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“Who do you think you are?” A search for roots.

Thursday, June 27, 2013

If you're a celebrity you may be highlighted on a TV special. If you're not, you're on your own.

I'm writing today to explain my recent 1000 mile journey to the coal regions of Pennsylvania. After my recent blogs from Europe (Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest...) continuing to travel to Wilkes-Barre, Carbondale, Forest City, PA seems rather anticlimactic.

I've done the "hard" work. I've found the records in the "old country," traced back several generations and found relatives still living in the ancestral villages, descendants of those siblings who didn't immigrate to the USA. There had been no contact between the families in over 70 years.

This trip wasn't about the logistics of genealogy. I'm pretty good at that now. Now I want to know more about who these people were, their history, and why some left everything they knew to travel to an unknown future and some did not.

Kings College in Wilkes-Barre was hosting a "Rusyn" Conference. That's my heritage – a group that most people don't even know exists. Because they never had a nation of their own, they were identified as Russians or Polish or Slovak or Czech or Ukrainian. They populated the Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe, an unfortunate location. It was situated at the intersection of major trade routes and many wanted to control it – militarily of course.

My connection with my heritage came through my weekend and summer visits to my grandmother in Forest City, PA. Born and raised in Brooklyn, my parents sent me back to their hometown as often as possible. There I attended church with my grandma (Baba, we called her). If you know the Byzantine Rite of the Catholic Church, those are the Rusyns.

I don't have many early pictures of family. Coal miners didn't have money for that, but some occasions were special. This is my mother's First Communion Class in 1929.



Mom is the shortest little girl. I wondered who the others were.

After the conference we drove one hour north to Forest City. Rusyns worked in the mines and steel mills

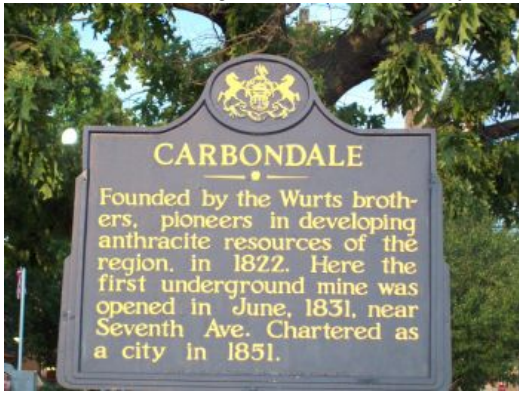
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so the coal regions of PA were a destination.

Carbondale was the "big" town about 6 miles away



St John's Byzantine Catholic Church is still there in Forest City. Five Roman Catholic parishes have now merged into one. There is no longer a need for separate Polish, Lithuanian, Slovenian, Slovak and Irish churches. The grandchildren of the immigrants don't even remember their native language. Still those persistent Rusyns are hanging on. Maybe that's where I get my stubborn "stick-to-it-iveness."



After Sunday mass as we stood on the steps where the original photo was taken, several people helped me identify those in the picture. A few even remembered my mom and grandparents. My parents were married here in 1943.

I have another connection to those steps. In 1999 I stood there as a spectator during the Steamtown Marathon and watched my DD#2 run by.

Forest City is exactly 26.2 miles from the finish line in Scranton, PA and the start is at the Forest City High School about ½ mile from the church. I wonder what Grandma would have thought of that.

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CD12146214

What a great way to remember your family history!
2908 days ago



MARYJEANSL

Very interesting. I used to attend a Byzantine (Ruthenian) Catholic Church when we lived near one, but there isn't one where I live now. I loved the Old Church Slavonic.





2908 days ago



WILSONWR

It's always nice to explore your roots!
2908 days ago



COCK-ROBIN

Enjoyed your blog!
2908 days ago



MERRYMARY42

enjoyed your blog, and so happy you are researching, so much work, I work on it, when I have the time, but it seems that most of my siblings and my DH's really are not that interested, and



beings I am now the older generation I need to find out as much as I can,
My Great Grandfather came from Scotland, and at that time his was a 100 year coal miner family and he continued it when he got to the United States
2908 days ago



CD14034154

Thank you so much for sharing your family history with me. It was fascinating to see and read!!! I wonder if we have some family that knows each other. I'm from Towanda, PA and that's where my mom's family is from. They're the Bailey's and back in the day, they owned all of the land in Bradford County. Of course, to keep up with what was going on, Granddad kept selling little by little off. The only thing that the Bailey's own now, is the land that the dairy farm is on. Granddad had that for umpteen million years!!!

God bless you,

- Nancy Jean -
2908 days ago



SOUTH_FORK

I loved seeing your trip and how you've tied it all up here with the visit to PA. On the way home from a recent trip to St Augustine, we took the scenic route and stopped by my grandmother's childhood home, the train depot that her father worked from, and the now liquor store that occupied the building where my grandfather's parents once had their general store. These small things make me feel connected to my family's long history in Florida (7 generations); I'm sure it's a bit of the same for you.
2908 days ago



BELLACUDDLES

Very interesting.....thanks for sharing!
2908 days ago



MISCHAKEO

Loved your blog and your family history. It is interesting to learn about your roots. It sounds like a great trip.
2908 days ago



SLIMMERJESSE

Wow, thanks for sharing all of this great stuff with us.
2909 days ago



SARAWALKS

Very interesting! Rusyn is a good way to refer to those who lived in the Carpathians. Avoids having to give them a national label which wouldn't really fit...
There is an Orthodox church here too...I'm sure there was a community dating back to the coal mining days and the iron factories.
2909 days ago



EFFIEANNIE

How interesting. My husband has been researching on Ancestry to get more genealogy information. So neat that you are doing that big time. Love the old church. So simple and beautiful.
2909 days ago



ONEKIDSMOM

Sometimes as "mature" people, roots become increasingly important. Thanks for sharing yours.
2909 days ago





WATERMELLEN

Loved this blog -- love the two pictures of your family church! Figuring out where we came from helps us understand who we are here and now.

2909 days ago

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