

“Wind through the Leaves of Time”

Introduction

This book had its beginning 62 years ago. It was when I was welcomed into the Chris and Veronica Yancey family upon marrying their son, Lester Christopher Yancey. The date was June 7, 1949. It brought new names, faces and experiences into my life. Now, a new member of the family, a new leaf was added to the family tree. I began the process of learning, and knowing, how I fit into this family. It was a slow learning process, for them and for me, as I became absorbed into the family unit. How did each of his family members fit into the puzzle for me? Who were these people who made up the core of the family and who were their ancestors? How will my life be molded and affected by the melding of my life into theirs? His younger sister, Beulah, had been my Maid of Honor, so I knew one half of the family on that date.

I was embracing a new way of life. They came from northern New York State. My family roots stemmed from Ohio and Illinois. My life had been lived in the south, since a young child. His life was lived in the cold North. I had joined his church on May 1st , just prior to our wedding, so I was embracing a pacifist lifestyle for the first time. His families spiritual background was steeped in the Amish/Mennonite faith. My brothers and I grew up in a small Southern Baptist congregation. My Mother came from Illinois, and the Methodist Episcopalian faith and from Wales/Irish background. My father was raised in the Lutheran church in Ohio, of German parents from the Alsace-Lorraine, area of Germany. I was a very active participant in my church and the Youth For Christ organization during my formative teen years.

Lester's parents divided their time each year between Lowville, New York and Sarasota, Florida. About equal time was spent at each home. In the fall of the year they would load their car and drive south, when the snow and cold began to blanket their upstate New York area. They returned to their New York home a day or two after Lester's birthday each year which is May 16th. The trip was 1,500 miles long and takes two or three days. I have always admired them for undertaking this long journey twice each year. At the same time Lester and I were married his mother was 57 and his father was 61 years of age.

They had a beautiful 1948 Buick car; blue and white in color, with lots of bright chrome on it. After Chris' death in 1972, this car sat in the barn at his home on State Street in Lowville, until at a still later time when it acquired new owners. They were the youngest daughter, Beulah's triplet sons, Mark, Luke and Paul. They received permission when they were teen-agers to take it out of the barn, and work on it. They spent hours cleaning it up and then got it running again.

Since both Mom and Dad drove, they shared the driving and changed drivers often on their trips. To my knowledge they never stopped overnight in a motel or hotel. They preferred to always drive straight through with a few hours of rest time. Popular in

those days. The rest and sleep time would take place, in the car, parked at a safe gas station/restaurant/truck stop area. The car would be parked in a darkened, but safe, area and after some hours of sleeping in cramped conditions in the car, they would again be back on the highway. This was during the Pre-Interstate highways period of time.

They, also, preferred to make sandwiches to eat on the trip. So, few restaurants were visited while traveling. I remember one year when they returned North, they stopped off to visit friends in the Williamsburg, Stanton County, Virginia area and did some sightseeing there, too. Another time they stopped overnight in Pennsylvania to visit friends. But, most of their trips were just as I have described them.

Several interesting items took place on these trips north and south. One time they had problems with the car on the New York Thruway, quite a distance south of Albany, the capital. A stoop at a local garage failed to find the problem and Chris never willing to spend money, or trust another mechanic, he did not know, he decided to drive the car on home to Lowville, after being assured it was not going to damage the engine. So, that is what they did. The only problem was the car would only go about 35-40 mph, and of course that caused back ups behind them on the highway as they chugged along toward home.

Another time going through Pennsylvania he was driving at a speed faster than posted. A local policeman stopped them. After the conversation Chris received a ticket for speeding. Well, that did not sit well with him. He felt he was not over the speed limit. He did take the ticket but refused to pay the fine. So, for a number of years after that, they did not drive through Pennsylvania. If caught a second time he said he would have to pay the fine, plus penalties and he would not do that. Back then the law read that if he was stopped, failed to pay the fine and penalties that he would lose his license to drive in that state and possibly have to go to jail for disobedience. Being stubborn he had his own way to deal with the law in Pennsylvania. He just would not drive in their state again!

