

Your great-grandma Helen adored Miami Beach. She had a studio condo at 1776 Collins Avenue (that's 17th Street) with a long balcony from which you could get a glimpse of the Atlantic Ocean.

Her birthday is this Monday, March 16th and it would be meaningful to me if you could think of her and her love of the waves and the sand as you stroll with Dad under the palm trees. I hope you get to walk on the Boardwalk which she adored as it was a place she would run into her friends and watch the kids.

Gramma Helen loved the saltwater and the fresh smell at the Beach. In Brooklyn, she lived a few blocks away from Brighton Beach where the Boardwalk begins and then goes a few miles all the way to Coney Island with its famous rollercoaster. When we were little, Doda and I spent many weekends and summers walking the Boardwalk with Gramma and hearing her talk Jewish (Yiddish) with her friends. "Shalom Alechim," she would say. "Alechim shalom," they would answer. As a struggling refugee, Gramma's life was bittersweet and in fact that was her favorite type of chocolate, to be enjoyed with hot tea, Russian style in a glass.

Pepe and I made several lovely visits to spend time with Gramma Helen in the early 1980's. She really liked Pepe and admired his quiet ways and intelligence. She enjoyed baking a parade of goodies for him, and he gobbled up her light and lemony sponge cake – it seemed like he was consuming about one entire angel cake per day, as I recall.

She never finished school as she and her family fled Europe when she was 15 but she had a lot of common sense and tremendous kindness. She was very proud of the ethics and traditions and attachment to family in Judaism but quite open to what was good in other faiths and traditions: she thought Catholic school uniforms were an excellent idea, she enjoyed music from many countries, she did yoga in the Park with other seniors, she took up the tricycle in her 70's to make grocery shopping easier. She was self-sufficient and also very connected with her friends and family. She was a modern woman too, who worked and earned a living for her family as my grandfather, her husband had rheumatic fever as a young man, due to poverty, and suffered a stroke. Since he became an invalid when Granpa George was just 12, he depended a lot on his wife and son for daily care and it was tough on them.

Caleb, how Gramma Helen would have cherished you, and all of your wonderful qualities. I wish she could have lived long enough to have gotten to know you & Jeremy but she died just five days after your brother was born and I was heartbroken for a long time. It's now been 21 years since she's gone, and each year I appreciate how special a person she was.

When we would visit Miami, Daddy and I enjoyed looking at postmodern skyscrapers and also the old art-deco hotels along the Beach. I don't know if the Cardozo where we once stayed is still there – the porthole windows and funky eyebrow and shiplike architecture are fun to look at. The Wolfsonian sometimes has good shows. There are pictures somewhere of Daddy & me going to nearby Viscaya.

Hope you guys have a great trip! Love, Mom