

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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THE MYSTERIES OF MIYO BERGER

by Kay Silberfeld

Miyo Berger was a resident at Pennswood from 2001 until her death in 2010. At that time, the community was surprised to learn that Miyo had left a considerable sum of money to Pennswood, with additional generous individual bequests to the Library, Flowers and Concerts Committees.

Doug Meaker wrote an article in the *Pennswood Bulletin* of June 9, 2017, about Miyo. Doug had just been to a beautiful concert made possible by her bequest, and in his article, he posthumously thanked her for her generosity. We are doing more of the same.

Miyo Tajima was born in 1922 in Portland, OR, the youngest of six children. Her parents were both born in Japan. Her father became a baker and ran a confectionery business in Portland. Miyo went to school there except for a few years in her teens, when she was sent to school in Japan.

When Miyo was in her early twenties, during WWII, she and her family were interned in the Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho. Because they lived on the West Coast, they were considered aliens and thought to be a further danger to the U.S. The camp opened in August 1942, and after it closed in October 1945, it was designated a National Historic Site. A sign now at the entrance reads as follows.

“You are standing at the entrance area of the Minidoka Relocation Center, one of ten American concentration camps established in World War II to incarcerate the 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent in coastal regions off our Pacific states.

“Here 10,000 Japanese American victims of war-time hysteria occupied a 950- acre camp, living a bleak, humiliating life in tarpaper barracks, behind barbed wire and under armed guard.

“May these camps serve to remind us what can happen when other factors supersede the constitutional rights guaranteed to all citizens and aliens living in this country.

“In front of you stands the waiting room, which was often filled with visitors anxious to see and give support to friends and family restricted to life within the camp. To your left stands the guard house where all movement in and out of the Relocation Center was monitored.”

According to information in the Bainbridge Island (WA) Japanese-American Community archives, Minidoka was considered “the best of the camps” because of its “benevolent administration” and its “lighter security,” but the climate was “severe” and they were “plagued by dust storms.” Understandably, it was an experience Miyo rarely mentioned, and she refused to give any interviews, even here at Pennswood, because she feared she would be asked about the camp.

Throughout WWII, the American Friends Service Committee provided badly needed help with food and other necessities to many camp inmates, including those at Minidoka. Perhaps this was why, although she was not a Quaker, Miyo also left a large bequest to the Quakers.

In 1955, when she was 33, Miyo married Joseph Berger, 46. He had been married previously and had one child. He and Miyo did not have any children. Joseph’s father, Morris Berger, was originally from Russia and was Jewish. Morris became a

U.S. citizen in 1925, and he and his wife Esther lived in Wisconsin where he owned a hardware store.

Joseph had a special interest in foreign languages. In college, he majored in ancient Greek, and when he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1942, he was sent to learn Japanese. He spent WWII as an interpreter in the Far East until he was decommissioned in 1946. Although Joseph continued to study languages, French and Japanese, he actually spent his working life in the insurance business.

In 1950, Miyo got a business degree from the Latter Day Saints Business College at the University of Illinois. While there, she was a member of Phi Chi Theta, a fraternity promoting “the cause of higher business education for women.” Several years later, Miyo earned a Masters in Library Science from the University of Minnesota.

During their married life, the couple lived in many different places in the U.S. and were world travelers. Joseph died in 1992 while he and Miyo were living in Minneapolis, and because of his service, he was buried at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery there. The inscription on Joseph’s tombstone describes him as “a strong and gentle man.”

In the brief biography in *People of Pennswood*, Miyo’s jobs include office worker, teacher, librarian and volunteer.

Under her interests, the first one listed is gardening. And, in 1959, an experienced hybridizer named Belva Kusler registered a begonia she had bred with the American Begonia Society. The name of the begonia was “the Miyo Berger.” At that time, the Bergers lived in Frederick, WI, near where the Kusler family lived across the border in Minnesota. Perhaps their joint interest in flowers and their friendship is what led to the naming of the begonia after Miyo.

