



MONTREAL FORUM

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE
JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF MONTREAL

TO CATCH YOUR EYE

The triggers that catapult people headlong into the world of genealogy vary enormously. An element of curiosity is perhaps the most powerful component, but it is the degree and format of this curiosity that shapes the differences among us. Two of our contributors to this issue, **Joan Naimark** and **Willie Glaser**, demonstrate a strong similarity in their desire to flesh out raw genealogical data with the addition of historical events that directly affected their families. And then the skilful management of their findings demonstrates how outside control and pure chance encountered in similar circumstances led to variations in the aftermath of these events.

Joan Naimark, a valued member of JGS-Montreal's Executive, quickly impressed me as someone with shrewd and well-expressed reactions to whatever problems were being discussed. With this in mind, I invited her to write up the story of her own family history pursuit. When Joan's parents began fresh lives in their new country, past experiences were largely ignored and veiled in secrecy. In the fullness of time, the adult Joan decided to find out what really happened and so embarked on an intriguing trail.

As for **Willie Glaser**, it was an example of pure chance that led to the happy result that he is alive. And not just alive. Willie learned of a collection of letters written in the months before the outbreak of World War Two from Jews still in Germany and Austria begging for help in their efforts to escape. The unknown stories of what happened to these people haunted Willie and so he began his heartbreaking task of finding out as much as he could of all these stories. Including his own family.

Photographs. Do you cringe whenever the thought of them stashed all higgledy-piggledy around your home strays into your mind? Help is on the way. **Janice Rosen** has written a delightful piece on caring for photographs that is enormously practical and easy to follow.

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of Montreal

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Member of the
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So take heart, grab those shoe boxes (or whatever) and find the light at the end of the tunnel.

Anne Joseph

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MONTHLY LECTURE SERIES

Monday 18 June 2007

Three members – Nathan Rosenschein, Jerry Zell and Marvin Tafler – will present his/her own research experiences.

July 2007

Summer break – no meeting.

Monday 20 August 2007

Post IAJGS Conference wrap-up.

SUNDAY FAMILY TREE WORKSHOPS

Held at the Jewish Public Library,
 5151 Côte Ste Catherine Road, Montreal
 10am to noon
 Sunday 10 June
 Summer break in July & August

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**WHEN AND HOW TO UNVEIL
 CERTAIN MYSTERIES**

by Joan Naimark

Joan and her sister accepted the reality that their parents were reluctant to look back and so the sisters grew up knowing next to nothing of what happened to the family across the Atlantic. After the deaths of both parents, Joan found personal papers and photographs, and from this sketchy starting point, the intriguing task of unravelling the mysteries began. Joan describes how she achieved certain successes and weathered blocks, and describes many ways in which one can take a peak behind layers of secrecy.

My family had always been an enigma to me. I had known my relatives from *simchas* and funerals, but had no insight into the backgrounds and specific events that had formed them. Each branch had always carefully guarded its important information and its lore, and steadfastly refused to share what they knew with other members of the family. My sibling and I had often looked at each other and wondered aloud where we had come from I would have to look from outside the family to see the inside. And so I embarked upon a study of my family history.

My late parents had left their pasts in their old countries and begun fresh in their new. Because neither of them had enjoyed looking back, I had grown up knowing very little about their origins. Nevertheless, they had both left behind some photographs and their personal papers. I began my quest with an examination of those documents to try to establish their significance to my parents. From this foundation I was able to determine what type of information to further seek out.

I joined the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal to attend lectures and workshops and learn how to formally go about the practice of genealogy. Finding historical facts and records is not a substitute for interviewing people, but by the time I started there were no preceding generations left to speak for themselves. I got

lucky immediately. The first lecture of the season was on using the Internet for genealogical research. I soon found indices for both paternal grandparents in the records of JRI-Poland, and obtained copies of the records. A family tree began to take shape, and the potential seemed endless.

Genealogy is not a linear pursuit. Researchers often work diligently and not achieve results, though at other times everything falls into place. There was not enough preliminary information with which to form a detailed plan. Instead, I thought through what I expected to accomplish and this permitted me to define broadly the research I needed to carry out. My goal was to keep an open mind, and recognize who my relatives were and identify how and why they had developed into the people with whom I was familiar. I began to collect everything I could.

To start, I needed a framework in which to place the data I was about to amass. Wikipedia was a good initial source of information about the ancestral towns, as were several books on the Eastern Europe of the time that situated those towns in their broader context. Learning about the surroundings, politics, economic circumstances and way of life allowed me to understand what had been left behind and to form hypotheses about why my ancestors might have chosen to leave. This awareness of historical perspective went a long way toward illuminating what I subsequently found.

