

We Braved Convention

By Chris Hirschhorn

One day it occurred to me that I would like to marry but I knew no man to date much less marry. I remembered that my business experience was primarily with IBM equipment. So I applied to IBM. They gave me a test and accepted me as a teacher of their computer systems. I was happy since IBM had many single men as teachers and salesmen. Consequently, I had many dates to movies, Broadway Shows, operas, roller skating and weekend skiing on the slopes of Vermont.

But, who would I marry? I was Catholic. There were no single Catholic men. The protestant men were not interested in a Catholic. Then there was Howie – Jewish. The problem with Howie was that he really liked me.

Then he invited me to a party in his apartment. His friends were fun and interesting so I thought a man with such intelligent and fun friends couldn't be all bad. He and I didn't count on falling in love. We came from strict Roman Catholic and Orthodox Jewish families. One day, we declared that we were 'in love.' So what would we do now?

My Bravest Moment was declaring that this is our life not our parents' and we must make our life what we wish and not what our parents wished.

So, we were wed by a Justice of the Peace at the Queens County Court House in 1960, with my two IBM friends, and Howie's friends, and his brother and sister present. We didn't invite our parents or my Catholic friends to our wedding because, at that time, it was considered a mortal sin for a Catholic to attend such a wedding.

In fact, it wasn't until nine months later that we spoke with my family. I phoned them and announced that we had a baby named Philip. The announcement to my folks was another Bravest Moment. Would they cast me out or not? By then, they were happy to hear from me and welcomed my husband, Howard and baby Philip.

My parents and my husband's parents never met until our Philip was two and the second, David, was one. We had a birthday party in the garden of our Port Washington home and invited both families. They came, my mom and dad, both educated lawyers, and his hard working parents.

Years after we married, I learned that In order to marry the orthodox woman, Lillian, Louis gave up his good paying job in telegraphy, in the 1920s, so he could be home before sundown on Friday evenings, else the orthodox woman, Lillian, he wanted to marry would not marry him.

Louis told me that he sold veggies and fruits from a push cart to earn money to raise his family. My husband was first generation American.

My parents broke the ice and they conversed.