

Rosie Orbach by Ruth Chevion

Rosie Orbach was my Grandmother Miriam's older sister. Rosie and her husband Ephraim-Menashe Orbach and their four children lived in the same apartment house as my Dad's family, one flight up. Rosie's mother, known as Bubba Dvorcha, lived with Rosie and Ephraim-Menashe.

Even as I say that Bubba Dvorcha lived with them, I realize my own cultural overlay on the situation, because actually Bubba Dvorcha, whose real name was Dvora Wilk, lived there first. Rosie and her husband Ephraim-Menashe moved in with her, not the other way around.

In addition to living with Bubba Dvorcha, Rosie and Ephraim-Menashe took over Bubba Dvorcha's business, which was a fabric shop on the street level of the apartment house they lived in.

Rosie's fabric shop on the ground floor of their apartment house was a lively place where Polish girls would come for bargains on unusual remnants from which to sew their frocks. If you are an old timer in Manchester, dear reader, you might remember Harold Levine's fabric shop where his wife and family worked alongside Harold. If you remember the bolts of cloth on big tables where you could dig for textile treasure while tittering and storytelling mixed with business, laughter and conversation in the air — then you have an image of Rosie's fabric shop in Tarnow.

Conversation and jokes were central to Rosie's fabric business. Conversation and jokes were Rosie's forte anyway. From all reports, she was gifted with a great sense of humor. She seems to have been one of those people always on the verge of saying something funny. Even in the family photo below where everyone else looks so serious, the beginning of a smile plays on Rosie's lips. The fabric shop did well. Bubba Dvorcha became the assistant, sitting near the register, wearing her iconic long black dress and monocle, always ready to help a young lady pick out something becoming.

Rosie's husband Ephraim-Menashe Orbach was a Hasid. He also worked in the business, but a man so religious would not look at women, so he wouldn't have direct contact with the clientele. His job in the business was to move a ladder around to fetch bolts from high shelves. Ephraim-Menashe was loved by one and all for his live-and-let-live philosophy. His religion was his own practice, while his practice toward others was tolerance. The less observant members of the family suffered no criticism from him.

When the Germans came into Tarnow, one of their first actions was to "freeze" all Jewish bank accounts. Money owed to a Jew had to be paid into the frozen account. Without working capital, Rosie's shop had to close. Suddenly there was no source of income.

Ever resourceful, Rosie became a "knightbone." It turned out she had the ability to correctly position a broken bone. She would palpate, touching and feeling with her fingers until she found the break. Then she would set it in proper place and finally, wrap the limb onto a plank.

Word got around. People started coming to the house. As there was a general lack of medical care, she was useful. The local people couldn't pay cash, so they paid her with a live chicken, or a sack of potatoes. In this way Rosie kept the family from starvation.

Pretty soon, the other women in the house got involved. Miriam and Dvorcha made salves for healing wounds. Mostly they used onions - maybe the very onions Rosie got for the bone setting? They squeezed the juice out of the onions and mixed it with oil for an ointment that drew out infection. Out of garlic, they made a remedy against stomach worms. They made a mouthwash out of chamomile that they gathered outside. The chamomile was also made into a soak for what they called "women's issues." They learned how to do "cupping," which could help take down a fever.

The house became a little subversive clinic. Of course they would have been shot immediately if the Germans had found out about it, as it was "illegal" in Nazi jurisprudence for Jews to give medical care to non-Jews, but apparently the local people didn't report it.

I love this Rosie - my great aunt. Isn't she like Rosie the Riveter in a way? Rosie the Bonesetter. She gets it done! In the photo Rosie is the one in the middle row with a child on her lap. Dvorcha is on Rosie's left, and Miriam on Dvorcha's left.

