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## Ruth at 89: The wonder of gratitude

GRACE, GRIT & HUMOR

By **Susan D. Goodman**  
Advocate columnist



Ruth Gordon

Ruth Gordon is eager to see the blockbuster "Wonder Woman" for very personal reasons.

"I used to think I was Wonder Woman," she says.

When the "Wonder Woman" comic books first hit the scene in the early 1940s, Ruth felt a commonality.

"I always had so much energy," she says. "I felt I could just keep going and going."

Like the comic book heroine, Ruth had adversities to overcome at various times in her life. With focus and strength, she has been able to hold on all that she most cherishes – the love of family and access to education. Ruth has experienced considerable loss. At six, her mother died.

Her only sibling – her dear sister Ellie – died decades ago. She endured a disappointing marriage. Today, with her two children living out of state, Ruth lives in the Boston area, without any relatives nearby. Ruth doesn't leave any space for pity.

"I never want anyone to feel sorry for me!" she says. "I have not had a difficult life. I am so privileged."

For the past 20 years, Ruth has been enmeshed in a very caring community.

"I found my family at my temple," she says. "I feel cherished there."

Like all good families, the synagogue offers Ruth a steady source of encouragement, respect and stability.

"I have so many caring friends there that one said I must come to temple just for the hugs," she says.

At an early age, Ruth wanted to learn about anything and everything. Like most of her female contemporaries, the path after high school led to marriage rather than college. She refused to cast her educational dreams aside.

"It was a time when women were supposed to stay at home," she says. "But, I tried to be true to myself about what I needed."

The lack of societal support was not Ruth's only deterrent. Her husband would not allow her to attend school while their children were young. Once the kids started their own education, Ruth had a new impediment. Her husband chose to withhold the money she needed to fill her car with gasoline so she could get to her courses. That turned out to be an inconvenience rather than a dreambuster. In addition to raising the children and attending college, Ruth was a substitute teacher in the Waltham public schools so that she would have the gas money she needed.

Ruth received her undergraduate degree from Boston University and earned a master's degree in Jewish contemporary studies at Brandeis. Wonder Woman indeed!



Newton's Susan D. Goodman blogs at [ActingOurAgeBlog.com](#), which celebrates women over 85.

With her degrees in hand, Ruth was a desirable candidate in the workplace. She was hired by the Everett Public School system to coordinate the libraries at eight elementary schools. It was during the Johnson administration and funds for community development were accessible. Ruth wrote grants to secure federal dollars. She successfully generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Everett school system. In her 13th year, however, this exciting venture came to an abrupt end. The city's new administrator had other priorities for his community. Ruth's job was eliminated.

"I was really decimated," she says. "I was so proud that I had that job. "

Ruth was unable to find a comparable position. She ended up at a SYMS store selling women's coats. It was a far cry from the responsibility and challenge she had in the Everett school system.

But Ruth, like Wonder Woman, once again picked herself up. She filled her non-working hours with learning opportunities whenever possible.

Today, Ruth lives in an apartment in a well-maintained assisted living building. She is most happy when she is in a taxi or on The Ride, headed to a Torah study class, the movies or a lecture.

"I love hearing people speak!" she says.

Ruth's appetite for learning continues whenever she's at home. This self-proclaimed "news junkie" looks to John Hockenberry, Marco Werman, Terry Gross and other NPR hosts to stay current on the pressing issues of the day.

Ruth's journey has been bumpy: the early loss of her mom; her sister's untimely death; a marriage to someone who didn't support her dreams; the harsh end to a career where she flourished.

Throughout, she responded with optimism and action.

"I never felt lonely or sorry for myself," she says. "That's the kiss of death."

Today, she continues to push the past aside so that she can share her enthusiasm for all that's good in her life.

"I know that I am loved," she says. "I am so blessed."

Ruth's story is one of strength, self-reliance and tenacity. The similarities to Wonder Woman couldn't be more resounding.

*Can we introduce you in Grace, Grit & Humor? We are always eager to meet women 85+ for this column. If you or someone you know would like to be interviewed, please contact us at [susanactingourage@gmail.com](mailto:susanactingourage@gmail.com); (617) 367-9100 x132; or Acting Our Age, The Jewish Advocate, 15 School St., Boston, MA 02108, attn.: Susan Goodman*

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