



#### CLARA SPALA FREDMAN

After he had been in America for a few years, Neil Fredman met, “wooded”, and married Clara Spala.

*Clara was a wandering, teen age Jewish girl during the chaotic years that followed World War One. She was born in the shtetl that bordered the great 180 degree curve in the Bug River. The Bug—*



*from the German “baug”—winding or bent—is the border between the ethnic Poles and Ukrainians. Both sides of the river were ruled by the Russian Tsar before the war-- and both contained numerous shtetl's. Clara's birth place, Ustilug (Ustyluh), pronounced Austila, a town in Wolyn district of the Ukraine, was 90% Jewish and was the home of a number of Hasidic sects.*

#### **Chagall**

*The First World War was fought between 1914 and 1918. It caused the death of 18 million and the wounding of twice as many. Post war the 1918 Spanish Flu, a worldwide Pandemic, killed an additional 50 million of the planet's inhabitants.*

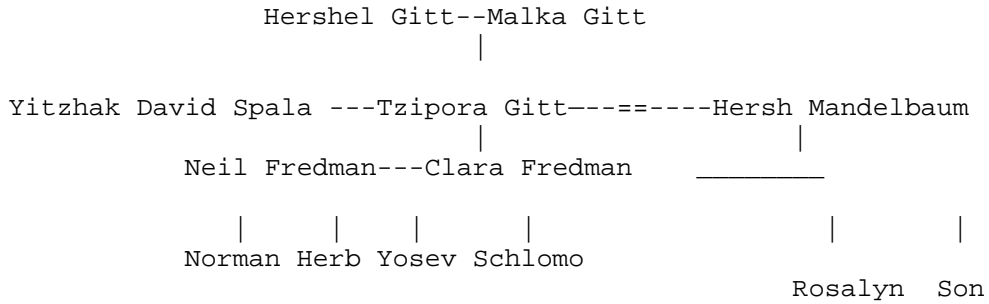


*In August of 1914 the ill equipped Russian army attacked Germany and was soundly defeated. As they retreated, Cossacks burned the Shtetls that dotted the roads, leaving many Jews homeless and starving. The pursuing Germans occupied what was left of the towns. The next spring a reconstituted Russian military attacked, was again defeated, and the Tsar was overthrown. For a year Russia was ruled by a parliament led by Kerensky. He rebuilt the army, attacked Germany a third time, and his forces were again crushed. He was overthrown by the second Russian revolution led, this time, by the Communists under Lenin. Russia withdrew from the war and turned ethnic Poland and the Ukraine over to Germans, who in turn, created a new country—Poland. After the “war to end all wars” Eastern Europe endured another set of battles. Four militias fought for control of their segment of the former Russian Empire. There were White (Tsarist) forces, Bolsheviks, Ukrainian fighters led by Petliura, and Poles commanded by Pilsudski.*

*Clara was 8 when the war started, 12 when the post war bands of raiders went from one shtetl to the next, and 18 when she boarded a ship and joined a father she didn't know in the U.S.*



**CLARA SPALA FREDMAN**



Chia Kailas mother was a Spala. She was David's first cousin. I was raised by my grandparents. My parents were divorced when I was a year old. I was raised by my grandparents.



**My mother remarried when I was 4. I used to visit her, but I liked my Poppie (grandmother) better than my mother. So I stayed with her. Mother Tzipora. Grandmother Malka. grandfather Hershel. And Clara Gitt**



**Father David Spala**

I was born in 1906, in Astilla, a town of maybe 5000. We lived on the border between Poland and Russia, on the Bug River. We were maybe 50 miles from Torchin. Astilla is a very famous town. The Wertheims, a famous rabbinical family lived there. The Wertheims still have descendents in the U.S.



Astilla is known for the famous Astilla Hassan. 100 rabbis came to that famous wedding.

Like Ludma was known for the Ludma Amoid. Amoid is a girl who doesn't get married. The Ludma Amoid was a girl who was very educated in Talmud. The movie, Yentl was based loosely on the very true story of the Ludma Amoid.

Ustilug (Ustyluh), pronounced Austila, is a town in Wolyn district situated on the Bug River. There were 12 synagogues in Ustilug which included shuls from the Hassidim of Belz, Trisk, Neschiz, Radzyn, Ruzhin,

I never knew my father. My parents were divorced after a year of marriage. My grandma was bitter. I knew my father was a scholar. He used to sit in sheel and learn Tanach and Gemorrah. My mother was more modern than my father. Later, when he came to America he became more modern too. His name was Yitzhak David Spala. (He was not related to the famous Spala rabbi from the town of Spala.)

My mother was Zapora Gitt. She was very educated. How did she get her education? There was another woman who came from Krakow. She was very educated. She taught the intelligencia. At that time they didn't allow a girl from a nice Jewish home to get her education from a man. So that teacher taught her Tanach, Dikdik, Polish, Russian, and Hebrew. Later on she was taught German too.

