

Leonard van Jeens

Hairdressing entrepreneur. Born c.1920.
Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



Contents

1. The Life of Leonard van Geens.
2. After Leonard's Death
3. The Hebe Salons Continue
4. Monica Rose
5. Another Monica Rose

1. The Life of Leonard van Geens

The account of the life of Leonard van Geens in this chapter and the next was recounted by Monica Rose to Alex Reid during a chance meeting in the Paul coffee shop in Holland Park Avenue, London, on 17th April 2023. Monica was Leonard's partner for fifteen years until his death in 2004. Their son Richard Rose now owns and runs the Hebe chain of hairdressing salons founded by his father Leonard.

Over coffee, Monica explained:

Leonard's father had a business repairing and reselling curtains and bed linen from ocean liners which were being re-fitted. He would go down to Southampton and buy these items cheaply as a job lot, regardless of their condition. He had a workshop where he would repair them, and then sell them on.

His son Leonard, who died in 2004, started with a single Hebe hairdressing salon, and then launched a second. His mother was worried about how he would manage two salons, and spent much of her time in one them to help out. The chain grew to 30 salons all over London.



The Hebe Salon beside the Savoy Hotel off the Strand.

Leonard was a perfectionist, who insisted that everything in the salon should be perfect, and he was very strict. For example one day one of his barbers came into the salon with a creased shirt. Leonard sent him home immediately to get a properly ironed shirt. On another occasion he saw a towel on an empty chair; it should not have been there and he asked for it to be instantly removed.

But along with this very strict perfectionism, Leonard was enormously caring to his staff. He never sacked anyone, and nobody ever wanted to leave. If there was friction between two members of staff in a salon he would sit down with them both and try to sort the problems out. If this was

not achieved, he would move one of the staff to another salon. He was loved by his staff, and when he visited a salon the staff would welcome him with smiles and hugs.

The Hebe chain of salons catered to both men and women. In the early days there would be a partition separating the men's and women's areas; now they are all open.

Leonard was keen that visiting his salons should be a rewarding experience. His large salon next to the Dominion Theatre in Tottenham Court Road had a resident parrot, which said "Please pay your bill". There was also a small live band, which played music of the customers' choice. In addition to hairdressing chairs there were hammocks in which the clients could lie on their backs and have their hair washed in a basin.

Another salon, still in operation in 2023, was established in the short approach to the Savoy Hotel off the Strand. This was patronised by Savoy Hotel guests, including celebrities such as the American film actress Grace Kelly – to whose wedding to Prince Rainier of Monaco Leonard was invited as a guest.

Grace Kelly is seen, with her substantial wedding cake, on the right.

In 2000, a few years before he died, Leonard brought our son Christopher Rose into the business, taking him around the salons and teaching him everything.



2. After Leonard's Death

Leonard left no valid will, and as I was not married to him when he died in 2004 his estate passed to his children. His son Paul was not interested in running chain of hairdressing salons; his interests were in property and interior design. My son Richard Rose (step-brother to Paul) was given the opportunity to buy the Hebe business, which he did – with help from my savings and with a bank loan which he repaid within three years.



Leonard and Monica's son Richard van Geens.

I had to find a new place to live, because the flat in which I had been living with Leonard in Marylebone was a company flat. We had lived there with three cars – a long low Jaguar, a Rolls Royce and a Mini. We hardly ever used the Rolls Royce, but I loved the Jaguar.

Towards the end of Leonard's life the chain of Hebe salons shrunk in number. The salon beside the Savoy Hotel continues in business. The other four Hebe salons are all at Canary Wharf, where they provide – as an employee perk – hairdressing services to the staff of bankers Morgan Stanley and lawyers Clifford Chance.

3. The Hebe Salons Continue

This interview with Richard Rose was published on the Hair and Beauty Jobs website in October 2013, and is reproduced with acknowledgement and thanks.

