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Obituaries



Elizabeth Guny; 'Auntie BeBe,' is dead at 89

PROVIDENCE — Elizabeth Abramowitz Guny, a spry 89-year-old woman known to those who loved her as "Auntie BeBe," died Monday at Rhode Island Hospital.

Mrs. Guny, who lived at 117 Benefit St., was something of a local celebrity, famous for her long and chatty daily walks that were filmed by generations of Rhode Island School of Design students.

She talked to everyone she met on the street, and her conversation was always a series of gleeful whoops and conspiratorial whispers. She was enthralled with the work of the student artists and faithfully attended their shows. Her apartment, too, was an endless source of tea, food and moral support.

Auntie BeBe was, herself, something of an artists' inspiration, managing to look both exotic and grandmotherly at the same time. Her eye-catching costumes included rings and bracelets, elaborate knitted shawls and necklaces of jangling bells, offset by a supportive walking cane and sensible shoes.

Ease for nothing from anybody, so the suprise is doubly nice when it comes right out of thin air and drops in my lap."

The daughter of the late Abraham and Betsy (Herman) Abramowitz, Mrs. Guny grew up in Elmwood, where the trees arched over the streets and trolleys clattered past neat lawns. She went to the old Technical High School and married the late Harry Guny in 1917.

They settled at 117 Benefit Street, in the same three-story building where she spent the rest of her life, with her knickknacks, faded photographs and memorabilia.

During her first three years there, she said, she nearly went crazy. Trains rumbled noisily into Union Station and coal dust blackened the area.

Later, she would tell people that she wanted to live nowhere else except Benefit Street. The student atmosphere, the vitality of the universities, and the memories — these things were irreplaceable.

Always, she told people about her Harry, her "once-in-a-million" man who died in 1963 and whose memory sustained and pained her during her last years.

"When you fall off a high golden pedestal," she always said, "you really take a tumble."

GUNY, ELIZABETH

Together, Auntie BeBe and Harry had run a drug store in Randall Square at Charles Street and Chalkstone Avenue. They had no children of their own, but they showered love on the children of others.

"We wanted a family," she once said, "but it just wasn't meant to be. So, the next best thing, little by little, was that we got mixed up with everybody else's children."

From 1924 until World War II, Mrs. Guny was the only woman on the board of directors of the Jewish Orphanage (later Children's Home) of Rhode Island.

Even after the orphanage closed, she monitored the progress of 'The Kids,' as she called them — tracing their careers and successes, marriages and families.

In Mrs. Guny's later years, friends sometimes cautioned her to slow down and take things easy, but she never listened. She said she was a teenager at heart, and that she wanted to be free to appreciate the little joys of life.

"When the time is up, my dear boy, it is up," she once told a reporter. "You can be in the hospital with all the equipment, all the specialists, all the scientific help — that's the end of the chapter."

There are no survivors. The funeral service will be held Friday at noon at the Max Sugarman Memorial Chapel, 458 Hope St. Burial

cemetery / Jewish