

**TRANSCRIPT OF IRENE BOEHM'S FAMILY HISTORY VIDEO
AS TOLD TO BOB AND STEVE BOEHM
JULY 31, 1993**

Robert (Bob) Boehm and Steven (Steve) Boehm recorded an interview with Irene Jonas Boehm on July 31, 1993. Irene's mother Lotte Spinner Jonas was born October 6, 1889 in Zurawno, which was part of Poland at that time. This is an edited excerpt of the portion of the interview pertaining to ancestors who lived in Zurawno.



It is Saturday night, July 31st, a day after Mom's birthday. I'm Steve, this is Irene and there is Bob for those who don't know us. Tonight we are going to do a little Boehm family history - Jonas family history. It is the recollections of Mom supplemented by questions and information from the boys. The purpose of this is to set forth a record of everything we know about our family and its accomplishments and the accomplishments of the people related to us and the extent we know them and we hope that someday we, or others, can enjoy looking at this and refreshing our own memories. It is both the accomplishments and the history. I think the "accomplishments" is too narrow; it is really the history and all information so to the extent each generations want to trace where they come from and what we are about. This will help.

Steve & Bob: *Let's talk about your mother's family. Tell us what you know about your mother's family.*

Irene: My mother was the second child in her family.

Bob: *Of five?*

Irene: Family of five. Which consisted of three boys and two girls.

Bob: *Your mother born October 6, 1889 in . . . Zurawno, Poland. That was a town...in Galicia.*

Bob: *Tell me about her parents - what you know about them? Your mother's name was L-o-t-t-e.*

Irene: No. L-o-t-t-i-e.

Bob: *In English.*

Irene: Yes.

Bob: *In German from some of the correspondence it is L-o-t-t-e. And neither she nor father as far as you know had a middle name?*

Irene: No, they did not.

Bob: *Her maiden name was Spinner in English.*

Irene: That's correct.

Bob: *What do you know about her parents?*

Irene: Her father's name was Schlomo Spinner. He was born in Zurawno and died there.

Bob: *What do we know about him [Schlomo Spinner].*

Irene: He was a very gentle man. He made his living - earned a living by selling grain. He and another man would get on a horse and wagon - grandma said he - grandma always spoke so kindly of her father.

Irene: He would get on a wagon with someone else and they would go buy and sell grain. That was his business.

Bob: *To Jews, non-Jews? Do you know*

Irene: I don't know. In the various towns.

Bob: *My guess is to everyone.*

Irene: He was a very timid young man. His parents lived nearby in town. Right close by.

Irene: My mother's grandparents. So they lived like two little pigeons, these two people and very happily whereas my mother's mother was a business lady. A very successful one.

Bob: *So her mother [Blima] was quite shocked by her marrying such a [man].*

Bob: *A woman ahead of her time.*

Irene: Exactly. And she was, you know, a very, very bright woman. And his parents were so in love. I am named after his parents. After my mother's grandmother - her name was Chayelle.

Bob: *Then your Jewish name is Chayelle?*

Irene: Yes.

Bob: *How - so that would be spelled for the record - C-h-a-y-e-l-l-e, something like that as close as we could get. Transliteration.*

Irene: So - they lived such a happy life together - then she got sick - they were married then about 60 years.

Irene: [They were in their] late 80's. And they lived in a one-room little house that they . . .

Bob: *So this gram's paternal grandparents?*

Irene: That is correct, and with beautiful flowers and it was so clean that you could eat from the floor. Like two little pigeons, they watched each other.

Bob: *Was she close to her grandparents?*

Irene: Yes - they lived right close by.

Bob: *And they treated your mother nicely?*

Irene: Oh she loved them and they loved her. I believe that her father was their only child, I don't know.

Bob: *Do you know what business her grandparents were in?*

Irene: No. But I know that grandma said when she'd go there - the house was so clean, so immaculate. And that they were like two little love birds.

Bob: *Even in their advanced years.*

Irene: Yes and then when grandma came to America, not only did she have her parents, but she had her grandparents. And here her father used to go to his mother constantly because grandma's mother was not a housewife, but when he went to his mother, she gave him a meal.

Irene: it was a clean house. Whereas grandma's mother did not bother with housekeeping and cooking. She was a business lady.

