

On family trees

By William Corden

You know how these politicians try to lay guilt trips on us about the legacy we leave for “Our children and our children’s children?

Well, it’s the worst form of oratory because it means nothing. because our offspring 100 years from now won’t know or won’t care about who we were. (assuming of course that we’re not blown into oblivion by a nuclear war)

We, “the children’s children”, usually don’t have a clue who our great grandparents were, what they did or where they came from but it does get interesting when you find out.



Unbeknownst to me, a distant relative of mine now living in Australia did an extensive search into my family's history through Ancestry.com. and he sent me the results

I knew that one side was from Wales and the other from Ireland but we never really were given any details about our origins.

I did know my maternal grandmother very well (and when I look in the mirror in the morning I quite often see her face smiling back at me, as Irish a face as you can get) she had about 3 husbands in her day, with two of them being killed in the world wars. We called the last one granddad Tom although we weren't related in any way.

As for her Mom and Dad we had no clue as to who they were or what they did to get by. We did know that they were from County Cork in Ireland.

There was a family myth that we were somehow related to the great Irish Liberator Daniel O'Connell but if there was any real connection it was on the wrong side of the bedsheets (according to my distant relative's ancestry research)

Now the other side of the family (my paternal grandparents) is rich with history although none of it aristocratic. It seems that in the early days of the industrial revolution most of the rural workers in the border farming counties, Shropshire and Cheshire and the Welsh counties of Denbigh, and Flintshire, well they pulled up stakes and moved to the industrial heartland of Merseyside where jobs were plentiful and mostly well paid.

This is where my family of peasants came from, I learned that my Dad's Mum came from The Welsh island of Anglesey, not even a drop of royalty in her entire tree. But it did trigger something that my Dad had mentioned on the rare occasions he ever talked about her and that was that they only spoke Welsh as kids and had a dog that could only understand commands in the Welsh Language...

"Sit!" is "ista" in Welsh by the way.

I remember him telling me as a kid that the dog would attack you if you spoke English to it.

So, she went to a one room school in Anglesey, got married at

18 as they all did back in those times and her husband was carted off to the first world war and killed. Then she met my Grandad (who I discovered I was named after) and delivered 7 kids to the world.

It was uncanny to see how many Christian names were passed down the lines in the family trees and yet we didn't know a single thing about the actual humans who carried them (see paragraph 2). But I did get a sense of where my own Celtic (and very troublesome) skin comes from.

Then my namesake grandad must have had enough of the hard life of the times and he skedaddled to Australia, leaving behind a destitute mother and of course no forwarding address!

He became successful in Melbourne and had a chicken farm, reestablished contact with my Dad and invited him to emigrate to Australia to join him in running the farm. I was a babe in arms at the time but I only realized recently that I MUST have met the man I was named after. My Dad always called him a miser and a cheapskate, so I have proudly inherited those traits from him. We went out there on the SS Ranchi.

I don't know the details because they never ever spoke about it but we only lasted six weeks in Australia before we were back home again, the only spartan details I ever got was that my Dad had a big fight with HIS Dad and we were on the boat back home, welcomed with open arms into a life of poverty.

Luckily all of that's behind us; now I'm only mildly poor.

So you see, keeping things right for our "children's children" is a chimera, they won't know or care who the hell you were.