

Memorial Day Letter to the Dubuque Telegraph Herald

Here is a story about my [Daniel Kortenkamp] research on my wife's Luxembourg ancestors – Fabricius & Weber. I wrote it for a Memorial Day edition (May 23, 1997) of the Dubuque Telegraph Herald. It was later reprinted in Megan Smolenyak's book (2000) -- In Search of Our Ancestors (companion book to the PBS series "Ancestors"). The article has also been reprinted other places, including Ancestry Daily News (May 2005).

On this Memorial Day, many of us will spend time remembering and honoring those who have died. However, genealogists spend years researching, recording, preserving stories and pictures, and memorializing their ancestors. It has been said that genealogy is the most popular hobby in the United States, next to stamp collecting and coin collecting.

I have been researching and recording the lives of my ancestors for almost 30 years. In 1990, while attending the Dubuque funeral of my wife's uncle, Rev. Anthony Lang, I met her 99-year-old great uncle, Peter Fabricius. Visiting with him I became curious about the ancestors of my wife, Janet Lang, who all settled in Dubuque County. Two of her ancestors -- Jean-Pierre Fabricius and Elisabeth Weber -- were emigrants from Luxembourg; however, I did not know their towns of origin. In 1995 I placed an inquiry in a Luxembourg genealogy magazine asking for information about these ancestors. And thus begins the Memorial Day story I would like to share with you.

Soon after my inquiry appeared in this genealogy magazine, I received a letter from Mr. Jean-Pierre Jung, who lives in Colmar-Berg, Luxembourg. He wrote in English, and enclosed photocopies of records documenting the birthplaces and birthdates of my wife's two emigrant ancestors. He even included his English translations of these documents, some of which were in German, and some in French. Over the next several days I received two more letters containing more photocopied records and translations. I immediately wrote Mr. Jung thanking him for his research. I enclosed thirty American dollars to cover his travel, copying and postage expenses, although he had not asked for money.

In Mr. Jung's next letter, which included more documents, he first thanked me for the "greenbacks," and then commented on my sending him money:

"Thank you very much, but please, please do not repeat it in the future. I am not doing research for any material compensation. Take it as my small personal tribute to the sacrifice of those G.I.s who fought during the Battle of the Bulge for the freedom of Luxembourg's people, and of those many thousands buried in Luxembourg ground at Hamm near Luxembourg-city, with their General Patton of the 3rd Army. My joy is in giving service to a U.S. citizen."

Over a 12 month period (1995-1996) Mr. Jung sent me 17 parcels of ancestor trees and documents.

I was very moved that Mr. Jung would feel such gratitude 50 years after the end of WWII; and that he still would be trying to repay the American people for their sacrifices in liberating his country; and that I, who was only 7 years old in 1945, was receiving this gratitude. Mr. Jung has helped me appreciate much more the sacrifices made by those who worked and fought to liberate Europe. But, there is more to my Memorial Day story.

In the early 1960s I worked as a psychology intern at the Veterans Administration Medical Center, Des Moines, Iowa. The Chief of Prosthetics was Cyril Mayrose. I knew that Mayrose was the first G.I. wounded in the liberation of Luxembourg. On Sept. 9, 1944, Sergeant Mayrose was reconnoitering in front of the 5th Armored Division in Gen. George Patton's 3rd Army. He crossed the Belgium-Luxembourg border in an armored car and slowly approached the first Luxembourg town, the small town of Pétange. As he came around a turn in the road, a German 88 gun emplacement fired on his armored car, hitting it and starting it on fire. Sergeant Mayrose was able to crawl free, but lost his leg below the knee. After the war, Sergeant Mayrose was knighted by the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, and a plaque was erected at the spot where he was wounded. I thought Mr. Jung would appreciate this story, so I sent him a copy of a **Des Moines Register** article about Mayrose.

In his next letter to me, Mr. Jung began: "Dear Daniel, I remember the burned out armored car at the entrance to Pétange. During the Battle of the Bulge (Dec/Jan 1944/45) I passed the wreck each day. I am born and raised at Rodange and fetched a jar of milk daily at the mill of Pétange." He continued in his letter to say that he saw his first G.I. "at a road intersection near Boulaide on Sunday Sept. 10th at high noon." That was the day after the attack on Sergeant Mayrose's armored car.

During the past year, Mr. Jung has sent more than one dozen letters and packages containing scores of documents and translations, including color photos he took of the former homes of my wife's ancestors.

These examples of Mr. Jung's gratitude, and his memory of Sergeant Mayrose's burned out armored car, inspired me to write a letter to Mayrose. Sadly, his wife responded to tell me that he had died several years ago. However, she wrote that it meant a lot to her to know that the sacrifices of her husband and other G.I.s were still remembered and appreciated by the people of Luxembourg. By the way, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg came to St. Louis after the terrible floods of 1993 and gave \$400,000 to help rebuild damaged schools. He said it was given in gratitude to the American people who sacrificed so much to liberate his country in 1945.

Long live the memory of Sir Cyril Mayrose, and the memories of all those who have sacrificed and died for liberty. And long live Jean-Pierre Jung, whose thoughtfulness and generosity keeps alive these memories. Long live all the Luxembourgers.

Someone sent a copy to John E. Dolibois, former US Ambassador to Luxembourg. Ambassador Dolibois sent me a very nice 2-page letter thanking me for my article.