Irene: So grandma's mother used to make fun of her father by saying 'what are you running to your mother to get food, things like that.

Irene: And when what many years later, I was already, you know, before I was born. Her grandmother got very sick, she was an old lady.

Bob: *Grandma's grandparents grandma got sick.*

Irene: Yes. Got very sick.

Bob: *Paternal grandmother got sick.*

Irene: Got very sick. Before I was born - I was named after her.

Bob: *But Gram was in this country?*

Irene: Yeah. And Yetta was already big - you know - child. And he was so overcome with taking care of her.

Bob: *He, that would be Gram's [Lottie Spinner] grandfather.*

Irene: Her husband.

Bob: *Grandma's grandfather.*

Irene: Grandma's grandmother's husband, yes. And he was - he got sick too. And they - one died a day apart, not knowing the other died. And they were buried the same day.

Bob: *Oh. So basically they died somewhere between 1915 and 1919.*

Irene: Yeah.

Bob: *Somewhere around there.*

Irene: Yes, yes. I would say [19]16 around there, [19]17, I don't know.

Bob: *Any other information about these grandparents?*

Irene: No. And that they were two love birds.

Bob: *That is a beautiful story. So sweet.*

Irene: And one never knew the other died.

Bob: *So they lived to a wonderful old age.*

Irene: Oh, yeah.

Bob: *Well, they must have been 90ish, if you think about it.*

Irene: Oh, yeah.

Bob: *Was grandma's father alive when his parents died?*

Irene: I don't know. Let me think. Yes he was alive.

Bob: *When did he die?*

Irene: I'm not sure.

Bob: *He did not live until Hitler - in other words, Gram's mother we think did.*

Irene: Yes. I know she did. She was taken away in the truck [by the Nazis].

Bob: *Let me step back for a second. Zurawno - General question. In this era. Do we - was it a largely Jewish town? A mixed town or something else, do we know?*

Irene: Well, it was mostly, I would say mostly Polish.

Bob: *Polish. Non-Jewish Polish.*

Irene: I would say, yes. And there were some Jews. Yes, there were Jews. But I would say primarily . . .

Irene: *From just what you . . .*

Irene: From what I know of - I don't know.

Bob: *What did Gram say - well we'll get to her- we will get to what Gram said about growing up. Let's talk about the business that Gram's mother was in. What was her name?*

Irene: Grandma's mother's name was Baila.

Bob: *Bella.*

Irene: Bella.

Bob: *Bella. B-e-l-l-a.*

Irene: Yes. Bella. I hope I am right. Bella. I believe Bella.

Bob: *You want to know something? We have a postcard, I think, we have a postcard where it talks about her . . .*

Irene: I may be wrong.

Bob: *It is B-a-y - we'll figure it out. Bella.*

Irene: Yeah. Beyla maybe.

Bob: *Right. So tell me - what was - what was her business?*

Irene: She had a hardware store.

Bob: *Like a general store kind of thing.*

Irene: Yes.

Bob: *When the Nazis . . .*

Irene: Yes. She had it in the center of town, a brick house. Today you don't want to live in the center of town, but then it was a big thing.

Irene: She had a brick house and part of it was the store. A beautiful brick house. She lived in the center of town. And I have an uncle that Hitler took care of whose name was David.

Bob: *Her brother.*

Irene: My mother's youngest - I believe - I'm not - Charlie was younger - he was younger - I think Charlie was younger. And he [David] was so good-looking. We have a picture of him and his beautiful wife. He had a beautiful wife and he was with his mother in the business. She looked like a Greek princess - she was Jewish, of course. And he had two children, to my knowledge. And I believe, I've heard or Grandma heard that she may have been the one that had a twin and one of the children died. But I am not sure.

Bob: *When did she have, she had a twin as a child?*

Irene: No, she gave birth.

Bob: *And one of them died at birth?*

Irene: I'm not sure. This might have been her, it might have another relative. But I know she had two children.

Bob: *Speaking about the wealth of your grandmother, your mother's mother. To what extent did she share that wealth - did checks ever come to you guys? She seems like a very prosperous person - did she ever share the wealth at all?*

Irene: No. See, what was money there wouldn't have been much value here. Whereas if grandma sent her five dollars, it was worth another room.