When I was 4 years old my mother remarried. She moved away from Astilla. My mother's second husband was a big Hebrew teacher. When my mother married him they moved to Rovna, a big city. There were 33,000 Jews in Rovna. He was one of the biggest teachers there. He organized one of the first Zionist groups in Rovna, in 1905. My mother's second husband was Hersh Mandelbaum. He wrote famous books. Before the war, when he moved to Rovna, he was the first to start a Jewish Tarbas. They lived in a big house. In his house he prepared students for the Gymnasia, and taught Hebrew. In those days you could get a teacher for 50 cents a lesson. My mother's second husband got \$5. He had 4 or 5 teachers with him. He taught older boys. He taught them Gemorra, Tanach, Dikdik.



**Bottom row: Tzipora; Malka; Hersh mandelbaum 2<sup>nd</sup> husband**

My mother had several children by her second husband that didn't live. In 1918-1920 she gave birth 3 times and none of the children lived. In 1924 she had a little girl named Rosalyn. She lived to be 18 years old. A year later she had a son who lived to be 17. In 1942 they were all killed by the Germans: my mother, sister, brother, and step father.

I was raised by grandparents. My grandfather, Mr. Gitt was a Haver of Hershel Bermi. They sold the Pesach flour.

They sold it for 25 years. They were tamida chachamim.

Others killed by the Germans: Yakov Yoel, my cousin from Torchin, lost his father, mother, and 3 sisters.



**Hershel**

My grandfather was killed in Torchin. My uncle, Joseph Spala was the city mayor of Ausditich until 1939. His sons were in a University in Vilna. Uncle Neil sent money for them, Yakov Yoel, Misha, and others. Moshe Spala's two sons were under Russia, on their way to Moscow. They went back to Torchin. They said that what happened to their father would happen to them. They were under Russia already. They returned to the Germans. Misha Klein gave them money so they could go to Israel. Two went to Israel. Those two sons went back. They stayed with their parents. One went to a concentration camp. One went with his father, Moshe. They told the Ukrainians that they had money buried. If the Germans leave the town he'll dig up the money and give half the money to the Ukrainian peasant, and he will keep half for himself. (He didn't have any money. But the Ukrainian believed the Jews had money)

When I was 4 years old I used to visit my mother. But I liked my popee (grandmother) Malka Gitt, better than I liked my mother. My Popee was very good to me. When I was 6 years old, I had a very wealthy uncle. He had a governess and teachers for his children. My popee couldn't afford teachers. She was not poor, but they couldn't afford private teachers for me. My Popee had a friend named Rosmarine.



### **Malka Gitt**

She went to her and said "I have a child. She's 6 years old. And she is going to grow up and be an ignoramus. I'd like your 14 year old daughter who goes to gymnasium to teach her Hebrew, Russian, dyadic, and Russian grammar. "She said OK. For 2 years she was my teacher.

I was 8 years old when the First World War broke out. Even during the war, while we were besieged, there were schools for children. A Ukrainian school opened. We didn't have to pay to go to it. My Bobee put me in the school because I already knew Russian. Russian and Ukrainian use the same alphabet. Ukrainian has a different grammar. They used to teach us Hebrew 2 to 4 hours a week. They also taught us Polish, German, and chiefly Ukrainian. It wasn't enough Hebrew. My grandmother didn't like it. A Polish school opened. They gave more lessons in Hebrew. It belonged to the government. Most of the kids were Polish, but there were a few Jews. So she put me into the Polish schools. I knew Polish and German. I went there for 6 months. A Jewish day school opened. They taught, for 4 hours, Hebrew: Chumash, Tanakh, grammar; German. I went there for 2 years.

Meantime my grandfather Hersh Gitt, is dying from hunger. He didn't have enough to eat. He was swollen from malnutrition. Before he died he sent me to a friend of his that had a store. He sent a Hebrew letter to his friend. The friend called in his daughter, a very educated girl. He said "read this letter from a 68 year old man. See the grammar he uses. A man like that is dying from hunger. And he begs me for a little flour." He was crying. He gave me some flour. He gave me a few other things from the store. I brought them home. Two to three days later my grandfather died. He died before Pesach 1918.

After that I saw that my bobee deprives herself. And I left. From the First World War I remember one day we didn't know that it was already the war. The next day there was so much confusion and noise. We walked out of the house. Soldiers were lying man to man. We had to walk over them. They were on their way to the war with Germany.

Then in no time we had to run away. We were afraid the Germans would take over, or the Russians would take over. We ran away to another town. They burned part of our town.



I remember an incident. We went to kill a chicken. A plane came. It dropped a bomb. We laid down. We were afraid the bomb would hit us. It didn't. It struck the cemetery. After the plane passed we went and killed the chicken as though nothing had happened.

