

Gail Fishman Gerwin

Skating with Kurt

He'd come to our flat on Madison Avenue. Mr. Schlossberger, young man with thick hair and a heavy accent usually reserved for those we thought old. He'd climb the painted stairs to our front porch and, despite his sweetness, his soft voice, I felt terror from those footfalls. I hadn't practiced, *she practices at her lesson*, my mother would say, eyes narrowed with disappointment. Final piece—*The Skater's Waltz* from John Thompson's red book. My right hand banged chords without grace, the left hand added the bum bum to move the melodic line—*daaa, bum bum, daa, bum daa daa*—Mr. Schlossberger counting *von two szree, von two szree*, as he tried to match my tempo. That piece ended my piano career, the Sohmer spinet went silent. I once walked all the way to Fourteenth and Thirtieth to visit Mr. Schlossberger, met his wife, his young sons. At twelve, I didn't know while my *practice lessons* took me up and down a keyboard that loomed like doom, that he'd trekked in silence through Europe and beyond, that his treacherous journey over mountain peaks took him away from Evil, that the notes he proffered freed him from this memory.

Gail Fishman Gerwin (www.gailfgerwin.com) is the author of *Sugar and Sand* (Paterson Poetry Prize finalist), *Dear Kinfolk* (Paterson Award for Literary Excellence), and *Crowns*, (Aldrich Press, 2016). Her poem "A State in Mind" was a third-prize winner in the 2015 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. She is associate poetry editor of *Tiferet Journal* and is a writing-workshop facilitator. Gail's poetry, book reviews, fiction, essays, and plays appear in print and online literary journals, in other media, and on stage.