Near the end of her life when she was living in Woolman House, Miyo planned a thank-you luncheon for a small group of residents in the (old) private dining room. She knew she might die before the party but wanted it to be held anyway. She did die the night before, and as she had planned, her friends met for the luncheon, turning Miyo’s thank you for them into their memorial service for her.

Miyo was buried at Fort Snelling in the same plot as her husband.

Editors note: This article could not have been written without the extensive document research done by Lucy Hastings and the memories of Miyo shared by residents, including Doug and Robin Meaker, Marjorie Ewbank, Jon and Pat Harding and Mim Nachman.



Miyo Berger Begonia: Shrub-like, cane-like stem, pink pendulous flowers, mahogany-colored pointed leaves

A SCHOOL STORY

by Bob Appelbaum

In the fall of 1926, the Trenton School System had set its cutoff birth date for admission to kindergarten at October 31, which meant that I, who would not be 5 years old until November 29th, would not be admitted. My mother was not happy about having me at home for another year, so she argued with the superintendent of schools until he gave in and let me into kindergarten.

At the end of the school year in June of 1927, the kindergarten teacher told my mother that, while I was mentally ready for first grade, I was socially retarded, and I should remain in kindergarten for another year.

At that time, the State Normal School (a teacher's training school which later became the Trenton State Teachers College) was located in Trenton, and they had a Model School for giving their students teaching experience. They were happy to accept me in the Model School, and, halfway through the year, skipped me from first grade to second grade.

In September of 1928, my mother presented me to the James Moses Elementary School as a third-grade student, and I was accepted. (They knew that arguing was futile.) So, here I was, the smallest, least physically and socially adept, and probably the smartest kid in third grade. (My nickname was "Big Words Robert!")

One day in November, I forgot to take my books to school, so I ran back to get them, running across the street into the path of a Model T Ford and into the hospital with a broken leg.

With a cast on my leg, I could not walk to school, so my mother dug up my old baby carriage and pushed me to school in it. If she had deliberately set out to humiliate me, she couldn't have done a better job.

Still, I was an academic freak, and never had to study to learn—until I got into junior high school, where I tried to get along without studying and barely got by. I flunked enough courses to extend my high school years by one year.

Because my official record contained only the courses that I had passed, it looked good enough to get me into college, where I lasted for two years before getting kicked out. But, when I showed up after the war, Bucknell University was taking back all former students who were veterans.

I've heard that women are mentally mature at 21, while men are not mature until 25. It seemed to be true in my case, because I breezed through my final two years of college.

SANDY SMILED

by Jay Chandler

Earliest memories have a way of popping up; at least they do for me. In 1935, before I was three, my newspaperman father must have been offered "a depression tonsillectomy special!" Four-year-old brother Billy and I were taken to the hospital, promised we'd get ice cream "after." I remember being held by the nurse and looking woefully at my woeful mother.

We called our mother "Mother" but referred to her as "Peg." We called our father "Jim." I don't know how this came about, but it was normal for us and our family and friends in Northern Ohio. Our Chandler family of four drove most Sundays from our Lakewood home to my great aunt's farm in Leroy, Ohio, for lunch.

"Mamie," Maida Easton, was kindly and sweet and used to have Uncle Fred, but he had died long ago. Jim told Peg he was upset

because Mamie liked Roosevelt! Roosevelt paid her not to grow stuff on her farm, and Jim said Mamie wasn't going to grow stuff anyway. It wasn't right, he said.

Leroy was after you drove through Medina and Strongsville and came to a mounded-up grass-covered traffic circle surrounded by little town buildings. Leroy Circle usually had deep tire marks going straight through, from big barreling-along trucks that hadn't dealt with the sudden arrival of a small traffic circle plunked down onto a straight flat two-lane country road. Jim got a new Chevy every two years. When we drove into Mamie's gravel drive, her dog Sandy was always on the side porch wagging his tail and smiling. His upper lip pulled way up, and you could see all those white collie teeth and gums.

