## Ruth Katz Zagon 1914–1984 Memory Book



Text & Photo Art by Randa Dubnick



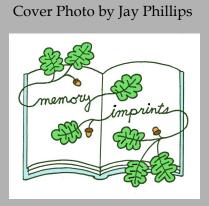
Ruth Kates Zagon Memory Book

Text and photo art by Randa Dubnick

Design by Heather Dubnick

Published by Memory Imprints

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232 Broadway, Pueblo , Colorado, the house where Ruth Katz lived most of her life. Digitized print by Randa Dubnick.

### My Mom, Ruth Katz Zagon

My mom was born in Pueblo, Colorado, on November 2, 1914. She was a middle child, sandwiched between an adored older brother, Isidore Allen, who later went by Al Kates, and an adorable younger sister, Edythe, who went by Edy and later became Edythe Sigman.

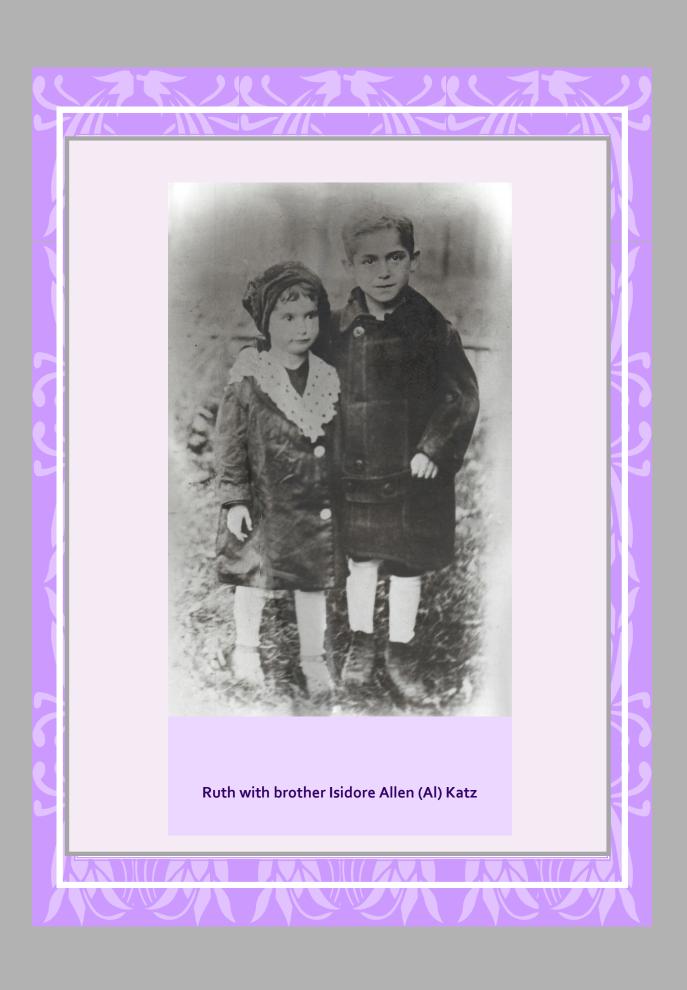
Mom was tall and rail thin, and I know she felt awkward and was shy. She told me that she was very ornery and used to spend a lot of time in the principle's office at school. I believe it. She had a wicked sense of humor and a skeptical attitude toward authority.

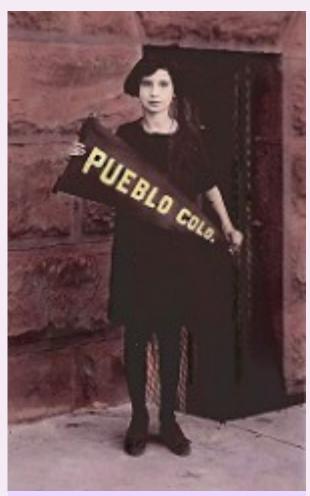


She wanted to go away to col-

lege, and did so for a semester, but I think the money ran out, though I am not sure. In any case, she came home and continued her studies at the local junior college. I know she wanted to be a writer, and she also liked to draw.

