

MAXWELL STREET PRINCESS

I was born on Maxwell Street in 1949. It was the heyday of the Blues Movement, and was just getting started down on the "Street". My father Bernard Abrams was one of the first Maxwell Street merchants to promote Blues music, and had a small recording studio in his record and radio store for the fledging musicians to record their demos. My father was known on the Street as "Mr. Bernard", and all of us kids were known as "Little Bernards". Quite often when one of the many musicians would come into the store for a guitar picks, tambourines, or amplifiers, I would be behind the counter. They would shout out, "hey Little Bernard or Little Princess, can you get me some of that stuff." Of course he would be pointing to something I couldn't possibly reach, and I would have to call my father (who was almost never around, or out "doing business") for help.

My grandparents lived around the corner on Newberry Street, across from Congregation Ahavas Achim. Though I understand they had only a fleeting attachment to it. I knew as young immigrants, my grandparents, Isadore and Annie Weinstein Abrams would attend Poale Zedek on Union Street with their landsman's. My fondest memory was when my grandmother Annie would take me to Saide's Red-hots on Maxwell, down the street from their jewelry store. Because of my grandmother's accent, she always ask me if I wanted a "red heart", and instead of a cinnamon candy, I always ended up with a hotdog (red-hot).

Fern Abrams Packer, age 56, 2005

Excerpted from "Maxwell Street Princess", a Memoir by Fern Abrams Packer, copyright 2005

MAXWELL STREET AREA



Congregation Ahavas Achim
1251 S. Newberry Street
1901
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