



find a tenant from the new group of G.I.s because she spoke English well. “And that’s how I met my husband,” she says.

It was love at first sight. Like Judith, Gerson Leiber, known as Gus, was 24. For three years he had been stationed in North Africa, Italy and the Mediterranean, and had been in Budapest for only two days when he met Judith. “I thought, this was the gal for me—I’d been looking for her,” Gus says of the first time he saw her. “She wasn’t too tall, she was well-dressed, tastefully. And

#### THE GRANDFATHERS

They hid in barber shops,  
in steam baths,  
and on the benches  
of small concrete parks,  
spending their few  
remaining coins of laughter  
on each other, swallowing  
humiliation, like schnapps,  
in one gulp.

But tears were there  
like secret tidal pools  
doomed by salt. Though  
once they had discarded  
the villages of their fathers,  
here they remained strangers,  
choosing the enigmatic life  
of fish or bees: silence  
or that low dangerous hum.

—Linda Pastan

pretty, very pretty. She had great culture and a great love of music.” For their first date, he took her to the opera.

Judith immediately knew she wanted to marry Gus, the son of a shoemaker who had grown up on the other side of the world in Titusville, Pennsylvania. “In 1945, an American G.I. was something magical and heroic,” Leiber told Sussman. “And that was Gus...I just thought he was adorable. I loved his sweet smile and friendly disposition. I was completely charmed, and I still am.”

“It was a wonderful time,” Leiber says of their courtship. But her parents were against the match—he was poor and aspired to be an artist—and they thought he was not right for their brilliant and refined daughter. For once, she stood up to her parents. As she reports, “They said, ‘He’s a poor boy and that makes no sense,’ and I said, ‘I’m not worried—I’m going to marry him, and I’m going to America with him, and that’s that.’ And my parents finally agreed.” The couple was married in 1946, just a year after their first meeting.

Months later, they sailed to the United States on a “bride ship”—a government-sponsored boat for the many American G.I.s who had married European women—and settled on Charlotte Street, a poor, Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx, where all the

residents kept kosher and observed the Sabbath, and the men wore black coats and beards. Both of the Leibers were a little shocked to meet Jews who looked and behaved like this—the couple considered themselves secular Jews—but they were delighted to be in New York. “It was our promised land,” Leiber has said. “The memory of the Holocaust was burned into our consciousness, and we were relieved to be away from the land where it had occurred.” Her sister Eva Peto also married an American and moved to the United States shortly after; their parents followed after a brief stint in Israel.

Gus worked and took classes at the Art Students League, and Judith dove into the New York fashion world. Most of the great European couture houses had stopped production during the war, and New York was emerging as the new fashion capital, especially for Jewish designers such as Anne Klein, Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, Michael Kors, Kenneth Cole and Diane von Furstenberg. Leiber found a job making handbags for Nettie Rosenstein, another prominent Jewish designer. “At the time she was the best in this country,” she says of the designer who invented the “little black dress.”

Leiber excelled, quickly mastering new styles. “She was the only woman doing this, so Judy was a phenomenon,”