

# Newsletter

P.O. BOX 523, ARDSLEY, NY 10502 ARDSLEYHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

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## WOMEN OF ARDSLEY: THREE LEADERS SHARE THEIR STORY

By George F. Calvi

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### **“The question isn’t who is going to let me; it’s who is going to stop me.”**

Those powerfully defiant remarks are attributed to novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand (1905-1982); words that may have seemed prescient at the time, yet so incredibly relevant today. While assembling the content for this newsletter, I came across a paragraph found in the November 29, 2017 issue of TIME magazine where the writer, having reflected on the past year’s events, stated: “. . . movements like the Women’s March aim to get more women in power to tip the ratio toward change. When women comprise 20% to 30% of an institution, things begin to change. Critical mass has its roots in physics. It’s the amount of material needed to sustain a nuclear explosion. Accumulate enough, set it off, and there is no outcome but boom!” This one paragraph in my humble estimation perfectly capsulizes the thundering sea of change that our society has been experiencing in the past twelve months; a sea whose tide no one expects to ebb any time soon.

As part of our continuing series on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women receiving the right to vote in New York State, I reached out to three community leaders who, in a sense, definitively exemplify the heirs of the Women’s Movement. Each were posed a series of questions on how the movement impacted their lives, the lives of their mothers, or perhaps the lives of their daughters. Well educated, highly articulate, socially-conscious, all have faced many challenges in their lives that could have easily side-tracked gentler souls. Yet, to their credit, they have met those challenges head-on, and have developed into the admirable leaders who serve this wonderful community we know as Ardsley. For your reading pleasure contained within are their stories.

## THE PROGRESSIVE BIBLIOPHILE: ANGELA Z. GROTH, PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTOR



“The Women’s Movement was and has been very empowering for me,” shared Angela Groth. Growing up in the midst of the tumultuous 1960s she gained a sense that she could do whatever she wanted with her life. To her credit, unlike many newly arrived immigrants, Groth’s mother did not insist that her daughter’s prime goal in life should be to find a husband. Further influenced by the independent and gutsy characters portrayed by Mary Tyler Moore and Lucille Ball in their respective groundbreaking sitcoms, Groth developed her own independent streak. Initially, she flirted with the idea of practicing medicine. Fearing she might get pigeon-holed into pursuing the more traditional woman’s role of a nurse, for a while she seriously contemplated becoming a physician. Alas, that desire wasn’t written in the stars. In her small old Bronx neighborhood, girls at the time just didn’t become doctors. Thus, when she enrolled as an undergraduate at the Rose Hill campus of Fordham University, rather than being a pre-med student, she chose to major in psychology. Proudly following in her sister’s footsteps, she would be the second in her family to graduate from college.

In sharp contrast, life had dealt her mother an entirely different deck of cards. Although her daughter secured a cashier’s job as a young teenager at Modern Market on Arthur Avenue, then a tight enclave and center of the world for many first and second generation Italians, adulthood arrived much earlier for her. She never attended high school. In fact, by the fourth grade in her native Italy she had already learned a trade becoming a tailor’s apprentice and seamstress. A bit of a free spirit, she didn’t marry until the age of 30, late by the standards of the time, to a man sixteen years her senior. Though technically not a mail-order bride, she answered the request of an Italian bachelor residing in the United States seeking a nice woman back home to marry. Having consented to marry this man, she immigrated to America, and soon found herself raising two daughters. He revealed himself to be a controlling man who sparingly doled out money for specific purchases like groceries. To provide her two growing daughters with items beyond the basic necessities of life, Groth’s mother sewed dresses for wealthy clients in between her household tasks. Needless to say, discretionary time was a rare commodity in the household. As Groth plainly disclosed, “The three of us experienced a great deal of freedom in our lives after my father’s death.”

This remarkable independent streak so apparent in Groth and her mother has filtered its way into the next generation represented by Sara. According to Groth, “Sara, raised and educated in Ardsley, is much more analytical in nature, loves math and physics, and works as a systems engineer for a Long Island military contractor.” At 34, she is holding off marriage to pursue her career, and contends with a revolving door of housemates that she locates from time to time on Craig’s List.