I worked back one generation at a time on both sides of the family, looking for all possible connections and associations. The JRI-Poland records had shown the names of my great-grandparents. That information gave me another generation to study, and offered clues about possible extended family members such as aunts, uncles and cousins. A pattern of names emerged. I began to accumulate documents and other pieces of knowledge from many different sources. There were similarities between the maternal and paternal sides in that they had both

fled difficult circumstances in Europe, but the backgrounds were quite different.

I bored my cousins by insisting that they provide their vital statistics and everything they knew about the history of the family, but a gratifying number of them became interested in the project. Through the JGS-M, I obtained help with finding pertinent details regarding my parents and connecting them with information about earlier generations. When Yad Vashem's Holocaust records came online, I discovered what had happened to family members who had been left in Europe when World War II broke out. Public government documents, such as immigration, naturalization, census and military records, provided valuable background data about both sides. I found the names of ships and the exact dates and ports of entry for both of my parents as well as some members of the extended family. The naturalization file on my maternal grandfather, whom I had not known, listed his physical characteristics and the Russian name of the grandmother I had always been told was Polish. My father's military file offered information that he had been reluctant to disclose. Gravestones in the local cemetery gave the names of my maternal great-grandparents.

Valuable Internet resources were Ancestry.com and JewishGen. Inquiries to and from people researching the same names in the Family Finder told me who I am not related to. My paternal ancestors had not originated in the town in which they lived, and those communications pointed me to other likely origins.

The Ancestry.com Social Security Death Index, census reports and border crossing records were useful for finding more distant family. I learned that my paternal great-uncle had emigrated to the United States, where my father had spent most of a year living with him and his family before returning to Canada in the middle of the Depression. My maternal family had emigrated twice, first to England and then to Canada. I found my family's British exit documents, but

still do not know the reason for their immigration to Canada.

Another wonderful resource is the annual IAJGS conference, which offers a plethora of opportunities to learn, to meet like-minded researchers and to exchange information. At each session I have benefited from what others are doing or have done, and then taken my lessons home to follow up..

The paternal paper trail has produced much enlightenment. The maternal trail has been more difficult to follow. Both are very much works in progress. There have been dead ends, blind alleys and brick walls along the way. I have often come up against privacy laws that prevented by obtaining written evidence of what I knew to be there. Both sets of my grandparents were married in the early 20th century, but at the 100-year limit, so I am hopeful that their details will become available in the near future as more data is released into the public domain.

I have documented my father's life from his last known address in a Polish shtetl to his place of burial. In searching out the information I also learned about my extended European family and their dispersion throughout the Diaspora. This knowledge has a pivotal place in the structure of my family history. My paternal tree now spans seven generations and my maternal tree spans six. I have established contact with cousins I had not known, and accepted proffered invitations to visit. I know which of the family stories are verifiable, and which are too interesting to confirm. I also know that my father and his cousin in the United States both carried the name of their deceased grandfather, who had passed away just a few years before my father's birth.

My mother had come from a family of seven children. Her only sister, the eldest, had died before my parents were married, leaving a

husband and young son who lived in New York. Only a few of my generation had met them, though others knew of their existence. While I was in New York last summer to attend the IAJGS conference, I arranged to have lunch with my cousin and his wife. We spent some fascinating hours together, appreciating one another and comparing what we knew of the rest of our kin. It was the first time in 60 years that he had had any contact with a member of the family.



The Naimark Family in Poland, c.1921. L to Rt: Sol Naimark, Chaya Naimark Kol, Esther Naimark, Gisia Ruchla Koplewicz Naimark (Joan's grandmother), Sam Naimark, Feige Naimark, Avraham Pesech Naimark (Joan's father). The picture on the table is of the eldest son Jack, who had already emigrated.

It is unquestionably exciting to find records and make connections, but they alone cannot explain what a family is. Through this undertaking I have acquired perspective along with factual explanations. I now understand why certain values are important to some family members, and why particular decisions have been made by others. I have established a commonality of interest with other branches of the family and, bit by bit, we are discovering each other. I have also found out where and how I fit in and, because of this new insight, can better recognize the person that I am.

