

(FOUR) PAGES FROM MY LIFE

Eleanor Lippman



Early Years

I was born in The Bronx on July 20, 1920. That was the year that women got the vote, but I didn't notice it until later.

When I was five years old, I was enrolled in New York City schools. Academically I was fine, but otherwise not. I was usually late, after arguing with my mother because I wasn't interested in food. In school, I was sent to the "late room" but I couldn't find it. For the next four years, I mostly went "up the down staircase."

When I was nine we moved to Scarsdale. Somebody owed my father money, so he was able to buy a house. Ours was on "the other side of the tracks," figuratively and literally. It was a regular three bedroom house, similar to what I live in now, but not a mansion like the other kids' houses.

All this was so long ago that the milk was delivered by horse-drawn carriages.

Then the Depression deepened and we lost the house, but we were able to remain in Scarsdale in rental homes.

Scarsdale had a wonderfully progressive school system. We didn't study history, we reenacted it. In the Second Continental Congress, I was Richard Henry Lee. My neighbor Cynthia & I wrote the Declaration of Independence and brought it to school. I was a boy scout when we discovered the North Pole. (It was so cold in Scarsdale in those days.)

Each evening, after listening to the radio, my mother, father and I would sit and read books, with my brother upstairs building model airplanes. He later became a pilot during the war.

College, Marriage, and Wartime

I was accepted at Barnard in 1937. Like others in the 'thirties I was idealistic and believed we could save the world. But I didn't like the Dean. She was against the bus strike!

I joined the American Student Union and attended a big meeting at Vassar, along with Eleanor Roosevelt.

I graduated from college in 1941. War loomed, and it was easy for a recent college graduate to get a job with the government. I went to Washington DC to work for the War Department, typing army personnel records on some kind of pre-computer. Most of us new employees were college graduates, and our aim was to get out of that stultifying job RIGHT NOW! I moved to the Department of Commerce as a Junior Economist, and later was employed by the War Labor Board.

In 1942, I married Leopold (Leo) Lippman, a journalist and City College graduate. We wanted to return to New York, and Leo succeeded in getting a job with the Council of Social Agencies there. I was able to transfer to the New York office of my agency.

I recall traveling to work from Queens in the sweltering subway and working in a building opposite City Hall, with no air conditioning. (I guess it hadn't been invented yet.)

Seattle

With the end of the war in 1945, my job ended. We hoped to explore the west coast. In 1946 Leo was hired to be public information director of the Washington Association for Retarded Children. We thought we would stay in Seattle for a year, which turned out to be 17 years. It was a beautiful city, so I took the

opportunity to have four wonderful boys. I also found time, on non-dancing days, to be an active member of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA).

I found folk dancing in Seattle! At first, I danced with Scandia, a group that specialized in Scandinavian dances. Lots of the dancers found their mates there, but I already had one. I transitioned to international folk dancing, which was a very serious business there, with an overall group called NFDI, Northwest Folk Dancers Incorporated. One of NFDI's main aims was to ensure that dancers in the Northwest performed the dances correctly. After a while, I became Standardization Chair of NFDI, and joined an exhibition group called Dance Circle.

Sacramento

In 1963, we moved to Sacramento, CA, where Leo worked for the handicapped under Governor Pat Brown.

I went back to work in 1966, after twenty years of being at home. It was more fun than being a housewife! I was able to get a job in the County Department of Welfare specializing in Aid to the Blind. A blind person became eligible for aid when he/she turned 16. I gained enormous respect for those young people.

In an effort to improve conditions for our clients (not for money or better working conditions), most of us workers went on strike. 180 of us were fired. Even though I was proud of our stand, it was scary to be fired.

In a short while, however, I went to work in the California Department of Welfare, doing mostly paper work. I learned to play table tennis during breaks. My boss was the city champ.

During those four years in Sacramento I danced with Camtia, an exhibition group featuring mostly Balkan and some German dances, such as the Schuhplattler. I joined the Unitarian fellowship and was active in liberal groups.

Then Leo publicly criticized the abysmal treatment of developmentally disabled in the State institutions. Ronald Reagan became the new Governor. It was time to leave, whether we wanted to or not.

Back East, 1968

We found a house in Teaneck. Leo got a job with Mayor Lindsay, as coordinator of programs for the handicapped. I worked for the City Economist in Newark NJ, then for the Model Cities program there. My next job was with Human Resources in New York City, and then as a planner with the Department of Transportation. There I did travel studies, mostly about buses & trucks. I wrote reports to the US Department of Transportation.

I got a Master's degree in government administration at NYU.

Of course I found folk dancing on the East Coast. I danced with Michael Herman and others in New York City, and with Jim Gold in Teaneck. Then I found Ginny and Hal!

My husband died at age 65 with a brain tumor. I retired a few years later. My children were grown and back on the west coast. I did some volunteer work with the Women's Rights Information Center, traveled a lot, fell in love with photography, made good friends, danced, and got active politically. I am still with the ADA, but now it is the Americans with Disabilities Act.

What's Next?

Let's dance!