

# WHO IS YOUR FAITH FAMILY TREE?

My Austrian Grandpa insisted that he came from Hapsburg royalty even though we could never find proof. Despite that we liked to fantasize about the royal blood coursing in our veins. He was a colorful character and we loved to tell how he promised his mother he was going to enter the seminary, but as he passed by the local brewery and was captivated by the aroma, he decided instead to become a brewmeister. I'm glad he did or I wouldn't be here. There's also the romantic story of how he met Grandma on the boat coming across the Atlantic and followed her here to Cincinnati. His driving behaviors were a family source of amusement. Though he loved to race the trolley cars, he never made a left turn or drove in reverse (which was a real problem when he pulled the car to the shore of the lake and had to have my dad and uncle push it up the beach so they could get home.) Though he liked to build things, his carpentry skills were somewhat lacking. He never seemed to be able to get chair legs even so bar stools often became foot stools, items cherished after he died.

My Italian Nona was the youngest of 10 children and played the organ and sang at church at a very young age. She said people would cry when she did this. (We were never sure if it was tears of approval or horror—and we never dared to ask.) There was word of another relative who got into trouble here and was sent out west where he continued his shenanigans. My mother-in-law's mother set a field on fire burning holy cards because "you just can't throw them in the garbage. My father-in-law's mom was getting ready for a family celebration in her downtown Elder Street apartment, when the cat leaped up on the table and started licking the cake. Without batting an eye, she got a knife, smoothed out the icing, and told the person there with her, "You know and I know and we don't have to eat it."

Remembering stories like these gives us a sense of continuity with the people who went before us. We feel as if we know them, though often we've only seen pictures or heard about them.

Recalling our forebears in faith does much the same thing. And we can go all the way back to the time of Jesus through the gospels and to the early church through the Acts of the Apostles. The 50 days of the Easter Season provides us with an opportunity to get a sense of the excitement, challenges, fears, and sense of community experienced shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

From cowering behind locked doors to boldly proclaiming Jesus' message of hope and new life, our Christian ancestors give us encouragement in our faith journey today. I like Thomas who wanted proof, Peter who went back to fishing, Mary who mistook Jesus for a gardener, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus who needed help to understand what was happening. All of them went from doubt and fear to belief and courage, and I believe sometimes backslid into old behaviors. I can identify with that.

Later there were the desert fathers and mothers, who were more than a little kooky by our standards who treasured the silence and grew deeper into relationship with God. Though we may not have opportunities to go into the desert and aren't into caves and hair shirts, we can learn from them about the value of quiet time with God. Then there are people like St. Teresa of Avila who once complained to God, "If that's the way you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them." We've all felt that way sometimes.

And each of us has our own "saints" whose faith and foibles have taught us about God. They may be relatives or friends, persons from history or the arts, but each of them has made an impact on our lives. What if, in addition to tracing our biological genealogy, we'd also look back at our faith family tree during this Easter season? We may be amazed to discover who our relatives are.

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