

April 8, 1991

Dear Barb,

I got lucky - I remembered that we had asked for some information to fill out Susie's baby book, which I subsequently copied into the books for the three other kids. Bob's is still at home, and I looked up the little family tree. Frantisek/Francis Racek (your great grandfather) was born in Bruno (Brno), Czechoslovakia. His immigration papers show him coming out of Austria, which we knew. The town is very close to the Austrian border now, and I don't know where the border was at that time.

According to Lester (Ladislav), Francis was being persecuted for going AWOL from the army for which he had been conscripted, and for which he had no sympathy (Dick knows which one; ~~Prussian~~, ^{Austrian} I think). While running at night, he was picked up by a man in a carriage who offered to take him home. (The plot thickens.) He turned out to be Count Zborowski, who had extensive sugar-beet properties. His daughter Marie eventually married Francis. Later on, all the Zborowski lands were seized.

The first three children, Stan, Lou, and Della, were born in Krakow, and came to America with their mother. They were sponsored by a family named Novrodgil (this is phonetic; Lu may know how it should be spelled) in Abie, Nebraska. Francis was smuggled onto a boat in a mattress and got to South America. There he had amnesty under an arrangement where you could work in the mines for one year for food but no wages. He finally was able to buy a postage stamp and write to his wife, and I think the same family sponsored him so that he could get into the States. He worked as a carpenter and farmer, and occasionally went to Chicago on the train to act as a court interpreter. I have been told that he spoke seven languages and read 13. (He had been an editor for the Catholic press, which was the largest in Europe.) After he got his citizenship, he became a postmaster. Apparently this background was never discussed, because they were afraid that somehow his citizenship was at risk. Lester remembered knowing that there was a terrible, dark secret, but never knew what it was until he was almost grown. We called Maudie Meyer (Celia's daughter) and Dorothy Sempek (Della's daughter) this weekend asking about the birthplace for their grandfather Francis, and they both said they had never known anything about the European roots even as adults; the subject was absolutely never discussed.

Anyhow, you can see why I gave Lester the tape recorder to put down what he knew of the family history. It doesn't exist anywhere else, and he's gone. If you are able to turn up that tape, I will be so thrilled. It's all we have.

Enclosed are photocopy paste-ups of the back pages of the family Bible, and also the front and back of a document which was folded inside and is very fragile. I will get it preserved and framed as soon as I can - I didn't know it was in there until recently. The writing is very faint on the back, and some of it is on bits of paper which were stuck on - maybe they are where various officials signed off. I believe the date on the front, bottom right,

