
The Ethnic Voice

The Newsletter of the Moquah Heritage Society, Inc.

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A Minnesota man helps his grandpa find his father, 91 years later

By

Molly Guthrey / St. Paul Pioneer Press

Just months after finally learning his dad's identity, (Richard) Mihalek traveled almost 1,000 miles from Washburn, Wis., to stand at the grave of Ralph Bewley in Hamblen Memory Gardens in Morristown, Tenn.

As other family members stood back, Mihalek stepped forward. He held his arms out.

"Here I am," he said to the stone in the ground. "And here you are."

No one should have to meet their father in a cemetery, but Mihalek felt thankful to meet him at all.

"After 90 years or so, you pretty much think, 'Well, that's the end of that', Mihalek said.

It wasn't, though — thanks to his grandson in St. Paul, who began looking into some gaps in the family tree.



Photo from the original newspaper article.

to try to do some online genealogy. I picked up a subscription to Ancestry.com and started researching daily."

Bitzer's interest in genealogy was something he had in common with his grandpa.

"I knew he had done genealogy research on his mom's side," Bitzer said, "His mother's parents were immigrants from Slovakia. Grandpa had traveled to Slovakia five or six times, first when it was a Soviet bloc country and later as an independent nation, to visit the gravesites of ancestors and meet relatives."

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A GRANDSON'S QUESTIONS

Nathan Bitzer, Mihalek's grandson, didn't initially set out to solve a family mystery back in 2015.

"I was working in the oil fields of North Dakota at the time," said Bitzer. "Instead of watching 'The Sopranos' in my downtime, I wanted to do something productive. I decided

As for his dad's side ...

"I knew from my mom that she never knew who her paternal grandfather was," said Bitzer. "But I never officially approached my grandpa to ask him about it until a couple of years ago."

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A Message from the President

by
Irene (Zurian) Walter

Finding Your Roots

Last year Dave and I decided to exchange the gift of genealogy for Christmas. AncestryDNA had a great online special to determine ethnicity. We sent in our saliva specimens in November and by Christmas received results via email. Dave is “goulash” and so he expected the mixed European heritage that was reported. I, however, was somewhat surprised that I was 12% British, a bit Finnish, Italian, North African and Native American? Yes, most of my background, about 84% was central/eastern European, but 12% British? Of no surprise was that my sisters were in the “possible range of immediate family.” I didn’t need a test kit for that! As the year went by, I periodically checked the Ancestry site. I even emailed a couple of “new” relatives that were listed but sadly, no one has replied. During the past year Ancestry had such great response to their promotion of genealogy research that they were able to expand their initial data base of 3,000 participants to 16,000. A few months ago, I was able to update my results. I find I am now 98% eastern European, mainly the regions of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania and western Ukraine with 2% from the Baltic states. Now, that sounds more like me.

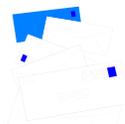
I think some of the recent interest in DNA and genealogy was sparked by the initiation of the Human Genome Project in 1990. The 15 years of research remains the world's largest collaborative biological project that revealed 20,500 human genes. We have also been intrigued by the use of DNA in forensics, DNA extraction, genetic engineering and information storage. Now through genetic programs such as

AncestryDNA, a breakdown of ethnicity covering 26 ethnic regions from around the world can be mapped. More current testing can follow the male “Y” chromosome. These Y chromosomes are passed from father to son virtually unchanged, just as surnames are passed down in western societies, making it easy to track through genealogy.

In this issue, we are happy to pass on a wonderful story of DNA discovery involving one of our long-time, dedicated members of the Moquah Heritage Society, Richard Mihalek. Richard has found new roots that make him so happy, he could almost dance a jig! We hope you enjoy his story and the other stories in this issue that show how technology is helping us decode history.

Irene

Readers Respond



“It was a pleasure visiting with you a few weeks ago. Thank you for re-introducing me to the Ethnic Voice. I’ll look forward to my next edition. Thanks for finding and giving me the past Ethnic Voice issue on the Piontek’s.” – **Richard Piontek, Elm Grove, WI.**

“I am the daughter of Ethel (Kucik) Beauchamp and I would like to know if there is a way to search for articles about the Kucik family? I know there was one, years ago, and would love to find it. My mother has enjoyed receiving the Ethnic Voice for many years, Thank you!” – **Teresa (Beauchamp) Sydor, Sewickley, PA.**

The Ethnic Voice is published quarterly to aid communication and promote the pioneer spirit between members and friends of the Moquah Heritage Society. Your ideas, articles and comments are always welcome. Please submit them or any questions to:

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Thank You!

