



*A Wonderful Life:*

*A Daughter's Tribute to a Family of Educators*

*featuring the artwork of  
Joan Myerson Shrager ED '60*

# *A Wonderful Life*

“Many of us carry memories of an influential teacher ...  
who said something at just the right time in our lives to snap  
a whole world into focus.”

-Laurent A. Daloz (20th century), U.S. educator.

*This exhibition was created by  
Joan Myerson Shrager, digital artist, Ed '60*

*in loving memory of her parents,  
Ruth Meyers Myerson, Ed '30  
and Adolph Myerson, W '29 and GEd '32*



# *The Artist*



*Joan Myerson Shrager ED '60*

I have been a professional artist for more than 30 years and have devoted myself to the working Philadelphia area artists' community for as many years, serving on boards of art centers, serving as president of a large area artists organization, Artists Cultural Exchange, helping to found a major art collective in Philadelphia, ArtForms Gallery of Manayunk, and serving as its director for six years.

After nine years of teaching in the Philadelphia Public School system, I received a master's degree in psychology and for several years wrote articles and taught seminars in stress management.

I also attended art classes at Moore College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, Tyler School of Art and the Cheltenham and Abington Art Centers as I was an art major at the Philadelphia High School for Girls. After many years of considering art my avocation, I finally understood that making art was what gave me the most satisfaction. I began as a sculptor and later became a painter using acrylics and other water-based paints. My work was typically Abstract Expressionist in style.

In the past four years, I taught myself to use intricate software programs to create digital paintings. While very difficult, more so than conventional art, I have become completely immersed in digital art.

## *The Artist, cont'd*

For this body of work, sepia photographs, yellowed newspaper and magazine clippings are combined with freehand drawing directly on the computer. I manipulate and superimpose the images, adding my own shapes to the mix.

I also continue to develop my expressionistic style in freehand paintings done on the computer which can be seen on my web site [www.joan-myerson-shrager.com](http://www.joan-myerson-shrager.com).

After my mother died in 1998, I sorted through her papers and realized that she had saved a treasure trove of memorabilia from World War I postcards to love letters from my father circa 1928, to letters I had written to her over the years, to letters from her adoring grandsons. The more I look through this material and the hundreds of sepia photographs, the more of a sense I get about what my parents lives were like.

They were magnificent people who best exemplified Simone de Beauvoir's words:

*"... go on pursuing ends that give our existence meaning ...  
by means of love, friendship, indignation, and compassion."*

My father graduated from Wharton in 1929, and later earned a master's degree from the Graduate School of Education and my mother from the School of Education in 1930. My father lived to attend his 55<sup>th</sup> class reunion, my mother her 65<sup>th</sup>. Both were superb, dedicated teachers who taught for a combined total of over 85 years. They were the most intellectually curious people I have ever known.

The University of Pennsylvania had a profound effect on my parents throughout their lives from continued involvement in alumni affairs, to maintaining relationships developed at Penn.

# A Life of Dance



"A Life of Dance"



Dancers in "Hades, Inc"



1936



Adviser—MRS. R. MYERSON  
9 B 1

1940's



Student in dance club

*I like your friendliness and understanding. You talked to us as our own kind and you have a great sense of humor. I wish teaching as well.*

A note of praise from a student



Her usual "A" rating



Dance Festival

My mother was known for her dancing. Her experience at Penn in Hades had a great impact on her as a teacher. Students loved her social and folk dance clubs, from which she staged city-wide dance festivals throughout her teaching career. She also ran folk dancing classes for adults. She taught me how to dance, shadowing me as my father waltzed me around. In her late eighties, she danced the latest dances with her grandsons and their friends at her grandson's wedding. In her nineties, she danced in a wheelchair at her senior care facility.

# *A Pennsylvania Daughter*



"A Pennsylvania Daughter"



Furness Library



Graduation



Women's Student Government



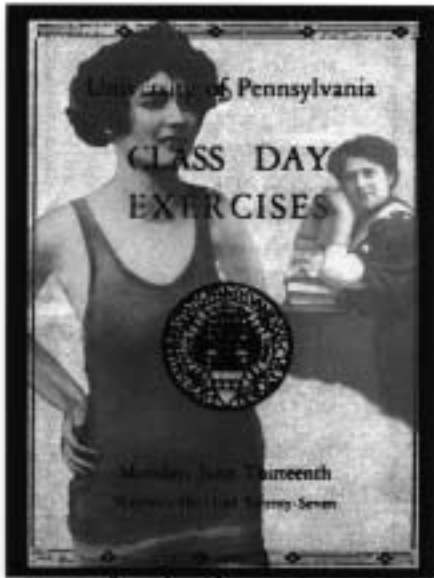
Student

My mother was awarded a Mayor's Scholarship to Penn but my grandfather refused to accept it because he was a Democrat and the mayor was a Republican.