Just days after college graduation, Angela moved to the Village with her new spouse, Stephen. She did a short stint with the Ardsley Village Justice Court, volunteered with the Friends of the Library, and then became a paid staff member at the library. Many, including Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, may remember her earlier days as the beloved children's librarian who used to show up, to the delight of many, in comfortable pajamas on reading day at the Concord Road Elementary School. Director of the Ardsley Public Library since 1999, she was very instrumental in the negotiation of a very beneficial shared services agreement with the Village of Elmsford that afforded in great part the physical expansion of the library building. Perhaps her crowning achievement is the transformation of the library from a simple book repository to a modern and progressive center for electronic information sharing and technology to sate the constant thirst for knowledge in this prodigiously cerebral square mile corner of Westchester County.

*[In addition to her Fordham University undergraduate degree, Angela Zuccato Groth holds a masters of information and library science degree also known as an MILS from Long Island University. She has lived in the Village of Ardsley with her husband, Stephen, since 1978. In addition to Sara, they have a son, Thomas, an attorney in Connecticut.]*

#### **MY DAUGHTER, THE LAWYER: HON. NANCY KABOOLIAN, MAYOR**



Looking back Mayor Nancy Kaboolian notes, “the Women’s Movement has given me more freedom and opportunities than my mother ever had. Sadly though, in 2017 women still face many inequalities and forms of discrimination in addition to the sexual assault issues plaguing our society. These kinds of horrific acts have been going on for years but it is only very recently that women have felt empowered to say “Me Too” and not fear ramifications. It is empowering to stand up for what’s right – but why did it take so long? While the Women’s Movement has brought about measurable changes, it is in many ways just getting started.”

“The Women’s Movement gave me the right to vote and I have never missed the opportunity to cast my ballot,” said Mayor Kaboolian. Even though the amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote is nearly 100 years old, women still only make up a small percentage of people in political positions at the national, state and local levels. “I am proud to say that I am Ardsley’s second female mayor and I was told recently that there have only been four women mayors, myself included, in the quad-Village area.”

Despite the strides achieved by the Women’s Movement, she had to work harder than any man to get recognized and advance in her career. She recalls early on going to meetings where she was among the very few women in attendance and most of the men in the room thought she was present to get them coffee. It

never occurred to them that she might be an attorney, too! On another occasion while working as a paralegal on a case in San Antonio, Texas, she and her colleagues were utilizing temporary space at a local law firm. On one particularly hot August day she made the decision to wear a skirt without stockings and was promptly advised by the secretary in charge that her attire was inappropriate for the office. Not surprisingly there were no women attorneys in the employ of this Texan law firm. In sharp contrast the law partner who she accompanied on the trip from New York had no issue with her attire. The Mayor recalls it wasn't that long ago even here in the Northeast when it would have been scandalous for a female attorney to wear pants to court. Moreover, even today, female attorneys have to be cognizant of their attire before certain judges.

Mayor Nancy Kaboolian was born in The Bronx. At the age of 4 her family made the move to Great Neck on Long Island where she attended the local public schools. Upon graduation she enrolled at the State University at Fredonia earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. With her heart set on being a teacher, she pursued her goal, but the opportunity never materialized. Ever resilient, she commenced a varied series of jobs in Manhattan starting at Tiffany & Co., moving on to a brokerage house, and ultimately landing a job at the American Stock Exchange. While engaging in these various undertakings she enrolled in paralegal school and upon obtaining her certificate she secured a position with the law offices of Abbey Spanier LLP. While performing her paralegal duties by day, a strong impulse steered her in the direction of becoming an attorney, and she decided to attend New York Law School, evenings, for four challenging years.

As a partner today, Mayor Kaboolian ponders about having worked at Abbey Spanier LLP her entire legal career, "I guess working for the same place for 33 years is a bit unusual in this day and age but I like the people I work with and I have had a rewarding career." Incidentally, the firm currently has more women partners than men. She notes that her husband, Frank's unwavering support helped her get through law school and continues now as she ventures forward as Ardsley's Mayor

The Mayor's mother and one of her grandmothers never went to college. As the Mayor puts it, "they were "stay at home" mothers who took care of the kids and home." Her mother was a very traditional 1950's housewife. She didn't work outside the home after she got married, and perhaps was not expected to. Her mother told the story how after high school she worked for a time at Prudential in Newark, New Jersey and when management discovered she was engaged to a fellow from New York she was summarily passed over for a promotion. Mayor Kaboolian is reasonably sure that something like this would not happen today – at least she hopes it wouldn't.

