

Recollections of Emma Arenstam

August 2001

Although we lived far apart, I was very fond of Bubbe. We would see her every summer when our family vacationed in Maine and maybe one or two other times during the year.

When we were in college, I brought Patty (way before we were married) to Maine to visit with the family. It was the last time I was to see Bubbe and the only time that Patty ever met her. Of course, I knew how sharp she was, but we were both amazed as she recounted stories of the family and rattled off all of the birthdays of her grandchildren and even the great grandchildren. I was very glad that Patty got to meet this special person

Patty and I named our first born, Emily (*Nehama*), after her. When it came time for Emily's bat mitzvah, we asked people to send us there memories of Bubbe. On the following pages are the stories that people were kind enough to send to us.


Joel Winetz

September 1990

My mother was a pretty, small woman. She was proud in that she always dressed well and with good taste. I remember one of the last times she went to the doctor. It was an unexpected appointment because she didn't feel well. Her worry was what would he think of her because she hadn't had time to have her hair done.

She had a small, but sweet voice and I so enjoyed when she sang to me. I don't think any of us inherited that ability.

When she was nine, she apprenticed out to a millinerist. I believe the woman was a relative who lived in Riga. Our family came from Mitau. One night she was working overtime to finish an order. There was a curfew. When the soldiers came to check they hid her in a feather bed until the soldiers left.

Mother always said her own mother was a terrible cook. She learned to cook from her mother-in-law and did become an excellent cook and baker.

Lemon meringue pie was one of her specialties. However, an occasion arose when she had to make said pie for a cake sale. The results didn't please her, but there was no time to make another. She later told me she's quietly bought it back.

Her family was her joy. She sacrificed time and effort to see we had the best of food, clothing and opportunities. These varied at different times depending on family finances. Jake played violin, Betty and Bertha and Arlene piano. Some also had dancing lessons. By the time she got to me I think she was slightly discouraged. I remember early dance and elocution, then she saved the money.

Jane Persky

July 25th, 1990

Dear Patty & Joel,

Happy to receive your invitation. I think it was lovely.

I will try to give you all the information I remember about my mother. I don't remember her talking about her childhood.

Her maiden name was Bernstein. Her father was a shoe cobbler and she was a milliner. She worked at hats.

She lived in Riga which was a part of Russia in her day.

Her birthday was May 21. My father came to the states alone and when he had money he sent for her. They had a wedding with another couple in Boston.

They moved to Rumford, Maine and Jake, Betty and Bertha were born there. While there she had Senator Muskie's father as a boarder.

Then they moved to Lewiston and I was born there, then Arlene and Jane.

She was very active in the International Club in the YWCA. She was a very friendly and intelligent woman.

She died May 9th, 1971, just before her 86th birthday.

Hope some of this is a help to you.

Love to you all,

Aunt Ann

Recollection of Emma Arenstam

Living very close to Bubbe Arenstam, I have a lot of memories of her activities: playing cards in her apartment with Zadie, making rock candy, preparing perogies, going everywhere with Aunt Bertha. But my favorite memory of her has to do with one of the grandchildren who had recently gotten engaged. The family was abuzz with gossip about the prospective mate – most of it negative for very minor reasons. Somehow, Bubbe and I were talking about the relationship too and she was very clear that it was a very good match. She made a point of telling me how “right” it was. And the marriage has lasted years and years. I always felt that she knew people and this incident reinforced that impression of her.

Beverly Shevis

Old Chatham, New York
September 6, 1990

Dear Patty and Joel,

I am sorry we cannot be with you for your Bat Mitzvah, but I will tell you what I know of Bobi Arenstam (Emma). I lived two blocks from her as a child, so I got to spend a lot of time with her. First of all I remember her eyes, sparkling and full of life. She got older, and her body got smaller and frailer, but her eyes never aged or diminished.

She was very distinguished. She had brought Manhattan with her to Maine. She always had that sophistication and urbanity in our New England world. Her small second floor apartment was a sweet loving oasis for me.

Hard candies and perogies. The hard candies were in a glass dish, so we never took them but had them handed to us. The perogies were lungen and ground beef wrapped in dough. I think of them often in my kosher butcher shop where lungen can no longer be sold. Delish.

One story. Sometime before coming to this country she traveled to visit relatives in Russia. At that time Jews were not allowed to travel. A knock on the door sent everyone scurrying. It was not healthy to be a Jew breaking the law in old Russia. They had Emma lay on the springs of the bed, and everyone else sat on the mattress on top of her. It was only the postman, a friend of theirs, but who could have known.

I remember visiting her right before she passed away at the nursing home in Portland. Very little of her body was left, and she was certainly beginning her journey. But, you still knew her spirit was very much alive on its way to rejoin Harry, the tailor.

Well, it isn't much but it is well meant. Enjoy your simcha, and have a very sweet and joyous new year.

Sincerely,

John Gedalya Persky

PS – Oh, yes, our son is named after her. Nathaniel for her Hebrew name Nechama.