

Acknowledgments and Thanks

I suppose that many authors engaged in writing creative nonfiction, with elements of family history, lament that they did not speak with their relatives before they died or investigate events and circumstances before those faded further into the past. I stand accused of not being interested enough in the history of my families to pursue these issues when people and events were alive and closer in time and space.

When are accounts mere excuses? I largely failed to cultivate an early interest in family genealogy because I was adopted. Both the Bechtel and Lamoureux clans were large and widespread and I was not of their blood. As much as I always fully identified with Roger and Evangeline as my parents, I never dismissed them as less and/or discounted their families, I was too busy for genealogical research. My academic career required much reading, research, and writing. Our four children kept Cheryl and I very busy. Any other excuses I can offer?

Two of my cousins, one on each side of the family, took an interest in family genealogy and produced extensive amounts of information long before I began my work. I'm indebted to them for their efforts; a lot of what I have done in this project benefited from their research. Mark Higgins, one of Uncle Leo Lamoureux's grandchildren, my second cousin, conducted genealogical research beginning in the mid-1600s when the clan immigrated from France to Canada and then later from Canada to the United States. Cousin Brian Bechtel, one of Uncle Donald's twin sons, conducted genealogical research on the Bechtel side. Brian's work was aided, as was mine, by the self-published memoirs of Gertrude Krippner Bechtel, *To Build An Empire: Bechtel Memoirs Of The Birth Of Cavalier North Dakota* (1975).

The genesis of my profound interest in family history was the odd coincidence of Ron Ravneberg having worked at the same jewelry store (*Dodson's*) in Moscow, Idaho as did my wife Cheryl, albeit 10 years earlier. I learned of that coincidence in June 2002. Noel had just passed away and so I was unable to delve more deeply into his background. Although we had a couple of conversations about his life in the military, mostly regarding his captivity by the Japanese, Noel was not a big storyteller about the past and I did not want to press him about his ordeal. While Noel was still living I simply didn't think to ask him about his life before military service; at that point I was deeply skeptical of mom's claim that they had dated in North Dakota and pressing Noel for details under those circumstances seemed somewhat unwise. Who was I to use Noel to unravel Mom's romantic tale?

The best source of information for this project would have been my mother, Evangeline Bechtel Lamoureux Ravneberg. Unfortunately, by the time I became really interested she was not much direct help. Mom had received a cancer diagnosis five or so years before Noel's death. The summer that Noel passed away, her treatment was continuing and the cancer had not yet killed her, but soon would. The disease progressed such that by the following fall her doctors suspended treatments. Mom died 14 months after Noel.

Further, during a cancer treatment stay in a hospital in Richmond, Mom fell and hit her head. The injury resulted in an accumulation of water on her brain that led to dementia. By the time that Noel passed away Mom's memory impairment was becoming more pronounced and obvious. By the time that she died in mid-2003, her dementia was bad enough that we had placed her in an Alzheimer's unit in Peoria for her final months.

When Mom died, I received boxes of her photographs and other historical memorabilia. At one point in her life, Evangeline was quite a pack rat. However, selling the house in Long Beach and moving to Williamsburg found her culling some of her collection. Of course, I have no way to know what materials did not come to me. Those that did were quite valuable to my research and writing.

I also viewed one item of interest from Noel's possessions. Noel kept a large photo album filled with images from the 1930s and 40s in North Dakota. I looked through the album a number of times, very carefully. Apparently, someone in his crowd liked photography because there were many images of Noel and his friends in their youthful days. The images appeared to be from Noel's late teenage years through early adulthood. I looked at hundreds of images: Evangeline did not appear in any of the images in that photo album. This caused me to further suspect her story about their North Dakota romance. Since my mother was not in the album and I was not yet fully engaged in this project, I returned the photo album to Ron Ravneberg along with other personal items of Noel's, including the Purple Heart that I helped facilitate. Before I began the research for this project in earnest, Ron passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Neither his wife in Cincinnati nor his sister in Arizona have been able to recover that photo album.