During World War II, she and my Aunt Edy, a few years younger, attended USO dances at the army base in Pueblo. Both of them were very beautiful and used to date some of the soldiers, and would bring the





One of my favorite family photos is this image of my mother. It is hanging on my wall in the original black and white. The background is Central Grade School, which I also attended decades later.



Mom in Cleveland (Rescued and posterized photo)

nicer ones home to the house. I have seen many pictures of them sitting with soldiers around the kitchen table or in a jeep.

At one of those dances, my mom met my dad, who was from Brooklyn but was briefly stationed in Pueblo. My dad played the piano and so did my mom and they hit it off. They got married after dating for just a few months. It was a very simple wedding, no fancy white dress. They had time for a quick trip to New York so my mom could meet my father's family in Brooklyn. And soon after, my father went oversees with the army, and was overseas for several years during World War II. My mom stayed in Pueblo and worked in the family business, a furniture store.

In the meantime my mom's dad (Ralph Katz) had passed away, and this changed whatever plans my parents had made. When the war was over and my dad returned to the states, he and my mom set up house-keeping in the family home, where my grandmother lived; and so did my aunt and uncle. (My aunt had also met her husband, Robert Sigman, at a USO dance.) And all four of them worked in the family furniture store. And both couples started families: I was born three months before my cousin, and we were raised like twins, and were even dressed alike. My grandmother, Dora Katz, who was deaf, did not work in furniture store, but she was very much involved in looking after my cousin Vicky and me, and taught us Yiddish, etiquette, and gin rummy.

My mom was a working mother in a time when that was unusual. She didn't cook much at that point because my grandmother and my aunt cooked most of the meals,. But she liked to make desserts and candies. She liked to joke and play games. I remember that when something funny happened while we were playing board games, she would laugh so hard that she was soundlessly shaking, with tears running down her cheeks.

After my grandmother died, the furniture store closed, and my mom and aunt ran a gift shop. My mom wrote ads in the form of clever poems to entice people to the shop.

As a teenager, I was sometimes embarrassed by my mother who was unconventional for the time, and well, for any time. She could swear like a sailor and she smoked like a chimney and did not suffer fools, gladly or otherwise. She wasn't one for school nights or mother-daughter teas. But she was a great mom for a teenager, somehow strict and permissive at the same time. She never nagged about my grades, but came up fun ways to help me study for a test. She didn't allow me to do things she considered risky or dangerous (like going on out-of-town dates, ride motorbikes, or going to drive-in movies with a boy). She was sympathetic but no nonsense, and helped put things into perspective by making me laugh, with lines like, "This isn't the first time your life has been ruined."

I took an engagement ring at high school graduation (though my mom thought I was too young). A few years later, we married and moved to Boulder. We returned to Pueblo after a couple more years had passed. I was about to have a baby and my husband had joined that National Guard (he lost the draft lottery). So I had my daughter in Pueblo and when my husband was in basic training in South Carolina, my daughter and I lived back home with my family, in the house where I grew up. I wasn't happy about the situation but I remember my mother insisting that I focus on choosing the colors for the small bedroom that would serve as was a nursery for my daughter. Looking back, I am glad my mother had the chance for extended time with my daughter—and that I had more time with her. When basic training was finally over, and we all returned to Boulder, my mom cried and said that it was too easy to fall in love with a baby.

Soon after my parents and my aunt and uncle moved to Denver, and became next-door neighbors in two condos, with a gate in the fence so they could go back and forth.

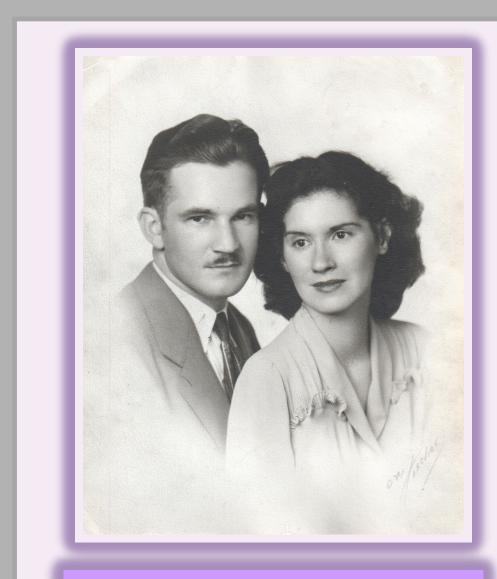
It was easier for my parents to come up to Boulder to visit when my son was born soon after. And it was easier for us to drive down to Denver. I would visit them with my husband, my daughter and son, and sometimes I would stay in Denver for a few weeks while my husband was in Wyoming for National Guard camp.

