

MEMO TO: CARMEN REZENDES  
FROM: ERMA REIN  
RE: MOTHER, GERTRUDE RAPP LUBAR, AND  
THE TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY  
FIRE OF THE EARLY 1900'S

Gertrude Lubar (Babe) was born Gertrude Rapp in 1892 in a small town near Vienna, Austria. She lived on a farm and came to the United States when she was twelve alone on a boat in the steerage department. She spoke at least German and Yiddish. She was helped on the boat by a young couple who were travelling in first class and allowed her to travel with them.

After coming through Ellis Island and living in New York she lived in a railway flat with her aunt and six other children.

She worked in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory which manufactured blouses, basically one of the early "Sweat Shops". She was earning \$3 a week in wages and put aside \$1 a week for her family in Europe. She was later able to send for her mother, father, sisters and brothers and help them come to the United States.

Erma believes that a picnic for workers for the Shirtwaist Factory, possibly a wedding celebration for a close friend of Babe's (Gertrude Lubar's) was the occasion for a foot race which Babe won and received as a prize a book which Paul now has, dated approximately 1907 or 1909, with an inscription to Gertrude Lubar for winning the foot race.

Babe had obtained the job with the Triangle Factory by putting her hair up so that she would look older than her age of approximately 15 despite her being only 4'11" tall and approximately 90 pounds in weight (~~before leaving~~ *in Connecticut, before* ~~leaving~~ *she had apprenticed to a dress maker when being sent* to stay with some of her mother's relatives).

At the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory she worked on a sewing machine and was paid by the piece (piecework). She was later promoted to floor manager before the fire.

### The Day Of The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The Triangle Shirtwaist fire occurred sometime between 1908 and 1910 (this can be checked through separate research). On the day of the fire Babe had a date with her husband to be, Samuel Lubar (real name Samuel Lubanski which was changed to the simpler name form at immigration check-in at Ellis Island - Sam was born 1888 and died in 1945 and was

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born in southern Russia, brought to the United States when three years old by his parents).

Apparently because she was going to leave as soon possible for her date with Sam Lubar and because she had some information to take down to the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, a multi-storied factory the doors of which, on each floor, opened in, she was able to take the last elevator down to the bottom of the building before the fire broke out. For this reason she was able to escape. (The doors all opened inward and when the fire started people were trapped being pushed up against the doors and couldn't get out.) Babe's close friend jumped out a window and was killed during the fire. Many other persons, possibly more than a hundred (research this information) were killed in the fire and the fire led to major legal reforms on working conditions for women and children and also fire safety conditions, i.e. doors had to open out, etc.

After the fire broke out Babe wandered in shock for several hours until she finally found Sam who had heard about the fire and had gone looking for her.

/h

Working Women's  
Plight



Sierra Rein  
Park Day School  
January 19, 1988

Working  
Women's  
Plight

Sierra Hein  
Park Day School  
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It all started when a fire broke out on March 25, 1911. More than 120 women died on that painful day as everybody started yelling that the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory for women was on fire. Before the fire, the women had gone on a strike for better pay and better working conditions. They had lost the fight, but the fire changed all that. It was one of the first instances where working women fought against

the unfair conditions they  
faced in America.

This report will describe  
how the strike developed the  
Working Woman's Suffrage.

Dear  
It was 4:30, March 25, 1911  
and a young girl of 16 named  
Bertrude sat huddled at her  
job at the Triangle Shirtwaist  
Factory. She had left her home  
in Russia and had come to  
America all alone when she was  
13 years old and had worked  
there since. She was relieved  
when her boss told her to get  
a sandwich for him at the  
delicatessen across the street.  
Finally she could get some  
fresh air.

Work there was hard for the girls. Their pay for the week was \$1.50. The wages went up 50¢ per year but hardly any of the girls got to take \$6.00 each week. Their hours were from 7:30 in the morning to 6:30 in the evening. When the season was on they worked until 9:00 <sup>P.M.</sup>. Relatives of the factory owner watched over all the girls; watching to see that they did their work, even watching when



They went to the bathroom. If they were in the bathroom for more than 3 minutes it was deducted from their pay. If they arrived 5 minutes late because the elevator didn't take them up in time, they were sent home for half a day without pay. Employers wore rubber shoes so they could sneak up silently spying, to make sure the woman workers weren't talking.