I remember, during the first few days of the war, there was a funeral. Cossacks were riding through town on their way to Austria. People were at the funeral crying. And a Cossack said "You damn Jews. You are crying. We are going to be killed. A little Jew dies, and look how much they carry on."

When we ran from town, it was fun for the kids, we liked it. We ran to Hrubieszow. We stayed there for a week or 2. The kids had a wonderful time

Meantime the Germans came in. We were happy. We hid from the Russians because they killed our people. But the Germans gave us bread and chocolate. They were nice to us. So we went back. We had a cow, food in the house. The first thing the Germans, with their kindness, did was take away our cows, silverware, brass candle sticks. Right away they took away our belongings ...with a smile, and sent it to Germany. Then, all of a sudden, they stopped giving us rye, wheat, corn.

I stayed with my grandmother for about 5 weeks after my grandfather died, Pesach 1918. I could see that there wouldn't be enough food for both of us. The government gave us a forth of a pound of bread a day, and a pound of frozen potatoes. The good potatoes they took to Germany. My grandmother's son helped her and me. But there wasn't enough. I could see that my grandmother would starve for me.

I didn't want to go to my father's parents. They were horse traders, rich farmers. They bought horses and traded them to the government. They even made money during the war. I left for my mother's home. On my way I stopped at a cousin's. She lived on a farm. She gave me some fresh bread and butter as thick as the bread. I hadn't seen bread like that in years. When she saw me eating she was crying. She saw how hungry I was. She said "I'm going to give you more." They baked 10 pound rye bread. She gave me a big piece, and I ate it in a moment. I stayed there for a few days. I would have liked to have stayed longer. They wanted me to stay. But I was proud, from childhood on.

So I went to my father's parents. I was 12 years old. My grandfather was very good to me. My grandmother sarcastically said "Oh, she's here?" Here I left a grandmother who would starve for me. She wasn't good to me at all. My stepmother was there too. She didn't make it easy for me either. It was hard for me, but I stayed there for 6 months.

How did I get there? I walked from Astila to Volodimir-Volynskiy. Loma, the cousin's son took me to his home in a small village. He took me to my grandparents on a horse and wagon. As he drove me I thought: I wish this trip would take years and years, and we would get lost in the woods. And I wouldn't have to reach my destination. My grandfather, my uncle the mayor was nice to me. My grandmother wasn't.

After I was with my grandparents for 6 months, my stepmother was marrying off a sister who came from Lutsk. Somebody got in touch with them and told them they found out that my mother was alive. We were under the Austrians. I didn't know my mother was alive. She was under the Russians. I remember when we went to Torchin we had to pay our way in.

My stepmother's sister said: "What would I give you if I told you that your mother was alive in Rovna, and you can go through Lutsk, to Rovna." (Her sister lived in Lutsk.)

I said "I can give you a kiss."

She said "You come to Lutsk and I'll put you on the train to Rovna."

Two days later I was ready to go to Lutsk. I went in an 8 person wagon. We had to buy off the Kerensky government to get into Russia. I went into Torchin. They had an open train, and I missed it. I was 12. I cried. A young man came over. He said "don't cry, little girl. I'll get you a horse and buggy in the morning." I stopped crying. He put me on the horse and buggy. It took 2 hours. It was only 12 miles. I didn't know where to stop. She told me she lived on Krasna Street. I stopped at the bridge, 4 or 5 miles from her house. It was raining early in the morning. Every time someone walked by I asked them where Krasna Street was.



They said "Oi Maidelach, you still have far to go." It took me 2 hours to find my stepmother's sisters house.

She kept me for 2 days, she wouldn't let me go. She was very good to me. Two days later she took me to the train. I had 4 rubles, a sack with my belongings, and a little bread. We walked to the train, 20 or 30 blocks. They didn't let her in. I was in the station and I saw the train was full of Russian soldiers returning from the front. It was November. The Bolsheviks had taken over in Petrograd, but the Getman (Kerensky) government was still in charge at the front. So I tried to get on the train, but the



soldiers drove me back. They called me names. I cried like a baby. An elderly man (35-40 years old) felt sorry for me. "My child, come. I'll help you."

The train cars were full of soldiers, but there was space on the narrow passages between cars. That man felt sorry for me. He took my package. It took all night to get from Lutsk to Rovna. The passages were open. It was raining in. He kept me on



his lap. I must have dozed off several times. If he hadn't kept me on his lap I could have fallen off and been killed.

I arrived in Rovna early in the morning. It was raining. They told me my mother lives on the same street as the Chazen. The train came in on one end of town. My mother lived on the other side of the town. I kept asking where the Lord's street was.

I finally got into the street. I went to the Chazen's house. I had visited my mother 4 years earlier, and I realized it was the wrong Chazen. I said "Does Mandelbaum live with you?"

