

## 12 Questions

**Leslie Kelman proves a family story about his great-grandparents' emigration to Australia to be true, but many questions remain unanswered.**

*On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto), forty-four members of the Society contributed their fascinating stories of family, migration, found cousins, loss and discovery, and life in the 'old' country and in their new country, Canada. The stories, including the following excerpt, were published in Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories, a 246-page volume released in 2011. \$25 + shipping. To obtain a copy of the book, see the order form on page 30 or visit <http://familychronicle.com/books.htm>.*

MOST PEOPLE KNOW that the story of Passover has four questions and very long answers. For many people their family tree story has many questions, but no one around who can provide answers.

The following is an example of a family tree story, with questions. I have been able to assemble the facts surrounding the story but I still have questions that will almost definitely never be answered.

Growing up in Glasgow, Scotland, I never knew my father's parents, Avraham and Gittel Kelmansky. Gittel died before the family left Ukraine in 1923 and Avraham died in Glasgow, just before my second birthday. However, I was lucky enough to know my mother's parents, Philip and Leah Wolfson. Philip died at the age of 60 just after my ninth birthday. Leah lived long enough to attend my wedding and enjoyed every minute of the occasion, especially as this was the first wedding of one of her grandchildren.

In family gatherings, whenever the subject of Australia, New Zealand or Antarctica came up, it was often accompanied by the phrase "... and yes, your grandmother was almost born in Australia." Before my interest in genealogy, that statement did not

intrigue me at all.

Even after I started some family tree work, I did not explore the question of Australia and my grandmother almost being born there because I knew that many families had thought about emigrating from the United Kingdom to Australia. There appeared to be nothing remarkable about planning to go to Australia and then dropping the plans. However, at one stage I was told that my great-grandparents had actually made it to Australia, but had come back to the UK when my great-grandmother was seven months pregnant with my grandmother.



*The author's great-grandfather, Jacob Marcuson.*

I did some quick calculations and dismissed the whole idea as unreasonable. My rationale for this dismissal was based on the following facts.

1. My grandmother was born in Leeds, England, on 31 May 1892.
2. She was the fifth child of Jacob and Hannah Marcuson, my great-grandparents.

3. The four older siblings were all born in England, in Sunderland and Leeds.
4. The date of birth of the nearest older sibling was 5 March 1890.
5. This would mean that they went to Australia after March 1890 and returned before May 1892, all in a 26-month window.

Now this is before the days of aeroplanes (no Quantas, no British Airways and certainly no online bookings). Therefore, I concluded that this story was basically unbelievable. I was not willing to accept that, in the 1890s, a family with four very young children would travel to Australia and then return in such a short period.

A number of years later, in 2005, I visited Melbourne, Australia, to participate in a transportation conference. On arrival at the hotel, in order to fight jet lag, after a 27-hour journey, I went for a walk in downtown Melbourne. By chance, I came across the Immigration Museum on Flinders Street. I paid my admission and wandered through the various exhibits. Suddenly I remembered the story about "almost born in Australia."

The museum, apart from me, had no other visitors. So I approached one of the staff and outlined my story somewhat apologetically, as I felt that I was probably wasting her time. She inquired about time frame and, when I responded 1890 to 1892, she indicated that these records were, in fact, computerized. It was my lucky day. We input the family name Marcuson and, incredibly, their names appeared. It was amazing, in a five-minute time span I had broken through a brick

# Migration

wall without even realizing that a brick wall was there.

The facts were there on the computer screen for me to see. Initially, it was difficult for me to take it all in, that my great-grandparents had really been in Australia. On 3 January 1891, they had arrived in Melbourne on board the SS Cuzco, after a 42-day journey via Colombo, King Georges Island, and Adelaide. The museum researcher also found me a photograph of the SS Cuzco, which was built in 1871 by the Pacific Steam Navigation Company and later sailed (briefly) under the Orient Line banner before being purchased by the latter for England to Australia service. I stared at the picture for a long time, astounded about how small the SS Cuzco was.

It was only in 2010 that, with difficulty, I found passenger records for their return to England and they were surprising. Hannah Marcuson, my great-grandmother, four-months-pregnant and accompanied by four small children, but without her husband, reached Plymouth, England, on 28 December 1891, on board the SS Orizaba from Melbourne. She had been in Australia less than 12 months. She sailed via Adelaide, Albany, Colombo, Ismailiya, Naples and Gibraltar.

My great-grandfather arrived back in England on 23 December 1892, also on board the SS Orizaba. This was a full year later and seven months after the birth of my grandmother. Through a separate search, I also discovered his application for Naturalization for the Colony of Victoria (pre-Commonwealth of Australia) in July 1892, with no mention of wife or children.

