

SYD'S MEN SHOP ROSE AND SYD SELESNICK

EARLY YEARS

In her early 20s, Rose Segal met Syd Selesnick, who was also from Chelsea. She had often walked past a drugstore where he hung out with friends, admiring his good looks and liking the way he filled out his T-shirt. Through friends, Rose passed along the message that she wanted to meet Syd. He tapped her on the shoulder one day and asked her out. During their first date, they told each other their life stories, something Rose had never shared with anyone. They immediately knew they were in love.

Syd and Rose's love affair lasted fifty-one years. According to their children, they spoke and acted as one person. Syd called her Roses and signed all his cards to her, 'To my Roses.' Early in their marriage, Syd won money in a poker game and visited Dreyer's Men's Shop at 336 Broadway to buy a suit.

Like Rose, Charles Dreyer had noticed how smartly Syd carried himself walking through downtown Chelsea, so Dreyer offered him a job. Syd had attended law school before running out of money during the Depression. He quickly became the men's store's manager, bought the place after Dreyer retired, and renamed it Syd's Men's Shop.

SYD'S MEN'S SHOP

Rose and Syd ran the enterprise from 1958 through 1987. The store was long and narrow, with chairs for friends to sit and talk, so it became a social gathering place as well as a bustling retail establishment. Their children often came downtown to visit and, eventually, their grandchildren.

ESCAPING UKRAINE

In a memoir she gave her family on her eightieth birthday, Rose wrote about escaping the Ukrainian city of Novohrad-Volynsk during the 1917 Bolshevik Uprising. The anti-Semitic Bolsheviks had burned down her father's prospering hardware store. Hoping to return in the future, Rose's parents buried some of their money in the backyard and sewed the rest into their clothing before fleeing on foot.

All Rose remembered of their early flight were the bombs going off while they hid in cemeteries. It was the beginning of the Russian Revolution. Five years later, after an arduous odyssey through Poland and Germany, during which the family survived by selling trinkets at roadside stands, they boarded a steamship bound for the United States.

COMING TO CHELSEA

ELLIS ISLAND TO CHELSEA

On Ellis Island, someone handed seven-year-old Rose a banana. She had never seen one and couldn't figure out how to eat it. Rose's children persuaded her to write down more family stories, so she penned a second memoir, this one about her mother's life, giving copies to family members on her eighty-fifth birthday. She said she would have authored a third memoir for her ninetieth but thought more writing would aggravate the bursitis in her right shoulder.

BROADWAY DRESS SHOP

In the United States, the Segal family lived for a year in Beverly, where Rose's mother's relatives had settled sixteen years earlier. Then, they moved to a more affordable apartment over a city fire barn in Chelsea. At fifteen, Rose began working at the Broadway Dress Shop after Eva encouraged the owner to hire her. Rose had been working there after school for about two years when, in nineteen thirty-two, the owner offered her the then-substantial sum of eighteen dollars a week to become the full-time replacement for the shop's lead salesgirl, who was leaving to get married. Rose was overjoyed at the job offer and rushed home to tell Eva the exciting news.

When Rose asked if she could accept the job, Eva said, "God only knows how much we need the money. You can always be a salesgirl, but first, you must get a high school diploma.' So, Rose finished high school and kept working in retail. She landed a job at a large Boston womenswear store during the Great Depression when the line of applicants stretched for two blocks. Rose was one of only three candidates chosen. Little did she know then how much more than sales her future career would involve.



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