Peg and Jim thought a lot of Sandy. Peg said that before I was born, one Sunday afternoon at Mamie's farm she went out the back door looking for little Billy. Sandy was standing by the fish pond with his head down and wouldn't come or move when she called. Then she saw that his teeth were clamped on the shirt collar to keep Billy's head above water. Billy was cold and crying when they fished him out. "Almost drowned!" they said.

I was four when Jim bought a Shetland pony for Billy and me. The pony, Susie, was to be kept with the cow, Josephine. (We learned to milk the cow, and how to squirt the cat and our mouths with warm

milk.) Peg said Jim paid five dollars for the pony and that Jim got a hand-tooled western saddle and bridle at Sears for a lot of money, twenty dollars. When Jim got on the saddle to show us how to ride, his toes scraped the dirt. I had to ride Susie almost every Sunday, and I hated that pony! She would toss me into pricker bushes, and I saw sky and then ground and would land hard, crying. When I got up on Susie, I had to keep pulling my legs back because she tried to bite me. Why would anybody pay five dollars for a Shetland pony? Billy could ride and laugh and wave and get his picture taken. I hated him, too. But we were best friends and played Pretend together.

Mamie had a gray and brown car called a Terraplane. It had two long front doors, and a door opened out wide from the front. To get in back you had to be little and squeeze by the front seat or be Sandy. There was a dusty, friendly smell inside and white real ivory knobs sticking out of the dash panel from elephants people shot. Mamie also had a BIG barn where we would climb way up and jump into the hay mow. Huge clouds of dust rose as we whooped and yelled. (Years later, my chest X-rays confirmed coccidiomycosis from those wonderful, scary jumps.)

Mostly, what Billy and I wanted to do was to go into the apple orchard next to Mamie's house when they were drinking bourbon while Mamie had tea. We could climb up high in trees where nobody could see us, and we could spy. Best was in the fall when we threw soft, part-rotten apples at the

trucks speeding down the highway. Splat! It was great! One Sunday, a truck we splatted slammed on brakes, and we ran. We loved going to Leroy. Billy and I could make up games in the big woods or look for snakes or Roosevelt. Coming home in the car, sleepy and tired, was best. We listened to Jack Benny and Fred Allen, with Billy lying on the back seat and me lying in my favorite place, up on the shelf in front of the back window.

Jim said we should do work to help the family. Polishing shoes I got five cents a shoe and one time only needed a nickel and polished only one shoe. I was sent back to the basement to do the other one. Once, I was told to cut the grass in back and to do my half first then Billy would do his. I got to mowing circles and designs and went in when about half was cut. Billy cried when I told him he was supposed to finish. Jim said he was mad and sent me back to cut some more. I saw Peg laughing. She later sent me out with a big dog biscuit for our dog Fluffy. I was sitting on the stairs and looked up to see her laughing in the window when she saw me eating my biscuit half. One time, I took a head of lettuce, but Fluffy didn't like his half, and I had to eat it too.

We lived on Wayne Avenue from when I was two until we moved to the next town, Rocky River, in 1940 when I was almost eight. I liked that brown house on Wayne, with its big

front porch and glider where you could play and stay dry on a rainy day. In the pantry was the ice box where the iceman put big blocks of ice. Peg put a card with a big star in our front window. At each point of the star was a number—25, 50, 75, 100. The iceman delivered whatever pounds of ice were on the top of the card. Our ice card wasn't the same as the Blue Star card lots of houses had in their windows later. Peg said they were for a boy in the army. I saw Gold Star cards, too. Their boys had been shot.

In hot summer, we longed for the arrival of the ice truck. The back was open and a black leather tarp was laid over the ice. The iceman would pick up a one-hundred-pound block with big metal tongs and prop the block on the black leather pad on his shoulder before walking up the drive and into our pantry, dripping water all the way. We would beg for a little piece of ice to suck on—wonderful on a hot day. Sometimes the knife sharpener man would come by with his big stone wheel, and Peg took knives out for sharpening. Once, an organ grinder man with a monkey came up the street, but my mother wouldn't let me near the monkey. Another man came regularly, yelling, "Pay-Pa Dee, Pay-Pa Dee!" He wanted paper and rags.