A few years later we moved to Kansas for my husband's first teaching job and my parents drove out with us, along with one of my dad's sisters. My mother was a riot to travel with because she carried cheese whiz and crackers and loved to stop a Stuckey's stores at rest stops. It really helped that my folks came along because it was hard to leave Colorado and my family.

I was teaching in Kansas, but had to finish up my graduate degree from the University of Colorado, so sometimes I would visit my mom in Denver (often with the kids) so I could go back up to Boulder to sit for my exams.

By then, my dad was selling furniture wholesale and she had a chance to travel the southwest with him. She wrote long letters about her trips. She wasn't a big traveler, and didn't like to fly, but when we moved to Chicago, she and my dad flew out to see us. She did make a trip to Hawaii, which she loved, not long before she died in April 1984.

She's been gone a long time, but sometimes I see her in the way my daughter stands, or in the way my son raises one eyebrow, or even (more and more) when I look in the mirror.



With husband, Hyman Zagon



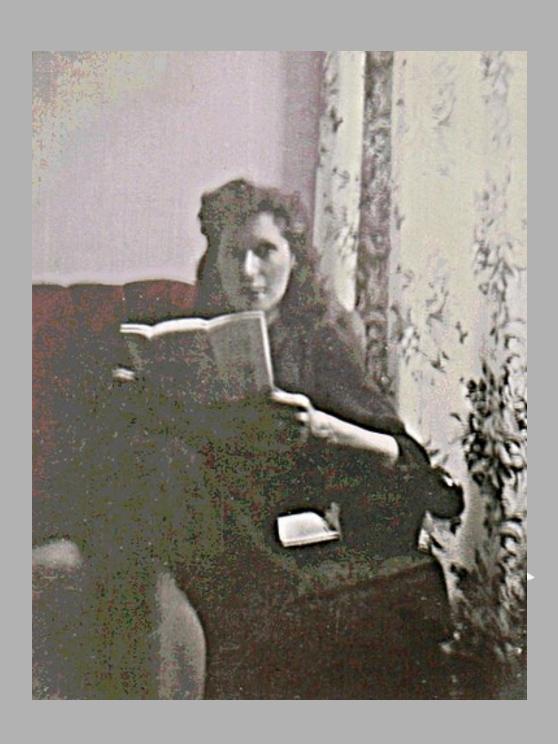
The photo must have been taken before my mom got married, or at lease before my dad's sister Rita and brother-in-law Ike moved out to Pueblo; Uncle Ike was a very talented professional photographer and became the family photographer.) I like the expression on her face, the 1940s hairdo, and the dramatic collar. (She was tall and could carry it off.)

#### Sisters

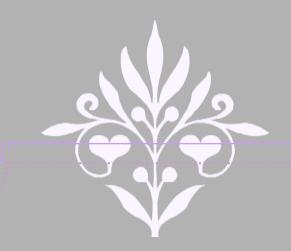
This is a detail from a painting I did of my mother and my aunt. I did this painting several years ago, from an old snapshot taken in the 1940s in front of our house in Pueblo. I used acrylics as watermedia on watercolor paper. I like to look at this painting because it captures the essence of my aunt's smiling face, and what I see of my mother when I look at my daughter's face.











# Mom Reading a Letter (Posterized and Rescued Snapshot)

This image is an old snapshot from my mother's old photo album, pictures taken of her as a young woman. Many of the pictures were before she met my dad and got married, and some were soon thereafter. And most of the photos I have never seen. Did she put the album away because there were a lot of pictures of her old boyfriends in there? Quite a treasure-trove. This photo shows my mother sitting in a chair and reading a letter. There is no date on the back, so I don't know when it was taken. But in the forties, obviously, and in our old house in Pueblo, Colorado. Was the letter from my Dad? My mother didn't have a clue that she was beautiful.







