

# THE STORY OF LENA WEINGAST SHAPIRO

By Debbi Shapiro Honorof, Granddaughter

*Note: To avoid confusion, I will use the name Lena throughout, even though she was born Lanzie Rivke and changed her name to Lena after emigrating to the U.S.*

Lena Weingast was born Lanzie Rivke Weingast in Skala, Austria (now Ukraine) on August 15, 1892 or 1893 (there is conflicting information in the records) to Avraham and Sophie/Sosie Schwartzbach Weingast.

Lena had five brothers, all born in Skala: Joseph (b.1881), Hyman (b.1883), Charles (b.1885), Louis (b. 1888), and Harry (b. August 15, 1892 or 1893). I had been told by my parents that Lena was a twin, so they may indeed have been twins, even though there are conflicting records.

Lena's mother Sophie died in either 1894 or 1896, when Lena was very young. Avraham remarried and according to family stories, Lena hated her stepmother, who brought two other children to the marriage. Avraham and his new wife had several more children. I know nothing about this branch of the family but was told that the children all emigrated to America and ended up in New Jersey.

Lena begged her four older brothers, who had already emigrated to NYC, to send her money for a steamship ticket. She emigrated in July 1907 from Liverpool aboard the SS Cedric and was met in NYC by her eldest brother Joseph. It is not clear where she lived for the first three years in America, but we find her in the 1910 census, having changed her name to Lena, and living as a boarder with the Abram Jarmulowsky family at 149 Norfolk Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It is the same building where her brother Joseph was living with his wife Bessie, their three children and his younger brother Harry (Lena's possible twin). There are two other female boarders also living with the Jarmulowsky family, sisters by the names of Anna Rinder (born 1893 in Austria) and Minnie Rinder (born 1895 in Austria). The family also had two young sons, ages 4 and 7 months. The three teenage boarders are listed as operators in a waist shop as their professions.

I have been unable to find any records for Lena from 1910-1916. This would have been the time when the "Catskills drag wedding" portrait would have taken place.

The next time we encounter a record for Lena is in 1916, when she marries Harry Shapiro, who had emigrated from Poland with his mother and three siblings when he was three years old. The couple were married by Rabbi Moses Silberman. Lena's address on the marriage certificate was 496 Williams Avenue in Brooklyn. One of the witnesses was her brother Harry.

Lena and Harry resided in East New York, Brooklyn and had three children: Sylvia (b. 1917), Pearl (b. 1918) and Alvin, my father (b. 1926) and five grandchildren.

Lena was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 1943 at age 50.

Lena died in May 1966 at the age of 73, after living for approximately three years in a nursing home and suffering from “hardening of the arteries,” likely Alzheimer’s disease. I was 13 when she died. My memories are of a sweet and loving grandma who was very “old country” and with a heavy accent, keeping a kosher kitchen, and serving me hot tea in a glass with a sugar cube to keep in my mouth while sipping the tea.



**Avraham Weingast in Skala**



**Lena and (twin) brother Harry**



**Lena in same dress as “wedding” photo**



**Lena and Harry Shapiro**



**Skala Benevolent Society 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1946**

**Front of table (from left): My father Alvin Shapiro, my grandma Lena Shapiro, Louis and Fannie Weingast**

**Back of Table (from left): Charles and Sophie Weingast, Beckie and Hyman Weingast, Beckie and Harry Weingast**



**Family photo from Wedding of Helen and Alvin Shapiro**

**August 21, 1949**

**Zion Auditorium, Brooklyn, NY**

**(From left): Pearl Shapiro, Sheila Feigelson, Lena Shapiro, Harry Shapiro, Sarah (Soviner) Shapiro (Harry's mother), Helen Rosenberg Shapiro, Alvin Shapiro, Phyllis Feigelson, Louis Murray and Sylvia (Shapiro) Feigelson**



**Lena (right) at my younger brother Matthew's bris in November 1958 in Brooklyn. I am at left, then my cousin Phyllis, then my older brother Steven.**