



Gratz Insider, January 2015 - Story Continuation

[To return to the newsletter, close this page.]

## **Rose Schmukler: Gratz College Alumna from the Class of 1931**

I met Rose Schmukler on a Sunday morning at her daughter Anita's apartment. When I entered the apartment, Rose jumped up to greet me with a spryness that belied her age. As I looked around, I noticed that there were paintings everywhere, adorning the walls and stacked in piles in the corner of the room. These paintings were the work of Anita's favorite artist: her mother, Rose Schmukler, who took up painting 23 years ago - at the age of 77.

When Rose was widowed after 55 years of marriage, Anita encouraged her mother to take a class at the Katz Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Cherry Hill. Although she had always doubted her artistic ability, Rose selected a watercolor class because, as she matter-of-factly explained, "it was at 10:00, and that's when the bus got there."

To her surprise, Rose shined with a burst of latent, unexpected and prolific artistic talent. Rose began her foray into painting with a meager palette of watercolors, like the ones used by schoolchildren. She has since graduated to a professional set of paints and brushes, given to her by Anita. Rose has worked primarily with watercolors, but at the age of 99, she decided to change things up a bit and try acrylics. Over the past 23 years, Rose has created hundreds of works, with paintings exhibited at the Center on the Hill at The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill and at the Katz JCC. Currently, her work is on display at the Leona P. Kramer Gallery here at Gratz College.

Well before she took up painting, Rose wrote poetry. In fact, during my visit that Sunday morning, she recited with emotion the lyrical lines of an original poem. Although she wrote this poem over 20 years ago, she delivered every line from memory. ([Click here](#) for a video of Rose reciting her poem, called "For Only a Fortnight.")

At the age of 100, Rose has also begun experimenting with a different form of expression: journal writing. During our interview, she produced a journal entry that she had recently written about Rebecca Gratz, who established the first Sunday school for the religious education of Jewish children. In this entry, Rose described her own experience at the school, explaining that she "showed up to hear bible stories, sing along and learn the hymns." She added that she never missed a class and that her only requirement was to bring a penny each week.

Still awed by Rebecca Gratz for her beauty, her independence and her "*yiddishkeit*," Rose painted a portrait of Rebecca from a picture in a magazine. Fittingly, the portrait is included in the collection of Rose's work that is being exhibited at Gratz College, the school which bears Rebecca Gratz's family name.

After her Sunday school days, Rose continued her Jewish education during high school - and she has the photographic evidence to prove it: a faded black-and-white picture of her Gratz College graduating class, the class of 1931. At that time, Gratz did not have a formal high

school division as it does today, but high school students were able to earn a Hebrew Teachers Diploma.

Although she walked almost two miles in all kinds of weather to get there, Rose never missed a Gratz class during high school. “I loved it,” she told me, “the music, the prayers, the people.” She then broke out into song, reciting words she had learned over 80 years ago. She also expressed elation at returning to Gratz - albeit in a different location - for the opportunity to exhibit her paintings.

As a Gratz student, Rose served as an assistant teacher at a local Sunday school. This experience was the closest she ever came to pursuing her dream of becoming a teacher. The harsh economic realities of the times thwarted this dream, forcing her to instead enter the labor force as a factory worker after high school. While working oppressively long hours for meager pay, Rose became involved in the labor movement. In fact, she was committed to social justice throughout her life. She supported racial and gender equality and participated in demonstrations to end war, hunger and poverty. To this day, she concludes her Friday night prayers with the words “Please make peace in the troubled world.”

Although Rose never fulfilled her dream of becoming a teacher, she has become a lifelong student. At 100 years old, she takes the bus to the Katz JCC for classes: Monday is art; Tuesday is Yiddish; Wednesday is current events; and Friday is opera.

Each day, she arrives at the JCC early so that she can exercise by walking a half-mile before class begins. In fact, toward the end of our interview, Rose stood up and took a few laps in the hallway of her daughter’s apartment. In addition to exercise, she has always been committed to healthy eating - a regimen that certainly seems to have served her well.

At the end of the interview, when I asked Rose for some parting words of wisdom, she said simply, “Life is for living.” It is sound advice from a woman who has been living life to the fullest for 100 years.

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*Rose Schmukler’s paintings are currently on exhibit through the end of March at the Leona P. Kramer Gallery at Gratz College. The gallery hours are Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. In addition, the gallery is usually open on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., but visitors should call first to confirm.*

*Rose’s artwork will also be on display during two special events at the College:*

*At noon on Sunday, February 1, the public is invited to a One Book One Jewish Community event featuring Gratz alumna and author, Nomi Eve, who will speak about her new book Henna House. ([Click here](#) for an event flyer.) The author event will be followed by a reception, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., showcasing Rose’s work in the gallery.*

*On Thursday evening, February 26, the public is invited to attend the Stern Family Institute for Israel Studies Lecture, presented by Gratz alumnus Dr. Eric Goldman, who will speak on the topic of Israeli society through film. For more information on this program, see the [event flyer](#) or contact [Mindy Cohen](#), 215-635-7300 x155.*