

Every Family Has a Story: An Irish Tale



Everyone's family has a story. And an Irish family might even throw in a little blarney just to keep it interesting.

In my family there are a couple of stories I've heard over-and-over again that I thought were true. Here are two.

One story I was told was that my great grandfather came over from Ireland on a ship that sailed down the St. Lawrence River (now the St. Lawrence Seaway). It was told that every time the ship stopped he refused to get off. When the ship finally landed in Waukegan, IL he was told that was the end of the line and he would have to get off. So, he did.

His son, my paternal grandfather was a gentleman farmer. That meant he lived in the city and was a member of the City Council of Waukegan but that he also had a farm on the outskirts of town. He would travel out there with my grandmother and they would plant a garden and grow other crops.

That's story number 1.

When my grandfather was getting on in years he decided to

transfer control of the farm to this eldest daughter's husband. His eldest daughter was my Aunt Irene. Irene's husband was known to be a fairly-successful business person, so my grandfather thought it a good idea to transfer the farm control to him. Not long after, my grandfather passed away.

Uncle Murphy took up playing cards with the boys.

He was losing one night and needed to come up with something to bet. He bet the farm. That's right, my Uncle "Murph" literally bet the family farm. And he lost it. Several of my father's family members never spoke to that uncle again. That farm is part of what is now the Great America parking lot in Gurnee, IL.

That's story number 2.

Turns out, much of this is true, but there are some interesting twists and turns as the story goes that I can now add courtesy of my intelligent and curious niece, Katrina.

Katrina decided to register for 23andme. That's a website that will take your DNA (provided by your spit) and have it analyzed to report out on your ancestry. You can also get a fancier version that includes health reporting.

People all over the country are participating and some of them are connecting with each other. One guy connected with my niece and lent us some very interesting information. He's married to the wife of one of our long-lost relatives.

Here are a few of the twists and turns I think I have figured out. Pardon me if there actually is a little blarney thrown in because this stuff is a challenge to follow. That, and I don't want to dig too deep. I kind of like the possibilities of slight inaccuracies. It makes the story more colorful.

In order to connect the dots, I have to jump backward in time.

I originally thought my G Grandparents came directly from Ireland on the boat I described above. Turns out that's not true. They could have easily come on a boat but not from Ireland. Before coming to America they first lived in Quebec, Canada. My G Grandparents lived in Valcartier, Quebec. Their names were Joseph Quinlan and Elizabeth Murphy. They had five children. Patrick, Thomas, Brigitte, William and Elizabeth. My grandmother was Elizabeth.

So they lived in Quebec for some time. The husband Joseph passed away and Mother Elizabeth Murphy remarried. When her second husband died, Elizabeth was no longer able to pay their rent (I assume on some land) so they left the area and came to America.

When I connect the dots, I see there was no male head of household. My great grandmother it appears piled on that boat with her five children, (including my grandmother) and made their way to America. No wonder they stayed on until the last boat stop. I can just imagine how frightened that woman was to be in a new land with five children and clearly little money.

My grandmother Elizabeth married my grandfather and he became the gentleman farmer. My father was her youngest son John.

One other interesting tidbit is it looks like Elizabeth and her brothers and sisters arrived just in time for the Great Columbian Exposition in 1893. She would have been 16. When I was a kid I saw a picture of my grandmother. I was told it was taken at the Exposition. I have been asking lately who in our family took possession of that picture. No one seems to know where it is.

My grandmother died about 2 weeks before her 100th birthday. She tended her own garden and seemingly, happily lived independently for a very long time. If I could be so lucky!

My original family who left Ireland were from County West Meath and County of King (now known as County Offaly). The great Irish Whiskey Tullamore Dew is made in that area.

So cheers to the Irish and the boats that brought them.