

*A Narritive
through the Times
of History
leading up to
ME*



*Dave Brezniak (Breznik)
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Hi:

*I am David Francis Michael Dominic Breznik (AKA Grandpa)
And this is what I know about my family History.*

*My roots grow from some interesting European backgrounds,
There is Polish, Ukrainain, Austrian, Canadian, possibly Russian
And other nationalities flowing in the sap of my Family Tree....*



but it all boils down to ...

My ethnicity is 'Slavic'

Ethnicity? I know! Big word for a Slav.

Ethnicity is our culture, not our citizenship.

For example, A Jewish person may be a citizen of Russia, France, England or Canada. But their culture, their ethnicity, is the traditions, the customs and beliefs they share and pass down from generation to generation.

Kind of like having a family Christmas or Easter dinner and sharing the traditional foods eaten by our culture.

Ethnicity is different than Citizenship.

Mine is Slavic.



Where did the Slavs come from?

Science tells us that there are 3 main divisions of Humans. The Bible, long before science came to be, tells us that the human race as we know it today, comes from Noah's three sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth.

I am sure that folks reading this know the story of Noah or the great flood, as archaeologists tell us there are over 200 cultures in the world that have the story of a great flood.

But just a little recap. God was not pleased with the way things were going on earth and decided to start over. Move on to Version 1.2 so to say. I can understand this in that I have recently

taken up oil painting. Every once in a while I will become disappointed and scrape the canvas clean and redo everything on top of the old. God decided to use Noah to rebuild, and to do so, he needed to keep him alive. So he had Noah build a boat. We call it the Ark. Now where was this Ark constructed? I don't know. But most folks who care say that it was constructed somewhere in the Fertile Crescent called Mesopotamia.

But where the Ark landed? Now that is of importance to this story. If you look on the map you will see an X. Give or take a hundred miles, that is were the Ark landed.



* A lot of details have been skipped to protect the innocent and to avoid incriminating myself.

The Ark landed, the door opened and there stood Noah and his sons. The earth, with no other human life stood before them.

No neighbors,
no need to lock the door at night
and only one main task.

Repopulate the earth.

A duty they seemed to take a great interest in. Lets face it. They didn't have a job to get to every morning, no rush hour commute. No lessons or sports to take the kids to. Other than making sure they were fed and clothed they had plenty of time to devote to repopulation.

Each of Noah's sons begat children and those sons begat sons and so forth. A practice that continues today but only during commercials and when the internet is down or the kids leave home. The population grew and spread out to the suburbs as it were.

Remember that at this time in human history, no matter how far a person travelled, no matter how long they had to spend commuting on the back of some stubborn smelly camel, everyone spoke the same language. The language that Noah spoke.

Then, after that little incident with the Tower of Babel, it became a little confusing and people dispersed even more, trying to stay within their new language boundaries.

From the map we find that Gomer, the son of Japheth, the son of Noah relocated both west and north of the Arks landing site. It is even thought that his descendants went as far as France and England.

It makes me wonder. Why would anyone say to their family.... lets leave this nice warm oil rich climate and walk all the way to the frozen north so that we can struggle to survive and get eaten by bugs while buried in snow?

Well, apparently Gomer was a salesman because he did

and they went.

I am a descendant of Gomer, a son of Japheth, a son of Noah, a son of Lamech, a son of Methuselah, a son of Enoch, a son of Jared, a son of Mahalaleel, a son of Cainan, a son of Enos, a son of Seth, a son of Adam.



If only it were that easy to record from Gomer till now. We are probably missing about 150 generations for which we don't have all the information. And did you notice that no one had a last name. That's something that started in the last thousand years. In some places it was in the last two hundred years and there are still parts of earths population that still do not use last names.

The part that affects this story is that the area just west of the Arks landing place that became known as Galicia. Now later on there will be another Glaicia that spanned the borders of Poland and Ukraine. Either way, Galicia is in our family history.

So let me mention that our great, great.... etc grandfather Gomer had some brothers namely Magog, Media, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.

And keeping with the families main task, Gomer begat some sons, namely Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah. Do you notice that there is no tradition about starting their names with the same letter. Maybe someday someone in the family will try and start that tradition.



Several years into their journey from the Ark to the land of borscht and pirogies, in a land known as Galatica, Gomers son Ashkenaz seems to have taken root as the Bible describes a nation called Ashkenaz. We also find Togarmah, another of Gomers sons, who divided his land between his eight sons and is listed as a powerful nation north of the Black Sea.

This is supposed to be a painting or drawing of Thargamos and his sons.

Hard to imagine!

Eight kids, spread out over a vast land.

No planes, no trains, no cars, and yet he can get them all together. And they even dressed up for the drawing. I have two kids and it's a struggle.



Between, Ashkenaz, Thargamos and their father, they were a strong influence in mid Europe around 1000 BC. Eventually, they mixed with the other cultures. Assimilating, but keeping their own ethnicity.

In that area over the years there were many kings and kingdoms or nations that no longer exist or are just a part of their former self. Example: In the 10th century the Bulgarians and Czechs were powerful, and in the 16th century Poland was the strongest nation in the area.

Now Russia, whose peoples are descendants of Japaths son Magog is the most powerful in the area, with more Slavs living there than in any country.

So I am a Slav! Am I also Polish?

Well, Slavs as shown on the map lived all through the area now know as Poland, Czechslovakia, Slovakia, Russia, Bellarusia, Ukraine, Serbia, Craotatia, Macedonia etc. which is most of central and eastern Europe and parts of Asia.

What impresses researchers of this period was that all these peoples spoke a similar language. Throughout all of their various languages, words were mixed together so that it was possible for a Slav from one area to understand a Slav from another area. I often wondered how my dad and mom could understand each other when she spoke Ukrainian and he spoke Polish and they could both understand some Russian.



Therefore, Slavs were defined as....

'A people who understand each other'



*The Official Flag Colours
of the Slavic States
as agreed to in the
Pan-Slavic Congress of 1848*

Today, Slavic languages comprise over 50% of Europe.

And with all that background, I know only about 5 words. And three of them I haven't heard since the last time mom got mad at me.

Most Slavic states have these 3 colours in their flags. But that doesn't mean that the USA is a Slavic Nation, although.....

We Slavs were first mentioned back in 545 as

.... barbarians, who lived under democracy, and believe in one god, "the maker of lightning" (Perun), to whom they made sacrifice. They lived in scattered housing living among nearly impenetrable forests, rivers, lakes, and marshes and having swamps and forests for their cities.

We were called barbarians because we did not speak greek.

