

## Biography of Selma Lyon (born Oster, married name in Germany Lachotzki)

Selma was born in a small town near the Dutch border, Xanten am Rhein, February 20, 1888. She had two brothers and five sisters, all of whom, except for one brother and one sister, were killed in concentration camps during the Holocaust. She left her town as a young woman and moved to Berlin, beginning her life in business by becoming a saleswoman at the department store KaDeWe. She was accompanied to Berlin by her younger sister, Dorothea, who also worked in sales at KaDeWe.

Sometime after WWI, Selma went into business with a partner, Julius Mayer. The business, called Lewinski and Mayer, was a manufacturing company that designed, created, sold and distributed fine ladies' fashions. Selma traveled every year to Paris with her own fashion artists to view the new collections of women's fashions. These became the basis for the new designs created and then sold by Lewinski and Mayer. The factory and sales rooms were located on Hausvogteiplatz.

In 1921, Selma married Bruno Lachotzki, who subsequently was employed as the head salesman for Lewinski and Mayer. After their marriage, her sister Dorothea moved in with the couple, later becoming a kind of nanny to Selma and Bruno's children. In 1927 their daughter Rosemarie was born, followed in 1928 by their son Fritz (later Fred).

Selma was clearly a very intelligent and business-savvy woman, helping to run a highly successful company. When the Nazi years arrived, she proved she was also very courageous and bold. When Bruno was sent to Sachsenhausen after the Night of the Broken Glass, it was Selma who managed to get the family visas to leave Germany, first to England and then to the United States. She also figured out whom to bribe with large sums of money to get her husband released from the concentration camp. She was even able to get an entire ship's packing crate of household goods (including china and silver, Persian rugs and furniture) out of their apartment and sent to England, despite the rules that supposedly allowed the family to leave with nothing of value.

The family settled first in Minneapolis, MN in 1940, at which point the family name was changed from Lachotzki to Lyon, and later moved to Burlingame, CA in 1956. Given her age, her lack of English, and the gender expectations of the time, Selma had to settle for being a housewife. She wasn't able to work, much less have her own business. She was not a happy woman during her years in the U.S., and finally committed suicide on Feb. 29, 1964.

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