Joan Naimark

**THE TRAGIC FATE
OF A FAMILY
WHO WERE TOO MANY**
by Willie Glaser

Volunteering has long been a way of life for Willie Glaser. He has found that it not only brings its own rewards, but also serves as a conduit to the pursuit of personal goals. For more than 20 years he has been a volunteer in the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, and in the process has learned a great deal about researching. It was his work at Congress Archives that led him to a collection of heartbreaking letters written just before the outbreak of WWII, and he has devoted recent years to the task of finding out what happened to these letter-writers. In his immediate family, only Willie and one sister survived the Holocaust. He brings to the subject of this article not only his experience of working at Congress Archives, but also the intensity of his personal involvement.

It is the month of April, when many Yom Hashoah commemorations are taking place in Canada. This period always reminds me of a special file box in the National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Because I was born in Germany I was drawn to and fascinated by the contents of this box.

This archival box contained some 500 letters written in 1938 and 1939 by Jews from Germany and Austria to the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services and Canadian Jewish Congress. If I include members of the families, the number of Jewish people involved could easily reach some 1500 souls. The writers are asking, pleading and begging for help by CJC to get them and their families to safe haven in Canada.

Because of the anti-immigration policy of the Canadian government of the day (and I will say more about the Canadian government immigration policies later on), these Jewish organizations had to inform the applicants that due to the very stringent and choking

immigration policy by the Canadian government they were not able to extend any help. In only a very few instances was permission granted by the government to immigrate.



Josef Meth

Picture Credit: CJCCNA

Deep in my heart I knew this box contained stories that must be told, even if they, like so many Holocaust stories, are heartbreakers. I told myself, for my peace of mind, I have to find out: how many of these letter writers perished in the Holocaust? This would give me a broad idea how many survived.

A while ago Yad Vashem created an online database of some three million names. The names in the data base come from several sources,

preliminary Pages of Testimony (PoT), concentration camp records and many other historical sources. In the case of German Jews, the German government published a memorial book (*Gedenkbuch*) containing some 149,000 names of German Jews who perished in the Holocaust and which was used by Yad Vashem as a very important source. In many instances, when I type in the name of a letter writer into the Yad Vashem data base, the Yad Vashem data base showed the German memorial book as a source.

One name, that of Josef Meth, caught my eye, and I gave this file my special attention. Josef Meth, his four sons (including twin boys), and his daughter were born in Nuernberg, a sister town of Fuerth where I was born.

On March 24, 1942, Joseph and his young family were deported to the transit camp Izbica in Poland. Izbica served as a holding camp for the extermination camp Belzec, and nobody

survived Belzec. The Meth family perished either in Izbica or Belzec. Josef's wife, who had been residing in New York since May 1939, apparently kept trying to find a way to bring the family to the USA.

Another important reason why I have chosen Josef Meth as a representative name is that my mother and her family were also deported on March 24, 1942 on the same transport as Josef, and met with the same fate.

Josef Meth and his children have been commemorated in the "*Gedenkbuch fuer die Nuernberger Opfer der Shoah*", "Memorial book for the Nuernberg victims of the Shoah".

I have concluded the search for the ultimate fate of Josef Meth and his family. He and his family mirror the fate of the many hundred German and Austrian Jews who appealed to JIAS and CJC to help them to immigrate to Canada. They did not have to perish in the Shoah.

J'ACCUSE

In my personal opinion their living or dying was decided by two men in Canada. These two Canadians were the Prime Minister of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King and his henchman Frederick Charles Blair.

As documented by Abella and Troper in their famous book *None is Too Many*, F.C. Blair was a pure anti-Semite. In 1935 he was appointed director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. Blair implemented the restrictive immigration policies to the hilt, no pardon given. They were his policies and he personally looked after the "Jewish file". Blair was a civil servant and his actions mirrored the wishes of his Prime Minister W. L. Mackenzie King. Jewish organizations had no power. The three sitting Jewish Members of Parliament were not able to influence the Prime Minister or Blair.

The negative attitude of the prime minister towards Jews should not be surprising. One has only to read between the lines in W.L. King's diary about his visit to Hitler in 1937 to understand his reasoning.

Many historians have written in great detail about this black and shameful period in Canadian history. Many people are witness. On April 15, 2007, I and many hundreds of Jews were standing on Parliament Hill in Ottawa with another Prime Minister of Canada to commemorate Yom Hashoah.



**Willie Glaser, in his Canadian Legion uniform with decorations, accompanying Irving Cotler at the wreath-laying ceremony on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Holocaust Remembrance Day 2007.
Picture Credit: Canadian Society for Yad Vashem**

Standing there on Parliament Hill, my mind was filled with thoughts of the many Jewish souls whose letters I have read and who could have been saved – but instead, they perished in the Holocaust.

