



State of Illinois  
Department of Human Rights

• June 2014

# IDHR UPDATE

Hello, Friend:

Last week, I shared with you Director Claps' immigrant story. Today, I'm pleased to present you with a story sent to me by Doreen Books, Human Rights Investigator II, from our Springfield office.

*"My great-grandfather, Bernhard Geissler was born in Germany in 1863. Bernhard was a deeply religious man, and at the age of 18, he and his sister emigrated to the United States which, he was told, needed pastors. He was ordained a Lutheran minister in Iowa, where he met and married a young German girl named Carolina. Bernhard was called to the Immanuel Lutheran Church near Basco, Illinois in the 1880's, where they still preached in German. He served as a minister for about 35 years, and although it was a very poorly paid profession, he raised a family of seven and taught his son Theodore (my grandfather) how to play the organ and sing for the congregation.*

*Life was good for Bernhard, but not everything was perfect. During the First World War, American sentiment turned against German-speaking people. When Rev. Geissler would ring the bells for church services,*



*townspeople would sneer and say "there must be a German victory that they are sounding the church bells for". Some also said that Bernhard was a German supporter because he only preached in German. The Immanuel church members didn't want Bernhard to stop preaching in German though, because many were not fluent in English, just like Bernhard.*



*Eventually there was a town meeting where the townspeople invited Bernhard to speak, in order to hear from him directly. His lack of fluency in English meant that he could not defend himself very well, and ultimately the meeting broke down into a mob who threatened to "string him up" for "supporting" the Germans. The situation was cooled when a good friend of Bernhard's, spoke up for him that night. Ironically, he was a Frenchman, whose country was fighting against Germany at that very moment.*

Back L to R: Max, Theodore, Paul . Front L to R:  
Adelheid, Rev. Bernhard, wife Carolina Wilhelmina  
(nee Opperman) Geissler.  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Basco, IL

*Rev. Bernhard Geissler retired soon thereafter and he and Carolina helped Theodore with his family farm for the remainder of his life."*

Thanks to Doreen for sharing with us. IDHR is full of these fascinating stories; Won't you take some time and tell us yours?

**The 2014 World Cup is here!**  
If you're a fan of "the beautiful game," send me a picture of yourself supporting your favorite team and we'll share it in a future newsletter.

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Sorry for skipping last week but to make up for that, I give you two stories today: Sheri Espinoza tells us about her dad; and, Nancy Stiles, shares her family's multiethnic genealogy. Thanks, ladies!

**Sheri Espinoza-** *"My father, Hector Espinoza, was born in Chile on June 16, 1955. As the oldest child of four, he had to take care of his younger siblings while his parents worked. So much responsibility at such an early age instilled in him a spirit of hard work and sacrifice on behalf of one's family. He went on to complete his education by earning a degree in engineering and then joined his father's construction business. He married my mom, Magda, in December 1988, and the following September I was born. Papi knew that I would face many challenges in Chile, and that the United States offered a much brighter future for his daughter. In 1992, we said goodbye to Chile and immigrated north, to Chicago.*

*My dad's degree was not readily accepted here and he struggled to find employment. He worked double shifts as a valet, parking cars, in order to provide for his family. I remember that I used to love waiting for him to come home from work and bury my nose in his jacket, which would always smell of Mexican food. I loved sitting on his lap and even though he was really tired he would let me play with his cheeks. By 2000, things had improved and we moved to Berwyn where he started working as a truck driver. Still, he continued to work long hours, knowing that this sacrifice was for the good of his family. Although his degree was not recognized in the US, he knew the value of education so he studied nights in order to earn his GED.*

*Shortly after, he was diagnosed with heart disease but that did not dim his spirit of hard work and sacrifice on behalf of his family. Against doctor's orders he kept on working a part time job until my mom finally convinced him to just stay home and rest. Papi went home to be with the Lord in 2012. If there are some things that I learned from my dad, were to never give up, to always keep a positive outlook on live and to remain compassionate. He had a very brave and caring heart. I'm proud to be his daughter and I'm blessed to have shared so many wonderful moments with him."*

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**Nancy Stiles -** *"My mom's grandmother, Magdalina Marksteiner, fled Hungary in 1919 to escape the first World War. In Illinois she met and married Simon Kerner, who was also from Hungary. Their daughter, my grandmother, Marie Ann Agnes Kerner, married Denzel Stiles, who was Native American. So my mom, Lori, is Hungarian and Native American.*

*My dad's grandfather, Peter Heibel, was born in Germany in 1848. Not sure when he came to the United States, however my grandpa, William Frederick Heibel, was born in Missouri in 1888. Grandpa married, Mary Ann Heindl, whose parents were also from Germany. So my dad, Frederick Heibel, is German. He worked as a contractor in California, where I was born. He's currently retired in the Philippines.*

*I was born Nancy Heibel, but when I left the military in the 1980s and returned to civilian life, I asked my grandma for permission to use her married name Stiles and honor my grandfather's heritage."*

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Thank you to everyone who's shared their story with us. This wraps up our Immigrant Heritage Month series, but it doesn't mean that the stories have to end. If you have a story that you'd like to share with us, please email it to me.

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