I was very intrigued by Richard Rose, as he is the owner of a very successful and respectable hairdressing chain, Hebe, in London and yet has no hairdressing experience, other than of the times he's sat in the chair himself.

There are 6 Hebe hair and beauty salons in total, 3 in the West End and another 3 in Canary Wharf. There is another one earmarked for the new Westfield Mall due to open in London, October 2008. Westfield will be the biggest indoor mall in the UK

Hair and Beauty Jobs spoke to Richard about what led him to working for the industry and the business challenges he faces.

Q. What's your background in?

Textiles. I managed the brand for a textile, clothing brand and was working in the Middle East, in Egypt and in Saudi.

They had shops all over the world and so it meant me travelling everywhere throughout Asia and the Middle East and backwards and forwards between London as they had a shop in Covent Garden.

Q. How did you go from there to owning the Hebe chain?

My mother was with the then owner of the Hebe chain, Leon van Geens. He'd set up the business in the '70s and being in later years of his life wanted some help with running the business.

His own son had no real interest in the business and so he asked me if I'd return to the UK and help him with the running of the business in the capacity of Financial Director. As it was I was getting tired of all the travelling I was having to do throughout Asia and so I readily agreed to return to the UK and help out.

Sadly the father died and with his son still not being interested in the business and wanting to sell up, I purchased the estate in 2004, forming my own limited company and took control of the shops.

Q. Does that mean you have no hairdressing experience?

Yes, other than having had my hair cut in the past. I don't want to be a hairdresser but having said that I am learning more about the business each and every day.

Q. What is the ethos behind Hebe?

We aim to give good quality hairdressing at reasonable prices and give a great service. We want each client to have a nice experience to feel that we have treally looked after them.

Hebe has a long history on the high street in the UK. At one stage they had as many as 30 shops. They were a big player along with names like Vidal Sasoan. So a lot of people are familiar with the name and what it stands for and it's important we carry on this tradition.

Q. What qualities make for good hairdressers?

Experience and education are key. If hairdressers have the skill set and then in addition have the character to fit in well with the ethos of the company then that's ideal.

It's also important they get on with the rest of the team. We are after all one big family

It's important that hairdressers are developed properly. We ideally want them to have a long career with us. Wella is one of our suppliers and we make sure that we tap into their courses as often as possible.

Q. What career opportunities do you offer to stylists?

We have plans in place to exapnd and with the opening up of new stores obviously comes the opportunity to become managers. It's also important to keep their creativity in check and we develop art teams to do seminars and enter awards.

Q. What are some of the biggest challenges you face in a business sense?

Operating costs are the main challenge we face. Escalating costs and the economic climate can make things tough at certain times of the year. But you have to ride through as we've got 55 staff members to support and we've still got to put a product out and deliver a good quality service.

Q. How do you deal with the life / work balance issue?

At the end of the day I'm responsible for making sure the business works. If something crops up, no matter what time of the day or night, I have to deal with it, with whatever happens really. Business comes first, I really want and have to make it a success. I definately don't want to go end going back to working for someone else.

Q. What are your aspirations for the future?

I try not to think too much about the future. But you know in 10 years time it would be lovely to have 25 or 30 shops, which might involve franchising some out. I'd like us to become a good household brand. We'll take each day at a time.

Q. What is key to running a good business?

People are what makes for a successful business. My business is only as good as the people working in my salons. At the end of the day I'm not a hairdresser and am not able to stand behind the chair. My staff therefore are vitally important. It's about being able to build great teams, successfully generated by a great team leader. Managers are key.

Q. Is networking important to running a business?

Yes, networking can be key. We do a lot of networking through the fellowship, through Wella in the workshops, through suppliers and new products.

Q. Have you or your stylists noticed any changes in consumer trends?

Yes, there is a demand for a lot more express treatments. People seem to have less and less time. In London, especially in Canary Wharf where we have a lot of workers from within the financial sector who are on tight schedules, it's important we can service them quickly. Often they'll come in on their lunch breaks and within that time they need to have their needs met and ultimately be happy with the outcome. If we were based in the Cotswolds perhaps this wouldn't be so much of an issue.