**"Hashem Yinkum Danam"
"May G-D avenge their blood"**



**27th IAJGS International
Conference on Jewish Genealogy**

Sunday, July 15—Friday, July 20

Hilton City Center

Salt Lake City, Utah

Here in Montreal at our now more-than-a-decade-old Jewish Genealogical Society, we have an average of nine or ten programmes a year, along with an equal number of workshops. As with the experience of all other societies, some programmes are more successful than others, but if you look at the whole year there is something of interest for everyone. We also have our own quarterly journal, which with this issue is completing its first two years of existence. Our president is skilled at chivying us into all kinds of projects and some of the results have been duly recognized by IAJGS. But we have trumpeted those achievements enough already, so let me just say that we do also work on other projects that are not so well known.

Where does the energy come from? A lot of places. But it would be foolhardy to ignore the impetus that is derived year by year from the IAJGS Conferences. Stan Diamond describes the attendees as being like students in a one-room school house, some in kindergarten, others in grade school, and still others in high school. And then there is the small group of those who made it to ‘college’ and even a few who are clearly in ‘graduate school’. It is obvious that in this setting the more experienced help the others, but the fact remains that the enthusiastic and curious newcomers teach the experts a great deal. Another of our members, Merle Kastner, is also regular in her attendance at these conferences. She notes that being surrounded by people with a common, passionate interest in genealogy not only adds to knowledge, but also leads to the pleasure of forming lasting friendships with kindred spirits.

Stan will once again be very busy this year. Not only will he be giving two lectures on Tuesday and Wednesday, but will also be fielding questions at the end of the showing of the film Past Lives (Stan’s own genealogy adventures) - twice. And this year he will be joined as a speaker by Alan Greenberg on Monday. Way back in 1996 in Boston, I was a speaker, so I know full well how much work goes into preparation. Montreal is always well represented, with some of the more regular attendees being Jerry Zell, Annette Coltin, Joan Naimark, Martin Tafler and others. And if you cannot make it yourself this year, come to our post conference wrap-up meeting on Monday 20th August.

**CANADIAN
BIRDS OF A FEATHER
Breakfast Meeting
Friday 20 July 8.15-9.30am
Room 332**

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While we, the Montreal Forum editorial trio, endeavour to ensure that all information presented in our publication is accurate, we wish to remind our readers that we cannot guarantee it.

DEADLINE FOR THE SEPTEMBER 2007 ISSUE - 15 AUGUST

ON THE CARE AND APPRECIATION OF OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

by Janice Rosen
Archives Director
Canadian Jewish Congress
Charities Committee
National Archives



For this issue, Janice is giving to us the benefit of her knowledge on a topic that creeps into the puzzlement category for all of us as we try to make sense of our genealogy collection. All those photos. What should we be doing with them. Where and how should we store them.

When we think of “old photographs” likely the first image that comes to mind is of a faded sepia-toned portrait, mounted on a dark and cracking cardboard. In fact, sometimes when filmmakers call here seeking period images for their historical re-creations, they request that the photos look like this. “But they didn’t look this way right after they were made!” I try to convince them, with variable levels of success.

I have noted that people’s reactions to old photographs of relatives run the gamut between an ardent desire to preserve and know everything about each one, to total indifference towards any photograph that is not clearly identified and personally meaningful to them. It is natural that the rarer an image is, the more it will be treasured, so that even a small blurred picture of a little-photographed ancestor is worth

preserving, while piles of images of long-ago birthday parties or unknown relatives posed in front of unidentified statuary become of lesser interest as times goes on.

From an archivist’s point of view, however, I would opine that in these latter cases, even a photo of unidentified people has value when it is a clear and well-composed image. It may not be of value to the family in this case, but at the CJCCC National Archives we field many requests for good photos of “typical” families of particular places and times, for shopkeepers in their stores (especially on Montreal’s St-Laurence Boulevard!) or other images of people at work, for photos of mothers and their children, for photos of people in pre-war Europe, and in the early days of the Land of Israel. So, to those of you who have such beautiful but mystifying treasures in your coffers, please bear this in mind.

We will now look at some of the enemies of photograph preservation, and some of the measures you can take to better preserve the photographs you treasure.

