

Former

SPEECH COACH

Now Award-Winning Director

Lillian Glass' career in communication is a master class in flexibility.

PERSISTENCE
BY MARY BROLLEY
⌚ 5 MIN.

AT A HOLLYWOOD PARTY IN THE EARLY 1980s, Lillian Glass '74 was in a group of actors and directors discussing their latest projects. Asked what she did for a living, the speech therapist and professor at USC hesitated. Rather than explain her current research, she mentioned that as a graduate student at the University of Michigan, she'd worked with patients transitioning to a new gender, coaching them on speech and mannerisms.

A man in the circle perked up, handed her his number and asked her to call him the next day. When she did, he gave her an address in Westwood and asked her to drive there and not tell anyone where she was going.

"And that's how I ended up meeting Dustin Hoffman and coaching him on how to become Tootsie," Glass said.

This offhand but startling story is one of many Glass related as she traced her career progression from a speech therapy student at Bradley, to an academic, to a therapist, to a best-selling author, to a filmmaker.

Remember the 1985 movie "Mask"? Glass was the real-life speech therapist of Rocky Dennis, the young man with the severe bone disorder played by Eric Stoltz. She coached deaf actress Marlee Matlin before her acceptance speech at the 1986 Academy Awards. She had an office in Beverly Hills and worked with Gene Kelly, Sean Connery, Kirk Douglas, Melanie Griffith, Julio Iglesias, Dolly Parton, Andy Garcia and many others.

Glass started out as an academic, earning her master's degree at the University of Michigan and her doctorate at the University of Minnesota. She published more than 50 articles in professional journals.

"Even as an undergrad at Bradley, I loved research. Later I taught at USC and in medical and dental schools and continued my research in medical genetics and in gender differences in communication."

Throughout her career, she also demonstrated a willingness to explore novel career paths. She became a news reporter for the ABC affiliate in Los Angeles. Afterward, she became a sought-after TV show commentator ("The Dr. Phil Show," "20/20" and others) on interpreting body language and, later, as an expert witness in criminal trials. She's written more than a dozen books, including "He Says, She Says," "The Body Language of Liars" and the bestselling "Toxic People."

Glass, who grew up in Miami, decided to become a speech therapist after watching a telethon for cerebral palsy patients when she was 9 years old. "I knew immediately that's what I wanted to do with my life — help people."

Her childhood, with older brother Manny and devoted parents who ran a drapery business, was loving and supportive. "My parents worked so hard. I was blessed to no end. They said, 'You can do anything you want in life.' They were so positive and encouraging. That was the biggest gift they could have given me, and I am forever grateful."

She graduated at the top of her high school class and decided to attend Bradley because of its well-respected School of Speech and Hearing Sciences.

"It was a beautiful experience," she said. "I'd never been away from home before. It was the best place for me to get my feet wet. Such a beautiful campus, great professors. They didn't dull my sparkle."

TRIP ABROAD REVEALS FAMILY SECRET

At Bradley, she had the chance to do a semester abroad. "I was 19 or 20. After I finished studying in several countries, I went to Israel and met a friend of my father's, and she told me some things that had happened to my parents during the Holocaust.

"When I came back, I asked my parents about it. They were upset because they didn't want me to be exposed to it.

"They'd never told me about their experiences. I knew they'd come over from Europe, and of course that there was a Holocaust. They didn't talk about it with my brother and me because they were focused on assimilating into America."

Over the years, as her career took off, Glass continued to be curious about this dark episode in her family's past. But her parents were still reluctant to discuss it.

A few years ago, Glass decided it was time to tell her mother's story. That led to her most personal project to date: "Reinventing Rosalee," an award-winning documentary about her mother, who died in December at 102. Glass produced and directed the 80-minute film, which blends interviews, archival footage and movie clips to tell a fascinating story.

Newly married when the Nazis invaded Poland, Rosalee and her husband Abraham narrowly escaped into Russia after several frightening encounters with Nazi soldiers. They were soon captured by the Russians and sent to a series of brutal labor camps. The couple lost an infant son to starvation and a young daughter to disease and poor living conditions.

Finally, the couple and their remaining son were allowed to emigrate from a displaced persons camp in Germany to the U.S., where Lillian was born a year later.

Despite early hardships and losses, Rosalee Glass remained upbeat and generous until Manny died during a botched medical procedure in 1999. To help her mother recover, Glass persuaded Rosalee to move in with her and enrolled her in French, tai chi, piano and acting lessons.

"She always had a beautiful singing voice," said Glass before joking, "and then she started auditioning for and getting commercials. I became her stage mother."

"Several years ago, I took her back to Poland and Russia so she could mourn her family who were killed in the Holocaust. We traveled around the world together. Whatever I did, she did. Wherever I went, she went."

Her mother's death has left Glass devastated. "She was not only my mother but my muse and my soulmate," she said. "It's been the hardest time. I'm deciding on my next move... but I know I'll be carrying on her legacy of 'fighting hate with compassion.'"

"And I'll continue making films." **B**

Lillian and her mother go dog sledding in Alaska to celebrate her 100th birthday in 2017.



DUSTIN HOFFMAN
Tootsie