

Traveling Companion: In the money

Fr. Michael Tracey

It arrived yesterday in a large white envelope with a small window that focused on my address. It came all the way from London. Its glossy cover showed an incomplete tree with pieces of a puzzle surrounding it. Inside, the tri-fold opened up to reveal a company history on the left, a series of FAQ's on the right and the center contained a cover letter, some papers to sign, a pre-paid return airmail envelope, a case reference number, a client reference number and the name of a contact person. The company introduced themselves as "Genealogists and International Probate Researchers."

I read the cover letter. It began, "Further to our conversation with your sister _____, who very kindly supplied us with your details. I should like to confirm that we are a firm of genealogists and international probate researchers specializing in finding missing heirs. I take this opportunity to enclose an introductory leaflet about our work and trust you will find it of interest.

We have recently been carrying out research into the estate of a person who has died and in which we believe you will be entitled to share."

Then I stopped reading and wondered if I was "in the money" and didn't have to worry about retirement financial woes.

I read further. All I had to do was to provide some personal information which included name, address, phone numbers; parents names, date, place of birth and death, date and place of their marriage, information about brother and sisters and if any had died, paternal aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Once I provide the necessary information, sign an enclosed agreement, then they will reveal the "the identity of the person from whose estate" I may inherit. Of course, for their efforts, they would receive 25%. If I were to receive nothing, then they would receive nothing.

Out of curiosity, I checked out their website and it seemed very professional. Still, I was not convinced. I noticed that they spelled my sister's first name incorrectly. Was it a genuine mistake or a possible red flag?

Having read all the material, I thought back to my family history. My family had moved to a small village in Ireland during the famine years in order to try and make a living. They farmed amid the rocks and poor soil trying to feed a large family. In later generations, my aunts and uncles emigrated to England to work in factories and construction. They sent part of their meager earnings home to help those, who remained at home, survive. Those who stayed in England, survived retirement on little savings. They all died without any fanfare. Our parents, without the benefit of high school or college education, sacrificed to make sure that their children benefited from education.

I checked with the rest of my siblings to see if they had received such a polished invitation and its possible ramifications. Were they as privileged as I was? I found out they had received the same package. How interesting, I thought! How did this company know about the rest of my family as well as their addresses?

My curiosity peaked. I am doing some detective work. Maybe, I might hire an investigative reporter to help me.

In recent months, I had received emails and snail mails with some wonderful offers of unbelievable inheritances. Once I had claimed such, I could then avail of some easy prescriptions including Viagra and they would keep me alive indefinitely so I could enjoy my new found wealth for a long, long time. Then, when it came to my death, I could die broke and happy. I would know that any of my heirs would not have to receive a large white envelope from London