

Rose Garbow Naftalin (1898–1998)

By Richard Engeman

Rose Naftalin was a restaurateur and cookbook author in Portland and the founder of Rose's, a Kosher-style delicatessen that was legendary for its impressive desserts and huge sandwiches. Rose's opened in 1956 on Northwest 23rd Avenue at the western edge of downtown, one block north of another celebrated Portland restaurant, Henry Thiele's.

Naftalin was born on March 18, 1898, in present-day Ukraine to Beril and Sarah Garbowitz. The family immigrated to the United States in 1904, took the name Garbow, and settled in Chicago. Beril Garbow died a few years later, leaving his wife with four young children. Overwhelmed, Sarah placed the children with a Jewish orphanage. Rose completed high school, went to a business college, and found work as a secretary. She married Mandel Naftalin, whom she described as "a connoisseur of fine food," in Chicago in 1917. Untutored in homemaking and cooking, she set herself to learning how to cook, and with the help of a Viennese-born friend she found a talent for baking, which became her passion.

The Naftalins had two children, a daughter, Davida, born in 1918 and a son, Bernard, in 1923. Rose Naftalin's baking skills won her several local prizes, and in 1927, when the family lived in Toledo, Ohio, they purchased a neighborhood delicatessen that became the popular Rose's Food Shoppe. Her multilayer cakes, tireless energy, and tuxedo-clad waiters made the shop a notable institution.

After Mandel Naftalin died in 1939, Rose continued working eighteen-hour days baking and running the restaurant. Davida married Dr. Edward Rosenbaum in 1942, and they moved to Portland in 1948; Bernard soon followed his sister. In 1955, Naftalin sold Rose's Food Shoppe to join her children and their families in Portland.

Retirement was not to Naftalin's taste, however, and in 1956 she opened Rose's Delicatessen and Lounge on Northwest Twenty-third Avenue, next to her son-in-law's medical office. The deli quickly became a culinary landmark, famed for Rose's whipped cream roll cakes, many-layered cakes, flaky raspberry Napoleons, and gigantic doughnuts and cinnamon rolls. She also served enormous pastrami and Reuben sandwiches. The "peak of the sandwich art at Rose's," *Oregon Journal* columnist Doug Baker concluded, "is the Nascher's [Nosher's] Delight, in which there are so many ingredients that the bread never quite encompasses them." Each sandwich was accompanied by a salt-brined and very garlicky pickle made by the legendary Sarah Neusihin, the sister of Rabbi Joseph Fain. Naftalin summed up her approach to the restaurant business this way: "Whatever we served, it had to be the best—the best!"

Rose Naftalin tried to retire, and she sold the restaurant in 1968 to Max Birnbaum and Ivan Runge, who ran it until the 1980s. She then put her restless talents toward writing a cookbook. In 1975, to wide acclaim, Random House published *Grandma Rose's Book of Sinfully Delicious Cakes, Cookies, Pies, Cheese Cakes, Cake Rolls & Pastries*, followed in 1978 by *Grandma Rose's Book of Sinfully Delicious Snacks, Nibbles, Noshes & Other Delights*. The two books sold more than 400,000 copies. Barbara Durbin, food writer for the *Oregonian*, dubbed the author "the Rose City's most famous Rose."

Rose Garbow Naftalin continued to cook and bake for family and friends until she was in her late nineties. She died in Portland on April 16, 1998, at the age of one hundred.

Sources

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