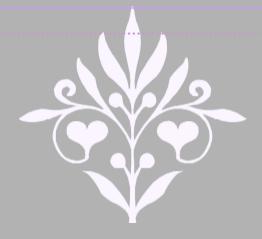
#### Coffee Time

A few years ago, my aunt sent me a package of photos of my mom. My aunt took them out of her own album and mailed them to me because she thought I would like them, and I sure do! Most of the photos were new to me, images of my mother before she got married, including this great picture of her. The handwritten inscription on the back said: "Coffee Time at the Katz Domicile – R". I have seen other photos of my mother and my aunt sitting at the kitchen table with a changing cast of characters: soldiers, assorted boyfriends, and even husbands to be, so I think this was during Word War II, though the photo is undated. My mom and my aunt used to go to USO dances and met soldiers stationed in Pueblo during the war. Sometimes a soldier got an invitation to come to the house. Apparently the "Katz Domicile" was the place to be! I don't know who took the picture – maybe my aunt or one of the guests – but the unknown photographer capture a great picture of my mom's face.



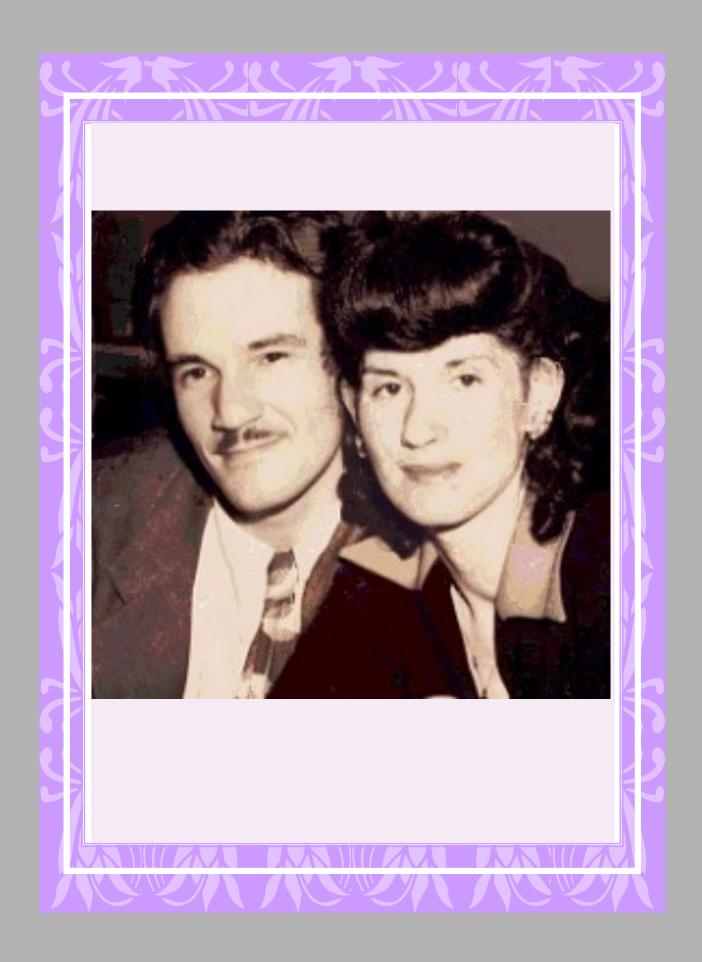


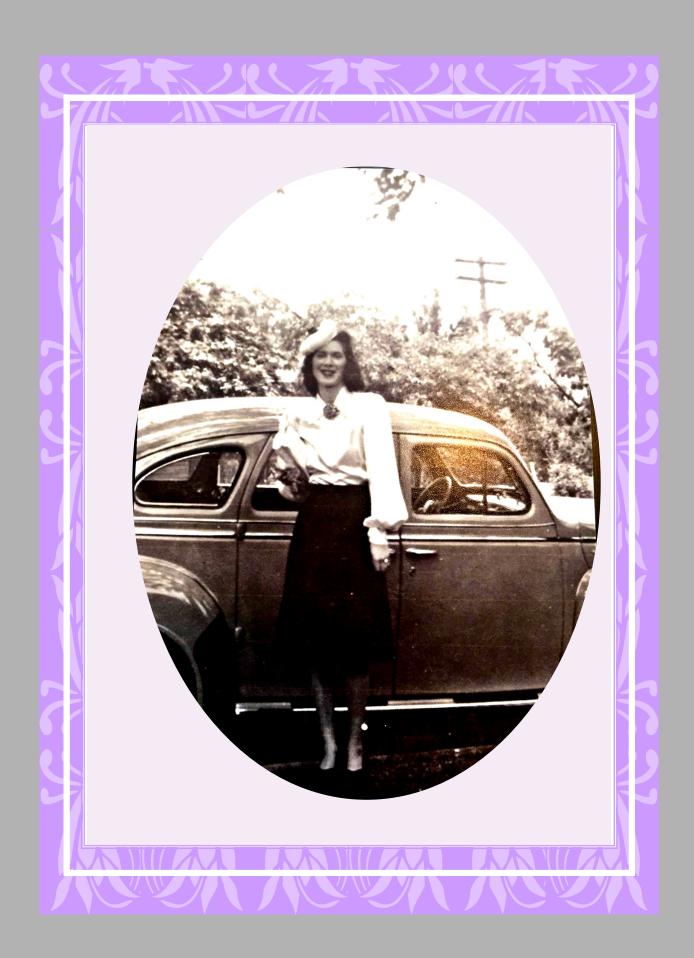




## Dad and Mom (Posterized and Digitally Modified)

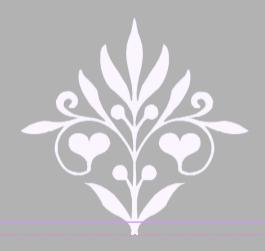
This is a snapshot from my mom's old album, which begins with her first date with my dad in January 1943. He was stationed in Pueblo, and they met at a USO dance. My mother's album records these events in photos labeled with notes written in white ink on black paper, so I know that this photo was taken on February 24, 1943, after they had gone to see Road to Morocco on a rare "day off" for my dad. They went back to my mom's house afterward, and another soldier dropped in unexpectedly. (Did he come to see my aunt? Was he a friend of my dad?) There were several snapshots of this event in the album, so I know that there were four people around the kitchen table: my mom, my dad, my aunt, and the second soldier. My aunt must have taken this snapshot because she is the only one of the four not in the picture. From what my mom wrote in her album, I can tell that time alone together was hard to come by. My folks met in January and married a few months later, fitting all that in before my dad was shipped overseas.