He said "No."

I said "Aren't you Pinchas

Chazen?" I knew it wasn't.

He said that he was a Chazen on another street. He told his shamus to show me where you go.



The Shamus said you go on this long street and you'll come to the place where this chazen lives.

I came to the end of a very long street. I was looking for Kakas street. There were 2 Kakas streets, an old and a new. I went to the old

street. I entered the shul. There was a minyun. They said. "we don't give charity here, little girl."



I felt awful.

He said "We don't know where the Chazen is." I'm going with the idea that I knew where I could drown myself. I saw a student going to the gymnasium. I was a snob. I didn't talk to him Jewish. I talked to him Ukrainian. I says "Can you tell me is there anyone by that name?"

He says "He is my teacher."

I said "Do you know Sarah Mandelbaum?"

He says, "Of course. He is my Hebrew teacher."

I said "Can you tell me where he lives?"

**Bottom row: Tzipora; Malka; Hersh mandelbaum 2<sup>nd</sup> husband**

That building. It was on a hill. He was going down. I was going up.

I came into before the house. I heard my mother's voice.

She said "I put my galoshes here. I can't find them." It was raining. She didn't pick up her eyes, even though she saw a kid came in with a peckel. She said "Sheina Yenta (her daughter) give her a piece of Challah." She thought I was a beggar.

I said "Momma. Don't you recognize me?"

You can imagine how my mother felt. She said "Oi" She nearly fainted. Then she said "I want to give you something to eat."

I said "I have my own bread."

I stayed with my mother. They got a little bigger house. My mother's stepson lived there. He went to the Commerce gymnasium. He said to me: "We have a store with all kind of corn beef and candies."

I thought that must be heaven where you could eat anything you want.

My mother didn't feel good. She was pregnant. So I had to take over the store, to watch until my stepfather came in. The store was near a school. She sold books and other things for students. It was a nice store.

She got a teacher for me, a Russian boy, and he taught me Russian. It was hard, Russian to Ukrainian. There was a Hebrew school where they taught Russian, German, and France. I went there one or 2 days. I taught some of my friends German. My mother got sick. They put me in Ukrainian school. It was right near the store. Right after school I could take over the store so my step father could give lessons. They never thought that a little girl who came from Germany knows so much Ukrainian. I was the only Jewish girl. Most of the Jewish girls went to the gymnasium. 30,000 Jews lived in the city. It was a very intellectual community.

(AFTER THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION IN 1917, RUSSIA WITHDREW FROM WORLD WAR I. THEY SIGNED THE TREATY OF BREST LITOVSK AND WITHDREW FROM THEIR WESTERN POSSESSIONS. POLAND AND THE UKRAINE. THE FUTURE OF THESE TERRITORIES WAS DECIDED BY A SERIES OF CONFLICTS.)

Six months later they started fighting. Petliura, the leader of the Ukrainian revolution, was fighting with the Poles and Russians. And Rovna was the Washington of the Ukraine. That lasted for a year to a year and a half. The Ukrainians made pogroms. They didn't make a pogrom in Rovna itself. Oh once they killed 8 Jews, but that was nothing. In

towns 20 to 30 miles away they killed hundreds of Jews. In the beginning Petliura had some Jewish soldiers. I once saw Petliura. He was a nice looking man. He spoke so nice. When I was young I never realized that their poet Taras Shevchenko. Chmielnicki the bandit. To me, Shevchenko was a god. How a child can be influenced by teachers. We used to listen to Petliura and we used to sing their song: Translation:

Ukrania didn't die yet.

Also, our fate and our language didn't die.

Our enemies will die like the dew on the grass.

We'll make lords out of our brothers.

Because we are laughing at our enemies.

Our bodies and our souls we'll give for our freedom.

And we'll make our brothers lords.

And we'll show that we laugh at the world.

None of those Russian kids knew the song, and I knew it. And the Russian kids looked at me.

One day I was alone in the store and 5 of Petliura's soldiers came in. They ordered drinks, sausages. I gave them everything. Each of them took out a \$50 bill, Petliura's money. If you found a \$50 bill and it had a little hole, it wasn't worth a penny. All of them had holes because they got them for nothing. I started crying because, I said. I don't have change for even one \$50. There was no money in the drawer.

Here, comes in a Jewish Petliura. He said "Brothers. What do you want from that child? Her father was in the war. He must have been killed. And she is helping out because her mother is sick. She is just a child. You know, brothers, she can't use those \$50 bills, even if she had change. Pay her what you owe her."

They paid me. And that Jewish soldier used to come to the store whenever he had a chance. He was 21 or 22 but to me he was an old man. That same soldier told me this story: They have to leave because the Bolsheviks were coming to the town. He had a dream that his father was killed. In this dream he saw that his father wanted him to say Kadish.