Well, thats proof positive that I am on the right path on the journey to find my roots, 'cause



Great Uncles Casmir, Dobro and Stanislav visit Rome

I don't speak Greek.
Do you speak Greek?
Therefore....
Barbarians we be.

So we are those who the Romans would call Barbarians. You may have heard of the Romans. They are the people that my ancestors defeated. Yeah, that's right. The *Barbarians* defeated the mighty Roman Empire. And for all of my many years I thought the barbarians were the bad guys.

We hear a lot about FAKE NEWS. But it didn't start in our time. It was around for centuries. The Romans probably had a whole wing of government dedicated to hacking out Fake News and sending the scrolls to all the news stands throughout the Empire and printing history books proclaiming their virtues.

This revelation has changed my world view. See who I root for in the next movie of Romans vs barbarians. Don't mess with us. We may not speak Greek, but we understand each other.

The whole of Europe has endured many changes in the past 3000 years. Just because we could understand each other doesn't mean we got along with each other. Plus mix in the seven other brothers of Gomer and their sons and their sons sons etc. and there were a whoooooole lot of people. Some banded together, others conquered, Kingdoms and nations were formed, lost and reformed. You could live your whole life in one place and for a while it was part of the Ukraine, then it switched to Poland, then another country would take it, then back to the Ukraine. And through it all, you had the same address. And it continues to the present day.

Years ago I worked for the Ministry of Government Services, then the Ministry of Economics, then the Ontario Realty Corporation. I never changed offices. Just the name on the door changed. It is the same with our family history. The town or area our family lived in stayed where it was, but the ownership of the area changed hands.

What with all of these wars, changing of Governments, fires, burning, looting, carelessness, people moving away, not speaking greek, illiteracy, no last names etc. it is very difficult to obtain any genealogical information from that era. But I am doing my best in locating sources and digging down to gather information.

This is a good spot in the narrative to add that I have recently found our 'Coat Of Arms'.

Our family has a Coat Of Arms?



OUR FAMILY HAS A COAT OF ARMS!!!

And....

Oh Boy !!!

.....what a coat of arms.

At the very top, where most families have an Eagle or a Lion or a Dragon, we have a....

... a part of a leg.

... a bended knee.

Not the most impressive looking thing.

In searching the meanings behind symbols', I found that this 'leg' symbolizes strength, stability and expedition. (Expedition in the 16th century meant 'setting out with aggressive intent' with 'speed' and 'purpose.) The spur is also important but I have yet to find out it's meaning. The colour blue stood for truth and loyalty.

[So all in all it's a good thing.](#)





Once upon a time...

Why did we choose that Coat of Arms? Well we didn't have much choice in it. Back in the 16th century and even before that time when Poland was *THE* strongest country,
there were rules.
there where laws.
there were classes of people

You may have heard of the 1%'ers of our day. Well, Poland had them too. One of the classes was a legally privileged noble class called the

SZLACHYA.

One of the privileges of this class of Nobility was that the **Szlachya** could bestow nobility. From what I have read there were only so many coat of arms to go around, so if you where inducted into the nobility class, you would be allocated the arms of an existing clan of nobles.

We, along with about 100 other families shared the Arms of the Nowina Clan.

The **Nowina** where a long standing clan believed to have been around since before 960 AD.

Now the question is,....

if you had to a noble to be allocated a Coat Of Arms, how did we get to be Nobles?

It all happened in 1764,

when our ancestor,

Stanislaw Brzozowski was enobled for his military service to the state.

Who? you ask.

Who is Brzozowski?

Ah, more study and research.

Our name, Breznik has it's origin as Brzozkiewica. It breaks down as

'bryozoa' which means birch tree and

'... ewica' which means 'the son or descendant of the one whose house was located at or near to the birch trees'.

Just as we went in my generation from Brzezniak to Breznik, so too did our original name develop into about 40 different variants over the years. We have Brzozkowic in 1439, Brzozoszek in 1743 and in 1786 Brzezniak.

But with all that being said we do have some information for the past 100 or so years. So, having the background in place, let my story begin.



Once upon a time...

Don't believe it. Sometimes it happens more than once. But you will never know unless you hear the stories



I should mention at this point that probably every family with roots has background stories, legends, tales of the past, rumours and myths. Our family has it share.

One of the best that I have heard, based on two sources, was that back in the 1500s, one of our ancestors gave a sack of gold to one of his sons and told him to go and make his fortune. Being an obedient son he did. I guess that's one way to get the kids out of the house.

He became very rich having many serfs working for him. The story then fades with rumours of parts of the fortune being buried and never found (or reported found).

Keep reading and you will find an interesting twist in this story. But it brings questions to mind.

- How did that relative get the bag of gold?
- How is he related to us?
- What happened to the fortune?



No relation: Just a period picture

There are other stories of members of the family being killed by the resistance during the war for collaborating, or working both sides of the war to their own profit. And there are many more stories that come back to me or I am reminded of as I write this.

But back to the story. We were at

Once upon a time...

The oldest known relative on my dads side is Basylii Brzezniak. He begat Kazimer and then in a land now known as the Ukraine, lived a young lad known as Kazimer (could be spelt Casimiri) Breznik. I wonder if he was named after Casimir the Great, one of Polands great kings from around 1370. But will we ever know that? Now I'm not sure if Kazimer was from the Ukraine or he came from Poland or from another country seeking his fame and fortune.

Searching for that elusive pirogue.

He was a Slav and as we have learned, these warm, lovable, non-greek speaking barbarians were all over the place.

What we do know is that Poland existed, the Ukraine existed and Kazimer existed.



There is a story my Aunt Kay used to tell of a person who was looking for work who came into a town in the Ukraine. From whence he came I know not. He went to see the local priest because back in those days, the priests had a lot of influence. The story goes that the priest made a deal with him.



Seems there was a family in the village who had two daughters. The youngest wanted to get married, but was not allowed to marry until the older daughter was married. The deal was, if this young man would marry the oldest daughter, then the priest would find him a job.

Now there's a way to nail a job. Especially if she is the boss's daughter. I wonder if recruiters today have thought of that?

Why didn't the local boys want to marry her? The answer could give us a hint of what may be floating in our gene pool.



It doesn't mean she was ugly.



Maybe she didn't like pirogies?
Maybe she was feminist?
Maybe she was stronger than all the guys in town?
Maybe she couldn't maintain a 4.0 grade average
Maybe she wasn't good at ploughing fields
Maybe, like one of my relatives, she just couldn't cook. As my dad said about this particular person....

