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ROOTS AND BRANCHES

Passing on a Legacy of Love to the Next Generation

By Miriam Weiner

Genealogists are a unique breed who extract life and nurture understanding by probing deep into the roots of family trees. Like most researchers and other scientists who do their investigation alone, the genealogist hopes to eventually share the fruits of labor with many and for the benefit of others. This exploration will become part of the inheritance to succeeding family members. However, not all family members share the enthusiasm and dedication, which at times can border on obsession that characterizes the tender of some family historians.

My niece, Molly, is the designated "genealogist-to-be" in the case of my family. I have chosen her to carry on this legacy of love. She accepted this responsibility forthrightly, which I did not expect. I did not even ask her first if she was interested or whether she was willing to assume the role as guardian of the family history.

IT BEGAN THE FIRST TIME she visited my home with a tour of the pictorial gallery lining the walls. As we approached the section of my father's side of the family, I told Molly about her great-grandmother's arrival in this country, how many children she had, and about her grandfather's early years in the Midwest, where he sold eggs.

I looked at her after each introduction — searching for the signs of interest and excitement I hoped would appear. Most of the time, she gazed at the pictures and seemed to be listening intently. When I think back it is amazing that she didn't even interrupt, but waited patiently until I would look at her square in the eyes to see if she was "still with me."

When I pointed out the photo of my grandfather, Alexander Rabkin, I told Molly how he came to Tulsa, Okla., in 1917, where he sold produce, and in 1923 opened a "fine open-air motion picture place," according to the newspaper announcement.

EACH PHOTO ON THE WALL reminds me of another family story — of someone I either knew personally or have come to know historically as our family mosaic takes shape through the exploration of our roots. The names have led to faces. The documents and family stories have been woven into a unique history and heritage that will be passed from generation to generation.

During another visit, I told Molly, my captive protegee, about my extensive research, my passion for discovery and the dedication involved in building my library and archives. She seemed to understand the tremendous responsibility I



LITTLE MOLLY after getting her first indoctrination into the roots and branches of Jewish genealogy from her aunt, "Roots and Branches" columnist Miriam Weiner, goes outdoor to explore the roots and branches of Mother Nature. This budding genealogist has been designated to carry on the legacy of love to the next generation in her family tree.

was describing and for a moment, when words just wouldn't convey the message, she looked into my eyes as if to convince me of her true and earnest commitment. It was then that I decided to continue channeling and stimulating her by sending articles, pictures and books to her mother, who will assist in starting the files and organizing the materials I need.

It is a great relief to me to know that the newest member of our family tree will carry forth our family history.

MOLLY SPEAKS ...

My name is Molly, and my Aunt Miriam is the keeper of our family history. Aunt Miriam has decided that I am

the one to continue adding names to our family tree when I grow up. I don't know if I have much choice about this.

Every time I go to her house, she takes me to the picture wall. Each group of pictures is for one of her grandparents. It is hard to remember who all these people are. Their clothes look funny to me. In the old pictures, the people never seem to smile.

Sometimes she shows me papers that tell stories about our family. She calls them census records, citizenship papers — she even has pictures of the boats that brought our ancestors to America from Russia, where they used to live.

ONE PICTURE ON THE WALL is of my great-grandmother, who is named "Molly," just like me. Her name was "Malka" when she used to live in the "Old Country." I would like to go there one day, but Aunt Miriam says it will be a long time before we are invited to visit the small towns in the "Old Country" where our family once lived.

Sometimes, when I visit Aunt Miriam, she takes out a very long piece of paper from her computer that stretches across the whole living room floor with a lot of writing on it. She tells me it's our "family tree," with names of all our relatives and all of their children. It doesn't look like the trees I have seen. One day, Aunt Miriam says, we will have a party and invite the people on the family tree. It will be a big party because there are so many leaves.

IT'S A LONG TIME BEFORE I grow up. I know it is important to Aunt Miriam that I understand what she is doing and that I help her. Once, she told me she wishes I would hurry up and grow so I could help her with all the papers. She said it was a responsibility and that she has chosen me to share it with her. Of course, I didn't understand much of what she was saying, but she was so intense. It was a magic moment as we looked into each other's eyes while she talked so seriously. I felt as though her eyes echoed the words she spoke.

I haven't decided whether being the descendant of an avid genealogist chosen to continue the work is an honor or a burden. I expect it will be a little of both. In the meantime, I am almost three years old and I started making a family tree with my dolls.

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Miriam Weiner, a certified genealogist, has prepared a beginner's guide (55 pages) on how to research family history that includes charts, list of archives and libraries, bibliography, maps, family group sheets and more. It can be ordered for \$10 plus \$2.50 postage/handling by writing to her at 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094.