

Temple and Family History Endeavors: To Be or Not to Be! (First Installment)

Life As Rock?

Motivating someone to pursue their family history endeavors may or may not be an easy situation based on the lack of availability of vital records and information, and even knowing where to begin to compile these pursuits. In addition, living relatives may not be plentiful to brainstorm with. Resulting that trying to begin family history pursuits can be a challenging task to be tabled to ones in retirement years when we believe we have more time but most of your living relatives may no longer be available. It's like moving a rock. If that the rock that is small, it is easy to move but if it is substantially larger, it is easier to walk around it. Much of this analogy can be applied to initiating family history endeavors. In this respect, my family history with temple submission implications was a rather tedious task for me while completing a Ph.D. degree and getting newly married all within the first four years of my baptism in Florence, Italy. What made my initial pursuits difficult was that I was the youngest person of my generation and of my entire family. My sister was 9 ½ years older than I and there were no other siblings in my family. My uncles and aunts were all in their 60s and 70s when I was born and their time on earth was already limited because of their ages and health conditions. Compounding the situation when I first began my family history pursuits in 1970 at the tender age of 27, I was the only member of my family to be a member of the church and my family had much animosity about attempting to research the past because of family skeletons and other personal reasons. My parents frequently spoke Polish in the home about sensitive issues so I would never know their innermost thoughts.

Pursuit of Happiness!

Because of my love for culture, geography and history, I welcomed the opportunity to explore my family roots much like my dear friend, Lily, in China that I previous posted on August 5th entitled "A Chinese Family History Testimony Experience" who has a similar thirst of "Who Am I?" "Where did come from?" "What am I doing here on earth." And "Who were my progenitors who made it possible for me to be the very person I am?" I didn't even know accurately which countries my ancestors originated from. All I initially knew was Poland and Yugoslavia. Finding those geographical locations was tricky because my ancestors immigrated to the America well before War World 1 when many of the Eastern Block countries boundaries changed substantially. As a result, my approach was to initiate my American genealogy research first because I needed more accurate spellings of the villages of origin in Eastern Europe in post-World War 1 and 2 years. Working with communist countries behind the "Iron Curtain" and not knowing the native languages in either written or spoken form, made genealogy a difficult obstacle course of the first order. As I started researching my American genealogy, it took me perhaps 20+ years just to get things straight of where in Poland my ancestors came from as well as in Slovenia, which is the northwest portion of former Yugoslavia. My research in the USA was very important because I was able to pinpoint information about my family roots from birth, marriage and death records as well as from newspaper obituaries, census, cemetery and other vital records with multiple spellings for the very same villages which made it very difficult to finalize their geographical locations for all of the villages where my ancestors actually came from. Originally, I thought my maternal ancestors were Polish and my paternal ancestors as Russian. Later when I visited Poland in 1996, I learned that they were Slovak and to be more specific Speis, a subculture of Slovak ancestry with Roman Catholic religious beliefs in the southmost, central part of Poland about 40 miles from the Slovakia border. My paternal ancestors came from eastern Poland in a section called Galicia which is about 100 miles due east of my Slovak family roots where Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia all meet together. Their nationalities were not Polish but Lemko which really were Carpathian Mountain people who were farmers with Greek Orthodox religious beliefs. And then I further learned that in 1947, the Polish government forced all Lemko people in Galicia area to either replace the German soldiers on the Western Poland border at the end of World War 2 or to immigrate to Eastern Ukraine almost in Russia where boundary wars are still being fought today between Russia and Ukraine when in 1947. This forced exodus of Lemkos to replace the Jewish people in Eastern Ukraine who were a part of the initial Palestine immigration movement to the Middle East with the founding of Israel. Lemkos were given 24 hours notice to immigrate with no compensation for the lands and homes. All they were only allowed to bring animals and any belonging into a box car with them to be transported by a primitive train with no seats. The rationale was that the Russian occupation of Poland was worse than the Nazi occupation of Poland with many people being killed so the Lemkos were being ethnically cleansed without being killed. Most of my Lemko ancestors choose to go to Eastern Ukraine. And from 1898 when my paternal grandfather immigrated to the US till 1998, there was for 100 years absolutely no contact between my Ukraine Lemko ancestors and my USA ancestors which was previously expounded in a testimony posting on July 30 entitled: "Faith Going Far Beyond The "Iron Curtain."

A New Game Plan:

In order to firmly establish a plan of action for researching my Eastern European ancestors, the “Iron Curtain” fell in 1989 which opened up the opportunities to travel and to do family research much easier. The result was that I’ve traveled to Eastern Europe now five times in 1996, 1998, 2001, 2009 and 2012. The networking that I’ve established in Eastern Europe is incredible because I am not alone trying to do research but I have people assisting me which makes my research cutting-edge not only for myself, but through for the church an incredible amount of indexing going on as part of a world-wide beta-testing project going on with FamilySearch.Org. The first Eastern European trip was generated when my oldest son served a church mission in the Munich area of Germany. At the end of his two mission and time for him to return home, my wife innocently commented that maybe we should bring and visit the areas of Poland and Slovenia where most of my ancestors originated from. I noticed that Poland and Slovenia had a triangular relationship with Munich and after having done genealogy actively for 26 years, I now had enough information of where to go to visit these areas but still not knowing who to see or where to find relevant information about my family roots. So my wife wrote a series of firesides suitable for church presentations in which my family provided musical presentation much like the Mormon Tabernacle choir’s Sunday morning radio broadcasts since 1929 entitled “The Spoken Word.” All the narrations in the spoken portions were written and translated into the native language of the countries that we presented in. I contacted the mission presidents and was able to get their assistance from people to not only translate our English narration into Polish, German and Slovene but to deliver them in their languages with the exception of my son, Rhys, who delivered the first fireside in German. Once we made our first trip in 1996 and found some distant relatives in Poland, subsequent trips were much easier to schedule together were all extremely rewarding because we took historic pictures, walked and visited the very places where our ancestors lived and we became well focused that there was a destiny that needed to be experienced and recorded for future generations of my family and not just for our own egos. In our five trips to Eastern Europe, we presented Church firesides in Munich, Germany, Warsaw, Poland (twice), Ljubljana, Slovenia (three times), Budapest, Hungary, Moscow, Russia, Vienna, Austria, Kiev, Ukraine and Rome, Italy.

Future Pursuits of Temporal and Spiritual Happiness!

In subsequent installments I will share with you specific techniques and tricks of the trade accumulated with 50 years of active genealogical pursuits that I’ve implemented to successfully research my relatives and ancestors in both the United States and in Eastern Europe. Success never came easily or directly and still doesn’t. But faith and action and persistence is what has given me the Spirit of Elijah and the Holy Ghost in this endeavor which is sacred in remembrance of ones family history roots, ancestry and their families to be shared with my family and future generations for years to come! Believe it or not, once momentum is generated with successful family history endeavors, your life’s journey will never be the same and much and keeping of what our Prophet Russell M. Nelson stated in a previous post today shared again at the bottom of this post. In closing on this first installment of my testimony about Temple and family history work, I firmly say that these comments are true and if you will begin your family history odyssey, your life will be richer than you can ever conceive, believe and be happier than ever before. May the Lord bless you in these sacred pursuits.