... she didn't know how to boil water.

Now I don't know if this was Kazimer or his father Basylii Brzezniak, who took the deal behind door number One.

But we do know that Kazimer married Rose Stanslowski. In either case, I am a descendant of the daughter no one wanted to marry.

It's no wonder that I have issues.

Kazimer and Rose had a son Joesph born in the town of Podkamien (in Polish) or Pidkamin (in Ukrainian)

Pidkamin means "at the foot of the rock," with kamien meaning "rock" and "pid" meaning foot.

A small church was built at the base of the Rock which stands on a hill just outside the town. It's still there. You can look it up on Google Earth.

It is not a huge place. Present population around 2,300. It is in the administrative district of Brody and from what I can find out, (cousin Theresa has been there and should be able



to fill in the blanks or correct my story) the closest village is L'vov, formerly known as Lemberg.

It tells a little about the people, my ancestors, in what they were proud of.

A Rock!



A big hunk of stone on a hill.

Imagine receiving the invite....

Forget going on a cruise, come visit us.

We'll give you a tour of The Rock.

Why just thinking about it, I have half a mind (because of my concussion) to fly over there just to see it.

But maybe my ancestors were advanced.

Maybe they had the original Pet Rock. (*Yes, there was such a thing*)

The area was once part of the small Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria that straddled the modern-day border between Poland and Ukraine.

As I said, Kingdoms came and kingdoms went.



This particular Kingdom went
It happened in the mid 1700's.

But the Rock stayed. (Hurrah)

Looking at the village on a map, I wonder what the men folk do for a living in Pidkamin because let's face it,

there are only so many unwanted older daughters to make a deal with.

The area has a history, but to me there is

ONE MAJOR SIGNIFICANT EVENT

that happened in 1846.

In that year,
in the settlement of Podkamiem (Pidkamin),
a boy child was born to Kazimer and Rose.

They named him Joesph.

Joesph still living in the Pidkamin area, married Rose Twardochlib. They had a son and named him Vincenty E. Brzezniak. I had learned that Grandfather's name was Vincenty Francis, but his tombstone reads Vincenty E.

There are records of his name being spelled Wincenty, which is more of a phonically spelling of the name.

Grandpa Vincenty

Grandpa had two brothers,
Walter and Gabriel.
Unfortunately, I have little information on them other than

Walter had two children
Joanne and Joesph

Gabriel had three children
Stephaine, Ugenia and Frank



I'm not sure who the person to the left of Grandpa in this picture is. It could be his dad or his nephew or one of his brothers. It could be Joe Galas representing the Wilson and Illowski side of the family tree. Something for further discussion.

Something I recently learned might throw some light on who this person is.

It is a story about my Grandpa and his **brother**.

It seems that his brother, I think it was **Gabriel**, had a girl friend that he was sweet on.

Her name was Tekla.

She was rumoured to be a real good looking gal. *Not that that makes a difference.*

But then, we Brezniks always married good looking gals.

Except maybe, that oldest unmarried daughter mentioned earlier.

But ol' **Gabe**....

.... he wanted some excitement in life before he settled down with a wife.
So he told her to wait right there while he up and joined the Army.

*So that could be Uncle **Gabe** in uniform, standing with my grandfather, in that picture.*

The whole time **Gabe** was in the army, *so the story goes*, he hardly ever wrote to Tekla and for sure, he never sent her any emails.

Poor girl, never knowing if he was alive or dead. But faithfully waiting.

Meanwhile back at the family farm,
Grandpa decided that he wanted to join a
Religious order. It was the Dominican Order

He became kind of a Friar, a Monk, a Bible teacher.
His title was 'Brother'.

In this monastery which was big and beautiful....



The Monastery Today

... keep in mind that these were people that thought a Rock was something special,

... in that monastery, big and beautiful, laboured day by day,
Grandpa Vincenty.

Now, not just anyone could become a Dominican Monk,
so it is an indication that the

Family Brzezniak
had some wealth.



Typical outfit worn by
Dominican Brothers



Not sure

if they were farmers or
if they flipped houses, or
if they had a Mcpirogie franchise or
how they accumulated their wealth.

But they must have had more than the average family.

There is some rumours that their farm was close, but not too close to Podkamiem (Pidkamin). I recently found a record of Grandpa saying he was from Mielkow, Russia. Can't find any such place but I did find a Milkow Poland maybe two days walking from Podkamiem (Pidkamin). The control of the area might have changed because of another relocation or war. Maybe at one time Milkow was in Russia. It would be really nice to have the history of the area - written in English of course.

There were lot of things happening in that monastery which was called a Priory.
Special services,
Ceremonies,
Famous Visitors
Lots of pomp and splendor.

And villagers where allowed to help.

One of these villagers was a girl named Tekla.

Yes, Tekla, the same young girl who was waiting for her love to return from the army.

Grandpa, a Dominican brother, worked with these villagers, and his eye fell upon Tekla. His other eye looked around and didn't see his Brzezniak brother Gabreal.

They became friends.

Then, as the story goes, Grandpas uncles became concerned about the Family estate. It appears that when great granddad had passed on and left that wealth behind, that the family members who were still at home where recklessly spending the money and frittering away the family fortune.

So they went to the Prior, *he was the man in charge of the Priory*, and asked if Vincent could come home for a while and straighten out the mess.

The Prior agreed and Vincent took a years leave of absence.

Now I don't know exactly what happened, but since
....he wasn't in the Priory anymore,
....and he was not bound by the Priories rules
....and his brother was still in the army

.... hestartedcourtingTelkaandaskedhertomarryhimandshesaidyesandtheygotmarried.

Whew....

Well, it appears that grandpa may have been a bit of a scoundrel.
While his brother is in the army he marries his brothers sweetheart.

But if he hadn't,
he may not have had a son named Frank,
 who may not have had a son named David,
 who may not have had a son and daughter named Michael and Kathryn
 and there may not be _____ (fill in your name)

So Grandpa, we will forgive you for that.

Vincenty, AKA my grandpa, married Teckla Bodnar.
Another spelling of her name could be Bednarozuk.
They were married at the Priory in Podkamien, Galicia, Austria.
Since he was a Brother they made a big deal out of it.
It was a big celebration with lots of candles.



Then Vincent and his bride hopped on a train and headed off to Bosnia-Hersogovenia to live.

Why Bosnia?

Was it because Uncle Gabe was coming home?
Was it because there was not much money left in the family fortunes?
Was it because he spend all the money on candles in the Priory for his wedding?

Why Bosnia?

I don't know.
But I understand that Grandpa worked there as a shoemaker.

