

# GENERATIONS: FOUR FATHERS

## An Eccentric but Loving Man Had a Side No One Knew

By BILL GLOVIN

PEOPLE often referred to my father as “a character.” For one thing, he had two first names. When my parents went to court to shorten our last name from Glovinski to Glovin, he told the judge, “I’d like to also change my first name from Max to Fred.”

Outside the courtroom, my mother yelled, “Max, why didn’t you tell me you were going to change your first name, too?”

“Lady,” he said, “I never liked the name Max and, for the same \$250, I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Why someone who calls most people either Lady or Sonny would care about a first name remains, like much about my father, a mystery.

While everyone from his past continued to call him Max, he began introducing himself as Fred to new acquaintances. Years later I combined the two into Frax — a nickname he seemed fond of.

Frax marched to the beat of his own drummer — sometimes in boxer shorts and slippers. I can still hear my mother’s blood-curdling scream whenever she would catch him retrieving the newspaper: “Max, the neighbors!”

But our neighbors in Fair Lawn were already accustomed to Frax’s peculiar habits. The man collected ancient, gas-guzzling cars the same way some people collect Tiffany lamps. Junking a car meant using it to store broken TVs and VCRs in our driveway. There are pack rats and then there was Frax. The sneakers I had tossed out would magically reappear on his feet. The basement contained enough canned goods, pill bottles and old clothes to survive a year-long siege.

For all his quirks, though, Frax was our go-to guy. If your car broke down, he was the first person you’d call. Need a ride to the airport at 6:30 a.m.? No problem. But it’s Kennedy. “That’s even better,” he’d say. “I can get us around the traffic and tolls.”

When my mother, Florence, in-

herited some money, he was on board with the idea of using it to help me and my wife with the down payment for a condo.

“Don’t even think about plastic unless you’re absolutely 100 percent certain that you can pay the loan back right away,” I remember him saying.

It’s been about five years since Frax’s death, and I’m still trying to come to grips with his life. But not for the usual reasons. Shortly after this hard-working, penny-pinching, family-loving man died, we learned that he had run up enormous debt, leaving my mother in a serious financial bind. Her only asset was her house, and she would be almost penniless until she sold it.

So we don’t always practice

### A discovery about a hardworking dad made only after his final rest.

what we preach. But that’s the strange part — Frax did. I’ve never known anyone with his work ethic: 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week for his entire adult life. And they weren’t hours at a desk; they were hard hours in a factory or driving a car on the same route every day for nine hours. He seemed invincible; I don’t recall him ever taking a sick day. And he never complained about his job or was too tired to help us with our homework.

He had always been the noble provider, the sole bill payer. My mother, he would often growl, was the best cook, best dancer, best mother, most beautiful woman. Now she was left to ponder why her soul mate had methodically liquidated everything but the house.

It was complicated. He was complicated. Born in Paris in 1928

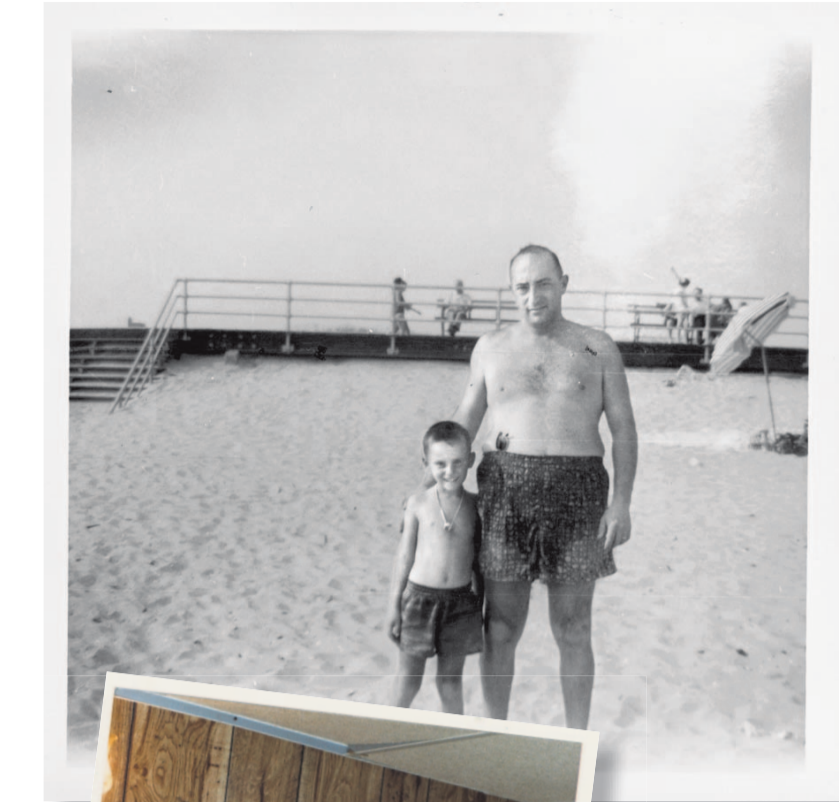
to Jewish parents who were in the midst of emigrating from Poland, Frax was only 6 months old when he came to the United States. He had been a standout student who had the ability to multiply large numbers in his head, could speak three languages fluently and graduated from high school at age 15, after skipping several grades. Although he enrolled at N.Y.U., he was daunted by the long commute from North Jersey, and perhaps more so by the awkwardness of entering an academic environment dominated by 18- and 19-year-old city dwellers, so he ended up in my grandfather’s embroidery factory.