Bob: *Build another room?*

Irene: She could build another room.

Steve: *Let's go back a second, Bob. Do you know anything about your maternal grandparents? Your mother's mother's parents? Like you know about your mother's father's parents.*

Irene: Nothing, I know nothing. I believed her parents died young. That is all I know. I know her maiden name was Sobler.

Bob: *Your mother's mother's maiden name was Sobler. S-o-b-l-e-r.*

Irene: As was my aunt Lena. As was Leo Safron's mother .

Bob: *Leo Saffron is - it's Leo and then S-a-f-r-o-n. We'll talk about him later. He was a police guy. Anyway, Mom, you were talking about Gram's mother.*

Irene: She was an extreme, a very capable business woman and a woman before her time. She was a very good business woman, very successful business woman. And she ran this business which was very successful, until Hitler.

Bob: *And now when you say that she ran this business in the center of town and what did Grandma say about her relationship with her mother? Anything?*

Irene: Well, then her mother was not a cuddly mother. Because you can't be both. You can't be both.

Bob: *A business woman and soft.*

Irene: You can't and have five kids.

Irene: And so grandma's mother who was a good mother did not get along with her mother-in-law because her mother-in-law was a soft, gentle woman.

Bob: *Much like her husband.*

Irene: Much like, the two of them were like pigeons. And grandma's mother was very involved in the business. And I must further bring my point out - when "grandma" [Irene's mother] was about to marry my father, my grandmother came from Europe [to New York] for the wedding.

Bob: *Approximately what year was that?*

Irene: 1912.

Bob: *Was it exactly 1912? Well, Yetta - the year Yetta was born, 1913.*

Irene: That is correct. That is exactly correct. My grandmother was so bright that one day after she got here, she was taking the subway and going all over. Without speaking a word of English . . .

Bob: *Excuse me. She spoke Polish, I assume, and Yiddish?*

Irene: Yiddish, yes. But she was - well - I mean [it was like] going to France and suddenly traveling all around by yourself and not knowing the language . . . And meanwhile, she was going to go back after grandma's wedding. . . . But by then, [my sister] Henrietta was on the way - . . . [so she decided to] stay for the first grandchild to be born. . . .

Bob: *Where was she staying? In Gram's house?*

Irene: Actually, she was living with my Uncle Fred [Spinner].

Bob: Itzik, *who we will talk about later.*

Irene: Yes. So, and meanwhile she . . .

Bob: *World War I probably broke out soon after that.*

Irene: I believe so, I don't know the details, but this is what I do know. That my Aunt Lena was a cousin, her name was Lena Sobler. And she was there and my grandmother said 'what a nice match this would be for Fred' . . . So grandma had Henrietta, and here is the funny part. She was living in Manhattan, downtown, with [her son] my Uncle Fred. And Grandma was about to give birth, so I don't know how she got the message.

Bob: *When you say grandma, you mean our grandma - your mother. . . . ?*

Irene: Yes. My mother was about to give birth to my sister and my parents were in Bayonne at the time. Bayonne, New Jersey. So my grandmother got to Bayone, NJ in no time at all.

Bob: *By herself?*

Irene: By herself and then Fred came later.

Bob: *How long was she [your grandmother] in this country?*

Irene: Then she was going to go back after Henrietta and get her family together and all come back here.

Bob: *That was the plan. They'd all move back here?*

Irene: Sell the business, sell the house. And come back here.

Bob: *Was her husband dead by that time?*

Irene: No he was not. Very much alive. But he was in Europe.

Bob: *With her other son, David.*

Irene: David and my aunt, Lena. Yes, and my Aunt Lena, I had an Aunt Lena too.

Bob: *Not to be confused with Lena Sobler.*

Irene: Yes. It just so happens they both have the same name.

Bob: *Your mother had a sister named Lena and she also ended up having a sister-in-law named Lena.*

Irene: Exactly.

Bob: *Okay, we'll get to the siblings in a minute.*

Irene: So, meanwhile there was a romance budding, [with] my grandmother promoting it.

Bob: *Between her son and Lena.*

Irene: Between Fred and my lovely Aunt Lena, who I adored. And so Henrietta was already born.