To the best of my knowledge his trade was that of Shoemaker.
Did he learn that trade before he became a Dominican Brother?
Did the family own a chain of shoe stores?
Don't know!!!



Back in his time, shoemaking was a respectable craft as shoes were not made and sold in bulk down at the local Shoes R Us. And in some countries such as Bosnia, people were just starting to wear these shoes.

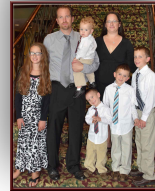
Each shoe was made by hand, and usually was a custom fit for the buyer. You had to be a good shoemaker to have people come back to you and buy more shoes.

We know that he was married and eventually had 5 kids so he must have been doing well in his craft. Or else he wasn't spending as much time in his craft as he should have.

Five kids!

A small family back then I suppose.

*Nowadays,
the only people that have 5 kids,
would be found living in the back woods of Michigan.*



Now, they were happily living in Bosnia. According to my Aunt Kay, My dad was born there.



Now living back in those places and those times, there were very rich and very powerful people. And they pretty well got what they wanted.

One particular powerful person noticed Vincenty's wife, Tekla.

He decided that he was going to marry her. Of course he couldn't marry her while Vincent was alive,

BUT... that could be taken care of...



A member of his household told my Grandmother what was going to happen.

She told her husband, and then covered for him as he took a train heading back to Poland.

She later gathered her children and also fled back to Poland

Safe, but uh oh...

Once more, for a reason now unknown to us, my grandfather, when he was in his mid 30's decided that North America would be a better place to live.

Who knows, maybe he had his fill of Borsch and pirogues. *As if that was possible....* Or maybe The Rock inspired him or maybe it was the political climate with WW1 on the horizon. I am guessing that he and grandma decided that hard as the move would be on them it would give a better life for their kids.

It was common for one person to go to another place find work and then bring the rest of the family over.

Sometimes, they would send money back to the family for them to save and come over.

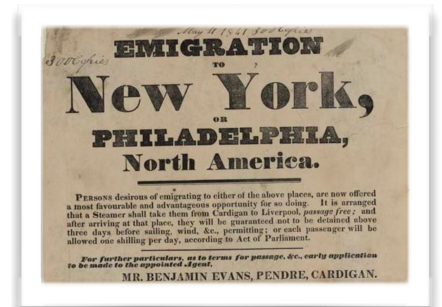
That didn't always work out well as another one of our family stories will prove. *(Another time)*

I am not sure what the plans were for the rest of the family left in Europe. They were probably left in the care of relatives.

The decision to leave his home could not have been an easy one. Yes, Canada, our wonderful country was accepting immigrants. Posters and lectures all throughout Europe proclaimed the beauty and endless possibilities to be found here. Land could be obtained for free.

And yet Grandpa must have heard not only these stories but the stories of those who came here and then returned, disillusioned and disappointed.

Maybe that is why he decided to go to the USA. Perhaps after seeing one of those cheaper, cheesier signs advertising emigration to New York.

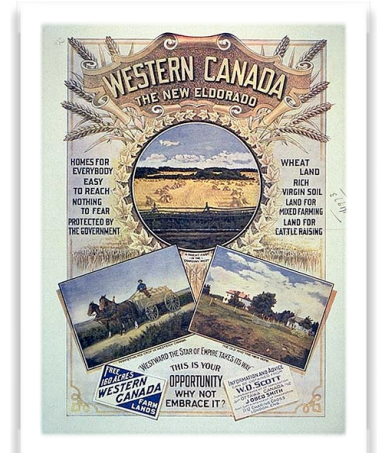


But the bottom line is that he and grandma were determined to do this, to leave their homeland, family, friends, home, the security of their work and all that they knew and did. Grandpa, like many others immigrated.

But all who emigrated did not stay. For many years the number of people *returning* to Europe from Canada *equaled* the number of people trying to *immigrate* to Canada. I recently read an article in the National Post titled -

Canada: A land founded on Misery.

Let me sum up the article as it fits into Grandpas' decision.



Although Canada was built on the backs of immigrants, many of them did not enjoy it one bit with reports of Ukrainian pioneers bursting into tears upon sighting their new land.

Of those who took up the offer of **160 acres of land that was yours** if within four years you cleared a quarter of it and planted a crop, of those, 40% could not complete the contract and lost everything they put into it. Immigrants petitioned to be returned.

One story that caught my attention was that of a young married couple who arrived in the village of Flambrough Ontario, an area where I once lived and where my brother Rick and his family now live. She laments

"Alas! What am I come to! My heart is breaking with grief!"

We can look at the boats today's immigrants are using to enter Europe and wonder if one of them is named Gothland.

He landed in New York on May 31, 1913. York,

Did he know anyone in New York?

Yes! Yes he did.

His landing papers say that he was going to stay with a friend named Josef Wiezbic.



<http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger>

But Vincent didn't like the Big City. So at the urging of relatives and friends in Canada, he moved to the Kitchener Ontario region.

I believe in Kitchener he worked for a time as a shoemaker, which was his trade back home.



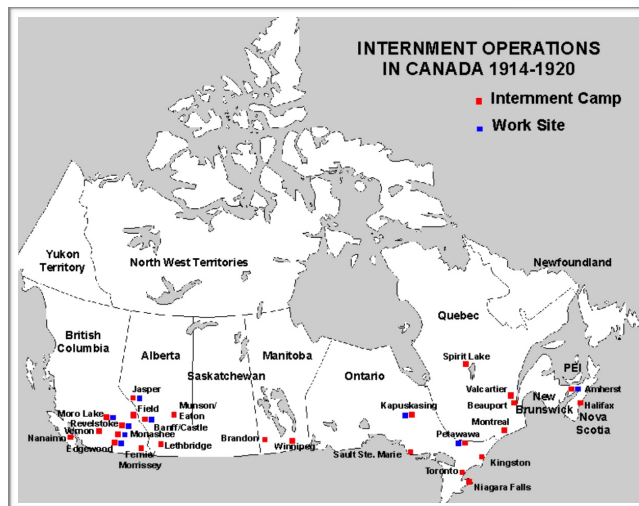
But it was bad timing. Shortly after his arrival, WW1 broke out and Vincenty was placed in one of 24 Canadian Internment camps. - see accompanying map.

I quote:

Though the main battles of the First World War were fought across the ocean, back in Canada, there were prisoners and casualties of another kind. In 1914, immigrants from Austria-Hungary, Germany and the other Central Powers were rounded up and locked away in internment camps. More than 8,000 people who considered themselves Canadian were imprisoned for being "enemy aliens".

