised up and down the magnificent Atlantic coast, darting through the scenic Pyrenees Mountains along the border with Spain and stopping to admire the luxurious Hôtel du Palais. Originally an immense summer home built in 1855 for the Empress Eugénie, the luxurious hotel offered sweeping ocean views. Finally, the proper orders arrived, and Stanley and Sherman were off to Heidelberg. But in the process, both young men had fallen in love with Biarritz and have held memories of this adventure in their hearts ever since.

As the boys were bidding *adieu* to beautiful Biarritz, Marilyn, along with Sherman's wife, Judy, had set sail from New York to Germany aboard the famed art deco ocean liner, the SS *Île de France*. Within a few months of their voyage, the ship would play a key role in rescuing passengers from the ill-fated SS *Andrea Doria* off the coast of Nantucket.

The boys got to Heidelberg a few weeks before Marilyn and Judy were scheduled to arrive, and they decided they would attend Friday night Shabbat services at the base chapel. This was their first time in Germany and both were apprehensive about being Jews in the former Third Reich. When they arrived there after sunset Friday, they found there were not even enough attendees present to form a *minyan* (a minimum quorum of ten Jews needed to read from the Torah). But, after Marilyn and Judy arrived, they started encouraging other Jewish soldiers—both married and single—to attend, and soon they saw 35 to 40 Shabbat worshipers there every week.

Their success in boosting attendance at services pleased the chaplain greatly, and he became quite attached to Stanley and Marilyn over the coming months. When they were searching for an off-base apartment, it was the chaplain who advised them. He also assisted Stanley in purchasing—for only \$300—an old German car called a Borgward, which was considered on a level just below a Mercedes.

The Borgward had 80,000 kilometers on the odometer and it served the couple well when they would hop into it every Friday night after services to enjoy cruising through the German countryside and beyond. These road trips were conducted on a thin shoestring budget. For example, instead of buying petrol on the road at gas sta-

tions, Stan would fill up five five-gallon jerry cans with gasoline at the Army base PX, where gasoline was far cheaper than at the public gas stations. He would also stock up on cartons of American cigarettes, which were the currency of the realm in the postwar bartering world of Europe. They would typically find lodgings in youth hostels or inexpensive *pensionnes*. A dollar fifty per night—or four packs of Luckies—got them a towel, some hot water, and a clean bed.

On one such sojourn, the couple ventured all the way back to Biarritz, where Stanley was able to show Marilyn the place with which he had fallen in love during his and Sherm's serendipitous stay in France. Marilyn and Stan enjoyed the most fabulous romantic weekend conceivable. In fact, it was there that the couple would conceive their first child.

Other Jewish couples from the Army base would often join Stanley and Marilyn on these excursions, with everyone pitching in for petrol and meals. The Borgward held up well during these jaunts, convincing Stanley that he was wise not to purchase a less durable car. On one particular weekend, as they were exploring the Rhine Valley, their crew in the Borgward was joined by some buddies driving a Volkswagen bug. As both cars strained to make it up a steep hill in the Gaisberg Mountains, the Borgward churned along to the crest, while the VW's passengers were required to hop out and push the car to the top of the hill.

There was another couple who were in even worse financial straits than Marilyn and Stan. Iris and Don Rosenberg were living on a shoestring that was close to breaking. So, Stanley made it a point to

invite them along for some weekend sightseeing and would invariably forget to ask them for gas or food money.

Marilyn and Stan were also friendly with another Army couple they had known from home named Norman and Mina Weiser. You'll get to know Norman and Mina in a future chapter. Norman was stationed at an Army base at Pirmasens, Germany, near the French border. Mina had become pregnant while in Germany and gave birth to a baby boy. Norman contacted Stanley and asked if he would do them the honor of serving as the baby boy's *sandak* (godfather) at the *bris* (circumcision ceremony). Stanley agreed, and drove for several hours to get to Pirmasens, only to learn that a third cousin had appeared unexpectedly and, since he was a blood relative, the honor was afforded to him and Stanley was left frozen out.

