Rosalie Weener

I was born in Malden and lived in Everett on County Road near Prattville, then in Chelsea at 14 Lawrence Street until I was 11, when I moved with my mother to West Medford.

Both my paternal grandparents, the Isenbergs, came to Chelsea from a village outside Kyiv, Ukraine. They lived on Bellingham Street, then Crescent Avenue, and finally on Watts Street. My mother's father came to the US from Lithuania; her mother arrived here from Poland with one of her sisters, leaving behind another sister and her father, who, along with his father, my great-grandfather, died in the holocaust.

My mother's parents started Gordon Catering in the 1920s. It was at 131 Arlington Street, next door to the Podradchik smoked fish business. In the basement of the Gordon building, now a dentist's office, is a dumbwaiter and other food-service equipment.

My mother worked in the kitchen and booked parties at Gordon Catering. My Aunt, Rose Gordon Goldman, and uncle, Joshua "Chicky" Goldman, worked in the business on weekends. My uncle handled trucking and transportation for the Onichty Society's catered affairs, among many other venues. When I visited the Gordon commissary as a little girl while they were preparing for parties, I painted the knishes with scrambled-egg juice to give them a sheen, staying within kosher guidelines.

My cousin, Barry Goldman, is one year younger than I am. When we were kids, during catered events at one of the venues, we would watch the people seated at the tables, peeking through the curtains on the stage, or wherever we could hide to look, until the janitor found us and made us scurry away.

Gordon Catering closed in 1958, when my grandmother, a diabetic, became a double amputee and had to give up the business. When Gordon Catering closed, my family moved closer to my aunt, uncle, and cousin in Milton. I moved to West Medford with my mother after she married my stepfather, who was a widower with two sons.

Leaving Chelsea meant a complete break with Sally Bencel, a friend I had been very close to since kindergarten, and I was devastated. I bumped into her many years later, when she worked for the Bureau of Jewish Education in Newton, and we shared our mutual longing for the Chelsea days and our lost friendship.

In earlier years, when I told the older generation, "My family was Gordon Catering," they were happy. I felt like I had a family of celebrities. When I met my future father-in-law, Sam Weeden, a Chelsea native living in Marblehead, he was impressed. "Gordon Catering!" he exclaimed when I told him about my family, and he immediately accepted me. His family was in a well-known retail kosher meat business near Shurtleff School. He eventually closed that enterprise and joined a partner in the wholesale meat business in Roxbury's Newmarket Square. Sprague Brothers had a kosher division and a non-kosher one, so he dealt with kosher butchers and retail supermarkets.

My maternal grandmother, Minnie Litvak Gordon, ran the catering business. She gave food to people who couldn't afford groceries, especially during the 1930s Depression.

Two of Gordon Catering's servers eventually started Gilbert and Davis, a highly successful kosher caterer at 1212 Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester.

All the kosher caterers attended meetings with Gordon Catering. My mother represented her parents' business at these gatherings. Gordon Catering was an integral part of the Chelsea community.

My mother graduated from Chelsea High School in 1933, when her parents had been in the catering business for several years. Their Lawrence Street home had been the rectory of Chelsea's First Baptist Church. I attended Carter School in Cary Square, near Temple Emmanuel, from kindergarten to early sixth grade.

Our home was kosher. My grandfather laid tefillin every morning. My parents lived on the first floor. My grandparents, my sister, and I lived on the second floor. My parents divorced in 1954, when it was a rare time for families to split up. My sister, Rochelle, who was eight years older than me, left home around 1956, when she was 18, to live in Plymouth.

After his separation from my mother, my father lived with my grandparents on Crescent Avenue until they moved to Watts Street. My grandfather, Nathan Isenberg, passed away in 1955. My grandmother, Sophie Isenberg, moved to the

North Shore, where my father's brothers and sister had relocated. My father lived in Point of Pines, Revere, before moving to Beverly with my grandmother.

Visiting times with my dad were special. I recall going with him to Katz's Bagelry; he dubbed it "the bagel factory." That remains with me to this day. Sadly, my father passed away from a heart attack in his 50s, before medicine had developed all those cardiovascular health regimens and treatment procedures.

Later in life, I took over preparing Jewish holiday meals. To avoid competing with my mother in Jewish cuisine, I took a French cooking course at the Boston Adult Education Center. I had my parents come over for a French meal, but I went with "Jewish style" cooking on holidays. My cousin Barry's wife used our grandmother's noodle pudding recipe.

Murray Dennis and I were married for four years before we divorced. With my second husband, Barry Weener, I had two sons, from whom I have two grandsons and two granddaughters. Barry owned Weener's Kosher Meat Market in Chelsea; eventually, he went into the wholesale beef business. After 19 years of marriage, we divorced.

Eventually, my mother remarried, and I acquired stepsiblings. My sons and I have always considered them as family. I raised my sons in Newton; they're in their 40s now. I have been living at one of the four Hebrew Senior Life centers in Brookline for the past ten years.

I have an associate's degree in business administration from Katharine Gibbs College. I am a licensed real estate broker, have been a Justice of the Peace for the past 14 years, and a Notary Public since the 1990s. In 2025, I performed 28 marriages, the most I've ever officiated at in a single year. Almost all the couples married so that one of them could remain in the US. Many of those striving to stay here held highly responsible positions at their workplaces.

I have a special feeling for Chelsea. My years living there were formative, as I went from third through sixth grade.

While living on Lawrence Street, I attended the Chelsea Hebrew School, where a very strict teacher toward women made me cry. My parents transferred me to the Hebrew School at Temple Emmanuel, which I liked much more.

I have painful memories of my parents divorcing when I was 7 and my father moving in with his parents on Crescent Avenue, when no other kids' parents were getting divorced. Another sad memory is of my aunt dying young when I was 10.

On the lighter side, I recall the Orthodox Gopins living near us on Lawrence Street, and two Orthodox Gopin daughters peeking into our window to see me watching cartoons on TV on a Saturday, something they couldn't do on the sabbath. I have warm memories of delightful times out on the streets, playing hopscotch, roller skating, and having fun. Unfortunately, moving to West Medford ended all that.

Source: A March 29, 2026 interview with Rosalie Weener