In Rocky River, our parents were finally able to build their own home, and we moved in at 1234 Homeland Drive. Our Norwegian grandfather, Thorvald Paulsen, oversaw the building and, now, Billy and I had our own bathroom upstairs. Peg was upset with us because we left the toilet seat

up. Peg said there was going to be a MEETING about it when Jim came home. We'd never had a MEETING before. After dinner, Peg explained the situation to Jim. He looked at us, hanging on his every word. He said, "Since this is a men's bathroom, they can leave the seat up!" WOW!

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

by David Cuff

These little *clerihews* use a form devised by Edward Clerihew Bentley (1876-1956) when he was a student at St. Paul's School in London. His verses poked fun at well-known figures.

You can write one, too! Submit it to the editor.

Cassius Marcellus Clay

Top heavyweight of his day
Even Before he became Ali
Would float like a butterfly,
sting like a bee

Rosa Parks

Her plaque is one of Montgomery's
landmarks
She refused, with little fuss
To move to the back of the bus

Winston Churchill

A strong figure still
In WWII led brilliantly
And tried to forget Gallipoli

James Bond

You know the cocktail of which he
was fond
A bartender made a fatal mistake
He gave it a stir instead of a shake

LE MARI ETERNEL— THE ETERNAL HUSBAND

by Gaby Kopelman



My uncle Albert Happ with
Tommy 1936

Throughout my Berlin childhood, there were sudden disappearances, some quite reasonably accounted for, and others not. A quite puzzling disappearance, though not one occasioned by Hitler or his minions, was that of my mother's sister, my Aunt Toybi. She and my mother were very close, and through the years, we saw a great deal of Toybi, her husband Albert Happ and their little boy Tommy. Albert was a pharmacist and the owner of the *Schweitzer Apotheke*, one of Berlin's most prestigious

pharmacies. For a man with his qualifications, there were ample opportunities to leave Germany. There'd even been an offer by an Indian prince to import Albert, together with his entire pharmacy and family, to the prince's domain in India. Everyone had urged him to accept, but my Aunt Toybi had refused to leave, and so the family had stayed in Berlin. And then, in 1937, Toybi had taken off for Argentina, leaving her husband and 3-year-old child behind in Germany.

Her departure had not been unexpected. A few weeks before she left, I'd stumbled, inadvertently and uncomprehendingly, right into one of the last acts of this drama. Returning home from school one afternoon, I'd opened the door to my nursery and come upon a scene I've never forgotten. There was my Aunt Toybi, the smallest of my mother's five sisters, sitting on my bed, her pudgy arms folded defiantly in front of her, her little dangling legs hardly reaching the floor. Around her, in various poses of fury and grief, were grouped my grandmother, my mother, my Aunt Helen, and possibly my Aunt Fanny as well. The room was filled with weeping women. Everyone's eyes were red, even Toybi's. Tears were streaming down my grandmother's face.

In my mind's eye, the door of memory slams shut, as quickly on their cries and lamentations today as it probably

did then. I did not know it at the time, but I'd interrupted a family conference, called to hear Toybi's official announcement that she was leaving her husband and child to go to Argentina, to join a man with whom she'd fallen madly in love. As Toybi told my mother, never had she known what sex meant until she'd met this man. Nothing, no one else mattered, nothing could stop her.

And nothing did. A few weeks later, Toybi left, her Argentinian visa arranged and tickets bought, all with Albert's help and money. Albert, the *mari eternel*, the eternal husband, as my mother dubbed him, also saw to it that his wife had a new wardrobe suited to the climes of South America, and personally escorted Toybi to the boat in Marseille.