Finding His Father

(Continued from page 1)

Bitzer eventually brought it up in a conversation about digitizing his grandfather's genealogy research. There was so much on Mihalek's maternal side, but nothing at all for the paternal line.

"I approached him delicately at first," Bitzer said. "I said, 'Are you OK talking about this?' He was."

There wasn't much to talk about. "I had no leads," Mihalek said.

A MOTHER'S MYSTERY

Here's what Mihalek does know: "My mother, like so many, wouldn't have had anything to do after finishing school in Wisconsin," Mihalek said. "She would have had to leave the family farm and go somewhere for work. Eventually, my mother ended up in Cleveland because we had relatives there."

He knows that his mother, Julia Mihalek, arrived in Ohio in 1925. He knows that she found work as a live-in maid for a well-to-do family in a suburb of Cleveland. And he knows that she was 18 when she gave birth to him Dec. 15, 1926.

He didn't know much more than that for a long time.

"My mother would divulge nothing," said Mihalek.

Julia was his mother, but another woman was his parent during those early years.

"As a live-in maid, my mother wasn't allowed to have children living with her," said Mihalek. "She was close to her aunt and uncle in Cleveland, who had no children, so it was my great aunt who raised me. She's the only mom I really knew."

Julia was still part of his life, though.

"I knew her as the woman who came over and bought me double-dip ice cream cones," Mihalek said.

Everything changed when he was in the third grade.

"I came home for lunch at noon and my aunt had stroked out," said Mihalek. "She died that night."

The extended family made plans for the boy that he didn't quite understand at first.

"They asked me if I wanted to go to Grandma and Grandpa's farm in Wisconsin," he said. "I said yes — but I didn't understand that it was permanent. It worked out fine — after a number of years."

A BOY'S JOURNEY

It took the city boy awhile to transform into a farm boy.

"Imagine you come from the city, 9 years old, and go out to the farm," Mihalek said. "Everybody had to do some of the chores, so I had to be a very fast learner. Pretty soon, I had my own two cows to milk, a horse to harness, I had to do hay work like the rest. We had no tractors or electricity or running water. In Cleveland, we had comforts like running water and I could even go to the movies for a nickel."

But that wasn't the hardest part. The hardest part was carrying the perceived stigma of his start in life.

"My grandma had a hard time with it," said Mihalek. "I could feel that all the time."

He felt differently with his grandfather.

"My grandpa was the closest I had to a dad," he said. "But he was very busy and very poor — four of their kids were at home yet. I was older than some of my aunts and uncles."

His mother was 800 miles away, but he still saw her once a year.

"She would come out each summer for a week or so," he said.

A FAMILY'S HUGS

Unlike his mother, Mihalek was able to finish high school and, because World War II was still being fought, he was drafted and served as the war was ending. Afterward, he chose to return to the place that now felt most like home — Wisconsin — and the G.I. Bill paved a path to college and a career as a high school teacher of the sciences.

"When a job in Ashland opened up," Mihalek said, "I decided, 'I'm going home to the trees, the deer and the outdoors.' And that's where I finished my life career."

Mihalek also became a husband and a father, which he found healing.

"There was a void in my life before," he said. "I discovered hugs."

His mother, who married later in life, never did reveal more about the origins of her only child.

"Being a 1926 model," Mihalek said of himself, "they just didn't talk about that. The mores of the time meant my mother and my grandparents felt ashamed. ... I did ask her, but I didn't press it. I think she tried to put it out of her mind."

FOLLOWING THE DNA

It wasn't only a father who was missing from the family tree — a grandpa was, too.

"We did ask our dad and our aunts and uncles quite a bit about it," said Barbara Bitzer, one of Mihalek's five children. "But no one seemed to know anything."

By the time her son, Nathan Bitzer, began researching the family tree, technology made other lines of inquiry possible.

"You know, they're doing a lot of things with DNA now," Bitzer told his grandfather. "That might give us a clue. Maybe we can figure it out."