Marilyn once again was able to put her teaching skills to work in Heidelberg. She found a job as an elementary school instructor at an English-speaking school run by the University of Maryland. The school served the dependents of American families working in Germany. One morning, as Stanley was driving Marilyn to school, he spotted a group of German children, aged six through eight, walking to school. He pulled over and offered them a ride, which they accepted. Once in the car, the children began directing all sorts of questions to the two *Amerkanishers* seated in the front seat. At one point, a child asked Stanley about his religion and he answered: "We're Jewish."

"What's that?" came the astonishing reply. The term "Juden" was totally alien to these kids, born to parents who witnessed the word sewn like a brand onto the garments of every Jew in Germany. Mari-

lyn's Yiddish was good enough to make herself understood in German. She verified the fact that these kids had no idea what Jews were or anything about them. If Hitler's goal was to wipe Judaism from the pages of history, he had succeeded here in Heidelberg.

When Stanley went to sell the Borgward as their thirteen-month hitch in Heidelberg ended, he found that, with all the weekend get-aways, they had put an additional 50,000 kilometers on the vehicle. However, the odometer only displayed five digits. Therefore, instead of showing 130,000 kilometers as the car's mileage, it showed only 30,000. Stanley did not correct the misconception held by the buyer that the car had only 30,000 kilometers on it. Of course, it made him wonder if, instead of 80,000 kilometers as shown on the odometer when he had purchased the car, it had actually had 180,000 kilometers or more.

When Stanley's service in Germany was completed, both he and Marilyn were ready to return home. But, in hindsight, both today look back on those months in Heidelberg as a very special time in their lives. A time of a certain innocence before the children arrived and when the road ahead seemed like an unending adventure. And, in many ways, that's exactly what it turned out to be.

In the following chapter we take a look at Marilyn's early life B.S. (*Before Stanley*).

Chapter Three

That Resnick Girl

“Love doesn't make the world go round, Love is what makes the ride worthwhile!”

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

There exists a community in the Bronx known as Woodlawn Heights that draws its name from a site populated by some rather well-known people. Miles Davis, Joseph Pulitzer, Irving Berlin, and many other celebrated figures who called the Bronx their home are buried at Woodlawn Cemetery, a stone's throw from a six-story apartment building located at 3525 Decatur Avenue. That stone-faced structure was, in the early 1930s, home to Jack and Pearl Resnick who, in October of 1933, welcomed the birth of their first child, a girl they named Marilyn, after the baby's maternal grandmother, Nissia, whose Hebrew name had been Malka.

Before Marilyn's birth, Jack Resnick had undergone a three-year course of study at the Mechanics Institute of New York City, where he received training in the fine art of plumbing. In March of 1931, after having completed his studies, the native-born son of Eastern European Orthodox Jews had married Pearl Ezaak, the Russian-born

daughter of immigrants. He needed to learn a trade in order to support his new family. The Bronx, according to the 1930 census, was roughly 50 percent populated by Jews, nearly all of whom were, like the Resnicks, first- or second-generation immigrants from Eastern Europe. It was also during those years that the 1929 stock market crash triggered the Great Depression. In a reversal of the traditional path that saw former bankers and land barons working as manual laborers, Jack Resnick decided to abandon his fledgling career as a toilet technician and seek his fortune in the New York real estate industry. In a move that many would have regarded as reckless, Jack saw an ocean of opportunity in the boarded-up businesses and foreclosed homes that pockmarked the city. By the time Marilyn was out of diapers, Jack had already begun to build his reputation as a steady and serious gentleman developer.

Jack's early success was in no small part due to both his culture and his character, factors that combined and enabled him to adapt to the new Depression-era economic landscape. While Jack's immigrant Jewish background did not solely account for his success—there were many with similar backgrounds who failed financially in those days—it did provide him with a unique talent for accommodation. A talent for “adjusting to the times” embedded into the DNA of his people after generations of having to eke out their survival under oppressive antisemitic regimes. A talent he had honed through adaptation to the American melting-pot experience.

Jack's parents, Israel and Bertha Resnick, had arrived to American shores in 1902, amid the second great wave of Jewish immigration from the Pale of Settlement. They hailed from Brest-Litovsk, or

Brisk, as it was known in Yiddish, situated on the banks of the Bug River in what is today Belarus. In addition to being the site of the famous 1918 treaty, Brest-Litovsk was the birthplace of such Jewish luminaries as Menachem Begin and Simon Wiesenthal.