He asked me if I could get someone to say Kadish for his father. My stepfather took the money and he said Kadish for this man's father, for a year.

Pretty soon the Bolsheviks came. Trotsky was in the same house where Petliura lived. Trotsky was the biggest general.

Petliura ran away. Meanwhile they robbed the town.

Some of the Jews came to Petliura and said: can you do something. Petliura said: My boys want to have a good time. They robbed my mother's store. Everything was gone.

### **Petliura**

Its 1919. The Bolsheviks are coming from Russia. The Ukrainians are fighting on the sides. Poland is coming from Warsaw. And they met at Rovna. There was a big battle.

We hid in the loft. My bobbee was with us. She was in her late 70's. She wore 8 outfits, one on top of the other, so she'll have something to wear if we have to run away. There are 2 girls who were afraid they would be raped by the Bolsheviks. My grandmother was all dressed up in 3 or 4 silk scarves.

One of the girls said "Look at the alte." and laughed. We were in the attic for 4 hours.

The Pollacks took over. They settled in our house, in everybody's house. We gave them preserves, cakes, whisky. A soldier said: "After we kill the Bolsheviks we're going to kill the Jews." They called the Pollaks





"Hallergies." Their general was Haller, one of the biggest Anti-Semites.

Meantime an officer came in. He said "We have to run. The Bolsheviks are coming." They left. (This all happened in one day.)

When they left we ran into the center of town, to be with other people. My mother was already in the middle of town. It was on a Friday. We already had put our dinner in the stove. We thought the Bolsheviks would enter the town the next day.

They didn't. On Sabbath, the Poles came back. We were hungry. The Poles were in town. And they looked for the Bolsheviks. Where? In the drawers. Under the beds. They took whatever was in their way.

My brother said, to the Pole checking the drawers: "on my honor, you won't find a Bolshevik there."

The Pole said "You keep quiet you Shumtzika Yid."

Twenty families were gathered in a house in the middle of Rovna. We were very hungry. And we knew there was food in the oven. So my brother and I went home. We lived on a hill. The people were all outside, and they saw us. The Russians had left the hill the hour before. Our neighbors told us. We told them that we just had the Poles. Meanwhile the Bolsheviks were shooting from one part of town. and the Poles were shooting from another part of town.

We see the bullets.

There were 5000 Poles in town. Five Bolsheviks on the hill kept up the front, because the Poles didn't know.

Every time we saw something flying, we lay down with the food. Eventually we brought the food, two pots, to the house where everyone was gathered, and we ate the food. The people who owned the big house where everyone gathered were so friendly. The kids slept 6-8 people width wise on the bed.

In 1920, little by little Pilsudski took over. They opened the Polish legislature--the Seime. They took in some Jews. One of my wealthy cousins was in the Seime.

When the Russians came in, we had a little store. We sold thread, butter, herring, flour, yeast, bread...a general store. The Russians bought everything. They gave us their money. The next day the money wasn't worth anything. We didn't have anything. They told us that since my stepfather was a Hebrew teacher, he was a parasite. He was against the Russian government. We were Capitalists, exploiters, because we had a store.

I was 14 years old. It said I want to be a free Czarina. When I came back, and we didn't have any money. And they thought we were wealthy and against the Russian government because my stepfather was a Hebrew teacher. I said "Uncle. I don't like that government."



Pretty soon Trotsky's back, and he's attacking Warsaw. One week the Pollacks sang: "From Warsaw to Kiev, the road is free for us." The next week the Bolsheviks were singing the same song "From Kiev to Warsaw..." The Russians were in Warsaw a day, and they were driven back. That was almost the end of the war.

The Polish government was mean to the Yidden. For a few years America opened up. Everyone had relatives in America. Money came in from America. Right away we had a few dollars and we reopened the store. Militias roamed into town.

The minute they left a town without government, the peasants came in and there were pogroms.

Then the taxes took over. They used to take a third of what we had. When they examined the store, we had less than \$100 worth of merchandise. We had to hide merchandise in our homes, under our beds.

A night school opened. I went. During the day I attended the store. My mother kept having babies and they died. The Tarbas opened. My step father was too high classed and proud to teach just a parsha of Humash. We were very, very poor. My step father used to always be well dressed. He bought his clothes from the used, open market. After the war we lived on a poor street. It bothered my stepfather a lot. I lived there for 4 years. My mother had a child who was one year old. I'm leaving for America.

I had an Aunt. My mother's brother's wife--Sally's mother (Sally from Patterson New Jersey.) The aunt was in America. In 1912 she was pregnant and she came back to Europe. She wanted to see her parents and to have the child in Europe. And she was trapped. A week before the war broke out she sent out her luggage. It got lost and she couldn't leave for America until 1920. During the war years we came to her house every day. She had 2 children and so little to eat. Sally used to say, can I have another piece of bread. She said Chaika will come. And she's always so hungry. She deprived herself for me.

