



BARBARA BENON

This is a book about a fiery, passionate, wise woman whose love for life is still abundant as she approaches her ninth decade. When she was 17, she was unmarried and pregnant. It was 1949. A girl in her condition invariably dropped out of high school and quietly awaited the birth of her child. That was Barbara Moscovitz, a striking young woman who would marry the father of the child, have another with him, eventually divorce him, experience anguish over a tragedy that would befall him, and go on to live an extraordinary life

filled with daring choices, “two and a half” more marriages, a bout with booze, an abortion, world travel, a wide array of friends that included celebrities, difficult personal relationships with some of those friends and family members, success in business, extreme wealth and a 38-year marriage to Leon Benon, who would help her become whole and the woman that she is today. Every woman can relate to the pages in this book – and every man can learn from them.

“Barbara Benon: Going Through the Pages” is a revealing, frank story that readers will find intriguing, inspiring, educational and simply entertaining.

RAYMOND MOSCOWITZ

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BARBARA BENON: GOING THROUGH THE PAGES

WITH RAYMOND MOSCOWITZ



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And last, but most of all, my brother Ray for his time and patience and honoring me with his interest and love.

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Preface

Our lives are like books. And there’s no way I can avoid what’s in my book. No more than I can avoid something that happened yesterday, or something that will happen today or tomorrow. I believe this so thoroughly, that it’s always been an important part of my life. All these things that I’m recalling now are part of the book that I’m trying to reassemble – because it feels good. It is the book I have felt a need to write.

Here’s what my horoscope for Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2010, said in the *Santa Barbara News-Press*: “Breeze through life. The book of your life has pages that seem to turn themselves, but they are actually moved by the air you stir up as you rush around to tie up the loose ends before the holiday commences.”

In describing my life, which has been far from routine, I have tried to be as honest and accurate as possible. I have also tried not to hurt people. It has not been easy to do this because of my determination to present facts and situations as I see them.

I realize that some people may see things differently. But this is my book – my life – and I can only express my remembrances, thoughts, experiences and reflections from my viewpoint.

Chapter 1: Las Vegas

I went to the New Frontier. I didn't understand any of it. But I learned quickly. It was an education that, I'm sure, wasn't anything like my senior year of high school would have been ... the senior year I didn't have.

Las Vegas in the Fifties was a lot like it is today – a so-called “sin city” of gambling and excitement – but in a more sophisticated way. Sixty years ago, as the city was starting to become a destination for gambling and entertainment, ladies got dressed twice every day. At night, they wore evening dresses and gloves, and they had their hair done before going out. Today, women walk around in anything – tennis shoes and Bermuda shorts – even at night.

I experienced Las Vegas in both the Fifties as a struggling woman in her early 20s, and decades later as a wealthy child-of-sorts in her late 60s. Looking back, I see Las Vegas as a place that represents the problems, decisions, people, learning, emotions, and other facets of the life I have experienced in almost 80 years.

I have been called high-strung. I have been called tightly wound. I can't argue with those observations. I can be a fiery, emotional little woman. In the final analysis, I have been, and continue to be, a passionate person. I have been passionate about doing something with my life and being successful. I have been passionate in caring about the lives of my children, family and friends. I have always been passionate about living to the fullest

without wasting my talent and abilities. Sometimes my passion has caused me problems – the kind that all people suffer in some way or other.

So the bottom line is this: Please do not judge my book by its cover, but, instead, by the pages you read.

As I am about to turn the final pages, I feel compelled to look back at the previous pages that tell the story of my life. It has been a life filled with hard knocks and joyful triumphs. It has been a life of a businesswoman that I could not have conceived of as an 8th-grader who was almost thrown out of school. It has been a life of men who left me bruised before I found the man who made me whole. It has been a life of friends who picked me up when I was down. It has been a life of difficulties with my children that they and I have worked to overcome. It has been a life of wealth beyond my imagination. It has been a life of world travel that I never could have dreamed of. It has been a life of helping others in small and large ways. It has been a life that – as you will see – has been far from ordinary, with unique twists and turns.

When I arrived in Las Vegas in July 1955, it was not a place for a woman to go by herself without getting a bad reputation, especially if she had children to protect. I had two at the time – ages 5 ½ and 2. But I made an agreement with my wonderful parents to watch my son Kenny, the oldest, and my daughter Ricky for six months until I could make enough money to pay off my debts, come back to Los Angeles, get a job and fend for myself.

Las Vegas' reputation as a place for pleasure was created not only by legalized gambling and big-time entertainment, but by beautiful young women who moved there. They wore alluring clothes that helped draw men's attention. They would hook up with somebody, but for most of them, they would look like rag dolls six months later. The \$500-a-fling night would eventually fall off to less than \$50 as men used the women up.

I was aware of the dangers of going to Las Vegas; I knew that one misstep could cost me my children. But I couldn't live with my debt – no matter how small – because of the way I and my siblings had been raised. I

had to gamble in my own way, you might say, on my future.

I was fortunate to get a job there by being in the right places at the right times.

Las Vegas was not in my thinking in late 1954 when, needing a job, I went to a beauty salon, Helen Young's, on Canon Drive in Beverly Hills, California, that I couldn't afford at the time. But I wanted to have my hair done that afternoon so I could interview for a job in a dress shop in what was then known as The Farmers Market in mid-town Los Angeles.

While I was at the beauty shop, Aida Grey was there, having her hair done. She was a French lady who had come to America and started a magnificent business. She opened the first beauty studio in Beverly Hills and was the first one, to the best of my knowledge, to do complimentary makeup. So, of course, women bought her products.

I guess she was recruiting women at the time – she was brilliant in the way she did it. She kept looking at me, and one thing led to another. She told me about her shop and asked, "Would you like a job? You look like you would like to do what I'm doing now."

Before I could say anything, I called my mother and said, "I don't know when I'm going to get home. This woman offered me a job and I want to go see about it. I'm not going to the dress shop."

Aida said she was training girls. At the time, I was not familiar with makeup, other than lipstick and a little mascara, but I was always interested in artistic things. So she conned me into not going to the interview at the dress shop, but, instead, going with her to her salon on Beverly Drive and Charleville. She offered me a job, and I accepted.

The money was very, very poor. But I loved what I was doing, and I was good at what I was doing. After a while, she would rely on me for many, many things.

However, despite doing well at Aida Grey, I was there less than a year. I began to realize that I couldn't stay; I needed to make more money. Things were going badly for me.

But going to Aida Grey resulted in getting me to Las Vegas – barely.



My parents, Edward and Cecelia, on their wedding day.



Top left: Me at about age 1 1/2. Top right: In my Girl Scout Uniform. Right: Me at age 13.

The photo of me that won a baby contest and was shown in movie newsreels.





Top left: My "aunt" Dora and her son.
 Top right: Me with my sister Sharon and brother Raymond. I was kind of a nanny for them. Bottom right: A photo taken during the early years with my brother Bob, sister Sharon and brother Raymond. Bottom left, me at age 21.



Clockwise from top left: Kenny and me in the dress I made for his Bar Mitzvah.
 Me with Karl Levin, my second husband, shortly before we were married.
 Me and one of my oldest and dearest friends, Lila Bayer.
 Lila with her husband, Hal.
 Me relaxing on a loveseat in my home on Doheny Drive in 1964.

The balance of the pages have been omitted from this preview.