

The following is a transcript of the notes taken by Selwyn Greene while visiting his Aunt Eva Simon at the Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged, Pittsburgh on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1978.

"I remember when Hilda, Jack and I were small children living with our parents in a village called Yaniva near Kovna in Lithuania. My mother Basse Grebowsky<sup>1</sup> (born Guttman) had her mother and her blind brother living with us. Her other brother, Samuel, after escaping from Lithuania had worked on the oil fields in Baku for the Rothschilds, and on one occasion wanted to take me to a party he was attending at Buckingham Place.

My father, Samuel Grebowsky, had a brother, Morris, who had married his own first cousin. My Father's parents had a large tavern 50 to 70 miles from Kovna in the country where they supplied board and accommodation (no liquor) to travelers. They were both murdered but the culprits were never established.

During the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, my father and his brother left Lithuania and went to the U.S.A. to peddle clothes, leaving their families in Lithuania. Uncle Morris, who had changed his name to Green, first settled in Waterbury, Connecticut where he later established a new car dealership. He had lost no time in returning to Lithuania to fetch his family. They had seven sons all of whom prospered after qualifying as doctors or lawyers. The oldest, Lawrence known as Larry, later became Howard Hughes's lawyer before the strain of having this man as his client became too much and he resigned. I remember the Greens moved to Westchester where I think the sons and their families still reside. On one occasion, Ike and I bought a new Lincoln car from Uncle Morris Green.

Meanwhile my father who had changed his name to Greene had the wanderlust and could not settle down. He left his brother in the U.S.A. and sailed for South Africa and from there he traveled to Rhodesia. He sent messages to my mother in Yaniva to join him, but for some time my mother would not leave her blind brother. I do not remember what happened to him but eventually my mother decided to leave and I can recall a train journey from Lithuania to Bremen when I hid behind a woman (who had accompanied my mother and her 3 children) to escape the eyes of the guards at the border post.

We traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland to stay with my mother's sister and her husband, Morris Stungo. After staying awhile with them we caught a ship at Southampton bound for Cape Town where we arrived just after the turn of the century, to find the city draped in black, mourning the death of Queen Victoria which had taken place during our voyage.<sup>2</sup> At this time my mother was not able to speak a word of English. I think some cousin met us when the ship arrived. I recall that Hilda and Jack were left on the ship whilst I accompanied my mother and the cousin who went looking for my father in Cape Town. After we had found my father (we bumped into him in the street) we returned to the ship to fetch Hilda and Jack and our belongings and moved into a small lodging. My father was working in a whiskey factory and conditions were hard, the Boer War having

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam's note: This is an alternate spelling for the name Grabowsky. Other alternate spellings include Growbowsky and Grebowski.

<sup>2</sup> Queen Victoria died 22 January 1901.

just ended. We soon left Cape Town and traveled by train to Rhodesia where my father was anxious to settle down as he had liked that country. Evidence of the Boer War was seen from the train. I can remember my parents running trading stores, first in Salisbury where they sold blankets to the Africans and we went to the Convent School, and subsequently in Hartley. We lived in Rhodesia for a few years before moving to Benoni in the Transvaal where my father started a building business. I don't think he was much of a builder or a business man, he was more a scholar. However I remember him building a place near the station and also a boarding house. After Jack had left school he (Jack) went to work for Mr. Elliot at Randfontein Estates (an estate agents office) although he had always wanted to become a lawyer but my parents could not afford to give him this education.

My father decided to revisit the U.S.A. and he took me with him to see his brother Morris in Waterbury, Connecticut, leaving the rest of his family in Benoni. My Uncle Morris urged me to stay with him and his family would take care of me. He had a large store and a substantial house.

My father returned to South Africa leaving me behind in Waterbury much to the distress of my mother. The one Green son was a Doctor and he fancied me. Because of the close relationship I decided to leave my Uncle's house and move to Pittsburgh where I stayed with my mother's step-sister who married a widower with a gaggle of kids. I was not happy there so I moved into Eva Cohen's house. We had known the Cohens in Lithuania where my mother had shown kindness to Eva Cohen and her brother who were orphans. I became friendly with Eva Cohen's daughters Florence (now Mrs. Bill Reisber) and Iona (now Mrs. David Kauffman), a friendship which still endures. Jack had a little love affair by correspondence with Eva Cohen.

One day I was standing on the verandah watching the funeral procession of Eva Cohen's sister.<sup>3</sup> On the other side of the road a young man was also standing on a balcony watching the procession where he spotted me. We became acquainted and his name was Ike Simon. He was a big man with a heart of gold and when he asked me to marry him I decided to accept, having in mind, if it didn't work out, I would leave him and return to South Africa.

During 1918 my mother went down to Durban on holiday and stayed at the Drumcree Hotel in Point Road which was owned by Sam Bloom. My mother met the Bloom family and was sympathetic to Bella Bloom who had just lost her mother. She told Bella that her son Jack was right for her. My mother then sent Jack to stay at the Bloom's hotel in Durban where the couple met and were keen on one another, although the Blooms did not fancy the match.

My sister Hilda came over to the U.S.A. with my parents on a visit and also stayed with Eva Cohen and family. Hilda had a couple of marriages which ended up in the divorce court. My parents returned to South Africa where they lived in a small flat on Durban's

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<sup>3</sup> Miriam's note: Family lore had it that this was the funeral for Hannah Sandusky. Time line is that Eva Grabowsky immigrated 20 August 1913; Hannah died 11 November 1913; Eva & Ike married 13 Nov. 1914.

beach front. I used to send them money from time to time. After my mother's death my father returned to the U.S.A. and he died and was buried here in Pittsburgh.

My fourth child, Leonie<sup>4</sup>, was tragically killed in a diving accident when she was 12 years old. Her head was critically injured and Ike's brother, who was a doctor, was unable to save her.<sup>5</sup> Bella was particularly fond of this child.”

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<sup>4</sup> Miriam's note: Leona Simon died 28 July 1932.

<sup>5</sup> Miriam's note: this contradicts the story that she died at summer camp of meningitis.