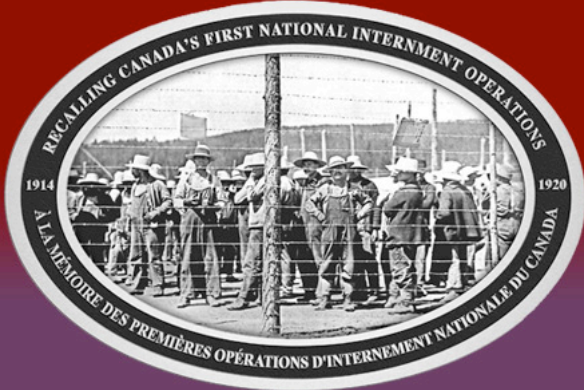
During the First World War, Ukrainians from Galicia were classified as enemy aliens by the Government of Canada and over 5,000 Ukrainian Canadians were interned in camps

- Library and Archives Canada



This URL will bring you to a short video of the camps. <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/first-world-war-internment-camps-a-dark-chapter-in-canadian-history-1.1945156>


My grandpa amongst others who had recently travelled to Canada and were thought to be a potential danger to our Country were placed in camps, very similar to the Japanese internment camps of WW2.



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These were work camps where internees, in contravention of international agreements concerning prisoners of war, were put to work building roads, working in mines, clearing bush and doing construction work. The governments of the time had little money to hire people to do what needed doing. The prisoners were a windfall. So much so that some camps still existed two years after the wars end just so the labour could be exploited.

The following link will bring up an interesting and easy to read article on the camps.

http://www.uccla.ca/Without_Just_Cause.PDF

Unfortunately, on March 5, 1954 the Canadian government signed an order to destroy all records of those camps in an attempt to remove the stain of that wrong doing from the Canadian conscience.

Not all records were destroyed but unfortunately, on the remaining records the name of Vincenty Brzezniak has not been found. It could still be there, I just haven't found it.

I have looked through the roll calls and there is no Brzezniak and there are only one Vincenty and 3 Wincentys' with last names that are nowhere close.

Which camp was he sent to?

I cannot find that information.

I did find that some of those that were imprisoned were German and were at the work camp in Vernon BC. Prisoners who died in Veron were buried in the local cemetery - Pleasant Valley. The remains of four of the german prisoners who died there were transferred after the war to Woodland cemetery in Kitchener. A cemetery a few blocks from my present home where several of our relatives are buried.



**Official German War Graves Portion
of Woodland Cemetery, Kitchener**

So it's possible that if he was in good shape, Grandpa could have been sent there. If not there were four camps in Ontario.

The roll call records can be found at:

http://www.uccla.ca/Roll_Call_2000.pdf

http://www.uccla.ca/Roll_Call_Additions_2009.pdf

While granddad spent time in the camp, unable to earn money for the families passage, his wife Teckla Bodnar with the five children - Anna, Katie, Patricia, Francis and Dominic spent the war on the move.

She would have been 31 when the war broke out.

It seems obvious that what ever plan they had to keep the family safe and intact in Europe until money could be earned had fallen apart with the outbreak of the war. The family was living hand to mouth. Sleeping in dugouts, Bomb craters, destroyed buildings, barns, whatever they could find. Obtaining food and shelter, however and wherever they could.

Europe at the time was a place of Chaos. Different factions fighting each other for control of pieces of Europe. Forced mass migrations of people, outright killing or planned starvation over areas was carried out. In areas, those who could where forced to work and in some places the death rate amongst

'The useless mouths

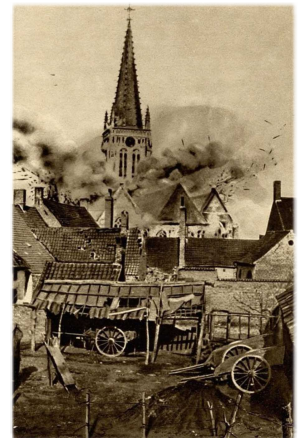
– children, old and sick people' rose as high as 46%.

The war provoked a mass movement of refugees resulting in a humanitarian mess as both soldiers and civilians sought to escape.

And during all this Grandma Teckla kept the family together. It shows a lot of the internal strength that we carry in our blood. I knew her, but not very well. She lived with us for a few years before her death. I only remember that she was short in stature and spoke with a strong accent.

Dad liked to tell the story of falling asleep in a building during this time to wake up with half the building destroyed.

During this season of forced travel and subsistence living Dominic died and was buried with little ceremony as the family had to keep moving and didn't want questions asked.



Refugees faced all manner of difficulties. They were furnished with emergency accommodation in railway stations, schools, empty factories, breweries, hotels, bathhouses, army barracks, monasteries, synagogues, theatres, cinemas, cafes, and even prisons. Hard-pressed local authorities lost no time in trying to 'evacuate' refugees to other parts of the empire. Initial sympathy and hospitality rapidly evaporated as it became apparent that most refugees had no money to pay for accommodation or food.

There were a lot of stories told about the travels in Europe but as a child I didn't take much note and my memory of them is very hazy. I know the story of Dominic was one that no one wanted to tell and I'm sure there is more to it.

There must also be some strong stories that were never shared with us but hints could be seen in Dads and Kays outlook on some parts of their lives and other nationalities they interacted with.

Dad did not trust those in charge. When a policeman approached our property he would send us inside. Kay always seemed to believe that she was being ripped off by merchants, especially the person who delivered oil to her house and she sure let you know what she thought of other nationalities who she had to interact with.

Reading some of the history of those times I find that in Europe soldiers police and priests were put in charge of areas and they pretty well did what they wanted. Priests were considered employees of the state.

I wonder what some of Dads and Kays memories were of?
What scenes were replaying in their heads?

In the late 70's I received a phone call from someone who did not identify themselves asking if I knew a Joesph Brezniak. Having some of dads wariness, I replied that I did not. And that's true because I never knew Joesph. Sometimes I wonder if it was an estate lawyer trying to distribute the wealth of our long lost but dear to our hearts, rich relative.

Although dad remained Catholic, he had very little use or respect for the priests of the church. It reminds me strongly of a new classmate that entered the catholic school I was in around grade 5. He and his family recently arrived in Canada. He could speak some English and he used it to continually warn us about trusting the priests and nuns. He was always insistent and would warn us loud enough that suddenly, after a few days, he no longer was allowed in the school. (Just as he was winning me over)

After being released from the Interment camp, Vincenty obtained work in the Kitchener area. At one point I believe he was custodian of the buildings of Sacred Heart Parish in Kitchener.