Family was always important to them. It was the way of life during the early 1900's. Families were closely knit, relied on each other, and kept in close contact with one another through visitation. Chris' family, the Daniel and Lena K. (Reyn) Yancey, family consisted of five boys and two girls. Veronica's parents were Andrew B. and Mary (Moser) Zehr. Her family included ten children; four girls, one of whom was an adopted daughter, Blanche, and six boys. Veronica came from a family that continued to live predominately in the Lewis County area. Many belonged to the same church so were in contact with family members on Sundays' at worship services. Weddings and funerals always brought large gatherings of family together. They turned out in large numbers to help each other when tragedy or illness struck.

Chris' family was not as close knit due to some of the family living in Wayne County, which is about 100 miles south of Lewis County. I knew very little about Chris' siblings until I began the research of this genealogy. I barely knew their names. I learned about Mom's family members while listening to family discussions when his parents

shared, or cousins came to visit, during the winter months. Most of them were from the Lewis County area.

Chris' family had moved from the Lewis County area south to Wayne County in about 1907-08. We know that from Nelson Sr., birth which was in 1905 and his birth is recorded as Belfort, Lewis County. There is a family photo in the Photo Album of this book and Nelson is about 2-3 years of age. He is in a white dress which was normal then for boys of that age. Some cousins remember, riding down there, with their parents, to visit. They remember that it was a full days drive between the two counties. One remembers her father would stop at an Ice Cream Shop about half-way to their destination. This allowed the children a break in the trip and a chance to stretch their legs. Did they travel by horse and buggy or by car? I don't know the answer to that question.

According to the U.S Federal Census of 1890, Daniel and Lena Yancey were living in Lewis County, with three children; Edward E., Christopher E., and Theodore M., but by the census in 1910 they are found living in Wayne County with four additional children; Lena Louise, Elsie E., Benjamin Alvin, and Nelson Mason. I find it interesting that the first two sons both had the middle initial of "E", but so far my research fails to put a name to those initials. One time Chris did tell me that his middle initial "E", does not represent a name, but is simply an initial. This is a bit unusual for German and French speaking families.

While researching this genealogy many questions came to me. I wondered why the two families lived so many miles distant from each other. One hundred miles separated them in a day when it was an all day trip to travel that far. Why did Edward and Chris each marry wives from Lewis County and remain in the Mennonite faith? Why did the other five siblings marry spouses in Wayne County and not remain in the Mennonite faith? Today many of them claim membership in the Methodist Church. Were there no Mennonite churches in the Wayne County area? Was Daniel from the Mennonite faith and Lena was not? One family member recently stated that they could not remember Lena ever attending the Mennonite church in Lewis County. Her Aunt Mary (Addison) Lehman, who she lived with until her marriage to Daniel attended it, but evidently Lena did not. Those are questions that remain unanswered.

Researching the family through the U.S.Federal Census reports I learned that there were two other "Reyn" family members living in Huron Township in Wayne County. Were they brothers of Daniel's wife, Lena? On the 1910 Census report page it lists all three families living side by side as neighbors. Is this the reason Daniel and Lena moved their family from Lewis County to Wayne County? Was it Lena's desire to live close to her family members? She had an Uncle William B. Reyn, living in Lewis County at Port Leydon. Was the hard life they lived in the Belfort and Croghan area a consideration? It gets so cold in that area. It is an area popular with hunters and outdoor enthusiasts. There are still Reyn families living in Wayne County. In 2009 phone contact was made with one, but he is elderly and hard of hearing. Perhaps we should try a personal visit with him or his children, if he has any, to try and establish a relationship.

On that 1910 Report all of the children are listed as living at home in Wayne

County with Chris being the oldest at 21 years of age. Chris is listed as “doing odd jobs” for his income. When did he return to work in Lewis county and what drew him back? Was it a return to the church he grew up in or was it a certain young lady from Lewis County? Was it because he could find work as a woodsman? I know from Post Cards sent to him in 1910-1913, that he was working for Mike Efferly on his dairy farm in Castorland. I know from stories he told, and photos, that he also worked in the woods when he was a young man. He married Veronica Irene Zehr on 15 January 1914. I don't know where they lived when first married. Did they purchase the farm next door to her parents at that time or later?