### Mom in Pueblo

This image is a picture of my mom in front of our house in Pueblo. The snapshot is undated, but it looks to be around the mid-1940s, around the time she married my dad.

## Wedding of Hyman Zagon and Ruth Katz

This image began with an old family photo, a picture taken of my parents on their wedding day, April 4, 1943. My father was stationed in Pueblo, and met my mother at a USO dance on the base. They were married a few months later, before he left to go overseas. I colorized the image with a combination of color overlay and digital pastel, and then posterized it. I invented the colors (I have no idea if my mother wore pink that day). What I was after was the feeling I get when I look at these old photos: familiar images, modified by the softness of memory, the patina of time.



# The Wedding Cake (Digital Woodcut)

This is a photo of my parents at their wedding reception (April 4, 1943). I wanted to add color, but decided to talk to my aunt first to see if she what she could tell me about my mother's outfit. My aunt confirmed that this was my mom's "going-away outfit" and that my mom had changed from the pink dress she wore to the ceremony. I learned that the suit would have been a neutral color (gray or beige) due to war time constraints. My aunt wasn't sure of the color of the blouse, but thought it was a red color. I had been thinking of going with teal blue for the blouse, but after talking to my aunt, I decided on darker pink or plum, and a gray suit with a blue cast. (Of course, when I added posterizing and woodcut effects, the colors changed anyway.) Then the problem was to integrate the color scheme with my dad's uniform. I tried to use the 1940s print of the curtains to pull some of the colors together, and to create a bit of continuity between both parts