Because he once was a Dominican Monk, he could assist with the Mass and other 'sacred' things.

Family legend has it that when the war was over, Grandma, still in Europe made a walking trip to an area a day or two from where they were living.

(Could it be Milkow?)

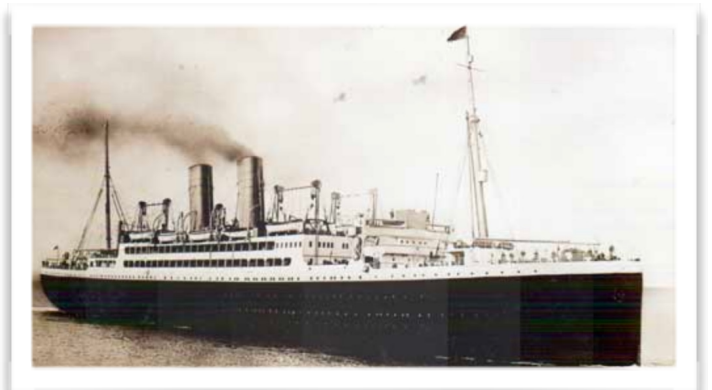
She stopped at a farm and asked to stay overnight in the barn.

It turns out that this particular barn had been in the family years earlier. During the night, she dug up a bag that had been buried in the dirt floor of the barn.

It contained money and some jewels. Carefully covering the hole back up she took the treasure and returned to the family. Later using the money to purchase passage to Canada.



She arrived in Quebec on July 14 1922. She would have been 39 years of age. To this date I have only found Grandma Teckla and Aunt Pat (Petranela) on passenger lists.



Departing from Warsaw they came on the ship Melita. At least this ship looks a little more seaworthy but I'm sure it wasn't considered a cruise ship but more of an immigrant ship. But maybe in the \$40 - \$50 range.



I know dad also came by ship but have yet to find him on any passenger list. I know from the stories he used to tell that he came by ship and hey, it was the only option back then. It seems that he used to enjoy standing at the back of the ship and watching its wake, either straight or curving as the ship left its trail behind in the water. He always wanted to return for a visit but never did.

When the priests who Vincenty worked for heard that he had brought his family over they spoke with him. Family legend has it that they told him that they knew he could not support a family on the salary they were paying him, *so they were letting him go.*



Even though Dad continued to attend that Church, it probably explains some his comments around the dinner table concerning the priests.

Granddad worked hard to keep the family together. Most of the pictures I find were taken either at Waterloo Street, where Tony and Mildred Wilson lived. (Other family members lived there before), or at Jim and Annes place on Marina Road and later at Dad and Moms place on Highland Road. Just seeing these pictures indicates a strong supportive immigrant extended family.



Grandpa passed away on Oct 5 1948 At the age of 65. He passed away quietly in the parlour room of his daughter Annie. I was almost two years of age. I remember, a very hazy memory, of him lying there on the sofa and my dad placing pennies on his eyes. A tradition.

Teckla passed away Feb 25 1960 in Hamilton at the age of 79 after living with us on the Snake Road for several years.

Dad

Dads story picks up on the immigrant tale in a new country. A story he often told was of his survival in a new land. He could not speak or understand the language. He was small and skinny. Probably from being undernourished while trudging through Europe, eking out a starvation existence in the days of WW1. He was often picked on and bullied. I remember him telling a story of having taken a beating by a group of 5 boys.



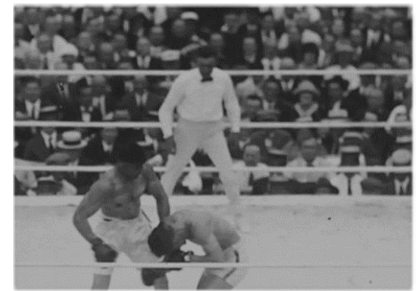
Dad started to take wrestling and boxing lessons and became very good at it eventually winning the Golden Gloves. *(My research into the Golden Gloves has stonewalled at the death of a man living in Brantford Ontario who kept all the records in his basement. His wife has not responded to my inquiries.)*

Somewhere in my pictures I have one of dad in his boxing stance.

Dad like to finish his story with telling about how he, after learning how to defend himself, revisited each of those 5 boys who had beat him.

“I tightened my belt and knocked on their door”.

He visited them one at a time, and they never bothered him again.



He finally left school at grade three. Not because he was slow, but because of the difficulty in the language, adapting to the new culture and the bullying. Also, his earnings assisted the family. He worked at a lot of different menial jobs.

Another tale he told was that of being the Champ. In those days there were traveling circus's that would visit towns. One of the attractions was, go three round with the Champ in the boxing ring and win a prize. The prize was usually \$5.00 which back then was around weeks wage. Because he was an amateur boxer he could not box for money. If caught, he would lose his amateur status. But what's a poor boy going to do?

He boxed.

He boxed with one eye on the opponent and one eye on the crowd. If he spotted the boxing commissioner in the crowd, he would jump out of the ring, dive under the canvas siding of the tent and run.



In 1944 he married Julia Ann Dubyk.

Dad had gotten into the construction trade, working I believe as a foreman for a general contractor in Kitchener. He also worked at a furniture factory and was foreman at BF Goodrich Tire company in Kitchener.

He wanted something more secure. One of his sayings was

‘a ticket on the wall is money in the bank’.

That led him to become a Stationary Engineer, providing a good home and a good life for his family.

I look through some of the family pictures from shortly after they landed on Canadian soil with nothing. And then in my minds eye I see Mom and Dad standing in the dining room of their home on the Snake Road surrounded by friends and family celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. To them and those who knew the background, it was a picture of success. It was the reason why Great Grandpa and Grandma came to this country.



So that their children could have a better life.



Dad receiving his retirement certificate from his Department Head

Dad retired from Stelco after many years of faithful service. I remember him crawling out of bed, sick with the flu. Having me or Gerry drive him to work where he put in his shift, then us picking him up again to bring him home, where he would crawl out of the car and into bed.

He was always thankful to have a job and didn't shirk it in any way, even scheduling his eye surgery to his vacation time.

Dad Passed away Nov 5 1978 at the age of 68.

His wife Julia Ann Dubyk passed away in 1989 at the age of 70.



