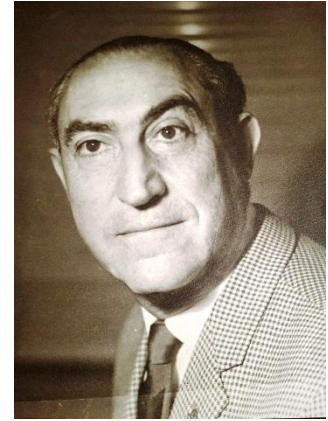


# Dr Sabse (Simon) Spiro

The History of the Spiro family with information  
presented to Geoff Boner by Sabse's daughters  
Celeste Reef and Fiona Nafte and others.

September 2024



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Dr Sabse Spiro served the people of Roodepoort and Florida as a general practitioner for many years. He was a respected physician providing help to all those who came to him, often treating those who could not afford it.

Sabse Spiro was born in Kroonstad in 1910. The family lived in Bultfontein in the Orange Free State. He was an outstanding student at Grey's College in Bloemfontein, both in his studies and as an all-round sportsman, especially in rugby and cricket. He apparently matriculated at the age of sixteen and then studied medicine at the University of Witwatersrand.

He married Gladys Sack who was born in Johannesburg in 1911 and had grown up in La Rochelle, one of the southern suburbs of Johannesburg. Sabse and Gladys Spiro were both born in South Africa to families, which had originated in Lithuania. Gladys was a teacher of music, but did not work after her marriage.

Sabse's first appointment as a doctor after completing his studies and marrying was in Heidelberg about 50 Km south-east of Johannesburg. In about 1936 he opened his practice in Roodepoort. His offices were in the Bonvin building above the pharmacy of Louis Boner. Several years later he was associated in the building of a large multi-storied building opposite the Municipal offices and Town Hall of Roodepoort and moved his practice there.

Sabse spent the rest of his professional career serving the peoples of Roodepoort and Florida. Initially the family lived in a house not far from the business center of Roodepoort and in 1948 built a house in Florida and moved there.

He was a truly dedicated doctor and would do house calls throughout the area. Some of his patients could not afford to pay him so he would receive live chickens in lieu of payment. We have received a description of Dr Sabse Spiro from a Dr. Roy Husemeyer, a Christian, who as a child lived next door to the Spiro family in Florida. He remembers the Spiro family as being the only Jewish family in the area, and Sabse as being a 'tall, dark haired, quietly spoken and very kind man'. Roy describes an incident of when he was 8 years old and had fallen off his bicycle and gashed his knee. Although Dr Spiro was not their family doctor, his father asked him to attend to Roy. Sabse opened the consulting room attached to the house and stitched the gash in Roy's knee using a local anesthetic and so causing minimal pain.

Sabse Spiro, as a true general practitioner, covered many aspects of medicine such as obstetrical care and surgery, which today are carried out only by specialists in that particular field.

He was also involved in many activities of the community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. He was a member of Rotary and was chairman of the Roodepoort/Florida branch for many years. He was an active member of the Roodepoort Jewish community and for some time was President of

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**MEDICAL  
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**NEW PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION**

Dr Simon (Sabse) Spiro was inducted as President of the Medical Association of South Africa at the Adjourned Annual General Meeting held in Johannesburg on 25 May. Dr Spiro is a Federal Councillor from the Southern Transvaal Branch of the Association, and succeeds Dr K. Goldswain of East London as President.

Sabse Spiro was born in Kroonstad and was educated at Grey College School in Bloemfontein where he matriculated in 1928. He received the degree M.B., B.Ch. from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1934, and after 18 months in Heidelberg, Transvaal, he commenced general practice in Roodepoort where he has practised for the past 24 years.



Dr S. Spiro

Dr Spiro was elected to Federal Council in 1958 and since 1963 has been Chairman of the Central Committee for Contract Practice. He has served on several of Federal Council's Committees and has been a member of the Executive Committee since 1966.

Dr Spiro was President of the Southern Transvaal Branch of the Medical Association during 1970-71. Sabse has an active interest in cricket and bowls and serves on various committees. He has been a Rotarian for 25 years, and for 29 years has been a member of the Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation, as well as being President of the Congregation in 1962.