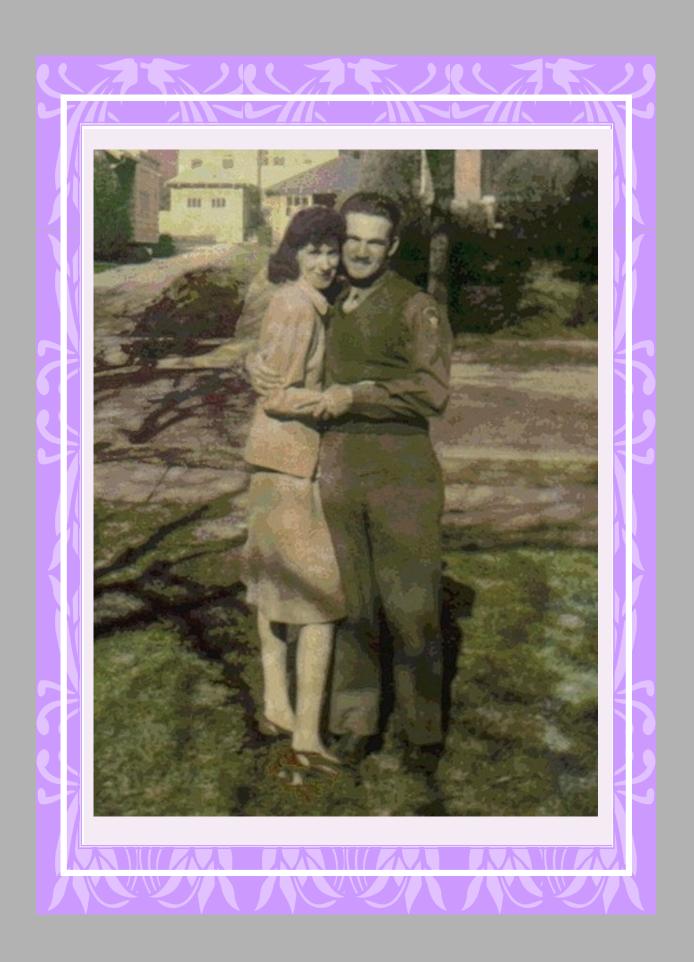


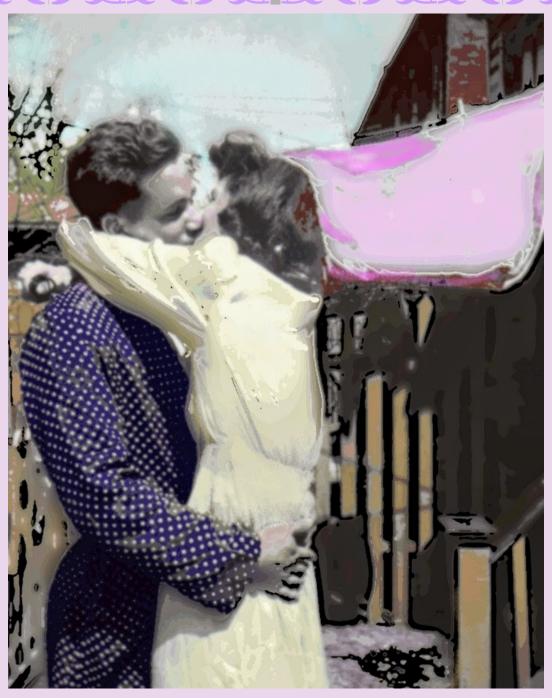
of the background. It took several tries to come up with a solution, but I am happy with this one. The color scheme reminds me of the wall paper and drapes in my childhood home. (My aunt confirmed that both the ceremony and reception took place at the Vail Hotel in Pueblo, Colorado, and there were only 40 guests.) I really enjoyed spending time thinking about my mom and dad and their wedding and talking to my Aunt Edy about it.

## Honeymoon in Kansas City, Missouri (Digitally Modified and Posterized Photo)

My mother kept an album that starts with pictures on the day she met my dad, through their wedding a few weeks later, their honeymoon trip to New York City, and then photos that my dad sent back while he was overseas during World War II and photos of my mom's life in Pueblo until he returned. She kept all the photos in order, with captions and information written longhand in white ink on the black album paper.