Our Aunt Annie married Jim Kuijanik and they had a neat small farmhouse with a barn and some acreage on Marina Road in Kitchener. What I remember most is the two seat outhouse. The house is still there but the land was divided off to support the widening of Belmont Ave. She died in 1955 at the age of 52 from a heart condition. I remember her as a... lets say slightly oversize woman who always seemed to have some good food and a smile for us. Jim passed away in 1960 at the age of 78 after living with us on the Snake road for a few years.

Aunt Pat - one of the few pictures we have of her, died in 1939, taken seven years before I was born. She is buried in the 'family plot' at Mt. Hope Cemetery in Kitchener next to her parents.



Aunt Kay married Eph Bottinger and lived on Belmont Road in Kitchener in a home that dad helped construct for her.

She lived the longest passing away in September 2000 at the age of 87.

Eph passed away in 1968 at the age of 61. I was one of the Pall Bearers. John Wilson was another.



Our grandparents and parents understood what it was like to live in oppression. To have nothing. To be on the run. To be abused and disadvantaged. To be called names. One of the names was DP. Displaced Person. Doesn't seem like much now but it was an insult at the time.

Yet for all that, no one asked for special favours or to be treated different. They didn't ask that their way of life be recognized and protected.

The family assimilated into it's new culture, thankful to be here.

Traditions of the past were kept within the family but they became Canadians first, celebrating our heritage amongst themselves.



Amongst those who first came to Canada family was important, especially the extended family. It tied us together and gave the family strength.

Weddings, funerals, family gatherings were all important.

I remember many weddings held in Church basements where the beer flowed freely and



it was hard to see across the room from the cigarette, pipe and cigar smoke.
And the room was always crowded with family.

Funerals also were well attended.
We had our share of loud mourners. And as each person,
so very old in my young eyes passed from this life, they
each took a piece of Family history with them.

**Remember our past,
share and preserve it for the future**

*If you don't recount your Family history,
It will be lost.
Honour your own stories
and tell them too.
The tales may not seem important,
But they are what binds Families,
and makes each one of us who we are.
Unknown*

Then comes Me



From my dads side of the family I am the first born in this new land. The first natural born Canadian with the Family name.

My dad often talked about my birth. I was born having Yellow Jaundice. Dad said that I looked like a skinned rabbit when he first saw me.

Well, hey, I was a first born immigrant. I looked the part.

I will admit that I am bit confused on where Dad worked during this time. He was for a time a foreman at I believe the B.F. Goodrich tire plant in Kitchener. After that he was in charge of the Power Plant at St Mary's hospital. I also have pictures of mom taking me to construction sites that dad was working on.

I know that he worked at the Kitchener Aud when I was around 4 or 5 years of age. We were there long enough for my brother Gerry to be born but soon after our family moved to the Waterdown area before I started school.

Dad and mom had a great place on Highland Road in Kitchener. A really good piece of property. It's still there although a small apartment unit is now where the front lawn used to be.



**Dave, Dad, Grandpa
at Marina Road**



This picture was taken in that time frame just before Gerry (above) joined the family.

Left to right:
Grandpa Vincenty,
Aunt Annie, Jim Kujauk (Annie's Husband),
Eph Bottenger (Kays husband),
Joe Galas (Mildred Wilson's brother)
Parish Priest.
Kay, Dad, Me, Mom, Grandma Teckla.



Dave and Gerry
backporch Highland Road

Dad thought he could see the writing on the wall for his job at St Mary's Hospital. They were expanding and he would have to upgrade his license to keep his position.

I don't know all the details but I do remember that one day some farm trucks from Notre Dame Convent in Waterdown drove in our drive. They packed all of our things into the truck and then with me riding in the truck, we moved to Notre Dame Convent and lived on the third floor in the staff quarters.



It was not good. We had three rooms on the floor and had to share the washrooms and bath with other staff living there.

Dad and Mom purchased a piece of land from the convent that became our home on the Snake Road and dad started to build. Again, not sure what the story was but it was decided that while the house on the Snake Road was being constructed I would live with my aunt Kay and uncle Eph in Kitchener and go to school there. Mom, Dad and Gerry lived in the basement of the house during construction. Once the basement was finished they lived in it while saving up to finish the rest of the house. It was possible back then.



Although I liked living with Kay and Eph, it was not the best. I slept on the couch in the front room, probably because I was too scared to sleep upstairs by myself. It wasn't the best situation as Aunt Kay and Uncle Eph did not have the best of relationships and disagreements would often flare up. However, I do remember Uncle Eph teaching me to make eggs. I must have made a dozen eggs that night and ate every one of them. Aunt Kay was not too happy when she got home and I overheard her mentioning it to Eph. So did the neighbours.

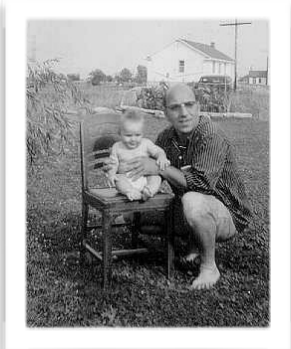
Back then, Kay and Ephs house on Belmont was at the edge of the City. Everything behind them was fields and farms. I do remember Uncle Eph asking me if I wanted to go hunting. Sure! He grabbed his shotgun and we headed out back. Somewhere, between Belmont and where Westmount now is, there was a little road, not more than a path. And I clearly remember a wooden fence post at the end of a driveway. Uncle Eph asked me to wait there while he went in and asked if we could hunt on the property. He was gone a loooooong time. Found out later that it was one of his drinking buddies. While I was standing out there he and his friend were drinking a few. Aunt Kay was not happy as again, I overheard her mentioning it to Eph.

I have little recollection of the school. I remember that there were five Davids in the class. I remember that I had to walk to school every morning and it was over a few blocks just off Stirling



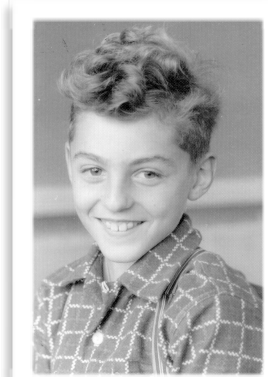
Ave. I do remember that I was signed up to take violin lessons at school along with many others. Dad took me to a music store in Kitchener and we rented a violin. I took it to school for my first lesson. When I got home mom and dad and Kay were all eager to see what I knew. I remember opening the violin case and looking at the instrument. I also remember not having a clue, not an inkling, not a hint of anything I had been taught. My career in music went downhill from there. At the school Christmas concert the violin group preformed. They placed me at the side. Way at the side, like behind the curtains. I don't think anyone could even see me.

Dad returned the violin.



