

Not in my family

Jo, our secretary, handed me the note. I checked the area code and found out it was Virginia. Along with the area code was a phone number to call “Tom Tracey” and the message had one word – “genealogy.”

I realized I didn’t know any “Tom Tracey” in this country and furthermore, I was the only one of my immediate family who was living in the United States. I wondered was there a long lost very distant cousin living in Virginia. I know that my grandmother, on my mother’s side, had spent some time in the United States before she got married but there would no connection there with a “Tom Tracey.”

I decided to take plunge and call the phone number later that evening. I dialed the phone number and was greeted with a “Hello” I asked, “Is this Tom Tracey?” He indicated in the affirmative. I introduced myself, “This is Michael Tracey returning your call.” I was met with, “Thanks for returning my call.”

My curiosity peaked so I had to ask, “How did you come across my name?” He told me. “Some years ago, when you had Hurricane Katrina down there, I saw your name on the newspaper here and I was curious. My son was down there some time later working on a project with Northrup-Grumman in Pascagoula so I asked him to try and find your phone number. He did but I misplaced it for a few years and I finally found it the other day and decided to give you a call.”

Now that my curiosity was satisfied, we could continue our conversation. Tom told me that his family’s excursion into the United States happened in 1848, arriving in the New York area and eventually moving west. His Irish connected led him to the town of Clonmel, in Tipperary, Ireland. He told me that he found a phone number for a “Tom Tracey” in that same town and decided to call him. He recounted the conversation, “Is this Tom Tracey?” “It is? “This is Tom Tracey?” After a reverential pause, he said, “I might be related to you. Do you know anything about the Traceys in America?” He didn’t and I’m sure he was wondering why this Yank he never heard of was bothering him in Ireland.

Tom began to tell me about his background and his family. Years ago, his mother opened the only woman-owned menswear store in Westport, Connecticut. “The women would come into the store to buy clothes for their husbands because, back then, men weren’t comfortable buying their clothes from a woman.”

Tom’s first child died in childhood. “She just got her shots as a baby and within forty-eight hours, she was dead. Back then, they said she died from S.I.D.S. (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) but later on we found out that she really died from a reaction to the shots. We never got over that even though we had two other children later – a boy and a girl. I was raised Catholic but, after that happened to my daughter, I stayed away from church and have not practiced since. The last time I was in church was Ash Wednesday.”

He indicated that his other daughter and son are gifted with a photographic memory. My son is an electronics specialist and he can read any manual once and never has to open it again and you can ask him what it says about so and so on a certain page and he can tell you without consulting a book. My daughter is the same as well as my grand-daughter.”

Thirty minutes after our conversation began, we ended it, reminding him that he was more than welcome to contact me any time or if any of his family were ever in this area, we would be happy to meet with them.

As one who has delved into my own family background, I could appreciate Tom’s desire to connect with his own family tree. Studying my own family tree, I discovered how my family was dispossessed because of the 1845 famine and had to try and hatch out a living on the side of a mountain amid the rocky grounds.

I wish all genealogies were as simple as the genealogy of Jesus as presented at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel. But there is one consolation. I may not be related to Tom Tracey in Virginia but through Jesus Christ, we are all related as adopted sons and daughters.