Some called me Chia, others Chaika. And when I went to school they called me Clara. I like Chaika because there was a woman who sold herring, gasoline, oil in our town. She wiped her hands in her skirt. And she looked so dirty. She was Chia.

One of my mother's girlfriends was Chaika. She was so nice, intelligent, well dressed. That's why I liked the name Chaika. I liked Clara with a K. But when I came to America the judge told me Klara with a K is Ousgeschlossen. In America its Clara. He said "Why don't you call yourself Clair."

I said "No, I've always been Clara."

In 1923 my aunt said, someday I'll go to America, I'll find your father, and I'll see to it that he brings you over.

She came back to America, and she didn't have it so good either. Everybody made a lot of money in Patterson in the silk mills. He came in when the mills were played out, and he lost everything, 10-15,000 dollars. When she came, they didn't even have enough money to rent a house. And she was bitter.

Meantime she got in touch with my father. She said she's a nice, educated girl. Why don't you bring her over. He sent a letter to his parents who lived 60 miles from Rovna. He asked them to send someone to Rovna to see if he could bring his daughter to America.

My parents had lived together for a year before they divorced. It was not a good marriage. It was a must marriage. My father was very educated in Hebrew. My mother was more modern. It was an arranged marriage. My mother didn't want it to begin with. She said my father was nothing to brag about.

After my father wrote, Yakov Yoel, Yakov Finkelstein's father invited me to stay with him, and he said in time she can go to America. I didn't want to go to America. I was 17 years old. I didn't know my father. But America sounded so special, and 6 months later my father sent money, and my stepmother was saying we'll be partners and move into one house in America. I didn't want a partner I wanted for my sickly mother. Eventually I went, and later I brought her over.



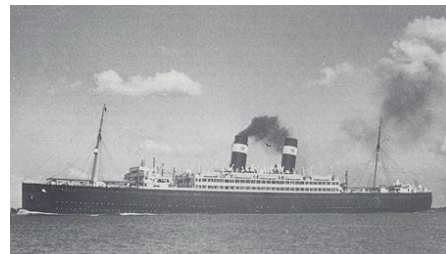
**SPALA AND WIFE**

After my father divorced my mother he remarried (in 1912). He left for America and he told his wife he would bring her over. Then the war broke out.

My stepmother said I'd never make it to America. I didn't like her to make up my mind not to go. I sat down, wrote a letter to my father, and in 1924 I had papers. And she couldn't pass the physical. 6 months after I got to America I brought her over. In America she talked bad about my mother. I idolized my mother. So I talked back to her. I still stayed until I got married. In the later years she came to Peoria and everyone thought she was my mother.

We made the papers in Warsaw. We went to Danzig. They deloused us for 2 weeks. If you were a dope they didn't let you in. They treated refugees so bad. We went from Danzig to Cherbourg on a small boat, in late April 1925. It took 4 days. I was not quite 19. I met people leaving Warsaw and we became good friends.

I came to the US on the Pittsburg. It was a small boat. The trip from Cherbourg to New York took 14 days. Oh was I sea sick. My father sends me a second class ticket, and I have to pay 28 dollars. I don't have the money, and I'm not going to write to my father he should send me money. So I went third class. The friends I met going from Warsaw to Danzig went second class. But I had very good company. I was all day with them in the second class.



We arrived in New York. I had to stay on the ship an extra day because I was third class. They took us to Ellis Islands. They gave us examinations. They are afraid my lungs are not good, my eyes are not good. Have you ever had pneumonia?

"No." Three times I had pneumonia.

Any problems with your eyes? Have you ever had rheumatism?

From childhood on I had rheumatism. But there I was healthy as an ox. We slept overnight on Ellis Island. It was not a nice place because many of them they sent back.

Finally they let me in. We got off the island. My father took me on the train to some landslith. 490 Willoughby Avenue in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I

came in and they thought I was such an ignoramus. I didn't know how to use a bathroom. We have civilized people too in Europe.

I was there for about 2 months. It was summer so there was no night school. The



cousin I stayed with was nice. My father paid her \$5 a week. She thought she could make a maid out of me. So I used to help her.

One time she asked: Would you mind to wash down my stairs.

I said "Yes, I would mind very much. I would do it maybe at night."

Some of our landslight used to deliver beer and soda. If they would write my mother that I was washing the floor for somebody else, my mother (God forbid) would die.

I wrote to my step mother and she came over. The day after she arrived a man offered me a job in a store.

I learned a few English words. I wanted to buy flour in a grocery store. I said to the grocery man, "Would you mind, I want to get 5 lbs of mail."

He said "Oh my young lady, it would be too much. Mail.