There was no insulation in

the winter, only a pot-bellied stove in the middle of the factory. If you were a finisher (sewing by hand,) you could sit by the stove with your. But, if you were a trimmer or a operator you had to sit where there was little heat, it was very cold! In the summer they suffocated with practically no ventilation. The only drinking water in the factory was a couple of taps in the halls. The water was warm and dirty. There was also vendors with pop for 2¢.

Before new spools of thread were brought, the old spools had to be returned. A fine of 50¢ was charged for each spool lost.

For a "number" ticket lost, you had to pay 25¢, and if you lost a "Trimming's" ticket before you received the trimmings, you had to pay the full cost of the trimmings which were from one to ten dollars.

Gertrude was thinking all about these things, when she walked into the delicatessen. In

the distance, she heard fire engines charging down the street.

She glanced around the store wondering why everyone was staring at the factory with mouths agap.

She glanced back to see what all the commotion was.

She burst out of the store just in time to see the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of the factory burst into flames! The fire engines that she heard drove up right in front of her. But the horses drawing them reared up, frightened by all the shouts and

the smell of blood. Women from the 9<sup>th</sup> floor tried the fire escapes, which broke, letting the girls fall into blankets held by men. But the force of the fall made the girls rip through the cloth, hitting the cement, crushed and lifeless.



Gertrude watched in horror as her best friend Sadie, leaped from the 8<sup>th</sup> floor to her death. She turned head away. She couldn't watch anymore.

After the fire was out, the fire-marshall found that 146 out of 500 all women and girls got suffocated, burned alive, or jumped to their death. He also found that many girls were trapped in the burning building. Unsafe conditions for fires and earthquakes were also found. The fire escapes were badly

built and would break under the weight of even a 6 year old, there was no sprinkling system and no fire extinguishers, that no fire drills were taken so none of the girls could know what to do when a disaster like this happened, and the doors opened inward rather than outward, so people would have to back up into the fire to open the doors.

The girls in the factory always knew they were treated unfairly, that the factory owner

only cared about money and not the lives of hundreds of girls.

In 1909 and 1910 the girls had led a strike to improve working conditions. All over New York, women garment workers had joined them.

✓ From this strike, a union of workers called the ILGWU (the International Ladies Garment Workers Union) was formed. In February of 1910, this strike called the "Uprising Of The 20,000" was lost at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. And most of



the women went back to work there.



Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL, addresses the strike meeting at Cooper Union Hall, November 22, 1909, that began the historic "Uprising of the 20,000."



The Strike

Women at the Triangle Shirtwaist  
Factory still had to work 59  
hours a week and not 54 hours  
a week like other women garment  
workers who had won their  
strike. The women had made  
2 other demands in that strike  
which were never discussed in  
negotiation: open, unlocked doors,  
and fire escapes that worked.

But now with the fire,  
everybody in the city knew  
about the awful conditions in  
the factory. Protest meetings were

- ✓ held throughout the city until the State Legislature formed a committee to investigate and
- ✓ make recommendations for improved factory safety. Finally, in 1913, a state law was passed establishing a 54 hour work week, and new safety laws.

The ILGWU went on to become a powerful union, to fight for the rights of women workers. It is still fighting to protect those rights today, and the sisters in that union still

sing the song:

Sisters mine, oh my sisters, brethren,  
Hear my sorrow;

See where the dead is hid in dark corners  
Where life is choked from those who labor  
Oh, woe is me, and woe is to the  
world.....

This was the song that  
thousands of women including my  
great-grandmother, Bertrude  
Kapp sang as they marched  
toward a better life.



# Bibliography Sierra

Wertheimer Mayer Barbara,

We Were There, the history

of working women in america,

Pantheon Books, New York,

1977.

3/88

Siena,

This is a powerful and clear account of an important event in our history. Not only did you tell about the story of that day, but also you were able to explain how the fire started a movement that after much time helped conditions to change. I was especially impressed with how you organized this report, it's something that I would expect from a high school student, you should Comments be very proud. Mike

- Great introduction, it makes your reader want to read more, but also lets them know what is to follow.
- You did an outstanding job incorporating the necessary facts within the story of that fateful day.
- Very few editing problems, but look through for editing "S".
- Great illustrations!
- I loved the ending, but you probably should have made a separate chapter for the conclusion. I liked how you didn't say that you were related until the very end.