So here are some questions that I would love to ask my great-grandparents, Jacob and Hannah.

1. Why did they go to Australia?
2. How did they cope, during the voyage on a fairly small ship, with four young children aged five, four, two and a nine month-old baby?

3. What were their impressions of the Suez Canal, which was opened to navigation only 20 years previously?
4. Why did my great-grandmother only stay in Australia for about ten months?



*The author's great-grandmother Hannah Marcuson.*

5. How did she cope on her own, pregnant and looking after four small children, on the 45-day journey back to the UK?
6. Who met her in Plymouth on her return?
7. How did she get from Plymouth to Leeds?
8. What caused my great-grandparents to basically separate, with her returning to the UK and him staying on in Australia and applying for naturalization? Was it a mutual plan or the result of a serious disagreement?
9. Why did he apply for naturalization after his wife and children were already back in the UK?
10. Was he intending to stay in Australia without his family?

11. It would appear that naturalization was granted, so when and why did he decide to return to the UK?

12. After my grandmother's birth, and my great-grandfather's return to the UK, my great-grandparents, Jacob and Hannah, had two more children, one born in 1893 (Leeds) and the other in 1897 (Dublin). By the 1901 census, they were back in Leeds and by the 1911 census, they were in Glasgow, Scotland. Why were they always moving?

So I have the facts of the story. I know the who, when, where and what. But I do not know the why and I probably never will. I am in touch with the archives from the City of Geelong, near Melbourne, where they resided and perhaps I will discover something new.

I am actually more intrigued with the return part of the story than I am about them going to Australia in the first place. It is not surprising for families to leave one country to try building a new life in another. However, the quick return to the UK and the 12-month gap between my great-grandmother's return and my great-grandfather's return is especially puzzling.

What do I know about my great-grandparents and that time period that would let me guess some of the answers to my questions?

First, the early 1890s were economically turbulent in the eastern Australian colonies. The long boom that began with the gold rushes of the 1850s began to collapse. Overseas investment dried up and the prices for wool and wheat fell dramatically. Most local banks collapsed, costing many depositors their funds. Unemployment and poverty soared, government tax revenues collapsed and public works projects were abandoned. This is what greeted Jacob and Hannah on their arrival to

Australia and probably made it impossible to find work or make a living. Jacob is recorded as a traveller on his naturalization papers, which I assume means a travelling salesman.

Second, Hannah had strong roots and connections back in the UK, whereas Jacob did not. In 1863, Hannah was born in Sunderland, England, and still had her mother, step-father, three brothers, and two step-brothers living in the UK. Jacob was born in Seirijai, in southwest Lithuania (then Poland), and had one brother back in the UK. Perhaps Hannah was unhappy and/or homesick and decided independently that she was going back home. Of course, for Jacob, the UK was not home since he lived there for fewer than 10 years before travelling to Australia. Did this difference in roots and connections contribute to their going separate ways for 12 months?

Third, according to the passenger shipping records, Jacob

and Hannah travelled to Australia with unassisted tickets. In other words, there was no government subsidy. I am still researching to see what it would have cost com-

---

So I have the facts of the story. I know the who, when, where and what. But I do not know the why and I probably never will.

---

pared to assisted tickets. It would appear that they could afford to travel there and travel back. So perhaps Hannah left because their savings were being depleted and they could not find work.

Fourth, Jacob and Hannah were brought up in different countries and Jacob was older than 18 when he arrived in the UK. I could not find him in the 1881 census, when he would have been 18 years old. Perhaps their different cultural backgrounds contributed to their difference of opinion about living in Australia.

It has been an exciting voyage tracking down the travels and travails of my great-grandparents, Jacob and Hannah. I have discovered much more than I expected and for this, I am grateful. Even if I will never know the real reasons why.

*Thanks to Leslie Kelman and the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) for allowing us to include his story in Family Chronicle.*

To learn more about the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) visit their website at <http://www.jgstoronto.ca>

FC



## Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories

Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto)

### Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories

On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Canada (Toronto), forty-four members of the Society share our fascinating stories of family, migration, found cousins, loss and discovery, and life in the 'old' country and in our new country, Canada. As we trace our roots and tell our stories, we do so to honor our ancestors and provide an important legacy for our children and our children's children.

ISBN: 978-0-9867306-0-3. 6' x 9'. 246 Pages. Soft cover. B&W pictures.

**\$25.<sup>00</sup>**

+ \$7.95 shipping

Canadian orders subject to applicable taxes.

See orderform on page 30 or

Visit our bookstore at:

[www.familychronicle.com](http://www.familychronicle.com)

**1-888-326-2476**