I was also unable to take advantage of the memories of the last remaining siblings on both sides. Only one of Roger's siblings survived beyond June, 2002: Aunt Rachel (Lamoureux) Redmond, lived in Sioux City and died there in December, 2002. I often talked of taking the family to the Sioux City area to visit relatives and see the family farmlands. However, Peoria to Sioux City is a very long day's drive; we simply never made the trip.

Aunt Veronica (Bechtel) O'Brien lived into her 90s, passing in 2007, but suffered from dementia. While not debilitating, Veronica's condition limited her ability to remember details. Uncle Donald Bechtel died in 2008 but suffered from dementia that had incapacitated him for many years prior to his passing. Richard Bechtel, my Uncle Dick, was able to provide lots of information and served, especially, as a fact checker in my early research. Unfortunately, he developed late stage dementia before I was able to complete primary writing. Uncle Dick passed away in 2015.

Five cousins provided invaluable help with the project; many other cousins and second cousins also made significant contributions). Roger was the second youngest child in his family; Evangeline was in the middle of her 6 siblings. They were 38 and 36, respectively, when they adopted me, a somewhat older age than when most folks acquired their first child in the 1940s and 1950s. As a result, many of my cousins are somewhat older than myself; their parents were older than mine and started their families at a much younger age than did Roger and Evangeline. The five cousins who provided an enormous amount of help on this project were present in the lives of our families as much as 20 years before I showed up on the scene.

On the Bechtel side, Veronica and Jim O'Brien's daughters Jean (O'Brien) Nash and Maureen (O'Brien) Creswick provided insight both about Bechtel history in general and also specifics about my mother because Evangeline lived with and near them in Fort Madison and Keokuk, Iowa both before and after World War II.

On the Lamoureux side, Aunt Bertha and Uncle Walt Ceilley's daughter Carol (Ceilley) Norton has extensive memories of the family. Likewise, Aunt Rachel and Uncle Jim Redmond's daughter Mary Ann was born and raised in Sioux City, Iowa and carried with her a broad set of

memories about the family on its home turf. Additionally, Aunt Corinne and Uncle R.L. (Dave) Davidson's son, (Thomas) Tim Davidson, grew up in Keokuk, Iowa when the Davidson's lived there and then moved to Peoria, Illinois. Tim was a teenager in Keokuk when my father and mother met and wed there and recounted stories about my parent's first meetings. Unfortunately, Tim passed away in January 2014, just as my work on this project was really picking up steam. But gratefully before he died, Tim passed along stories about Noel's visit as well as Roger and Evangeline's earliest encounters.

After my birth mother Marie Claudette Beaulieu Cyr and I came into contact, we exchanged numerous letters; first handwritten or typed and later via electronic mail. Over the course of our relationship, until her death in late 2016, Claudette relayed stories about the circumstances of my birth and adoption as well as somewhat fragmentary details about my birth father. My youngest sister Renee, probably knows more specifics than I've included in this book. I refrained from collecting more information from her for a specific reason.

A major motivation for continuing this project over the long term was to give voice to my long-silenced birth mother. I know that Claudette suffered, beyond measure, over my being taken from her. She did not relay a lot of information about the situation to her kids. However, Renee was her primary care-giver toward the end of Claudette's life; I know that some information was exchanged that I did not access. I used every fact I gathered to write her sections. However, I wrote the rape (assault? 5 months earlier, statutory rape for children under 16 in CT in 1952) scene from my heart and from my knowledge of social relations in the mid-50s. I wanted to portray, to the best of my ability, the victim's perspective as a way to empower my birth mother. I felt that creative fiction gave me more room in that regard than would have retelling the version

that Claudette might have shared with her youngest off-spring, Renee.