You mean flour don't you?" (Mail is Yiddish for flour.)

I got so red in the face. I thought if I work in a store and they ask for something I won't understand them. They'll think I'm an idiot. I worked in a store from childhood on. I said no to the offer of working in a store.

But I worked in the shop. I came into the shop and he showed me a pinner, a person who pinned those Palm Beach suits on dummies for the people who sew. There were 20 people working on suits. He paid me \$8 a week. It was a pretty good job. I didn't think I'd ever know how to do it. The boss came over. He said you are a very intelligent girl. I'll teach you how to do it. And he did. Another girl was sitting with me, and after 2 weeks she wasn't any better than me. I asked her how much she was making. She said \$13. So I went to Mr. Sokol the boss and said "Mr. Sokol. I make just as many coats as she does. How come she makes \$16 and I make \$8. I have to help my mother in Europe."

"He said "OK, How many do you make?"

I made 20-25, I told him 35.

He said "If you'll make double, you'll make a nice living.

I thought to myself, if I make 35 ....

There people are waiting for you. If you aren't fast enough they have nothing to do. And sometimes a girl wouldn't come in. We worked from 7 to 5. Half-hour for lunch. I came in 6-6:30. I used to walk 18 blocks. The streetcar cost 5 cents. I figured for 5 cents my mother could buy 5 lbs of bread. It wouldn't hurt me if I walk.

I became good friends with the book keeper. She took me out once, after I worked there for a month. She bought me some cheese cake and a cup of coffee. They charged her 50 cents.

I said "Yetta, I can't do that for you. You make more money than I do and I can't afford to take you out too."

She said "What do you do when you bring your food? How much does it cost you?"

I was embarrassed to tell her. I said 50-60 cents. It really cost 25 cents.

She said "would you bring me food?"

I bought her 2 rolls. It cost 5 cents. For me the rolls cost 2 cents because it was from



yesterday. I went to a push cart and bought a little can of salmon. Near the shop it would cost 25,30 cents. It cost me 12 cents. I bought a cantaloupe. 10 cents. Near the shop it costs 25, 30. I bought enough for 50 cents for both of us. For 2 1/2 years my food didn't cost me a penny. I wish I could find that girl to give her back the money. I have it on my conscience. She was my friend. I saved her money, but still it bothers me.

When we used to eat lunch, the others would come up with a soda. I wanted a soda so bad. But I figured what my mother could buy with that nickel. A half pound of meat. Enough for the whole family.

Q: Did you date any men?

A: I had a lot of friends from Europe. We used to get together. We would go out to concerts, soccer games. One friend A German wrote me from the Catskill Mountains. He was very educated. In America he was a waiter. We called him our literary friend. He took me and my girlfriend places.

When I was engaged to Neil my stepmother called him, (the German) and he took me by taxi to a show. He said is it too late to ask you if you would back out of your engagement?

I said "It's too late."

He said "If I would have asked you before?"

I said "I would have grabbed you." I wouldn't. I liked him but I didn't want to marry him.

Uncle Harry is going to Europe to see his people. He has a bachelor brother and he takes him along. Neil is writing to a cousin, a young American girl. He thought maybe it's going to be a shitach. Harry took Neil to New York.

Dr. Giber was my dentist. We became good friends. While I was waiting he gave me letters in Russian to read. I knew Dr.Giber 2 years. They just opened a new hotel. They're all at that hotel. And Dr. Giber asked Harry "What's with your brother? Is he married, engaged?"

Harry said "Were looking for a kallah.

He doesn't tell him he has a girl he was writing to."

Dr. Giber said "I know a nice girl." He thinks I'm nice. Then Neil is someplace else and they tell him that there is a nice girl. They were also talking about me.

My father asked Mr.

Kaufman who those young boys were. Kaufman said, "Oh Mr.

Spala, you don't know them, they are from Torchin. They are Shlomo Sracheel's."

My father said "Shlomo Sracheel's sons. They're my cousins."

My Shviga and my grandfather were first cousins. I'm third cousins with Neil. At the time I had been working for 2 years. I was living with my father. I was 21 years old.

My father said "Come to me. I have a very good looking girl."

That's the third time someone mentioned me.

It's Shvuos. I went to the dentist.

He said "You are supposed to be at home. Aren't you having company?"



MAX

DOROTHY

### *The Gibers*

they are from Torchin. They are Shlomo Sracheel's."



I got red in the face. I went home. They were there. I had a date to see the soccer game. And Neil doesn't want to leave. And Harry doesn't want to get away. And I **Neil**

wondered when I was going to get rid of that greenhorn. I was a greenhorn; I couldn't speak English. But Neil was a greenhorn to me.

I had a date. He took me and my girlfriend. Neither of us understood the game.

Finally I said "I would like to spend more time with both of you, but I can't. I have a date. We are going to the game. If I would have had sense I would have taken Neil along. And he would have liked it.

