



Roots and Branches

By MIRIAM WEINER

Family Reunion: Planning Ahead Or Standing in Line at The Deli

Recently, a long line of people waited outside the Rascal House, a deli restaurant popular with Jewish retirees in South Florida. In the course of conversation, Henry Kinast from Hubbard, OH, thought he recognized the accent of the man standing near him, who was lamenting in Yiddish about the lengthy wait in line.

When he asked Sam Saide of St. Paul, MN where he was from, both men were astounded to discover they not only came from the same small town of Lenczyca near Lodz in Poland, but they were first cousins! Saide's mother and Kinast's father were sister and brother.

The men had not seen each other since they were children in 1939, each thinking the other had not survived the Holocaust. The irony is they both spend their winters in condominiums less than a mile from each other in Hallandale, FL. The good news traveled in Yiddish down the line of customers and soon everyone knew the whole story. When it was time to be seated, the reunited cousins made it a "foursome."

The chances of a street corner encounter with your relatives, even the ones you know, is rare, except in your home town. Why wait? Plan and organize a family reunion.

There's nothing like getting the whole clan together to rekindle family ties. Frequently, branches of the same family have lost contact for a generation or two. A family reunion is a special opportunity to catch up on everyone's life, marvel at the children and grandchildren, share fond

memories and simply enjoy being together.

Whether your family's reunion is to be a casual gathering of a few people, or a meticulously planned weekend for a large crowd, you will need to plan and organize well ahead.

It is best to take it step by step. At least a year before you plan to hold the event, begin compiling a master address list of the

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entire family. Fill out an index card for each name on the list including details such as occupation, relationship and special interests along with name, address and telephone number.

Form a committee of willing relatives to help with the myriad of details and serve as coordinator or their activities.

Set a date, keeping in mind that there is no way to accommodate everyone's schedule. However, summer would be ideal, since children are out of school, and the reunion can be combined with vacation plans. You will need a budget for meals, rooms, printing, long distance telephone calls, postage, handout material, prizes and party favors.

Prepare an announcement that will intrigue your family members so they won't

want to miss this special event.

Choose a location geographically convenient for the majority, inquire as to convention rates and overbook! The turnout can surprise you and it is better to be prepared.

Establish a registration fee to cover your expenses over and above lodging. Arrange for a large meeting room to be your headquarters. Provide name tags, color-coded by family branches and listing each individual's direct line of descent.

Plan on prizes for who came the greatest distance, the oldest, longest married, and other creative ideas such as those utilized by Barbara Alexander of Chicago in her family reunion, like the "Wandering Jew Award" (for Uncle Bernie who moves every year or two) and the "Missing Mishpocha Award" for "achievements of memory and helpfulness above and beyond the call of duty" to Cousin Lillian.

Write up a press release about your family and the reunion. Send it to the local press, both general and Jewish newspapers. Create a registration packet that includes the reunion itinerary, family trees and forms for recording new data, and reprints of articles about particular family members.

An emphasis on the past is not likely to interest children; therefore, special planning is needed to ensure that the children have fun. Since the purpose of the reunion is to bring the family closer together, plan activities which involve the children and teens with each other.

For the program itself, someone should recount a brief history of one of the common ancestors. The account should be accurate, but colorful. Try to bring out humorous incidents, sad events, and triumphs.

Home movies can be shown of some of the early members of the family or a video can be prepared showing ancestral homes and historic landmarks where your ances-

tors lived.

Everyone is interested in seeing old family photos, but they should be identified as to who they are, when they were taken, and the family connections. Documents such as census records, birth, marriage and death certificates, family *Ketubot*, naturalization records, passenger lists, and newspaper clippings about family members are all of interest. Make sure you use copies rather than original documents.

Also, provide maps of the area where the family came from with the various towns highlighted. If there is a *Yizkor* book about the town or towns where the family originated, have it available as well.

An enlarged version of the family tree will be one of the prime attractions. Everyone will want to see their relationship to the rest of the family. If possible, have the family tree reduced in size so it can be accommodated in the registration packet.

In addition to the individual family group photos, schedule a family group picture of all those attending which will require some special planning. Schedule oral history taping sessions with the older family members and have old family photos on hand to jog their memories.

A videotape of the reunion highlights is desirable and can be done inexpensively with minimal equipment. Remember, this may not be an annual event, so you want to preserve it forever.

For people intrigued by their origins and the mystery of the past, there's no better reason than a reunion to explore and discover your family's history.

Miriam Weiner, a certified genealogist, has prepared a beginner's guide (55 pages) on how to research your family history that includes charts, list of archives, bibliography, maps, family group sheets and more. It can be ordered for \$10 by writing to her at 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094.