

A Dedication: Mrs. Greenstein

*by Vicki Woodard*

As I have been contemplating this subject, so many women come into my mind. I have aunts who were and are very important to me, mentors starting with my preschool teacher, friends, therapists, the list could cover decades. Finally, a name popped into my head who I haven't thought about in many years: Mrs. Greenstein.

In my early twenties I was living in Kansas City, Missouri, after escaping the hillbilly town of Springfield. Starting over again after a failed relationship is always tough and running from it is even harder. I was working a low end optical job living with my aunt and her four girls, plus I had no money. I was struggling by with my future always on the edge of a breaking point trying to go to night school to become a licensed optician. Life was a drama and I was the queen.

It was one thing after another that first year: moved into an apartment in an old house, had my vehicle stolen, and lost my job in a two-week period. So, as I was crying on the bus I decided to get off at the Plaza and exclusive shopping area in KC. While walking around, I saw a small Sears store and noticed it had an optical shop inside . . . in I went. What did I have to lose? I was going to apply for a job. The first person I met was the optical shop manager Paula, and she informed me they had just hired a new girl who started tomorrow. Just my luck. But she did ask me to fill out an application in case maybe something came up at another store. Luck changed. Just like that, the next day the girl didn't show up and I had a job.

I share all this to lead up to Mrs. Greenstein.

I didn't meet Mrs. Greenstein right away because she really didn't leave the house much, but she was mentioned quite often. I knew her son, daughter and grandchild and saw her husband often, but she was a mystery.

Mrs. Greenstein ran a kosher home which kept her busy and she was very involved with the temple. Plus, her volunteer work helped misplaced family members locate each other.

One day, everyone had gone to lunch and I was alone in the shop. Suddenly, a short stout woman walked into the reception area looking for Paula. This lady was dressed in a fur coat and hat with beautiful jewelry and the brightest red hair I had ever seen; honestly, she took my breath away. She wasn't beautiful or attractive but something about her was stunning.

"You must be Vicki?" she said in a loud raspy voice and the whole store stopped what they were doing, and all eyes were on us. "Who did your nose?" was the next question. I answered, "God."

"I am here looking for Paula. Do you know where she is having lunch and with whom?" I told her and as she turned away she looked back and said, "I am Mrs. Greenstein and I will see you after lunch." Off she went.

That was my introduction to Mrs. Greenstein.

As time went on, I was invited to family dinners and to Passover and Hanukkah because the family thought I should be Jewish. Everyone around me during this time in my life was Jewish.

The first time I noticed something different about her was when I saw the tattoo on her arm, and that is when Mrs. Greenstein started mentoring me about life. Mrs. Greenstein was

from Russia and had lived through the Holocaust and was in Auschwitz concentration camp. She was so wise and knew how to handle many situations

She taught me about the Jewish religion, how to handle myself at a dinner party, how to dress for special engagements, how to know if a man is from a good Jewish family (she was always pushing that issue). Grammar was her pet peeve and she would just wait for me to use the wrong word or phrase.

How I feel about her I can't describe. She was so much more than meets the eye. The smell of her Chanel perfume, the way she carried herself like nothing would stop her, the love in her eyes when she looked at her husband of many years, the love for her family, and she made a statement when she walked into any room.

Mrs. Greenstein was there when I got married but wasn't happy about the gentleman I married. She kept forgetting I wasn't Jewish. She helped me pick out my dress and she was so happy to have a beautiful corsage made with white roses to match my bouquet. It went perfect with her navy blue velvet dress and her red hair.

Mrs. Greenstein was only in my life for four years but her wisdom, warmth, guidance and ability to learn to forgive still lives in me.

I will never forget Mrs. Greenstein, and I hope she never forgot me.