She participated in the cultural life of the University as a member of the glee club and student government. She performed in theater and musical events. This experience served as the foundation for a lifetime interest in theater, concerts, lectures and dance.

She recalled certain male professors who refused to teach women, forcing her to leave their classes.

# *Aspirations*



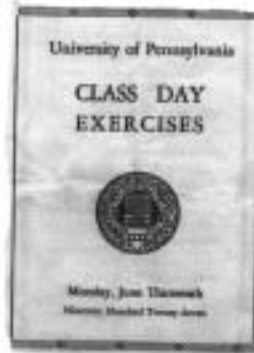
**Aspirations**



**Ruth on beach**



**Lisa Katz - Ruth's mother 1906**



**"Pennsylvania  
Thou hast given thy  
Daughters a heritage  
That will endure"**

As I look at the collection of old photos of my family, I often think about my grandmother who came to America, a teenager alone, with her name and the name of her half-brother, already here, pinned to her clothes as she didn't speak English. She arrived in 1907, worked in a shirtwaist factory, married my grandfather and gave birth to my mother in 1908. She loved to read but never learned to write in English. Twenty years after leaving a shtetl in Russia, she sent her only daughter to the University of Pennsylvania.

This photo painting represents my questions about the aspirations of these two women. What did Lisa Katz dream for herself when she came to America? What did she dream for her daughter? What were my mother's dreams for herself, and in turn for me?

# Baby Days



"Baby Days"



Ruth - Baby Days  
Hand colored



She wrote about "Baby Days."



Each person wrote a message



Review written by Ruth

My mother's South Philadelphia High School for Girls, class of 1926, yearbook was compiled by hand. It is a hardcover scrapbook with grommets securing the pages. Students wrote poetry and prose and supplied photographs.

I have always treasured it for its flowery sentiments, pressed flowers and

beautiful photographs of another era. "Baby Days" is my homage to my mother and her friends, several of whom were with her at her 90th birthday party.

"Baby Days"  
It was an  
exciting thrill -  
think that we  
were coming into an  
"own" decade - how  
that name thrilled!  
We romped with the  
rest of 3 year olds. An  
entertaining program.  
The Faculty's attendance  
at the genuine enjoyment  
a program by all was  
moving heart.



# *Dream*



Creating the photo painting “Dream” (upper right), involved touching up and combining two sepia photographs (left) into the lower right greyscale composition. Then I used filters and brush tools and added colors.



# Dreams



**DREAMS**



**College age**



**Childhood**



**Bathing beauty**



**Hades advertisement**

Born to Russian Jewish immigrants in Duluth, Minnesota, my mother grew up in a household with her parent's younger siblings brought from Europe one by one

and given a home until they could establish themselves. She told me about her uncles sleeping on doors detached from frames and put between two chairs. She lived in a predominantly Norwegian neighborhood and when she came to Philadelphia, her "Norwegian" accent was so strong she was assigned to a speech class.

The weather in Duluth was so cold and snowy that she wore snow skis to get to school. She said she could not see above the piled snow all winter. When her two-year-old sister died, the child's body was kept in a carriage on the back porch until the ground thawed for burial.

What did she dream for herself as she posed on the "moon?" Did she know how significant her life would be to the many students, friends and family she touched?

# *Growing Older*



Ruth, my mother, at ages 19, 29 and 90.

# Hades Incorporated



HADES INCORPORATED



Ruth - right

**PENN-GLIE CLUB BUST**  
 Program for "Hades, Inc." to be staged in May  
 With the selection of the most and chosen completed, the University of Pennsylvania Glee Club will begin its intensive rehearsals for work for "Hades, Inc." an original light opera which will be presented by the club in the Academy of Music on May 3, 4 and 5.  
 The work of Dr. H. Alexander Matthews and William O. Miller, the opera is expected to be by far the most colorful production ever staged by these students, more than 200 members of both the University Glee Club and the Women's Glee Club having been selected to participate.  
 A Special Feature (entirely) Clyde Douglas, James, and Miss Pauline Wilson and Miss Florida Matthews, soprano, have been chosen for the leading parts in the opera.  
 Miss Cecelia Matthews, Miss Florence Kirk, John Archer, Raymond E. Ballard and James Shirley also will be leading voices, while among others listed in the cast are Christine Board, president of the Penn Society at the University, and Miss Gladys Fox, president of the Women's Glee Club.



