

CLASS OF 1966

'Doors Were Suddenly Open to Me'

If **Mirga Kerbelis Bablin '66** were alive today, there's no doubt in the minds of any of her eight children: she would have wanted to celebrate the 50th anniversary of her graduation.

Mirga graduated nearly 20 years after she'd last stepped foot on campus, yet she wasn't about to miss commencement. Completing her Rochester degree altered the course of her life, and the lives of her large family. "It's a pretty inspirational story," says Mirga's youngest son, Christopher Bablin, who was not yet born at the time.

Mirga's oldest daughter, Mary Abbott, remembers graduation day. "When the time came for Mom to graduate in June of 1966, it was a big family affair with Dad, the seven kids, and Mom's parents in attendance," Mary writes in an essay entitled "A Model Mom." After morning Mass and Communion at home in Amsterdam, New



SECOND ACTS: Bablin's seven children, as well as her husband and parents, joined her at commencement, after which she launched a new career.

York, the family piled into two cars and made the three-hour drive in time for Mirga to attend a preceremony luncheon in the women's dining hall. Then the family sat in the bleachers of Fauver Stadium and watched as she walked across the makeshift platform, pregnant with Christopher, to claim her degree.

The oldest child of Lithuanian immigrants, Mirga graduated as salutatorian of her high school class in 1942. Two scholarships—one from Rochester and the other from New York State—enabled her to enroll in the College for Women that fall. Mirga kept a diary of her early months and years at school, in which she expressed the full range of emotions typical for young adults adjusting to life away from home. As Mary writes, Mirga filled its pages with stories of "sorority sisters, many handsome dates, the stresses of study, plus missing her mom, dad, and brothers."

Yet for reasons that remain a mystery to the family, Mirga would abandon the five-year nursing program in which she was enrolled, just short of graduation. In 1947, she moved back home. A year or so later, she married a veteran of World War II, Edward Bablinskas (the name was later shortened to Bablin).

Mirga spent the 1950s and early 1960s as a mother and housewife, supplementing the family income with occasional part-time work. The woman who'd been an achiever in the classroom was no less determined to excel in the home. In an autobiography she wrote for her family in 1983, she recalled that she'd raised her children "with such zeal and dedication, I wonder, now, how I did it. Aside from the routine tasks of diapers and bottles, I sewed my own clothes, slipcovers, curtains, and drapes, and became a proficient canner and outstanding cook."

Meanwhile, Edward's career floundered. He struggled in various jobs, and after she gave birth to their seventh child, Mirga decided she had to finish her degree. Borrowing money from her extended family, she took night classes in nearby Troy, transferring her credits to Rochester in time to graduate with the Class of 1966.

Christopher grew up knowing how important her achievement had been. "I like to think that I walked across that stage with my mom," he says. He doesn't believe his mother was ever satisfied with where she had left things in 1947.

"I don't think she was happy with the June Cleaver type of thing," he says. The family was also struggling. "When she got her college degree, it really changed the whole trajectory of our family."

Her children note that at the height of the feminist movement of the 1970s, Mirga combined characteristics that conventional wisdom held at odds. She was a devout Catholic and raised her children accordingly. She was conservative in her values and her politics. Yet she not only worked outside the home; she reveled in her job as a technical writer for the New York State Department of Criminal Justice.

"My mother had a very rewarding career," says Christopher. In 1973, Mirga transferred to the Department of Mental Hygiene, where she worked until 1990. She died in 2007.

"When I was growing up, my father was the one going to my parent-teacher conferences," Christopher says. He suspects she would have liked to attend more school events, but accepted that trade off. As Mirga wrote herself, her degree launched an important new chapter.

"Doors were suddenly opened to me, and I soon started to combine the best of both worlds." **6** —KAREN MCCALLY '02 (PHD)

1989 **Jim Lowe** writes: "I've been the music director and conductor of the recent Broadway revival of *Les Misérables* at the Imperial Theater. It just closed in September after two-and-a-half years and over 1,000 performances. This past season, I made my debut at San Francisco Opera, conducting *Sweeney Todd*. I also led Stewart Wallace's *Hopper's Wife* at New York City Opera and Daniel Catan's *Il Postino* at Opera Saratoga. This season I'll conduct *Candide* at the Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse and the Opéra National de Bordeaux, and will return to the Glimmerglass Festival to conduct *Oklahoma!*"

2014 **Jamie Wilson** (MA) (see '11 College).

School of Medicine and Dentistry

1957 **Dwight Fitterer** (MD) died in July. **Sandra Beckman '57RC** writes. After completing his residency in gastroenterology at Genesee Hospital in Rochester, Dwight spent his career with Kaiser Permanente. In the late 1960s, he became physician-in-chief of the original Kaiser Hospital in South San Francisco, and later worked with architects and the Kaiser Foundation Hospital board to create the current Kaiser Hospital on El Camino Real. He remained there as physician-in-chief until his retirement in 1992.

1962 **Arthur Moss** (Res) won the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the School of Medicine and Dentistry. (See "Honoring Alumni and Friends," page 56.) . . . **Geoffrey Sperber** (MS) sends a photo of his new grandson, Ethan, "contemplating the next-generation sequence of the DNA helix." (See page 54.) Geoffrey is a professor emeritus in medicine and dentistry at the University of Alberta.

1964 **Lawrence Nazarian** (MD), '66 (Res) won the Alumni Service Award from the School of Medicine and Dentistry. (See "Honoring Alumni and Friends," page 56.)

1969 **Mark Weinstein** (MD) (see '65 College).

1985 **Bob Glowacky** (MS) (see '84 College).

1988 **Jim Musser** (MD/PhD) received the Rous-Whipple Award