Edward is not listed on the 1910 Federal Census, so he was no longer living at home. When did he return to live in Lewis County? Or did he not move to Wayne County with the family? He was 25 years of age in 1910, so did he continue living in the Croghan area of Lewis County? He married Rozella M. Zehr on 13 June 1912. When did they move to Harrisburg Township? That is where they raised their family on a dairy farm. Ed and Chris' farms joined at one time with a line fence. Did each of them purchase their farms from their father-in-law, Andrew B. Zehr or from other land owners in the area? We know from Rozella's diary of the boat trip to Isle of Pines, Cuba, in October of 1908, (see diary of Rozella) that upon their return the Zehr's purchased a large farm on the West Road of Lowville, moving there from Croghan. Part of this tract of land is still farmed by some of Andrew B.'s descendants.

Lena married Daniel on 29 August 1887 in Beaver Falls, Lewis County, N.Y. Their Old German Family Bible, now owned by the Lester Yancey family, lists that Edward was born on 02 October 1885. Family lore has it that he was born in France and came to America with his mother as an infant. Lena, with her infant son, resided with her Aunt Mary (Addison) Lehman in Belfort, upon arriving here and Daniel adopted him after marrying Lena. Daniel and Lena owned a hilly, and very rocky farm in Belfort in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains, and this is where Daniel and Lena's children were all born.

On the 1910 Census of Wolcott, Daniel is listed as a “grain farmer”. On the 1930 Census, his occupation is listed as working in a “flour mill”. Since Nelson Mason was born on 18 February 1905, and is listed as born in Belfort we are assuming that the family sold the farm in Lewis County and moved to N. Rose, Huron Township in Wayne County in about 1907-08 and prior to the 1910 Census being taken. The weather is warmer and milder there, where it is near Lake Ontario. In Belfort, the temperature can easily dip to -40 to -50 degrees below zero in the Adirondack Mountains during the winter time.

Farmer's in the Wolcott area raised lots of apples. Many fruit farms dot the landscape there as well as grain and hay farms. When I married into the family, Uncle Nelson and Aunt Greta owned and operated an apple cider mill. That Cider Mill was previously owned by Daniel and Lena Yancey, and was their first home in Wayne County following their move from Belfort.

Family lore has it that this Cider Mill (or maybe it was still a “flour mill”) was owned at one time by Chris Yancey. Later, supposedly, he sold it to his youngest

brother, Nelson. Why did Chris get it? Why not Edward? He was the eldest son. Did he not want to live down there? Did Chris inherit it as the next oldest son? Why did he sell it to Nelson and when did this transaction take place? Chris married Veronica Zehr on 15 January 1914. I have several post cards written from Chris to Veronica in 1910-1913 and she also wrote to him during that time.

At that time Chris was working on a dairy farm in the Lewis County area for a man by the name of Mike Efferly who lived in Castorland. One card is dated November 1910. Did Chris no longer want the Mill since he was not living in the area? Who was operating it then? Did Daniel still own it? Nelson would have been too young to own the Mill in 1910 as he was only 5 years of age. There are a number of stories told, and events transpired, in relation to this Cider Mill, over the years. Today it is owned by Mason Yancey's widow, Linda, and being operated by a young couple who Linda hopes will buy it from her. At one time a young woman's pregnant body was found in the Mill Pond. There were suspects but no one was ever charged with her murder. Who was she? How did she get there?

Lester used to tell the story of how his Uncle Nelson liked to keep a barrel of cider down in the basement of their house. There it would ferment into hard cider. At times Aunt Greta would find him down there consuming his "special brew". One time Uncle Nelson became pretty intoxicated and got pretty rowdy. During that episode he broke up some of the furniture. Upon that taking place Aunt Greta went down to the basement, took a sledge hammer and broke open the cider barrel, letting all of the contents run out into the sewer. Nelson, Junior, laughingly told us how Uncle Nelson became so inebriated at his daughter's wedding. He became quite an embarrassment for the family. I remember Uncle Nelson as being a fun person and we enjoyed being with him and Aunt Greta.

History has always interested me, so researching family history has been a priority as an adult. I suppose I inherited this talent from my mother, along with the fact that our family lived so many miles from our relatives. Mother's maternal ancestors immigrated from Portrush, Ireland, which is in County Cavern, Ireland. They first lived in Noble County, Ohio, and farmed it. However, this was down near the Ohio River in hilly country and not the best farmland. Her grandfather, Samuel Large, and his brother, Richard left Ohio a few years later and pushed on west to find better farming land. The trip, overland by horse and Conestoga Wagon, took 3 months.