As a nine-year-old, all I knew was that Aunt Toybi had left Berlin. Undoubtedly, a suitably innocuous reason was provided, but here and there, I did manage to pick up snatches of the adult talk. Somewhere in that story of Aunt Toybi's, there figured a man called Benveniste, a petty crook, from "the Ghetto in Istanbul," this phrase usually uttered in whisper tones, accompanied by meaningful glances. The place was obviously a site of unmentionable horrors.

I now know the affair had been going on for some time. It seems that Benveniste had been a "fixer," peddling visas to faraway republics, smuggling currency and valuables out of Germany and so on, all matters of interest at a time when

everyone was trying to flee to safety. As it happened, it had been my father who'd unwittingly introduced my aunt to him. Benveniste had been in my father's office one day, discussing possible South American entry visas for the three of us—as my father later said, “Distasteful as it was to deal with people like Benveniste, in times like that, what choice did one have?”

Unfortunately, just as Benveniste was heading out the door, my mother and Aunt Toybi happened to drop by, and good manners had obliged my father to introduce Benveniste to his wife and sister-in-law, something for which he never ceased to reproach himself.

In the months following this introduction, Benveniste managed to insinuate himself not only into Toybi's bed, but also into her social circle. As a consequence, there had been several unpleasant incidents, implicitly or explicitly pointing at Benveniste: a gold cigarette lighter, being passed around a circle of acquaintances that included Benveniste, somehow got “lost” in the process; then several fur coats were stolen from Aunt Toybi's foyer, while a party was going on in the drawing room, a crime judged by the police—and my mother—to have been “an inside job.” And so on.

As I found out decades later, Benveniste had also infected my Aunt Toybi with some sort of venereal disease. I recall my mother and me sitting by her bedside, while Aunt

Toybi, propped up by satin pillows, lay there in state—lacy little bed jacket, embroidered sheets and all. It had puzzled me—there were none of the visible signs of illness I was used to. She wasn't sneezing or coughing, and she was as cheerful as ever. At one point, she laughingly talked about the rubber ring on which she had to sit, because “. . . everything down there is so sore!”

I must have looked as shocked as I felt, because my mother hastily explained that Aunt Toybi had eaten some bad lobster.

“Right! And Gaby, look at that!” Aunt Toybi pointed at the basket of roses standing at the foot of her bed. “That's from the owner of the restaurant where I ate that terrible lobster,” she said, amidst more laughter and giggles.

Yes, sure. Even then, I sensed there was some mystery. When, shortly thereafter, Benveniste had departed for Argentina, my mother's family had heaved a collective sigh of relief, but it was far from the end of the story. A few weeks later, the German police intercepted a letter Toybi had mailed to her lover and found it to contain some cash—this at a time when the mailing of currency out of Germany was strictly *verboten*, a criminal offense.

A policeman came to question Uncle Albert. It turned out that Benveniste had a record. “He plucks women like they're chickens,” said the policeman. Fortunately, the officer had been *anstaendig*, decent. He had taken pity on poor Uncle Albert and

had let the matter drop. Or perhaps he had taken a bribe. Or both.

In our rather sedate family, Toybi's subsequent desertion of her husband and especially of her child—this at a time of such political uncertainty and danger—struck like a thunderclap. My grandmother, true to form, vowed never to speak to her daughter again. My grandfather, true to *his* form, could not bear to think of a child of his in want and sent a monthly check to her in Argentina, as did the hapless Albert.

Our family ran heavily to females, and so Toybi's little son Tommy, all black curls and big brown eyes, had been a particular favorite since birth. After my Aunt Toybi's departure, my grandparents in Lithuania, as well as cousins from as far away as South Africa, started pleading with Albert to send them the child, to bring him to safety. This would not have been difficult: visas for children were not to hard to arrange. But it was not to be. Convinced that someday his wife would return—if not to him, then her

child—Albert had no intention of letting go of his little hostage.

As it turned out, Albert was not eternal, and neither was little Tommy—their fate was that of millions of others.

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Founder and Editor Emerita:
Paulina Brownie Wilker
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