Mayor Kaboolian's parents are first generation Armenian Americans. Her grandparents immigrated to this country to escape the Armenian genocide orchestrated by the Turkish government. Though deeply proud of their Armenian heritage, they recognized and defended the freedom and opportunity they found in America.

While it was important for Mayor Kaboolian's parents that their daughter attended college they never really dreamed of her as having a career outside the home. "In fact, in their minds they justified providing my brother with more opportunities than they did for me because he was going to have to support a family," she reveals. She further adds "At the time, I didn't think I felt restricted by their attitude but I do think it took me longer to find my niche." She says that her father came to understand and appreciate that a woman's role was not just as a homemaker, and with great pride would habitually introduce her as "my daughter, the lawyer." She knows that he would be incredibly proud of her today.

*[Nancy Kaboolian has lived in the Village of Ardsley since 1995 with her husband, Frank Hemerlein. Together they raised their son, Daniel, who attended Ardsley Schools and recently earned a degree from NYU in music theory and composition. Kaboolian served on the Board of Architectural Review, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and on the Village Board of Trustees for five years before becoming this past November the very first woman mayor in the 21st century, and only the second since Ardsley's incorporation as a Village in 1896!]*

## **THE LOCAL ACTIVIST: JODIE REAVER**



Jodie Reaver grew up in Sterling, Illinois, a small industrial, farming town 100 miles west of Chicago. She graduated from Illinois State University with a bachelor of arts degree in English and a minor in Women's Studies. Her education taught her to question the current standard, namely patriarchy and what conventions it holds as true. Straight out of college, she joined the Peace Corps. While teaching in Moldova on the border of its break-away region of Transnistria, Reaver's real awakening as a feminist occurred because she witnessed and experienced the inequity that exists across borders, class, race, religion, sexual orientation and political affiliation. "Of course, I had experienced all of this in the United States," she said, "but stepping out of my comfort zone and own environment truly illuminated what happened elsewhere and then right at home."

According to Reaver, prior to Moldova, she was dedicated to volunteering for any good cause. However, after her stay in Moldova she narrowed her focus to women's rights which she argues ". . . are ultimately human rights." "The women's movement has given me a chance to learn and grow," she stated. She cites Angela Davis, Audre Lourde, Muriel Rukeyser, Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf as examples of women who informed her education. "From their writings I developed a different lens for viewing the world."

Reaver is an active member of the Rivertowns League of Women Voters, and the Greenburgh Town Human Rights Committee. In late December, Mayor Kaboolian appointed her to the newly formed Ardsley Multicultural Committee. She is also participating in the organizing of a new coalition, yet unnamed, whose goal is to combat hate in the community.

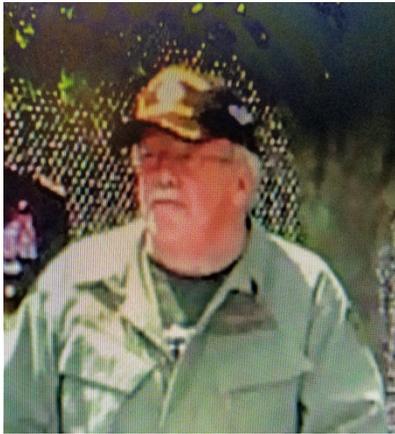
Reaver's mother was the youngest of six girls. The family had a level of affluence that allowed the older girls to attend college and experience life. Unfortunately, that affluence was gone by the time she was ready for college. She put herself through beauty school and then worked as a beautician. "Throughout my childhood my mother worked in various jobs to support our family and supplement my dad's income as an operating engineer and farmer," said Reaver. She further added "My own background is heavily influenced by the combination of my dad's benefits as a member of the Local 150 Operating Engineers Union, his family's farming heritage in Illinois (German Protestant farmers for four generations in Illinois and earlier in Pennsylvania), and my mom's Irish Catholic matriarchal family."