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Finding His Father

(Continued from page 3)

Mihalek — who had taught biology and chemistry as a teacher — was intrigued.

“I bought him a DNA kit from Ancestry for Father’s Day in 2016,” Bitzer said.

The results were confusing.

“I’m a novice, so it was challenging to interpret,” said Bitzer. “I saw a pattern, but no rhyme or reason to it.”

There was one clear clue: Matches were popping up in eastern Tennessee.

“We have no connection to eastern Tennessee,” Bitzer said.

Not that they knew of, anyway.

To help make the search more linear, Bitzer asked his grandfather to take a second test from Family Tree DNA: “A ‘Y’ test,” he said. “It follows the male descendants. It follows the surname.”

This helped clear the path.

“I didn’t know if it would show anything, but I did get three matches with the name Bewley,” said Bitzer. “I was pretty confident that this was his father’s last name.”

By studying another family tree online, Bitzer narrowed the candidates to two men.

“All the names lined up to two brothers who were alive at the time my grandfather was born and who were within 10 years of my grandma’s age,” Bitzer said. “So, I looked in a Cleveland directory from 1926 — and there was Ralph D. Bewley. He was in the directory that one year only — the next year he was gone. My grandpa was born at the end of 1926.

“When I got to that point, not quite a year from when my grandpa took the first test, I felt really confident,” he said. “I was almost certain that Ralph Bewley was going to be his father.”

Bewley would have been single and 21 years old when he lived in Cleveland in 1926. He died in Tennessee in 1988 at the age of 82, survived by a wife and nine children — or was it 10?

“When Nathan said, ‘I think I know who your father is,’ I thought, ‘Whoa!’ ” Mihalek said. “You know, when you’re 90 or 91 years old, you don’t get so shook up like when you were a kid. You try to keep it cool, not get all twisted up. But this one ... my head isn’t all the way around it.’

NOW WHAT?

Bitzer turned to DNA Detectives, a Facebook group for genetic genealogy.

“Someone suggested that I try to approach the younger generation, people around my age,” Bitzer said. “They said to just tell them what I found — not that I know it as a fact. And then hopefully we could confirm it through DNA.”

He did have some leads dating back to 1999. “I found an obituary for Ralph Bewley’s wife, Lona, with the names of their children,” he said.

Bitzer also found Jonathon Bewley, a grandson who is a pastor in Tennessee.

“Nathan sent me a Facebook message,” said Bewley. “I didn’t know him, so I overlooked it. Then he reached out to our church.”

Bewley figured it was a message that couldn’t wait.

“I went back to Facebook, opened the message and began to read,” he said. “I thought, ‘Oh, wow, this kind of sounds far-fetched.’ ”

But after reading the details of Bitzer’s genealogy journey, Bewley decided to do his own research.

“I had to see if my grandfather had spent a year in Ohio,” he said. “I just didn’t know if that was true. I didn’t tell anyone in the family I was looking for proof, but I did some asking around — and I found out that Grandpa *did* live in Ohio for a short time, when he was younger and looking for work. He had talked about how cold it was. He came back about a year later.

“At that point, I told Nathan that I would take a DNA test.”

The results were clear.

“Richard (Mihalek) was one of my strongest matches on Ancestry.com,” Bewley said.

It was time to tell his father — Jack Bewley, one of Ralph Bewley’s sons — what they had learned.

“When you tell someone, who is 81 that they have a brother they never knew who is 91, it’s a bit of a shock,” Bewley said. “Once I told my father, it took a couple of days to process, but then he embraced it. From there, we began to tell other family members.”

THE NEWS

No one knows how Julia and Ralph met. They do know that they were both young, they were both working in a big city away from home — and that he was a musician who played the guitar.

“Maybe when we get to heaven we’ll find out the whole story,” Barbara Bitzer said. “There’s just so much mystery involved.”

The Bewleys are sure of one thing, though.

“The type of individual my grandfather was, if he knew he had a son out there, he would have moved heaven and earth to reach out to him,” Bewley said. “That he never mentioned it to anyone, we came to the conclusion that this was a very brief encounter.”

Just like his son, Ralph Bewley had a tough start in life.