They finally settled on an area south of Taylorville, Illinois, where there was an abundance of fertile farm land. They named this prairie area "Buckeye Prairie", after the state of Ohio, that they came from and today it continues to be named that. Samuel established the first "Buckeye Prairie Methodist Church" and was the first pastor. In 2011 this church will celebrate it's 150th. Year as a congregation. He, and many of his descendants, along with his wife and children, are buried across the road from the church in the "Buckeye Prairie Cemetery". This is a well maintained cemetery containing many of my relatives.

Mother's paternal ancestors immigrated from Wales, England. They landed first in Baltimore, Maryland. It was near here that they first settled. Moving from there they went south into Virginia and still later settled near Lexington, Kentucky for awhile. They, too, were farmers and plantation owners. Pushing on west my Cole grandparents located in Pike County, Illinois, on fertile farm ground, not too many miles from the Mississippi River, where they raised their family. My grandfather was an engineer and as a young man worked in the mid-western states of Kansas and Oklahoma. This is where he met my grandmother Emily, who was a school teacher there in one room school houses out on the western prairie's. Grandma told many stories to Mom and her brother, along with the neighbor children, of the dust bowl, Indians and tumbling tumble weeds being blown across the dry farm land and being pursued by the hot winds. She and my Mom both told stories of tornado's out there and the damage they wrought on the inhabitants of those areas. Mother's parents were married in Illinois and settled there to raise my Mom and Uncle Hollis.

Grandpa Cole owned and operated a tile and brick factory. When Grandpa's health began to fail, brought on by the firing in the Kiln's full of bricks, his brother, my Great Uncle Jim Cole, encouraged him to move to NW Ohio and buy a farm near them. Grandpa did that. They purchased a 120 acre grain farm in the Spring of 1912 and lived there until he died on 14 January 1918. His death was the result of damaged lungs that came from the Kiln firing process. Mom was 8 years of age and her brother, Hollis, was 13 years old. Mother came from a musical family, as did my father. Mother and her brother both attended Defiance College in Defiance, Ohio. Later Uncle Hollis graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a double major in Engineering. He was employed all of his life by the Standard Oil Co., in Berkeley, California as one of their top chemical and production engineers.

My Father's grandparents immigrated from Alsace-Lorraine, much as the Yancey family did, and they settled in the Toledo, Ohio area. My grandfather, Jacob Knerr, owned a large grain and vegetable farm in the Maumee section of Lucas County where they raised their family of seven children. All played musical instruments and sang together as a family. Grandpa and his brother, Fred, both played violins, then called "fiddle's". They played for many "barn dances", not necessarily played in a barn. Grandma was an excellent dancer and at times they got to dance together, resulting in their romance, and later their marriage in June 1891. Today the Ohio Turnpike runs right past where their farm was located. Today, part of his farm is a residential subdivision of the city of Toledo.

The void in my life, and in the life of my brothers, sent us in pursuit of information. We wanted to document who we were. How we were impacted through our distant family members. What gifts and talents were present in the family DNA, and gene pool, that we had inherited. It was this desire to know more, and document information, about Lester's family, both for myself and for my children that caused me to begin the research of the Yancey family.

This desire became more intense following the death of Lester in October 1986. I

felt almost compelled to research his family so that our five children could know more about who he was, and who the persons were that made up, and helped to form his life. I wanted them to know about the richness of his life. To know where the family lived and how they lived. To know some of the stories that made it come alive. This is a living document of their lives. I have included information on family members as they have shared it with me. I have listed occupations, educational achievements, hobbies and talents plus medical information so future generations can be knowledgeable of medical issues present in the family.

I spoke with his older brother, Clyde, during the 1990's to determine his interest. Clyde came by my house one day following Lester's death and I made a copy of the paper listing the names and birth dates of the aunt's and uncle's for him, and he saw the restored Bible, with the recorded data in it. I, also, gave him a copy of their research, I have, also, receiving written permission from Lorraine Roth to use their research in mine. Lorraine lives in Ontario, Canada and Ruth Jantzi Ryan died in Sarasota in March 2009 at the age of 105 years. Ruth's son told me that her mind was still sharp yet when she died. While at my house that day Clyde shared with me some of the family stories that he had heard while growing up, but I didn't record them. I always planned to spend more time with Clyde working on this research project. But, sadly it never took place. I guess we were all too busy in those days. It is sad, as now the time has passed and so have the people who could tell us those stories.

