

SIMI LITVAK, North High School, Class of 1959

My mother's parents were from Rumania. They met in Colorado through a long involved process. Grandma Simi, who I never met, was taken at a very young age, by her wicked stepfather (for real) to a girl's school in the Old City of Jerusalem, run by British Protestants in order to convert Jewish girls to Christianity. The tuition was free, with the proviso that she would not see her parents again. She graduated at eighteen and was placed as a "nanny" in a Jewish convert's home, but in fact she was their maid. Somehow she ran away and studied as a nurse at an Arab hospital in the Old City of Jerusalem. Through many other adventures she ended up in Chicago and married a Jewish vaudevillian. He died soon after she bore one child. Simi ended up in Denver with her grandmother, who had moved to Cairo from Rumania previously. When in Denver, Simi met my grandfather, an illiterate fixer, who fled Rumania to avoid being conscripted for life by the army. My maternal grandparents moved to Salt Lake City, where my mother was born and then to Pueblo, where my mother graduated high school. Eventually my grandfather moved to Denver and opened Charlie's Second Hand Store on Larimer Street.

My father's family came from Belarus, I think. My grandfather was the first in his village to come to America. He had asthma and was guided to Denver by a Jewish relief organization, which met people at the Castle Garden, the precursor to Ellis Island in the late 19th Century. From Denver, my grandfather, a bricklayer, systematically brought my grandmother, their two young children and every one else in the village to Denver. In the 50's we had a cousins picnic for the Litvak side of the family and over 100 relatives came. The numbers of cousins are far larger now. The Litvaks lived on Dale Court where they had a cow, chickens and a vegetable garden. A midwife delivered my father there. Eventually my grandparents moved up the hill to 14th and Hooker Street (sans cow) to a duplex my grandfather built. My grandmother's sister and her family lived next door. My father went to Cheltenham School, Lake, and North (until the tenth grade). My parents were introduced by my father's cousin Goldie who hired my mother as her first beauty operator at her shop on the West side.

My mother and I followed my father to Florida, California and Washington State until the Army sent him to Hawaii. After the War my father joined his brother as a partner in Ace Auto Wrecking. I grew up in the west Colfax "shtetl"* along with my sisters, Lee and Gale. We went to Colfax School, Lake Junior High and North.

**A small Jewish village in Eastern Europe*