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Finding His Father

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“His parents died at a young age, so he lived with family members and was bounced around as a child,” Jonathon Bewley said. “It’s so ironic, how they grew up the same way.”

After Ohio, Ralph Bewley bounced around again, working in the Kentucky coal mines before returning home to work at a furnace factory and tending his family farm in Russellville, Tenn. When he married his wife, Lona, he became a stepfather to her son, and they went on to have eight more children.

THE MEETING

The Bewleys and their big brother finally met in October.

“When I got to Tennessee, the first thing they said was, ‘You look just like Daddy,’” Mihalek said.

He also learned something about his family. “They are the hugging-est people,” he said.

The siblings are staying in touch and their reunion will continue next year, when the Bewley clan plans to visit their brother in northern Wisconsin.

“God works in amazing ways,” said Jonathon Bewley. “Part of me feels the timing of this is not coincidental. I think the siblings were meant to find each other at this time in their lives, when they’re elderly and dealing with health problems. This has been a nice thing to happen to them at this time in their lives — it’s brought them some joy and happiness.”

Printed 24 November 2018.

Clues in the Dress: Dating Photos Using Clothing

The Wisconsin Historical Society provides free Webinars, available to the public with registration. Recently Barb Grek and Irene Walter participated in an informative webinar presented by Leslie Ballais, Curator of Social Life, Wisconsin Historical Museum. Leslie has studied clothing trends for both men and women and has catalogued styles for each decade from 1840 to 1940. She demonstrated how it is possible to date photos by noting the style of clothing worn. Consider that clothing may be out of date in the photo and the older the person, the more dated the clothing. Also, peasant (farmer) clothing is most likely several years behind current trends. Clues in the fitting of the blouse and skirt, the collar or necktie and hairstyles and hats all help determine when a photo was taken.

Here are examples of dating photos using clothing:

The upper photo was professionally done and has definite clues.

In the lower photo the clues are not so definite. The photo is ordinary but the clues are still there in the mid-calf length and narrower skirts. The bodices are blousy and the hats are smaller with the hairstyle shorter. These clues are consistent with post World War I styles. This photo is dated 1922.

If you are interested in further information you can access the webinars at: Wisconsinhistory.org. Under SEARCH, type in Webinars. To find the clothing webinar select General Information: LOCAL HISTORY WEBINARS.



This dress has a narrow waist with tucked blousy top, full-flared, gored skirt. Stand-up collar and somewhat puffy sleeves. Hats are bigger. All these clues are consistent with styles of the late 1890s-1900s decades. This photo is of Mary Hlatko and is dated 1902.



Here is another picture. Can you see any clues to when it was taken? Pictured are Mary Patka at left and Mary Zoldos at right.

In Memoriam . . .



NW Sands Auto Tour Project

Many of you remember the *Moquah Barrens Auto Tour* guide prepared by the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Service. This self-guided booklet highlighted various ecosystems of the pine barrens along forest roads north and west of Ino. Recently, it has been difficult to obtain the booklet and the signposts along the route disappeared. This is because a “new, improved, extended” auto route is being planned! The new guide named the “NW Sands Auto Tour” will include the Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape. This is a large area of glacial outwash with sands hundreds of feet deep that create a unique drought-prone environment. The landscape is unlike any other forest types in Northern Wisconsin and is considered globally significant. The route extends from the city of Bayfield in a southwest trajectory to near St. Croix Falls. The tour will follow the 1850s route of the Bayfield-to-St. Croix Stage Trail as closely as possible, demarcating ecological, historical, geological, cultural and natural points of interest.

Several groups have begun to work together to create the tour guide for print and as an App for iPhones, thus providing a tool more suitable for younger generations. The Moquah Heritage Society has joined the team to develop “our portion” of this auto tour. We hope to incorporate information about blueberry picking, the open Section 26, the Actor’s settlement (north of Ottman’s) and the one-room schools built in the barrens. We also want to include directions to the Moquah gravel pit (which exhibits a towering wall of sand) and the visible portion of the St. Croix side-trail which lies just north/east of Barrens and Kerr Roads.

If anyone has any interest in becoming a part of the development of the auto tour or has any interesting information to feature, please contact Dave and Irene Walter.