Program

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"Hades Incorporated" 1928, was a highlight for my mother at Penn. She talked about it all her life. Her love of dance continued and she ran a very popular dance club for many years at Wagner Junior High School, where she taught.

Using the original sepia photograph as the focus of this piece, I combined the shapes of the other memorabilia and used color to frame the graceful dancers.

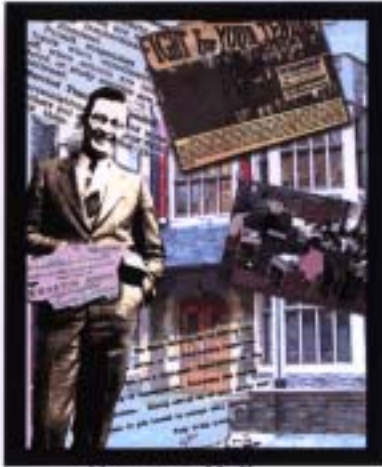


Ruth lower left



Ruth - lower left

# Houston Hall



Houston Hall



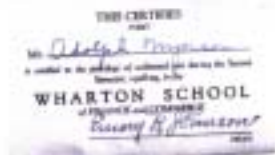
Mayor's scholarship



Houston Hall



Tenure fight  
1936



Unlimited cuts



Adolph in 1932

Born on a farm at Castor and Cottman Avenues in Northeast Philadelphia, my father attended Frankford High School and taught there from 1935 through 1976. He was affectionately known as “Mr. Frankford.” After graduating from Wharton in 1929, he attended law school for one year. Because of the Depression he could not continue and applied for a teaching position. He was first in the city teaching exams. He later earned a master’s degree from Penn’s Graduate School of Education.

With a recent photo of Houston Hall as the background, I included some highlights of my father’s early years:

- ♦ A letter from the mayor’s office announcing a full paid scholarship to Penn, unimaginable for the son of immigrants who did not speak English (nor did my father when he started school).
- ♦ A card entitling him to unlimited cuts at Wharton because of his high grade point average.
- ♦ A newspaper photo of him leading a group of teachers to Harrisburg to fight for tenure in 1936.

# Issues of the Day



Issues of the Day



College graduation



1938 Teacher Contract



Married teachers subject to being fired

Dear Teacher:  
 We think you will be interested in knowing that you have been nominated by one of your students for the Quilt Kids scholarship award for the nation's best classroom teacher. The teacher who wins the award will be invited to appear on the Quilt Kids program, will receive a year's scholarship with all tuition and living costs paid, and \$1,000 in cash. The winner will be announced by the end of this school year.  
 We congratulate you most sincerely on doing such a good job that one of your present or former students thinks you are the best teacher in the United States. The teacher's work is the most important the country has to offer, and you can be proud that you are doing it well.

Beatrice H. Walfish  
 submitted your name

Sincerely,

*John Savelle*

Nominated for "nation's best classroom teacher"

My mother began her long career during a time when teachers, especially women, were vulnerable to the whims of their employers. There was no union and there was no tenure. She went on to be one of the finest teachers in Philadelphia. Poems and writings in the many autograph books and letters she saved are testimonials to her great skills. She collected materials from all over the world to enrich her lessons and she spent hours every evening preparing for her classes. I believe she represented the last of a particular type of teacher, the ultimate professional who regarded teaching as a calling.

# *The Graduate*



**The Graduate**



**Coed**



**65th reunion- Judith Rodin greets Ruth**



**Recent photo of the Quadrangle**

My mother was thrilled to attend her 65th Penn reunion. She sat on the back of a golf cart and waved to all of the students who lined College Walk. What a remarkable woman she was, one of very few women in 1927 to attend college, the wife, mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother of Penn students as well. I see her span a lifetime of University of Pennsylvania experiences.

I will never forget how on the day of his graduation, my son left his own class procession to march with his grandparents who were celebrating my father's 55th reunion.

# Tree of Life



"Tree of Life"



Ruth and parents



Ruth in 1927



Ruth in 1940 age 32



In front of the Banyon Tree



"Tree of Life" was inspired by the middle lower left photo of my mother in her late eighties standing in front of a Banyan tree as old as she. We were in Los Angeles for my son's wedding.

Extremely popular at Penn, she participated in many extracurricular activities. Dancing was her favorite and she often spoke of multiple dance partners, a full dance card being the sign of how attractive she was. The upper right dance booklet was signed twice by William S. Paley, whom she always said was interested in her. But she also added that she had fallen madly in love with my father so Paley was out of luck.



Dance card with #8 and #9 filled in by William S. Paley





*Many thanks to our friends and alumni who made this evening possible. Our special thanks to Joan Myerson Shragar for generously sharing her talent and memories with the Penn GSE community.*