But his career choices seemed to have absolutely no impact on his love for learning. Long drives meant discussions of history or solving complex word problems. Scrabble, a popular after-dinner activity at the kitchen table, meant a lively discussion on strategy and vocabulary.

He was a born teacher who always made the time to play cards or hit baseballs to us after supper on Sunday nights, or to run an errand for my mother, to whom he seemed so singularly, passionately devoted.

And yet, we learned months after the funeral, he had forged her name and duped her into signing about a half-dozen credit-card applications. He had cashed in his life insurance policies and Individual Retirement Accounts, made a bad time-share deal and even went so far as to use cash advances to buy groceries. Now that he was gone, there was suddenly a leaky roof, plus property taxes on a house and other expenses — and not a dime left to pay for any of it.

Who was this man? Shortly before his death, Frax had volunteered to help me do research at the New York Historical Society. My car was in the shop, so he picked me up. Even though I was on an expense account, I couldn’t convince him to put his car in a lot. It was still a waste of money, he said. We found a meter and took turns go-



**MOMENTS**  
From top: The writer, Bill Glovin, with his father, Max, at Rockaway Beach; Max and Florence Glovin; and Bill with his father and mother at his bar mitzvah.



ing out every 90 minutes or so to feed it. For him, browsing through old history books was a labor of love. “Are they really paying you to do this?” he asked.

He was still one of my heroes then — a father who had sacrificed everything for his family. Perhaps it had all been too much.

My guess is that something had gone wrong, and he couldn’t face us.

It took enormous energy and legal advice to unravel the financial mess — and more than a year before my mother was able to settle with the credit card companies and get back on her feet.

Eventually, she sold their home and moved to subsidized housing. Chalking it all up to “your father not being himself in those last few years,” she was much quicker to forgive him than I was.

And now, finally, I have figured out why. She never thought he was invincible.

## SHOP & DINE IN PRINCETON




### 2008 Summer Concert Series Schedule

June 19	The Klez Dispensers
June 26	Swingadelic
July 3	The Blawenburg Band
July 10	The VooDudes
July 17	Animus with Dancers
July 24	The Alice Project
July 31	Alex & the Kaledoscope Band
August 7	KJ Denhart
August 14	Monday Blues
August 21	String Fever
August 28	Frank Vignola

Where: Princeton Shopping Center Courtyard  
When: June 21 - August 30  
Thursdays from 6pm to 8pm

**FREE ADMISSION!**  
For information contact: 609-924-8777  
www.artscouncilofprinceton.com  
www.princetonshoppingcenter.com

Presented by the Arts Council of Princeton and Princeton Shopping Center

### Your Neighborhood American Bistro

“For Over 20 Years”

# WINBERIE’S

## RESTAURANT & BAR



Princeton, NJ  
One Palmer Sq.  
609-921-0700



Summit, NJ  
2 Kent Place Blvd.  
908-277-4224



Ridgewood, NJ  
30 Oak St.  
201-444-3700

*The perfect place to meet friends for lunch, after work, for drinks or for a relaxing family dinner*

## Great Shopping & Dining!

That was one great dinner! More shopping anyone?

I got my second wind.

Ditto!



Combine great dining with over 40 of your favorite brand name stores and one of a kind boutiques...all in the unique setting of downtown Princeton

Palmer Square

www.palmersquare.com

## FOLLOW THE LATEST NEWS ON YOUR MOBILE PHONE

All the news that’s fit to go.

[nytimes.com/mobile](http://nytimes.com/mobile)