Then I moved back with my family to the Snake Road. We moved out of the basement and into the upper level. Some years later my brother Rick was born. I remember trying to convince my parents to call him 'Corky' after the name of a TV child star we saw when we watched TV at my Aunt Kays.

Our first TV was purchased around the time that Corky Rick was born. I remember thinking 'it must be great to be born in a home with a TV'. I was eleven before we had a TV. Talk about a poor immigrant child. I used to watch TV at Kays or at a friends house. It was like the forbidden fruit.



I attended St Thomas Catholic school in Waterdown. I was also an Altar Boy at St Thomas Church and at Notre Dame Convent. That convent gig was rough. I had to be there at 6am every Friday. When Dad was home he drove me. When he wasn't, I either rode my bike or walked. The mile or so I had to walk is OK during the day. But in the dark of the morning, for a ten year old, walking through the woods, all by myself, was a terrifying ordeal. Parents would get arrested now for forcing their kids to do that.

Did I mention that I have issues?

St Thomas school was a three room grade 1 to 8 school.

I spent an interesting 10 or 11 years there.



Second row, 2nd from right

I have always had a high I.Q. And that has been confirmed by all the recents tests I had to submit to because of this concussion. Yet I never did well in school. Maybe because I had absolutely zero interest in school and it showed.

I remember the first day of school. Right after lunch, I got up and started walking for the door. The teacher asked where I was going.



I replied,
Home.

She requested that I return to my seat.
I speeded up.

She rose from her chair.
I started running out the door and down the hall.

Another nun heard the commotion and joined in the race.

Who knew nuns could run so fast?

They caught me and I ended up over the teachers knee.

That was my first day of school.

It went
downhill
from there.



We hear a lot today of Canadas indigenous people suing the government over being taken from their homes and sent to schools where they were mistreated. Well, Hey. Here I was, son of an immigrant, over the teachers knee.

Probably another reason I have issues today.

If only my interest in school could have been sparked.
Maybe I would have found the cure for cancer,
or maybe learned to run faster.

For this story I searched the internet for a picture of St Thomas school. I have not yet found one but did come across an article in the Waterdown review from 2011 where some former teachers at the school were telling of their experiences.

One described the basement lunch room telling the story of her first days there when a student pointed to a garter snake climbing through a window into the basement. I was there that day. I remember it.

Frank Stinson, a childhood friend who had no fear of snakes. He used to find snakes, put them in his pocket and take them home. The teacher asked him to catch that snake.

He did.

He cried when he was told to take the snake outside and kill it.

I remember going out with him. *I just wanted to make sure the snake was dead.*



I also remember that another student that I sometimes chummed with, Larry Helm, used to bring cake for dessert.

His mother always put at least an inch of icing on the cake.

My mom only glazed the cake with a hint of icing.

I told mom about Larry's cake hoping she would do the same.

Instead mom went to see Mrs Helm to ask her to stop putting so much icing on her cakes. That, as I remember, did not go over very well.

And I never had any extra icing until I was married.

Sharon is the icing on my cake.

Anyway, St. Thomas was followed by a stint at St Jerome's High school in Kitchener.

St. Jeromes' was a boarding school. So once more I was shipped off.

Hummm. I'm starting to see a pattern here. I keep getting shipped off.

Fortunately I kept finding my way back.



I guess there is difference between being taken from your parents and sent to boarding school and your parents sending you to boarding school. There goes my law suit.

In this picture of St. Jerome's, notice the top left two windows, right above the ledge. That was the room I shared with three other boarders. And if you noticed the ledge, I used to crawl out the window and walk along it, even going over the peak and down the other side. What was I? Nuts?

Obviously I had issues.

I only spent one year of Dads hard earned money at St Jerome's, then I went to Waterdown District High

where I distinguished myself

by hardly ever showing up.

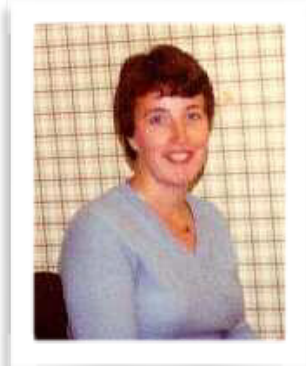
Years later when I needed a copy of my graduation certificate, Sharon went to the School to obtain a copy.

When she asked the principal, he looked at her and said.” What! He passed?” Yes, yes I did.

By the way, my name was etched into the metal plates on the roof of Waterdown High.
Not the brightest thing I ever did.

I have had many jobs during my work life with my last probably being the best. I may describe some of them at a later time, like working at Columbia Carbon or Tim Hortons Head Office or chasing bears down logging roads in the government truck, watching wolves watching me, the Oil Sands, The Salvation Army, My own Trailer Sales and Rental Outfit - a lot of stories.

But they are stories for another time.



Shortly after graduation I met Sharon Hewitt. Actually she ‘bumped’ into me much before that. She and her mother used to shop at a grocery store I worked in and every week she would ‘accidentally’ run into me with her shopping cart.

Her way of flirting.

I kept wondering what was wrong with this girl.
Does she need her eyes checked?

It turns out her eyes were fine and when she looked in my direction, she saw her future.

(It's my story, I'll write it as I see it)

But this time I met her socially.
And as things happen in life,
we married.

That was September 11, 1971.
Thirty years prior to 9/11. (No Connection)



In 1970 I accepted God's gift of Salvation and was born again into his Kingdom.
That, and Sharon turned my life around.

Since our marriage we have lived in 18 different places spread throughout the Province of Ontario and one stint in Quebec.

Goulais River was probably one of better places that we lived.

All that moving is another story for another time.

Along the way we were blessed with two children,

Kathryn,
my favourite daughter and

Michael,
my favourite son.

In turn they have blessed us with 8 Grandkids....

so far.

Kathryn Married Scott Bernard (*Our favourite son-in-law*) and begat

Kyria, Austin and Owen.

Michael married Evelyn Billiu (*Our Favourite Daughter-in-law*) and begat

Zoey, Zyan, Zackary, Zane and Zeke.

One thing that stands out strongly for me through the composing of this is:

The Bible states that in the last days the 'Sons of Gomer' will align with other nations and strike against Israel. There the invading forces (Sons of Gomer) will be completely destroyed.

Therefore, if my grandfather did not emigrate, I, if I was alive, I and my descendants would probably have joined this invading force. But because he did emigrate, our name will live on.



We all make choices every day. Some big, some small. All of these choices affect not only ourselves but our future generations.

I am sure it was very hard on grandpa,

but I am glad that my Grandfather made the choice that he did.



Family Photo taken in 2017 at the wedding of my niece Tania