This snapshot was taken in Kansas City, Missouri. My mom wrote that they left Pueblo on April 18 on the Santa Fe Railroad, headed for Brooklyn, New York, but made a stop in Kansas City and had breakfast with friends. (One of those friends probably took this picture.) I liked the fact that this was taken in Kansas City, Missouri, because years later we lived in Kansas (Emporia and Lawrence) and often visited Kansas City (both Kansas and Missouri sides).



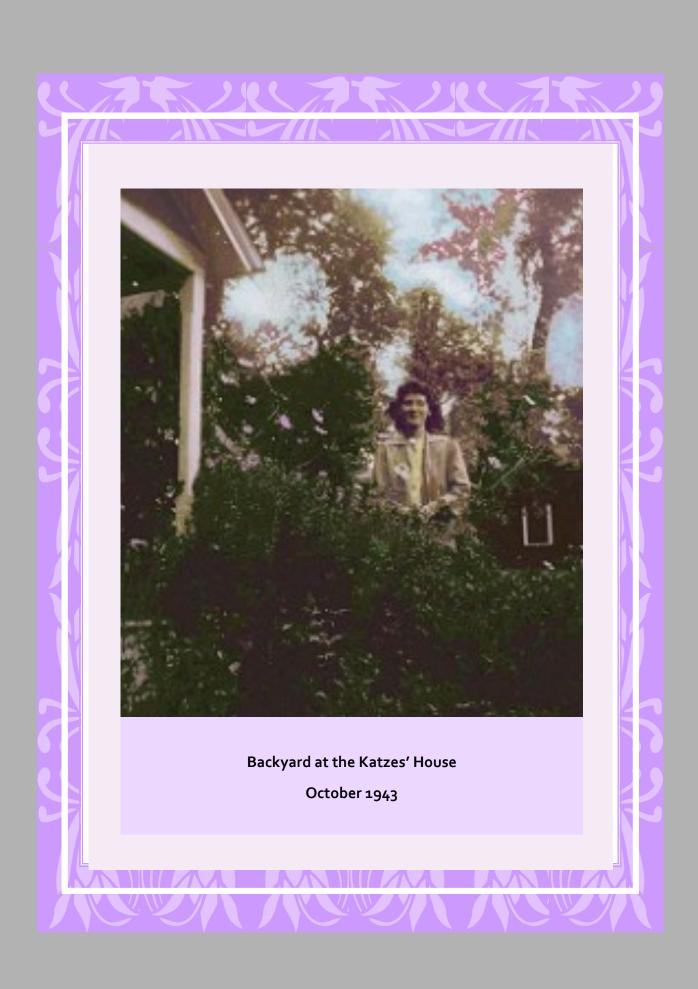




## "Mr. and Mrs. Hy" (Digitized and Posterized Photo)

My folks were married on April 4, 1943. My dad was born in Brooklyn, New York, but met my mother in Pueblo, Colorado, where he was stationed during World War II before going off to Europe. My parents met at a USO dance and married just a few weeks later, and took a brief honeymoon to New York just before he went overseas for two years. While he was away, my mother kept an album that began with their first date, their wedding, and honeymoon, and then pictures he sent her back from Europe as well as pictures of her doings back home in Pueblo. She called this one "Mr. and Mrs. Hy."