Sabse and his wife Gladys have 3 married children and 7 grandchildren.

the shul committee. Sabse Spiro was also active in the medical professional organization and was appointed President of the Medical Association of South Africa in 1972. He retired from active practice of medicine in the 1970's and worked in the Tara hospital before completely retiring. In the later years Sabse and Gladys moved to an apartment to Johannesburg. He passed away in 1995.

Gladys was active throughout her life. She was the chairlady of the Roodepoort Women's Internation Zionist organisation (WIZO) for many years. She received a certificate for 50 years of service to WIZO and was collecting funds for Israel even in her later years. She was also chairlady for the parents-teachers Association at Florida High School for many years. She passed away in 1999.

**The Spiro family had three children, Farrell, Celeste and Fiona**

**Farrell** followed in his father's footsteps and studied medicine. He became an interventional radiologist and had an outstanding career as one of the leading practitioners in his field in South Africa. He married Miriam Stoppleman, also from the Roodepoort-Florida community. They had 4 children. After retiring from his active practice, Farrell and Miriam retired to Plettenberg Bay.



In this picture we see Fiona, Farrell, Celeste, Sabse and Gladys on Sabse's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1990

**Celeste** was born in the early 1940's.

She remembers the people she grew up with, Isa and **Lenore Levin**, who now live in Australia, **Cecilia Blumsohn**, **Eleanor Tannenbaum**, **Zita Berkowitz**, **Nechama Orenstein**, **Bernard and Lynette Kaplan**, **Martin and Gillian Jacobson**, **Zelia and Geoffrey Boner**, **Bertie**

**Akres, Arthur, Glenda and Ethne Simon, Sheba and Anthony Berkowitz and Sheba Josman.**

Celeste was active in Habonim and was a madricha of Florida/Roodepoort group together, which she ran together with **Bernard Kaplan** at the Florida Primary School.

At that time **Rabbi Orenstein** was the spiritual leader of the Roodepoort shul. He was followed by **Rabbi Friedman**, whose daughter and others played an enjoyable evening of Badminton every week. Celeste continues to describe that all the Yomtovim were celebrated in the shul, especially Simchat Torah, when there was a dinner after the service with all members providing food. She mentions the **Hockman family, Morris and Dolly** as being a lovely couple and very generous. She also remembers the **Klein** family, whose son **Herman** became a well-known orthopaedic specialist.

**Celeste married Morris Reef**, from Vereeniging. He was a Chartered Accountant eventually having his own practice in Calgary for 30 years. Celeste was a teacher of commercial subjects and taught at Damelin, Harvard and Greenoaks for 18 years. They got married in the Roodepoort shul with Rabbi Friedman officiating. She describes Rabbi Friedman as being a lovely person, who used to travel once a week to the Johannesburg General Hospital to visit the sick. The reception of their wedding was in the Roodepoort Town Hall in 1964.

They would obtain Kosher meat from her uncles, who owned Empire Wholesale Meat Supply. Initially they lived in Florida and after 10 years moved to Robindale so that their children could attend the King David Victory Park school.



in this picture (left) Sabse is with two granddaughters: Nicole, Fiona's youngest, and Adrienne Farrell's youngest at their shared batmitzvah in about 1984

Below, Gladys is with her daughters, Fiona (left) and Celeste, in the later 1990s



In 1979, the Reef family moved to Calgary in Canada and remained there for 30 years before moving to Toronto where they have lived ever since. Celeste and Morris have three children and 14 grandchildren. Their son Trevor has a degree in Actuarial Science and practices as a Chartered Accountant. He is married to a girl from Calgary and they have six children and live in Toronto. Their son Colin is married to a South African girl and is a very successful entrepreneur. They have two children and live in Calgary. Their daughter, Hayley has a Bachelor of Education from McGill University. She is married and has six children, live in Baltimore and she teaches in Bais Yaakov school. They also have one married grandson, who lives in Toronto.



In this picture Sabse is with Celeste's husband Morris Reef and their two sons, Colin and Trevor Reef

During their lives together Celeste and Morris have travelled extensively in the world and have taken many cruises. They play bridge and love operas, ballets and plays which they attend very often.

At the time of writing this description of Celeste's life she is very ill and being treated in Toronto.

The third child in the Spiro family was **Fiona** (born in 1946), who married Leon Nafte, the son of another Roodepoort family. They had three children before they divorced.

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