As doctors are told when they begin to practice medicine – “first, do no harm.” The cardboard mounting paper behind most turn of the last century photographs is made of paper with a high level of acidity and in many cases is what accounts for the discoloration of the prints. However, it is best not to try to remove the photo from its backing. Old black album pages are also acidic, but unless the photos are detached already, I would not advise removing them from the context in which they were originally placed.



**Jewish Legion Soldier
in Israel**

Fingerprints (and yes, this includes thumbprints) are damaging to the surface of photographic images due to even minute amounts of oil and other residues on one's skin, so it is important to hold prints and negatives by the edges. And while on the subject of residues: glue and tape are rarely neutral in their effects over the long-term, so don't use them to attach photos to

be damaged further with handling. Large format white (not dark manila) envelopes are a less expensive and equally safe solutions, but I would not recommend them as much for the photos you are likely to show often, since you will have to manipulate them more by removing them in order to see them.



album pages, or use the type of albums that adhere a plastic coating over the top of your prints. And if you have loose photos with sticky residue resulting from one of these practices, keep them separate from the prints next to them by interleaving a piece of (preferably acid-free, or bond) paper between them. The best types of photo albums are the one that allow one to slip your photos into clear mylar sleeves.

Fragile old photos with tears or with corners that are beginning to curl can also be placed into archival quality mylar sleeves (available at photo and art supply stores) so that they will not

I won't venture to give advice about advanced techniques in photo restoration, but here is one type of intervention you can do at home. You may have some photos that have curled badly, or even some wide-format group photos that have rolled themselves into a tube. I have had some success in flattening photos by making the backing paper slightly damp with a lightly moistened sponge, laying the photo on absorbent paper, covering it with another sheet of paper, and placing an even weight such as a book on top of it overnight. But the results in the cases of really bad curling can be underwhelming, and

this is definitely not an experiment for the heavy-handed.

It is always good to have identifying information on your photos, but what people choose to write the identification with is often not a good choice. Most pen inks will smear on the back of glossy photos, and the sharp point of a ballpoint pen can poke impressions through to the front of the print. The best writing implement for the backs of almost all vintages of prints, and the only solution for the very glossy ones, is a soft lead pencil, something around a 6B. Of course, if you have all your valued prints housed in paper envelopes, you can simply write the information on the envelope.

Meanwhile, digital photo identification and preservation raises a whole new roster of concerns. However, this subject has been addressed quite often in recent newspaper articles and on amateur photography websites and I have gone on long enough already, so I will leave that aspect of this subject aside for the present time.



All photographs selected from the collection at Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives.

UK CENSUS RECORDS --- REMINDER

Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths began in England in the 3rd quarter of 1837. Although census records had been taken since 1801, it was not until 1841 that the data became useful for genealogists with the addition of name records. OK, I know that the Domesday Book data predates this, but for even the few of us who can track back to 1086, the content and presentation style were quite different.

The dates on which each census was taken from 1841 to 1901 is shown here. There will forever be a 30 year gap from 1921 to 1951, because the 1931 census records were destroyed by fire (by accident, not after bombing) during World War Two. As for 1941, people obviously had more

important things than organizing a census on their minds during the war.

1841: 6 June	1881: 3 April
1851: 30 March	1891: 5 April
1861: 7 April	1901: 31 March
1871: 2 April	

Years for which data not yet released.

1911: 2 April	1971: 25 April
1821: 19 June	1981: 5 April
1951: 8 April	1991: 21 April
1961: 23 April	2001: 29 April

Montreal - In Days Gone By KEEPING CONNECTED

For immigrants of any time in any place, keeping in touch with family and homeland becomes really important. As does preserving all the new experiences, the new sights, the new people, the new customs, the new everything. Standing alone on the concourse of Windsor Station back in February 1959, after my shipmates had all gone their separate ways, I pondered my next move and wondered “what have I done!”. The moment quickly passed and quite literally within minutes, I was digging in and enjoying myself enormously. I had kept a diary at sea as I moved from the old to the new, and copied most of this in letters to my mother. Like all mothers, she wanted “all the details”.

I wanted to keep track of all these happenings, too, but knew that if I tried both keeping a diary and writing letters to my mother, it would become a chore. So I wrote weekly letters to Ma, and asked her to keep my ramblings for me to pick up on my first trip back to England.

For my husband’s family arriving here back in 1760, there were no planes winging across the Atlantic, just slow ships. I’m sure they wrote letters, and oh how I would love to find some of them somewhere. Then as the family grew in size here in Canada and over the border into America, all added to the original European cluster of relatives, letter-writing became a bit of a chore that took up a lot of time. So they built up interesting circuits. Anyone in the circle would send a letter on to the next person, and eventually it would get back to the writer. In the meantime others in the circle would be doing the same thing, and so one’s news got around – eventually – with just one letter. It worked.