Bob: *How did they find Lena?*

Irene: Well, she was part of clan. They all lived down on the East Side and she was a relative.

Bob: *Oh, she was a cousin.*

Irene: Her name Sobler.

Bob: *I'm sorry. Because grandma's mother's maiden name was Sobler. I got it.*

Irene: And Lena's name was Lena Sobler. So my grandmother . . .

Irene: My grandmother made - see this is great - while she is here Fred will get married, so she stayed a little longer and Fred got married.

Bob: *Meanwhile WWI was raging and by the way for the historical perspective, Galicia at the beginning of WWI was a major battleground.*

Irene: However, she did go back - after - I don't know - but she did go back with the intention of coming back with the whole family. And then the war was raging and she couldn't come back. Meanwhile my grandfather got sick and he died.

Bob: *Her husband.*

Irene: The years went on.

Bob: *In all the years, he was in his separate grain business - grain delivery - never part of her hardware store.*

Irene: Never part of her hardware business.

Bob: *Did she start the hardware business? Or did she inherit it?*

Irene: No, she started it. She didn't have to inherit it.

Irene: And then my grandfather died and then . . . I had this uncle and aunt in Europe, Lena and David - oh Charlie came [Spinner, father of Sidney and Dorothy, husband of Neddy] to this country meanwhile.

Irene: Charlie came. And then she was only left with my grandmother and my aunt Lena, my other aunt Lena and my uncle David. Well they got married. And then Hitler came and I don't know what happened. They couldn't get them out.

Bob: *I would like to just ask one other thing before we close for this evening. Let's go through each of the five children of your mother's mother. Do it quick, because we are running out of room on this tape. First of course, there is grandma.*

Irene: The oldest was Lenny's father, my Uncle Fred.

Bob: *Okay, your Uncle Fred, otherwise known as Itzik or Isaac?*

Irene: No. not Isaac.

Bob: *Itzik.*

Irene: But he worked in the hotel Astor which was all German and so Itzik wasn't good enough so he took the English name of Fred.

Bob: *He was the oldest.*

Irene: He was the oldest. Then came grandma [Lotte Spinner Jonas].

Bob: *Grandma is second oldest. How much older than grandma was Fred? About?*

Irene: Two years. Then came Lena, my grandma's sister, I don't know what her married name was. There are pictures.

Bob: *The age difference?*

Irene: She had two children.

Bob: *A little younger than grandma.*

Irene: A little younger, but I don't, but I would say a couple of years because her children - I know they were younger than we were. And then came - I'm not sure of - I think Charlie or David - I'm not sure if David or Charlie was older.

Bob: *Charlie ended up, of course, in this country, which we will talk about.*

Irene: Yeah. I'm not going to tell you about, you will see in the pictures that my uncle David in Europe was very handsome. He looked like Lenny's father [Itzik/Fred], who was a very handsome man.

Bob: *So just for the summary then, Gram's sister Lena and brother David and mother were all [living until WWII began] and killed by Hitler.*

Irene: Oh, yes. A truck came in through Zurawno one day and and took them all away and they

Bob: *David had a beautiful wife. And how many children?*

Irene: Two children, and Lena was married had two children.

Steve: *One of the children was - one of David's children was a surviving twin, the other was a separate [child].*

Irene: I don't know. But I think there is a picture in the album of David and his wife, who was a beautiful woman. She looked like Princess Morena of Greece who married the Duke of Kent. I am telling the truth.

Bob: *Okay, let's - wait let me just make sure of one thing. And what did Lena's husband do?*

Irene: I don't know.

Bob: *Did Lena work, do you know?*

Irene: No. Oh wait a minute - the picture shows her dressed extremely well. For Zurawno in that period of time. And the maid had taken care of the two children.

Bob: *And you have that picture.*

Irene: In the album there is a picture of my grandmother [and] my aunt Lena in Europe with her two children, she had two children, beautiful little children.

Bob: *How old were they at the time of the war? Young children?*

Irene: Well they were younger than we were.

Bob: *But they were all killed.*

Irene: All of them. They were all taken in the truck, taken away, every Jew, and killed.

Bob: *Let's end this tape right here.*

