

Celebrating Yesterday and Building Tomorrow . . .

My son Jeremy loves digging into the past. In his pursuit of family roots he often can be found visiting cemeteries and pouring over record logs. He's joined genealogical groups that give him access to church and civil records throughout the world. Recently he was able to connect me with a second cousin in Australia. I knew that his family fled Hungary to escape Russian control but had lost contact decades ago. By tracing my grandmother's family history and immigration records in Australia, Jeremy was able to locate my second cousin in Sydney in just a few days. We're now friends on Facebook.

In his pursuit of his heritage Jeremy's uncovered missing pieces of family history and occasionally some dubious connections including one to the notorious Lady Godiva. One common thread in most branches of our family was that, like the Jews of the Old Testament, they were fleeing something—often violence and war—to make a new home in a place they knew little about. What a courageous and scary journey for them—and for so many whose names are listed in the registry at Ellis Island that my son often peruses looking for names of long lost relatives.

I have great admiration for them and for the possibilities they've opened up for me and my children—possibilities they didn't live long enough to witness. Ask anyone who's ever moved and left behind what is comfortable and known what

it's like to leave a place of memories to move into a new and unfamiliar setting. It's both exciting and frightening.

Where someone lives makes its mark at the time and remains throughout their lives. I am constantly meeting people who, when they find out that I'm at St. Leo's, are quick to tell me about their memories and connections with the area. There are so many stories from so many different people that sometimes it almost seems that all roads somehow lead through St. Leo's and the Fairmount community.

My own father had memories of this area. Once when telling him about visiting a family in an apartment on Westwood

Avenue in South Fairmount, he asked if it was the rear one on the second floor. It was and it turned out that was where he lived as a boy. He told tales of boyhood adventures and pranks there and wondered if it now had indoor plumbing. What are the odds of that happening? I drove past the other day. His boyhood home has been demolished but the memories remain and are being passed down to a new generation.

North Fairmount was first settled by German immigrants whose mark is still seen in many of the sturdy older homes, many of which were built by hand. Hills separated this area from South Fairmount which was first settled by Italians. St. Peter's a

small stone structure was the first church in the area still stands on Queen City Avenue. Descendants of some of the original families still live in the area and love to talk about the history of the neighborhood. Once it was a bustling place with grocery stores, banks, and a variety of small businesses. There were four schools—North and South Fairmount and St. Leo and St. Bonaventure. For a while neither community had a school, but Orion Academy, a charter school is now operating in the old St. Bonaventure building and the former North Fairmount School is getting new life as LEAP Academy, a new Cincinnati Public magnet Spanish enrichment school which will open in the fall.

Today residents of both communities are a hard-working mix of races and backgrounds.

Many are homeowners. Many others are working toward that goal and coming together to dream and further revitalize the area.

And amazing things are happening. In addition to the new school, there have been grants to bring exercise equipment to the park on Carl Street. Grants are also coming available for homeowners to upgrade their properties as well as the possibility of new housing in the area.

Like flowers bursting through the soil in the spring, new life is coming to Fairmount. Like St. Leo's, the old is becoming new and the possibilities are endless.



"Houses and neighborhoods are more often built to isolate and protect than to connect and integrate. The proclamation of the Gospel will be a basis for restoring the dignity of human life in these contexts, for Jesus desires to pour out an abundance of life upon our cities."

~ Pope Francis (cf. Jn. 10:10). (11/24/13, no. 75)

