



Where Are You From?

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Since I was a young child, I have enjoyed hearing stories from friends and relatives about our ancestors and the experiences that they had. My maternal grandmother would say "I am going to tell you, Linda, because someone has to remember" and then would go into great detail about the people and events that were long-gone but stored in her memory. She would also have me repeat words to the Lord's Prayer in Norwegian, line by line until I had the proper pronunciation. It was obvious that she believed she had a legacy of stories to pass on to me and the generations to come.

I adopted grandma's respect for family history and, over the years, have used an old briefcase to house obituaries, cards, photos and notes that I jotted down after interesting conversations. The briefcase has become more and more full over the years and now it is hard to close.

When my mother died, I inherited boxes of photographs. Many of pictures show smiling faces of nameless individuals who I realize I might never be able to identify. I know that each photo is a key to the past but also realize that I might not be able to use them to unlock doors that are now locked.

And through the years, I have had a growing feeling that, like my maternal grandmother, I have something of value to pass on to the generations to come.

Sometimes I would write or tell family history stories to my grandchildren who were interested because of school assignments. Often, I would share ancestral tales with my children during casual conversations. Frequently, they would respond with comments like "How do you know all that?" or "How can you remember all those details?" and my reply is always the same "This is important." You see, knowing the past helps us understand ourselves and how our identities were formed.

We have all learned so many lessons from the story of my paternal grandfather who, as an orphan, came from England to Canada when he was ten years of age and never saw his family again. His courage reminds me to carry on when things are difficult. My maternal grandmother's family also emigrated from England but pioneered in Ontario before moving to the bald prairie which became my birthplace. They taught me that life is a series of choices that lead us from one life situation to another.

The healthy pride that my maternal grandmother had in her Norwegian roots reminds me to treasure the culture that shapes us. Her husband's family, who originated in Germany and settled in the eastern United States before grandpa came to Canada, is a testimony to ongoing relationship. The family continues to have strong links through the dozens of individuals who continue not only to communicate with each other but also to share the historical nuggets they possess of those who came before.

But I have learned so many other things about life through my hobby with genealogy - like the values that were commonly held. Respect for others, the importance of honesty and the way that spiritual faith can sustain in times of trouble were evidenced in the lives of my ancestors. I have been shocked by how strong they were during times of loss and how they moved forward into the unknown with faith and hope.

I don't want to live in the past - especially when the future offers such interesting possibilities, but, at the same time, I am thankful that I have had the opportunity to examine the past through the lives of my family members and cause their stories as inspiration.

When people ask me "Where are you from?" I can confidently answer "A good place".

Where are you from?