And then in 1896, a 12-year old schoolboy in Quebec City, my father-in-law’s brother, prepared a newsletter that he distributed to his branch of the family at Purim. He called it The Moon, and in it he announced such earth-

shattering news as the fact that the weekly card game had been cribbage instead of euchre, that S. Shovel Esq had broken his leg, and that the birth had occurred of a doll to his sister. Move over Randolph Hearst.

Somehow the idea caught on and was developed as an annual newsletter over the years. It went through many stages. The first important change was that family members would provide one page letters that would be assembled into a wee journal. Editing The Moon remained the task of my uncle, Pinto Joseph, until he left for university, at which time my father-in-law, Edward Joseph, took over.

By the 1960s, each annual issue of The Moon was assembled by a different member of the family, and this continued until the 100th issue in 1995.

The latest major change was when my husband’s son, David Joseph (grandnephew of Pinto), took over the editorship in 1996. We had entered the era of computers, and so The Moon switched to becoming produced with desktop publishing.

The latest issue, number 112, contains 142 pages and is mailed out to about 120 households. It is split into sections, including family letters, births & deaths, social section, arts & literature, humour (this is usually too awful for words!), and family history. Guess who is roped in for the history section: David starts bugging me soon after Pesach to start worrying about what I shall be doing next time around.

We have a complete set of 112 issues, which has been a boon for me as I worked on the Joseph family history. There are irritating references that none of us can figure out, but in the main it makes for wonderful reading. In these days of emails and desktop publishing, it is a great way for families to stick together with really little effort – except for the editor, of course.

Anne Joseph

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Stanley Diamond

In this issue, Editor Anne Joseph quotes my characterization of an IAJGS conference as being a vast schoolhouse mixing together students just starting out in kindergarten and, at the end of the spectrum, experts who have made it all the way to graduate school.

It's easy to extrapolate this thought to every aspect of the Jewish genealogical world. Most societies are also schools in which new and old members share their knowledge and learn together. Perhaps my own journey can inspire others to aim to "graduate" as well.

In 1999, I was invited to be the keynote speaker at one of the Toronto society's workshops. It was a special pleasure for me, because it had been two of their leaders who had played very important roles in expanding my involvement in the genealogical world. At the International Conference on Jewish genealogy in Toronto in 1993, their then President Henry Wellisch urged me to start a Montreal society. A year later, Toronto's founding President, Dr. Rolf Lederer, was guest speaker at our Montreal society's first meeting. Listening to him that day, I couldn't imagine my knowledge of Jewish Family History research reaching the point where I'd be asked to be a speaker.

Let me go back to where I started, because my experience illustrates how all of us can learn that those doors to our family history - the ones we may believe are locked forever - can be opened, and that we can learn how to get past the walls of family silence or follow the paper trail. We can find relatives who may have survived - and even some we may not have known about. We can perform mitzvot by helping survivors find flesh and blood that they never knew existed, or from whom they were separated by the Holocaust. My journey started when a man in

Hawaii, Arthur Fink, asked my older brother a question ... "whatever happened to his Diamond cousins in Canada?" Arthur Fink! I'd never heard that name before - yet, he is my late father's first cousin!

But that doesn't answer the question as to why people now think of me as some sort of a maven on Jewish Family History, or why I have found the study of Jewish genealogy to be so fascinating and rewarding. What led me to conceive the idea of a project to create an Internet-searchable index of the Jewish vital records of Poland. How did I end up with tools to unite Holocaust survivors and long-lost or never known family members.

When I attended my first conference in New York in 1992, I knew almost nothing about genealogical research. Looking back at the early and quite embarrassing letters I'd written, the misdirected research I'd done, and some of the naïve conclusions I'd reached, I now know that these first steps were part of the learning process. I've come a long way since then and the journey was possible because there were many people, experts I could call on who knew a little - usually a lot - more than I did. These are the same experts you can call on. Many of them are right here in Montreal, members of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal.

Back to how I got "from there to here"; I listened, learned, evolved, and learned even more through helping others. There's expertise everywhere, at every level. We all have more research tools than ever before. The Internet enables virtually everyone to jump-start their research and often find long-lost relatives, in some cases overnight.

When it happens, there are feelings of both excitement and satisfaction. What more can we ask for?

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