Reaver mused "My mom lacked educational opportunity due to finances but she made up for it with a love of self-learning. She, her sisters, and her aunts taught me the value in being a woman who is not afraid to speak her opinions. Unfortunately, her mother died when I was a baby, but from what I can glean from her sisters (one of whom lived to 99 and the other mid-90s) she was as much of a spitfire as the rest."

Though she is raising children of her own now, Reaver has had the opportunity to work for governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) that further the cause of women's rights and human rights. She has had the good fortune to secure jobs and volunteer work that fit with her beliefs. Further she holds high hopes that her own daughter, Helene, can live her life free from the critical lens of men and society without fear of assault, discrimination, bias, or lack of representation. "I want her to feel free to be who and how she wants to be. Free to be a plumber or a ballerina, but based on interest not gender stereotyping." Reaver notes that at this point in our society people are slowly opening their eyes to the challenges women face in the workplace, particularly sexual harassment; a harassment that sadly pervades daily life as well.

*[Jodie Reaver has lived in the Village of Ardsley since 2016 with her husband, Patrick Dillon. In addition to Helene, they are raising three sons, Eamon, Pierce, and Arthur, all attending Ardsley Public Schools.]*

## HONORING ONE OF OUR OWN BOARD MEMBERS: STEVE WITTENBERG



Early last autumn County Legislator Mary Jane Shimsky nominated our own Ardsley Historical Society board member, Steve Wittenberg, as a candidate for the Westchester County Senior Citizen Hall of Fame. Subsequently, it was my honor, at the behest of the legislator, to support and substantiate why Wittenberg should be enrolled. Reproduced below is an excerpt from my response.

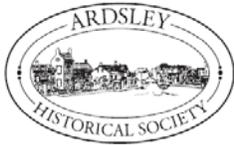
“Attempting to pigeonhole Steve Wittenberg is a challenging task. The Steve I know is bold, stubborn, committed, tenacious, sensitive, conscientious, generous of his time, and combative when necessary to fight the good fight. In essence, he is the man you want on your team, preferably beside you, when the going gets rough. He is our hometown John Wayne. Where he gets it from is open for speculation. Perhaps it’s his strong German / Mexican heritage or perhaps his wartime service in Vietnam. Steve has displayed his leadership qualities volunteering many years with the Ardsley Secor Ambulance Corp, the Ardsley Historical Society, the Ardsley Little League, the Ardsley Traffic Committee, and of course the local chapter of the American Legion.

Several years back he assumed the position of Post Commander of American Legion Post 458. The organization was a shadow of its former glorious self. Older members were dying off, and new members just weren’t signing up. Thanks to his leadership Steve whipped the organization back into shape. He tracked down and encouraged local veterans who for one reason or another never sought membership. He revived participation in the annual Memorial Day parade by organizing a procession of classic automobiles to cart the older veterans, securing key note speakers, and making sure that everyone in the Village knew there was a parade on tap. Today, the Ardsley Memorial Day parade, and the services held in Pascone Park afterwards, are a quintessential “Must Do” activity on everyone’s calendar from elected officials to first responders to the general public. All thanks to Steve’s admirable determination.”

Before family and friends Wittenberg was inducted into the Westchester Senior Citizen Hall of Fame in early December 2017. Steve, on behalf of your colleagues at the Ardsley Historical Society, congratulations!

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We hope you have enjoyed these stories about our local citizens. As we draw near 2020, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ratifying of the nineteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women equal voting rights in all states, please anticipate more articles on prominent female residents of Ardsley. Also, in the next issue we will commence a series of articles on the origin of street and place names in Ardsley. If you are not a-member and would like to read these forthcoming articles, please consider joining the Ardsley Historical Society for a very reasonable fee. Our fee schedule is listed below. In addition to our newsletter, membership includes an annual calendar, and invitations to special programs. Help us preserve and share Ardsley’s historical legacy!



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A generous way to show your support of the Ardsley Historical Society is to become a member. Your support allows us to share Ardsley's history through our newsletter, our special programs, and our newly expanded website. Your support is especially needed this year as we work to complete our digital archives and continue our mission of collecting, preserving and presenting Ardsley history. With membership, you receive the newsletter three times a year filled with Ardsley reminiscences, as well as our calendar. So join or renew your membership for the coming year. We welcome you and appreciate your sponsorship. If you have any questions or suggestions write to us or contact us at 914.693.6027.

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