



“In 2009, I had a dream about owning my own boutique.

I had returned to school in my late 40's to get my Master's in Health Education and even though I was applying for jobs that only required a Bachelor's, I kept getting told they were going with someone more qualified. And after three years of that I decided that maybe education wasn't what I was supposed to be doing.

My next love was fashion, so I started looking for a place for a boutique. I looked for years and then went back to New York to work for three years before returning to Florence in 2009.

It was then that I had a dream where God told me to walk and find my store.

And I said 'Walk? I don't walk', so instead I got in my car and I started driving. I drove around Florence for four months trying to find an affordable location for the boutique.

When I couldn't find one, I thought about the dream and decided to walk. I got up the next day, put on my sneakers, and walked six miles around Florence. And my first boutique location ended up being literally five minutes from my house.

My first location was on Irby Street by S/W Printing. I was there for almost two years when I started having issues with the building. Frustrated, I asked Renee, a fellow business owner, to take a walk with me Downtown. She asked me why I wanted to go Downtown because there was nothing down there. I told her I just needed to walk it off, so Renee and I headed around the corner onto West Evans.

It was there on West Evans that I saw the for rent sign in the window of the building I'm currently in. I started looking in the window and Renee grabbed my hand and said 'Ms. Ella, I know you're not thinking about getting that building. That building has been empty for years, you can't do anything there.' I told her I was just looking and we kept on walking.

I had been a telephone operator for seven years in New York, so even though I didn't have anything to write the number down with, that number on the for rent sign stayed in my mind.

I called the number as soon as I got back to my store and after some negotiation, I ended up buying the building and moved in around December of 2011. That was before the revitalization of Downtown really started going and it was kind of scary moving here because besides one or two other stores, there wasn't really anyone else in Downtown at the time.

I became involved in the planning and revitalization when I moved into my store and they brought people from Atlanta and Baltimore to try and tell people in Florence what to do to revitalize Downtown. But people in Florence knew what to do, they just needed some time to get things moving.

It's been exciting to see the growth over these past years and to now have people come Downtown to see all the changes and differences.

And I love to tell them it's not over yet.”

- Ella Frazier, owner of Ella's Boutique