Marilyn eventually became the oldest of four children. She was followed by brother Burt, sister Susan and, after a long hiatus, baby brother Ira, who came along when Marilyn was sixteen. She adored the child and doted on him. To Marilyn, it seemed as though one of her childhood dolls had come to life. She would exult with every step of Ira's development. "Oh, look. He's sitting up!" "He took his first steps!" "He's talking! He calls me Monanee!"

By this time, the family had moved around the corner to more congenial digs at 323 E. Gun Hill Road, but still only a two-bedroom apartment. Growing up in the close-knit community that was the Jewish Bronx could only be described as wistfully wonderful. Contrary to the words penned by a young poet named Ogden Nash, "The Bronx? No thonx." (words he later regretted and recanted), the borough situated north of the Harlem River was, in those days, a nearly magical spot for growing youngsters.

"You didn't need carpools back then," Marilyn recalled. "If you wanted to be with your friends, you just had to go downstairs and everyone was there. Or you could head over to the Williamsbridge Oval, which was our playground."

Marilyn and her classmates likewise did not require a school bus since they could easily walk from their apartments to PS 94. She later did ride the public bus to Junior High School 115, also known as Elizabeth Barrett Browning Junior High. Although Marilyn's mother,

Pearl, kept a kosher home and all of Marilyn's friends, like Irene Sussman, Arlene Greenburg, and Stephanie Mattersdorf were Jewish, the synagogue did not play a major role in Marilyn's life. Her parents were what we would today call "secular Jews." Her father Jack's strongest connection to a Jewish institution in those days was with the 92nd Street YMHA, where he loved to play handball. Bat Mitzvahs were a thing of the future for Jewish girls, who were more focused on becoming homemakers than Torah scholars.

Summers were spent at Camp Merrimac in Contoocook, New Hampshire. The rustic facility was founded as a summer camp for Jewish boys in 1921 on the banks of what the campers called "Lake Josylvia" after the owners of the camp, Joseph and Sylvia Clough. With the onset of World War II, the camp became co-ed, and this permitted Marilyn and her friends to start attending. The camp is today operated by the Greek Orthodox Church of Boston.

Surprisingly, Marilyn had to be persuaded to attend Camp Merrimac since she harbored memories of a nightmarish experience at the Girl Scout camp she had attended over the previous summer. After two weeks at that camp, her parents came to visit and were shocked by what they found. Their sweet little Jewish daughter was a mess. She hadn't washed or changed clothes since arriving and was utterly miserable. Marilyn's camp stay was terminated on the spot and she immediately returned home with her parents.

Although she fared far better at Camp Merrimac, after two summers, Marilyn determined that she simply was not a happy camper. It was about this time that Marilyn's parents began renting a summer cottage on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens, as did numerous oth-

er neighborhood families. In fact, it was almost like the Jewish Bronx had been magically transplanted into this quaint beachside resort community. To Marilyn, summers at the bungalow were far better than those spent at camp. It contained no bathtub, only an outdoor shower on a wooden platform adjoining the house on the side. She liked the fact that she was living in a small house with her family and not in a barrack with a bunch of strange kids. Whether it was bouncing along the boardwalk or sunning at the beach, Marilyn loved having summer fun along the seashore with her many Bronx girlfriends.

By the time she was fourteen, Marilyn's fun-filled summer days with the girls were followed by moonlit nights spent on the boardwalk dancing with the boys to the music of Harry James and Benny Goodman that played nonstop on the big Wurlitzer jukebox. One of the boys was a good-looking lifeguard Marilyn knew from school named Stan Katz. Stan, along with his cousin Mel Katz, had gotten their Red Cross Swimming Instructor certifications and were both spending their summer working as lifeguards along Rockaway Beach.

One of Marilyn's friends, Carol Warshaw, pointed out Stanley to her as he stood along the edge of the dance floor.

"You see him?" she said, nodding in Stanley's direction. "I got him really mad at me today when I threw some sand at him. He chased me all around his big lifeguard chair. But you know what? He's really cute when he's mad."

Marilyn agreed that he was definitely a great-looking guy, but she had other things on her mind. She was busy putting together plans for her big Sweet Sixteen party coming up in October.

In the following chapter, we take a look at Stanley's early life B.M. (*Before Marilyn*).