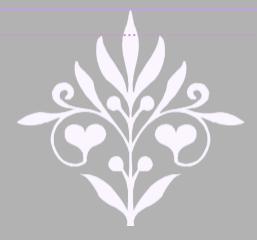












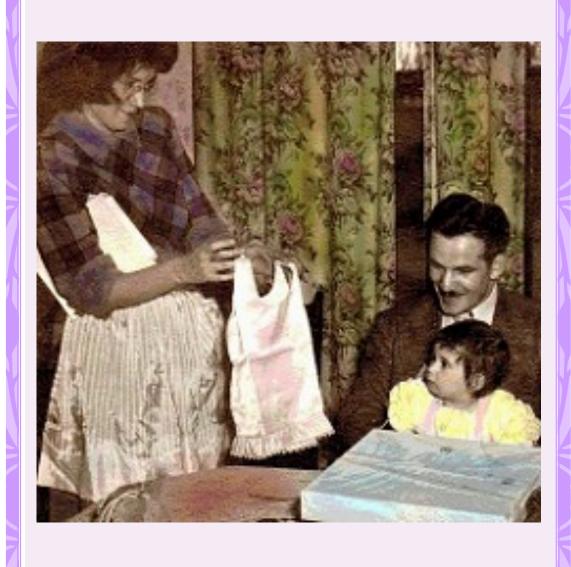
#### Mom at a Poker Party

My mother wasn't shy about everything, but she was shy about being photographed, so I don't have as many pictures of her as I would like. This image is part of a group photo, taken at one of the poker parties my folks often had at our house. Other people in the original snapshot include my Grandma Katz, my dad, and my Aunt Edy, as well as several other of their poker-playing friends. I am guessing that the photographer was my Uncle Bob, because he would have been there too, but he wasn't in the photo. I used some overlays and digital pastel to add some color, and then I gently posterized the image. This little rescued and digitally altered photograph gives me one more picture of my mom, and this image really does get her facial expression and body language. (And it has made me smile today to remember those poker games in the dining room. A poker-playing mom isn't exactly a typical subject for Mother's Day, I guess. My mother was terrific, but she was anything but typical!)





Photo by Jay Phillips





With cousin Vicky Sigman (Edy's daughter)

#### Randa and Mel's Wedding

June 12, 1968



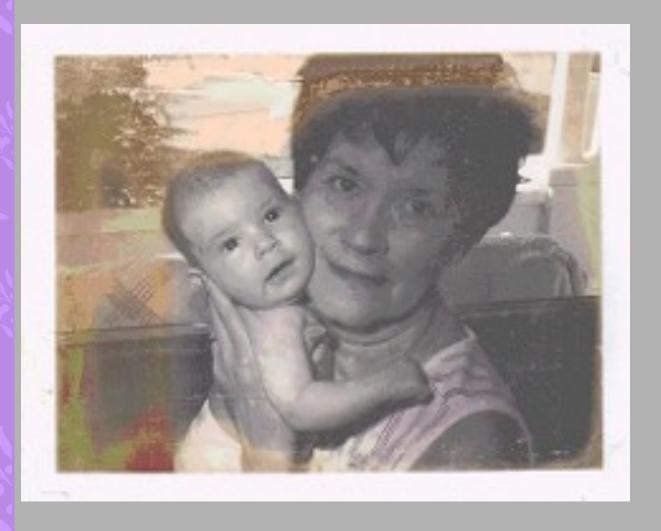
Photo by Jay Phillips

#### Mon and Dad Duet (Digital Woodcut)

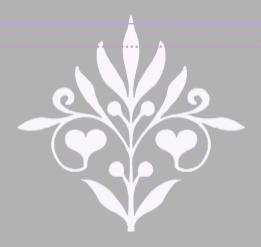


This image is based on a fading Polaroid snapshot of my folks playing piano. Although my parents played duets all the time, this was the only photo that I found of them at the piano. I might have taken it myself because it was in my own album, with other photos that I took during the 1970s. My mom played from sheet music, and my dad played by ear—songs like "Taking a Chance on Love" and "Tea for Two" and other forties hits. I am posting this today because they were married on April 4, 1943. Although they have both been gone for some time now, there is still time for me to celebrate my luck in having such great parents.









#### My Mom with my Daughter

My mother hated having her picture taken, so I have very few pictures of her taken with me as a child. If there were pictures to be taken, she was more likely to be holding the camera! But today I found some snapshots of my mother with my daughter, taken in Pueblo, Colorado. I had moved back home with my baby girl while my husband was in South Carolina for basic training for the National Guard (having won the draft lottery). It was hard to see the up-side of this at the time, but now I know it was an opportunity for me to spend time with my mom and the rest of my family in Pueblo. And it was a chance for her to enjoy her first grandchild. It dawned on me today that she seemed more than willing to have her picture taken holding her grandchild; maybe time had taught her the value of photographs! When this adventure was over and we were leaving Pueblo again, my mom cried and said she had forgotten how easy it is to fall in love with a baby.

