

FORUM

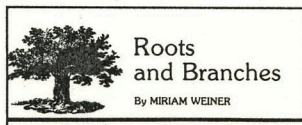
IS THIS MY DAD?

One of the most satisfying achievements of my genealogical career was the reunion of a father with his daughter that he had not seen for over forty years. This incident was one in a continuing saga which began when I started researching my father's family, the Weiners of Sudilkov and Shepetovka in the Ukraine.

At a 1982 gathering of Weiner relatives at my cousin Myra's house, I met my distant cousin, Nat, for the first time. After a short while, he proceeded to tell me about his daughter, Miriam, from his first marriage. As a result of his wife's irreversible illness and accompanying problems, Miriam was to be raised in her new family with no associations from the past. Nat told me he had spent many sleepless nights through the years wondering about his daughter and what she was like. My name was identical to his daughter and perhaps because of my background as a licensed Private Investigator (by the State of California), he felt I could help him.

Nat asked me to try to find Miriam, but could provide little information. Her name had been changed to Barbara and he thought she might have been raised in Baltimore. In the meantime, Nat's two children from his second marriage came into the room during this discussion and were very surprised to find their father telling this story to a "new cousin".

I promised to attempt to locate Miriam/Barbara and use my best judgement prior to arranging a meeting with Nat. It was sug-



gested that I contact Nat's two children with any information I found.

Armed with the name of the adoptive father and the probable city in which she was raised, I spent the next few months researching by mail and phone. I was able to locate the family in the Baltimore telephone directories, but there was no listing after 1958. I contacted the Board of Education and received a response indicating that my cousin had graduated from a local high school and was referred to them for further information. There was no response from Barbara's high school.

In April, 1983, I attended the Holocaust Survivor Gathering in Washington, D.C. At the end of the Gathering, I borrowed a friend's car and left for Baltimore to "find my cousin". At Barbara's high school, a cooperative vice-principal located my

cousin's graduation yearbook. At last I saw a photo of my namesake. The vice-principal then began to telephone those people she knew who graduated the same year with Barbara. Finally she located someone who said, "Yes, I know Barbara! She is a lovely girl, married to a doctor here in Baltimore and here is her phone number."

What an exciting moment that was for me! Even though I had mentally rehearsed what I would say to her, I was extremely nervous as I dialed the number. When she answered the phone in her husband's office, I said, "My name is Miriam Weiner. Does that name mean anything to you?" There was a pause and finally she answered, "I think we are related."

I told Barbara that I had some very personal matters to discuss with her and asked if we could meet immediately. She was very receptive. Forty-five minutes later we were together in a private office. My question, "What does the name Miriam Weiner mean to you?" was finally answered. Barbara said, "I think that was my name before I was adopted."

Barbara's knowledge of her adoption alleviated one of my major concerns. I spoke of my involvement in genealogy and of the family meeting where I had met her father, brother and sister. I told her of their desire to meet her and showed her photographs taken at my meeting with her family. Barbara did not know her natural father was alive, nor that she had a brother and sister. She had been raised as an only child and both of her adoptive parents were deceased.

At this time in her life, she was happily married with grown children of her own and seemed eager to meet her previously unknown family. I was as impressed and enchanted with Barbara as I had been with her father, Nat, when we first met.

We called her new brother and sister from Barbara's home that evening. They felt it best to break the news to their father personally. When Barbara was later called to the phone by her daughter, we heard her say, "Is this my dad?" There wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Since that phone call in May of 1983, Barbara and her new family have met often — for the Bat Mitzvah of Barbara's daughter, for another daughter's wedding, for the wedding of Barbara's new brother, for the Bar Mitzvah of Barbara's new nephew and other occasions. They have all blended together well and been enriched by the new relationships. Nat has often told me that he feels such inner peace now as well as great pride in his daughter and her family. He and Barbara look alike and share the same sense of humor and sharp mind. Barbara's new brother, David, claims it is wonderful to have gained another sister without suffering the accompanying sibling rivalry!

A Beginner's Kit (55 pages) on how to research your family history, which includes charts, list of archives and libraries, maps, bibliography, family group sheets and more can be ordered from: Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094. (Cost: \$10)