

LUIGI DISCIPIO, AT 68; WAS CLOTHING DESIGNER, TAILOR

Joshua Hudelson, Globe Correspondent

2 August 2002

The Boston Globe

Luigi "Gino" DiScipio, a clothing designer and tailor, died of hepatitis C on Sunday at Epoch Senior Health Care of Melrose. He was 68.

Mr. DiScipio designed and tailored men's clothing for shops in Italy and America. In 1968 he started his own business, Design by Gino, in West Medford.

His career had started to gain steam four years earlier in Italy, when he represented a fashion house in an international design competition in Genoa. Contestants were separated into rooms, where they spent five days - without visitors or escape - designing and sewing a suit. Mr. DiScipio took home four awards, including two gold medals and a golden iron for the best-fitted suit.

He went on to design suits for celebrities such as Rick Wise of the Red Sox; Bobby Orr and Phil Esposito of the Bruins; as well as sports announcer Dick Stockton and actor Kirk Douglas.

Born in Canosa Sannita, Italy, he was left parentless at the age of 2, when his father was killed in Italy's war in Africa. Mr. DiScipio was taken in by the Mangi family of Crecchio, where he had been wet-nursed after his mother died.

Growing up a Mangi, Mr. DiScipio had two career options: "You either become a barber or a tailor," he later told his wife Rolanda. Believed too skinny to withstand the upright life of a barber, at the age of 7 Mr. DiScipio started an apprenticeship with a local tailor.

Mr. DiScipio rarely talked about the horrors of World War II, but his son, Marco, recalls his father telling him about one terrible encounter with the German army. In retaliation for an attack by Italian partisans, the Germans gathered everyone in his town in the town square. They picked out every tenth male to be executed in front of the crowd. Mr. DiScipio was number 9. One of his close friends was number 10.

Memories like these kept Mr. DiScipio from sleeping peacefully, even as a grown man.

"He would always have to have the light on at night, because he would have recurring visions of people dying," said his daughter, Simonetta Cordima.

At 16, he began working at Sartoria Reale Orazio Milano, a design house in Genoa. His boss's gambling problems kept Mr. DiScipio from earning enough to pay his rent, so Mr. DiScipio slept on the front steps of the building where he worked. A co-worker soon took pity on him and allowed him to stay with her at her mother's house. They were married in 1956, when he was 22.

In September 1965 he came to America with his wife and three children. He worked at Greco Brothers, a suit factory, for three years before starting his own business. Having arrived speaking very little English, Mr. DiScipio emphasized to his children the importance of relying on those close to you. "No matter how many fights you have, you always have to go back to your family," his daughter recalls him saying.

In 1996, Mr. DiScipio left his tailor shop in the hands of his son and wife, and went to work for Freudenberg International in Durham, N.C. He missed his family so much during his six years away that he could hardly stand it when they visited.

"He would just sob like a big baby," his daughter said. "Tough exterior, but marshmallow on the inside."

Mr. DiScipio put his talent to work for his family, as well as the business. "I always had tons of clothes," Cordima said. Mr. DiScipio even made suits for the grooms at each of his four children's weddings.

When Mr. DiScipio became ill about a year ago, he flew home from North Carolina to be with his family. Ailing and awaiting a liver transplant, Mr. DiScipio was not able to finish his last suit.

"That was like agony to him," Cordima said.

Besides his wife and daughter, both of Medford, and son, of Malden, he leaves two other daughters, Susanna Cortese of Medford and Sandra Giglio of Malden; a sister, Anna DiScipio of Canosa Sannita, Italy; and nine grandchildren.

A funeral Mass will be said at 9 a.m. tomorrow in St. James Church in Medford. Entombment will be in Holy Cross Chapel Mausoleum in Malden.