I searched for information about my birth father, Lars Swahn, for longer than three years. After locating information about him and discovering that he died (of a sudden heart attack at the age of 46) in 1970, I contacted Lars' sister, Margret Swahn Eddy. Aunt Margret provided significant amounts of biographical information about my birth father and his family (including my three ½ siblings). Margret also put me in contact with a (distant) cousin living in Finland: Tua Ericsson-Knif. Via email, Tua corrected and clarified many details about the family in Finland.

Former fiancé (twice) and longtime friend Ann Raney was born and raised in Keokuk and provided lots of details and perspectives about people I'd not met or that I only knew when I was a very young child. Ann knew many of the people I had contacted or heard about, over the years, in Keokuk. For example, a few years ago when I mentioned to Ann that I had learned the name of the woman that Roger dated just prior to meeting Evangeline: Frances Tallerico. Ann was surprised to hear the name as she knew the woman. In fact, Ann's mother, Ruth Raney, played golf with both Frances and Frances' sister Lucy, over the years, at the Keokuk Country Club golf course where Uncle Dave and Aunt Corinne, Uncle Jim and Aunt Veronica, and Jack and Ruth Raney were members. They and their family members often played that course as had I with my Keokuk golf buddy, Howie Sutlive.

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Traynor, of Devils Lake, North Dakota, were kind enough to chat with me both my phone and in their home. The Traynors were born and raised in Devils Lake and knew Evangeline and Noel, and their friends and families, personally. The Traynors were particularly helpful with descriptions of the social life of young North Dakotans in the 1930s and

1940s.

Additionally, they were able to describe the topography and road conditions of the era. In the early part of the 20th century, Devils Lake, a closed-basin body, was shallow and included a lot of dry-bed as the great drought of the 1930's brought the lake to lower than 2 feet deep in 1940. I learned from the Trayners that in the 1930s and 40s, cars drove over the lake-bed between Devils Lake and Minnewaukan, making it possible (and relatively easy) for young people to meet and mix socially without having to make the longer drive around the perimeter of the lake. Many social events such as dances, mixers, and athletic contests brought young people together from the two towns. Increased rainfall in the 1990s caused the lake to rise nearly a foot a month in some periods; it now stands over 24 feet deep and covers 120,000 acres (81,000 of those acres are flooded farm land).

I engaged in significant amounts of research for this project including extensive online work in newspaper records and public documents. In a wonderful bit of good fortune for researchers, a benefactor to the public libraries in Iowa provided resources to conserve and publish online full text (and fully searchable) copies of decades of the *Akron Register Tribune*. Via that database I was able to establish many biographical details about the Lamoureux family including rough dates for their moves from Salix to Akron and Akron to Sioux City as well as weddings, funerals and other events both important and trivial. I found little information directly about Roger. He only appears three times in the newspaper: He is mentioned twice as a high school football player and once just before enlisting in the Navy.

I spent more than eight months looking at microfilm copies of newspapers from Devils Lake, Grafton, Benson County, North Dakota and the *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*. Greg M.

Wysk, then librarian deluxe at the State Historical Society of North Dakota museum in Bismarck, aided me both in the library at Bismarck and by facilitating interlibrary loans from the museum/library collection in North Dakota to Bradley University's library in Peoria. Bradley's librarians, Marina Savoie, Erich Gilbert, Kari Garmon, and (then director) Barb Galik were very helpful and supportive. The North Dakota papers contained numerous interesting articles about Evangeline, the Bechtels, Noel, the Ravnebergs as well as other North Dakotans I'd heard mentioned over the years.

Bradley University College of Communications Dean Jeffery Huberman and Department of Communication chairman Tony Adams were always interest in and supportive of my work on *Threads*. I thank them with deep gratitude. Professor Gary Will allowed me to work with a class of Graphic Design students in support of iconographic approaches to the work.

Cheryl Lamoureux has shown patience beyond measure as the decades-long development of *Threads* has very often tested her patience for hearing (in many instances for multiple times) stories about my family and my speculations about how and why a particular event took place or person came and went. Her love and our family sustain and inspire me.

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