Q: What did you think of Neil when you first met him?

A: He didn't make a good impression. I heard so much about him, that he was so ehrlich, that he came from such a fine family. That he was honest. I was not religious. He was honest, so honest. To this day I like religious people. But I would rather have ehrlich people than religious people.

Q:What was your first impression of Harry?



A:He was smoothe.

I knew the background of the family. He asked "When can I see you?"

I said "Wednesday (the next day) We'll go to a show. But come 8 O'clock. It'll take half an hour to go to the show.." I didn't want to lose a day of work.

**Harry**

8 O'clock comes and Neil isn't there. 10 after 8...I still had school, so I went to school. A neighbor woman stood near the door. She said "Don't you have a date?"

I said I made a date with a green Chia (animal). He stood me up." She said "Oh, Miss Spala, You?"

I said that's all right. I didn't mind it. About 10 minutes after I left Neil arrived. The woman was still at the door: He asked her how you get to Spala's apartment.

She said "Oh, you must be the young man Miss Spala was waiting for. She thought you stood her up."



He said "No. I took the, train. It didn't stop at your station. I had to go further."

She said "She went away. She was very disappointed." She keeps telling Neil what a nice person I am. He said "Oh, I know about her.

She's my cousin."

The next day I returned from work. I was wearing a short apron. I was bare feet; tired. and my greenhorn arrived.

He said enshuldig. He tells me the story. I told him I'm sorry.

He says would you like to go to a show. I didn't know what to say to him. We were talking through the entire show. And



everybody said Shish. He liked it and he didn't like it. In Yiddish shows they sold tickets to societies. But at the last minute they sold the remaining tickets cheap. So when we got to the theater I told Neil to give me 2 or 3 dollars. I bought 4 of the most expensive tickets for a dollar each.



He said "You're embarrassing me."  
I said "If you wouldn't be my cousin, I wouldn't act like that."  
The show was sexy and he didn't like anything like that. It was one of the biggest actors.

He wanted to take a taxi home.

I said no. We took the train.

He left a day late. He said "If I write will you answer?"

I said Yes.

**Harry and Neil**

He wrote me.

I didn't answer.

Sometimes my father and my stepmother read my mail. Afterwards they sealed it up. I could see that it was opened, and I wouldn't say anything. Evidently they couldn't close one letter so they didn't give me one of the letters. I didn't get a letter. I wasn't so disappointed.

It's been two months. Harry is returning from Europe. He comes to see me. He asked what I heard from his brother.

I said I hadn't heard from him in months. He didn't write to me.

He said "When I go back he's going to write to you."

In New York you can speak any language except English, except in school. They want you to be a good citizen.

Neil wrote to me.



I ordered a post office box. One of the men there asked one if I had a love affair. I said "Yes."

We started writing to one another. I took my time.

In the meantime I started going with a fellow. I knew nothing is going to come of it. He was above me. He was studying law. He was graduate of a Yeshiva. I saw no future. I wanted to get away from my stepmother.

Neil sent me \$200, and I came here. He said "You can come. If you like it, it

will be alright. First you're our cousin. My family will show you a good time. And I will do my best to show you a good time. Please come." And he sent

me money.

Little by little I made up my mind. After Succos I came to Greenville. They took me to Collinsville. They had just built a beautiful home. And my brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws were very good to me. Harry and Dave gave me a beautiful watch. They told me if you don't want to go to Greenville well buy or rent you a house and you'll live in Collinsville with us. They tried to sell me their brother. And I didn't like that.





I  
 said,  
 "You  
 don't  
 have to  
 sell me  
 your  
 brother.  
 I like  
 your  
 brother.  
 I came

here to get married to your brother." I was a quiet girl.



**Brothers Neil Dave Harry**

We got engaged, and they made us a beautiful engagement party. You've never seen anything like it. So Harry went with Neil to buy me a diamond ring. This I didn't like. I didn't need a diamond ring. It's not everything. So there is a ring for 250-300 dollars. And there is a ring for \$150. So Harry tries to tell me I'm so intelligent because I don't want anything gaudy. An intelligent girl like that "Don't you think this is a nice, neat little ring."

I felt like crying. First of all I didn't want a ring. And if you buy a ring. you buy it and give it to the girl, not sell her a bill of goods.

We bought the little ring. After that we went to Kutten. His wife says to Mildred, I have such a nice girl for your brother, Bill Greenstein.

Neil feels very good. Frohlich. He says, why don't you have a nice girl for me?

She said Neil needs a girl with an iron stomach.

They were very good to me. Neil proved to be very intelligent. Very educated in Hebrew. He had more schooling than any of the brothers. He was very intelligent. Little by little I liked him better and better.

I went to New York. visited my girlfriends. And in 1928 I got married.