A Hebe hair salon.

4. Monica Rose

Monica Rose's first career was in office administration. Here she describes her second career, in retirement, as a knitting organiser.

After Leonard died I was in my sixties and had given up work. I would meet my son Richard for lunch in the Strand, but I needed a positive activity. I had always been keen on knitting, taught by my mother. She used to knit everything – baby clothes for us when we were small, and jerseys as we grew up. Everybody did that. And she washed our knitted clothes with great care, laying them out to dry on a towel.



An RSVP knitting group showing its work.

So I joined RSVP as a volunteer. RSVP stands for Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme – charity which has been operating for 30 years. Its volunteers provide drivers, help with reading in schools, do befriending and gardening, organise walking and exercise groups, and organise knitting groups. As I kept knitting, I joined up in the last category.

For about ten years I organised knitting groups, where people would come together for an hour a week in a café or village hall, and I would teach the group to knit.

I would go round charity shops to persuade them to give me wool, and I contacted cafes such as Costa as venues for knitting groups. I had to visit Costa's head office to make the arrangements; they were happy to have a knitting group, because it brought custom to the café.

I organised knitting groups in Tonbridge and Brighton. It was quite cheap to get to Brighton, because I could get free travel on my London Transport

senior pass as far as Croydon and would only have to pay for the journey beyond Croydon – and that was 30% off because I had a senior railcard.

The knitters were of all ages; the children would often say that their grandmother had knitted, but their mother had not; they were keen to carry on in their grandmothers' footsteps.

5. Another Monica Rose

Monica explains that people would sometimes confuse her with another Monica Rose – the on stage assistant to the hugely popular 1960s TV quiz master Hughie Green. The following account of the life of the other Monica Rose is reproduced, with acknowledgement and thanks, from her 1994 obituary in the Independent:



Monica Rose with Hughie Green.

Eighteen minutes of fame as a quiz-show contestant turned to 10 years of television stardom for the pint-sized Monica Rose, the chirpy cockney who became Hughie Green's resident and most popular hostess in Double Your Money.

'Being a hostess enabled me to see the world,' said Rose, the 4ft 9in daughter of a London Underground train driver and a cleaner at White City Stadium. 'Coming from a rough council estate, it was a lot to take in - being picked up in a Rolls and travelling by private plane.'

Rose, one of six children, was a 15-year-old junior accounts clerk when, in 1964, she was given tickets for a recording of Hughie Green's popular quiz show Double Your Money, which was born on Radio Luxembourg and moved to ITV when the commercial channel opened in 1955. Always locked in a ratings battle with the channel's other audience-grabbing quiz, Take Your Pick, hosted by Michael Miles, Double Your Money gave contestants a choice of 42 subjects, offered pounds 1 for the answer to a simple question and, if they answered correctly, doubled their money up to as much as £32, then gave them the chance to win a top prize of £1,000 on the Treasure Trail.

Plucked out of the audience to take part, Rose won only £8 but showed enough personality to persuade Green to let her chatter away for a full 18

minutes and to invite her back as a guest hostess six weeks later. She stayed for three years, but then left to escape the pressures of stardom. Fame had included a stage act with Green, based on the programme's format, in summer seasons and even a Royal Variety Performance. When Double Your Money was taken to the Soviet Union in 1965, the Soviet cultural attache in London made it a condition that 'the little cockney girl Monica' went with the show.

Rose returned to Double Your Money shortly before it was axed in 1968, as a result of an ITV franchise reshuffle, and was reunited with Green in The Sky's the Limit (1971- 74), in which contestants could win 21,000 miles of travel plus spending money. With the demise of that show, Rose went into cabaret with a singing and comedy act, and also performed pantomime.
