

Finesse Fashions

Helen Finkelstein



Location

Landis &
Lincoln Ave.
Vineland, NJ
Cumberland
County

Years

Active

1980s

Helen Finkelstein in front of a sign Displaying Finesse Fashions - May 1986

About Helen Finkelstein

Helen Finkelstein was born Helen Mendelsohn in Copalnic Manastur, Romania in 1928. Helen's family was sent to the Baia-Mare ghetto in April 1944. Later that year, the entire family was deported from the ghetto to Auschwitz, where she was separated from her father, mother, and brothers upon arrival. Helen was transferred to Bergen-Belsen after a few months at Auschwitz, and later was sent to Rochlitz labor camp. Helen and her fellow prisoners at Rochlitz were forced on a death march near the end of the war, during which she was liberated by American forces in Czechoslovakia. After liberation, Helen traveled

from the Pilsen displaced persons camp in Czechoslovakia to Budapest, Hungary. She intended to return to her home town in Romania, but when she heard that there was nothing to return to, she decided to immigrate to Palestine, and made her way to Italy to join with Zionists. She met her husband, Joseph Finkelstein, in Italy, and they married in August 1946. When they learned that Joseph had surviving relatives in a DP camp in Germany, they went there instead. From the DP camp, they applied for immigration to the United States. The couple crossed the Atlantic in 1948 on the SS Omar Bradley. They first lived in Boston, then relocated with Joseph's siblings to New York City. There, in 1950, Helen and Joseph bought a chicken farm near Vineland, New Jersey, which they operated until 1963. They transitioned into running an egg-breaking and processing facility, eventually retiring from poultry farming and egg processing. Joseph died in 1998, and Helen in August of 2013.

Finesse Fashions

Helen Finkelstein first entered the retail business when she opened Sportswear Factory Outlet. She converted the location into Finesse Fashions, one of Vineland's first upscale fashion stores, in the 1980s. The store specialized in women's clothing such as dresses, blouses, skirts, and pants.

The store was unique in providing a fashion destination outside the downtown Vineland area. While most clothing stores at the time were located along Landis Avenue, Finesse Fashions opened in a suburban shopping center at the corner of Landis Ave and Lincoln Ave. The location of Finesse Fashions proved to be a wise business decision, as commerce in Cumberland County, like elsewhere in the United States, moved away from the downtown areas and to suburban shopping centers.

Landis Avenue Small Business Community

Finesse Fashions was one many small businesses owned by Holocaust Survivors on Landis Ave in downtown Vineland. Some include Bernstein's Typewriters (Herbert Bernstein), Leeser Electrical Supply (Hal Leeser), and Esther's Dress Shop (Esther Frydenberg). Most of these businesses, founded by former poultry farmers, were family-owned and operated.

For more information see

South Jersey Holocaust Survivor Digital Archive, Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center at Stockton University.

Helen Finkelstein Obituary, 2013 Vineland, New Jersey (Legacy.com).

Helen Finkelstein Testimony, USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive.

Daily Journal, Vineland, 5/1986.

Profiles of South Jersey Holocaust Survivors by George D. Quinn (Project Lead), with contributions by Dr. Michael Hayse (Curator & Editor) and Biographical Information by Martina Giuliani.