

FOR OUR FAMILIES  
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## *Barbara Grossberg Has Traveled a Long Way: From European Nightmare to American Dream*

IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE LITTLE blue numbers tattooed on her arm, you'd think she'd had it made all along. Tanned from yearly vacations in Aruba and Saturday mornings by her Chesterfield pool, she stands ready, on her lavender spiked heels, to smack kisses on everyone in sight. Barbara Grossberg admits some people don't like her lips-on approach, "But I steal love here and there. It's my way of thanking God I survived." What she doesn't admit is that there are at least 300 people waiting for those puckered raspberry lips every day. From death's door at Auschwitz to a new life in America, Barbara Grossberg, founder of the Delmar Gardens nursing and retirement homes empire, has weathered the seasons incredibly well.

Born in 1927 in Debrecen, Hungary, to a close-knit family and a comfortable life on the outskirts of Budapest, Grossberg learned young, at the knees of her "playmates"—the people recuperating in her father's sanitarium—to love and respect the elders because, she was told, "They have already lived a lifetime."

Then, the Nazis came, the ghetto, and, at age 13, Auschwitz. More times than she cares to remember, she was suddenly cut from the line at the crematorium, where she's sure her father was killed. (Her mother died when she was 9). The memories are so strong that to this day she cringes at the odor of disinfectant because it reminds her of the showers at Auschwitz. From Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen to Dachau she went, for two and a half years absolutely certain there was a reason she survived another day. Grossberg remembers the moment the Americans opened the gates to Dachau: "They brought chocolates, and they were so gentle. After that, when I thought of America, I never pictured money growing on trees; I only thought of the gentle American soldiers. I was so skinny then. They thought I was 9, but really I was 16. Now I'm always on a diet."

Borika (her Hungarian name) returned to Budapest and met Henry, a handsome young man who'd been in the army during the war. They married and had two

sons, George (now head of Geropsychiatry at St. Louis University) and Gabriel (chief administrator at Chesterfield Villas). But no sooner did some good years come along than the Russians invaded Hungary. Freedom lovers, the Grossberg family walked out of their house and out of their country in the middle of the night, leaving all of their belongings—and nightmares—behind.

Next stop: University City, where, one by one, Barbara Grossberg's dreams came true. "First I wanted to learn the language, which Henry and I did by going to school at night and working during the day. And then I wanted to stay home and take care of my two loves, the children and the old people, because they need you more than anybody else. So we saved our money and bought a house on Kingsland." Then a woman named Lillian Shapiro asked Barbara to take care of her mother. Next came a Mrs. Siegal and a Mrs. Margolis and a Mr. Blyke—all living together with the Grossbergs on the first floor while they rented out the two upper floors. Soon, though, four grandmas and grandpas, as Barbara calls them, grew to be 13.

As fate would have it, one day in 1961 on an ice-cream outing with Mr. Blyke, Grossberg spotted an empty lot on Leland; from it, four years later, Delmar Gardens East was born. That beginning grew into Delmar Gardens Enterprises—five in St. Louis and five others.

Surrounded by flowers and colors "because they represent life," and pictures of butterflies "because they represent freedom," she admits she's become a workaholic. Fortunately, she requires nearly no sleep, and often in the middle of the night bakes apricot strudel or makes pink paper welcome signs for the new grandmas and grandpas who come into her fold.

"People always ask me if I'm for real," she admits. "Of course I'm for real, I say. I'm alive aren't I?" □

