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OBITUARY: Sylvia Rosen, 87

By JORDAN PRESS

Posted 1 year ago

Sylvia Rosen never started a one-on-one business meeting by launching straight into shop talk.

Instead, she engaged her visitors in a conversation about their personal lives, and then she served tea.

Now the meeting could begin.

"They left feeling like they had experienced something from the past that they didn't experience anymore," said her grandson, Adam Koven.

She got to know everyone and learned their likes and dislikes, and among her family knew who liked their cookies a little burnt, and who didn't.

A businesswoman, philanthropist and the matriarch of the Rosen family, Sylvia Rosen died yesterday morning. She was 87.

"I feel as if a part of me is gone," said her daughter, Merle Koven.

Yesterday, her family gathered at her home on King Street West. She will be laid to rest beside her husband, Harry, tomorrow.

"There's a lot of good feelings still and that's what we're going to take with us," said her son, Mayor Harvey Rosen.

Sylvia Rosen was born in Montreal, the second daughter to Harris and Rebecca Caplan, who lived on St. Lawrence



Boulevard in the city's Jewish district. A twin at birth, she remained close to her brother Lou for the rest of her life.

She was one of seven siblings, and the middle daughter of three girls. Despite being the middle child, she took charge of her siblings and acted like a second mother to them, her sister Frances said from Montreal.



At the age of 15, Sylvia got her start in business. She left school and started training as a bookkeeper at the same clothing manufacturer where Lou worked.

Two years later, at the age of 17, Sylvia started writing a young man in Kingston by the name of Harry Rosen. Eventually, Harry made the trip east from Kingston to Montreal and a relationship was born.

After two years of courting Sylvia, the two married and settled in Kingston. Sylvia worked as the bookkeeper for Harry's business, Rosen Fuels, and ended up managing the company's investments.

She was a businesswoman in an era when most women didn't work, said Merle Koven.

While Harry was preoccupied with his work, Harvey Rosen said his mother somehow found ways to make time for everyone in her life. Her personality complemented Harry's, Harvey Rosen said.

"She would say she never had to ask my father for anything, but she knew how to get what she wanted," Harvey Rosen said with a laugh.

"She was such a rock. She was there for every occasion," he said. "I can't think of anything happening without her present.

"To a large extent, she was the centre of the family."

Family meant the world to Sylvia Rosen. When her son, Wayne, grew fond of pecan rolls, Sylvia learned how to make the Greek dessert her neighbours knew well.

She took her grandchildren on cruises around Florida when they visited her during winter or March breaks from school, trips that usually included a stop at the flea market where she taught her grandchildren how to haggle.

When her grandchildren visited her in Kingston, she was more than willing to make them what she wanted, whether it was freshly squeezed orange juice, or fresh-cut French fries and hot dogs.

"She would spoil them," Harvey Rosen said. "She was probably a little more restrained with us, but the grandchildren could do no wrong."

When Harry died in 1986 at the age of 67, Sylvia had a hole left in her life and she filled it with volunteer work.

"I missed (Harry) very much. When he died, I had to do something to take up my time, to keep me from going mad," she told the Whig-Standard in 1991.

She sat on the board of governors for Kingston General Hospital, worked on landing major donations for the United Way and chaired the local chapter of Youth Aliyah, a program that rescued Jewish children from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia, Russia and Bosnia and settled them in Israel.

She also sat on the admissions committee for the medical school at Queen's University, voting for applicants not based on the papers before her, but the gut instinct she had from meeting them, Merle Koven said.

"It seems the more I do, the more they call on me to do. I do what I can," Sylvia Rosen said in 1991.

"I feel I have accomplished something in life. I feel rewarded."

A funeral will be held tomorrow at Beth Israel Synagogue.

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My condolences to the Rosen family for their loss.



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I agree. She seemed very nice, & generous.
What ever one says about this family dynasty in Kingston, all obviously worked hard to get to where one is.
Many here could learn from their experiences and work ethic.

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