

ELIZABETH 'BETTY' RIEMER SHOCKEY

Betty Shockey was born in the Bronx to Arthur Riemer and Marie Haberer in 1930. Both of her parents were of German descent. Arthur, who had at first emigrated to Poland, came to North America alone at the age of 16. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people in many parts of the world decided to leave their homes and immigrate to the United States. For much of this period, 'the Bronx' was the gateway for immigration to America. It was and still is a melting pot of world cultures. Arthur Riemer was apparently an entrepreneur, for much of his daughter's childhood, he operated a delicatessen which was essentially a community grocery store and later used his training and skills in mechanical fields. At some point, the family moved across the river to the North Bergen first and then, Jersey City, both still part of what is known as the New York City metropolitan area and



where Arthur already had a second delicatessen. Betty remembers looking across the river at the city during WWII when the threat of enemy action called for blackouts. She remembers air raid drills in school, walking home in the blackouts, and rationing. She also lived through the polio pandemic of the 1940's and 50's. and remembers classmates coming to school with cloth bags of camphor hung around their necks, front and back, to ward off the disease. She describes it as a scary time---with good reason.

The stories of women's lives are rarely seen in history books, but they often tell the stories behind the history. Betty's stories of her mother and grandmother's lives are examples of the history of German immigration into New York City in the late 19th century. Her mother Marie was only four when her father died of illness, leaving her mother Mina Martin Haberer as the soul support of five children, of which Marie was the second youngest. Mina does not appear to have had extended family or relatives to rely on. She supported her family doing whatever she

could. She was a seamstress and taught Marie, her daughter, to sew. The children did whatever they could to support the family. Child labor was common at the time and the family did "homework" Homework was a practice in which a family member would go to a factory and collect a 'bucket' of materials by which certain products could be created. Once at home, the entire family engaged in the work to complete the production.

As soon as she was old enough, Marie became a Shabbos goy, a Yiddish or Hebrew word meaning a non-Jew who performs certain types of work which Jewish religious law prohibits a Jew from doing on the Sabbath. The term is a combination of the word "Shabbos" (שבת) meaning the Sabbath day of rest, and goy, which literally means "a nation" but colloquially means a "non-Jew". Marie learned enough Yiddish to be able to communicate with Jewish shopkeepers and merchants. As she grew older, Marie worked in the garment industry, then a large part of the urban economy. Students of history will remember the story of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Manhattan in 1911. 146 workers were killed, mostly young women and teenage girls. It was the worst workplace disaster in New York until 9/11. Over 90 victims jumped or fell from the building in an accident that could have been prevented. Sprinkler systems, fire drills and adequate fire escapes existed, but the government refused to pass laws mandating their uses in industry. The public outcry after the fire led to reform and changed the course of history, paving the way for government to represent working people, not just business---which helped an emerging middle class to live the American Dream.

Marie, 16 at the time, worked elsewhere, but probably under the same conditions and potential dangers. She became a seamstress in her own right, providing steady work through which she became known for her skills. She made her children's clothes and garments for the Catholic hierarchy of the city: albs, which are liturgical vestments worn in some services by Roman Catholic and other officiants.; a special garment for the well-known Bishop Fulton J. Sheen; and special vestments and altar cloths for St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Betty's parents were able to provide a stable, working class life for their family and set the stage for middle class lives of their children. Betty graduated from Wm. L. Dickenson High School in Jersey City and a Thiel Lutheran College in Western, PA. There, Betty met and married Nick Shockey and after teaching for a brief period, she became a 'stay-at-home' mom. The couple stayed in Pennsylvania while Nick earned his masters' degree at the University of Pittsburg. Eventually, they moved to Norwich, CT where Nick worked in a mental health hospital and where their next three children were born. They learned of a job in Auburn, NY through a friend. At that time, the mental health agency in Cayuga County was one of four, in the country, federally funded pilot projects of a new community mental health model. Entering at the ground floor, Nick had a rewarding career in his field. He and Betty purchased a home in Union Springs after they were unable to find a house to rent in Auburn. This decision turned out to be the beginning of what was to be a somewhat idyllic small-town life for themselves and their children. With no local Lutheran Church, in which both had been raised, they joined the local Presbyterian Church. It became an important part of the family life. Betty describes their belief and experience that church involvement, with the rituals of Sunday services baptism, communion, youth group provides a context for raising children. Beyond that, biblical tradition suggests that if you raise a child in the way they should live, they will follow that way in their lives. Once her children were old enough, Betty began substituting in the local school. She went back to college earning a master's degree in library sciences from SUNY Cortland and worked as a librarian in the Union Springs School district for 24 years. After retirement, Became active as a Literacy Volunteer, something she did for 17 years. She taught people from all over the world to read English, some of whom she still hears from. She and Nick traveled throughout this country and Europe where they visited relatives and the families that hosted their children as exchange or foreign students in Germany. Nick passed away in 2013. Betty remains active in the community, especially with the Historical Society. She is an avid student of history, her own and others. Her life, and the lives of her mother and grandmother, represent a woman's experience of the history of German immigrants in America, of Women's History or Women's Her-Story. She is a repository of local history and holds the memory and mementos of her own and her mother's life, plus all the lessons learned from the heroic lives of her foremothers. She cherishes her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who carry the way they were raised into the future, a gift for which Betty and Nick will be remembered.