Rose (Treba) Lajcak, 99, of Ashland, WI, and formerly of Moquah, passed away October 15, 2018 at Ashland Health and Rehabilitation Center in Ashland. Rose was born at the family home on Water Street in Ashland, the daughter of Charles and Helen (Bieseik) Treba.

Rose was the eldest daughter in a family of 15 brothers and sisters. She always loved the old neighborhood by the Oredock and the shores of Lake Superior. In 1941 Rose married Andy Lajcak from Moquah. Andy passed away in 1973.

She was always involved in the community where she belonged to numerous organizations over the years, including Moquah and Holy Family Churches, Pythian sisters, VFW clubs, 4-H leader, Moquah homemakers and Senior Center Volunteering.

Rose is survived by her children; Tom (Charlene) Lajcak of Moquah, Jane (Dennis) Asbach of Ashland, Betsy Tobin of Peshtigo, WI, Tracy (Tom) Pristash of Moquah; Brothers, John Treba of Troy, MI, Tom Treba of Muskego, WI; Sisters, Helen Duquaine of Milwaukee, WI, Mary Lou (Ronald) Welton of Chicago, IL, Sister Jean Micheal Treba of Saint John, KS; Special sister Paulynn Instennis of Saint John, KS; and Daughter in law, Linda Lajcak of Maryville, MO.

Preceding Rose in death are her parents, husband, sons; James and Charles; Siblings, Chet, Esther Hanson, Clara Pagac, Agnes Delvaux, Irene Pagelsdorf, Isabelle Nelson, Charlie, Infants Adam and Eve.

A Funeral Service was held at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic

Church in Moquah. Visitation was at the Mountain Funeral Home in Ashland, WI. Interment was in Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery in Moquah, WI.

Susan Marie (Bassett) Chvatik, 62, of Benoit, WI, passed away October 13, 2018 at her home. She was born in Ashland, the daughter of Robert and Marjorie (Hagstrom) Bassett.

Sue graduated from Ashland High School in 1974. She married Anthony Chvatik on January 21, 1987. Sue worked for nearly 40 years at Lake Shore Buses of Ashland, driving in Ashland and Drummond.

She is survived by her husband of 31 years, Tony of Benoit, three sons, Mark Chvatik of Benoit, Max Chvatik of St. Cloud, MN and Anthony “Toner” Chvatik of Benoit, and a brother, Bob (JoAnn) Bassett of Ashland, WI.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

A memorial service was held at the Roberts Funeral Home in Ashland with Pastor J.D. Weber officiating. Visitation was at the funeral home.

Jeffrey J. Ottman, 52, passed away December 8, 2018 at his home near Ashland, WI. He was the son of Edward and Barb (Oratch) Ottman of Moquah.

Jeff is survived by his sons, Brendan and Jesse Ottman; mother, Barb Ottman; siblings, Lyn (Gary), Mark (Jenny), Burt (Heidi), Lisa (Jack) and Lori (Jim).

He was preceded in death by his father, Edward. Per Jeff’s wishes, a private celebration of his life will be held.

Moquah Heritage Society Items for Sale

Slovak-American Cook Book — \$12.00

Published by the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association on the 60th Anniversary of their founding in 1952, this is the 19th edition. The cookbook includes the favorite Slovak and American recipes collected through the years by the members. Includes recipes for paprikas, halusky, klobasky, studenina and pastries like roshky, fanky and kolacky. (hard cover 439 p.)

The History of the Moquah Area —\$10.00

This is a reprint of the original book compiled by Jerry Novak in 1966. We have recreated, to the best of our ability, the original format and content. We did, however, make a few corrections and added some names to photos from the original book in an addendum. **The price includes shipping and handling.** (42 pages)

The Volumes of the Ethnic Voice — \$15.00 each

The Ethnic Voice in five-year sets. Each book contains 5 years of area history, news and local happenings. Issues from 1987-1991, 1992-1996, 1997-2001, 2002-2006, 2007 to 2011 and now **2012-2016** included in volumes 1 through 6. Please add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

Getting Ahead, From Love of Reading to Love of Healing—\$17.00 (plus \$2.00 shipping)

An autobiography by Dr. August Jurishica, this book traces his early life from growing up in Slovakia, his immigration to the U.S. and all the obstacles he encountered on his way to a medical degree from the University of Wisconsin. An inspiring story of struggle and success.

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