In 2001, Clyde Jay and their older sister, Arletha Pearl (Yancey) Knechtel both died. Clyde died on 07 May and Arletha on 06 October. Now I was alone to try and research the family. The one remaining sister, Beulah Jane (Yancey) Widrick's memory is no longer reliable so she is unable to provide me with information. I was thankful for one of her daughters, Irene (Widrick) Roggie, who was able to provide me with some names and addresses of family members living in the Wayne County area of New York. Through contact with a couple of them, I have had help in moving this project along.

I am forever grateful for Debra Ann (Yancey) Miller, a daughter of Donald Benjamin Yancey. One of the first family members who helped me was Mary Christina (Yancey) Swartzentruber, a daughter of Uncle Edward Yancey. Another willing helper who worked tirelessly to obtain information for the book was Savilla Rose (Yancey) Steria, grand daughter of Edward E. Yancey. His daughters, Bertha Faith (Yancey) Roes and Rosella Ruth (Yancey) Roes, along with their sister, Iva Rose (Yancey) Yousey all helped in countless ways, which included identifying persons in photos. Iva had a treasure trove of family photos that she copied, and shared, with me on the one day I was able to spend in their home in Lowville in July 2008. That source was priceless.

Over the past decade I was told someone had written a book on the "Yancey Family". I began to ask different family members if they had any knowledge of one, hoping that I could glean some information from it, but I was always given the same answer...."No" not to their knowledge. Arlene Yousey, who kept a journal for many years while growing up, has documented much of the stories of Mennonite families living

in the Lewis County area in her book *“Strangers and Pilgrims”*. However, the Daniel Yancey family is not documented in her book. Perhaps because by the time she was born the family had already left Lewis County and moved south to the Wayne County area.

Each year, during my early years in the family, upon Chris and Veronica’s return to Florida each fall, I would listen as they shared with Lester the events in the lives of different family members during their summer in New York. So, though the faces were unfamiliar to me, the names were not. Also, during the early years of our married life we received a copy of the local newspaper *“Lowville Journal and Republican”*. It is printed weekly in Lowville. So, I had that source of information. It really is amazing how much can be learned about your new family just by reading the local news sheet. Especially, when it is a small village setting and not a large city. Another way is to listen quietly while the family is visiting together. Pieces of the puzzle soon fit into place. Letters from family members, when preserved, are always a good source for historical data. We have some of that in the form of post cards and letters written during the early 1900’s, and saved by Chris and Veronica.

In 1998, I contacted Bertha (Yancey) Roes, who lives here in Sarasota and whom I had learned to know in the 1980’s. When I began to inquire of her about the family of her parents, she put me in contact with her sister, Mary (Yancey) Swartzentruber. Mary, Bertha, Iva and Rozella, are all double first cousins of Lester’s. Mary gave me the first information for her parents. That information, and the information on Lester’s siblings, gave me a boost forward on my project. But, I didn’t work seriously on the project for a few years. In 2002, Mary again helped me to update her family data.

In May 2005, Clyde’s daughter, Brenda Kay (Yancey) Kolb, invited all of us living in the Sarasota area to a family reunion one Sunday. It was a cold, rainy day so some didn’t attend, but there were about 75 present. It was a pot-luck dinner and a couple of male cousins, Clyde Junior, Ronald and his son Ryan, roasted a pig. As is always true when families get together, there was food for everyone! After dinner was over, Eugene Yancey, read some of the genealogy information that I had worked on before. He was interested in knowing more about the family. He gave me the paper that he had and asked if I would work to update it for the next time we get together. That inspiration was enough to light the spark to get me started again.

During the summer of 2008, we took a trip to Lowville, accompanied by my husband and youngest grandson, Benjamin Allen Comes. Ben has many characteristics of his grandpa Lester. I wanted him to experience, and know, some of the background of the family. I hoped it would give him an appreciation for where his ancestors originated and some of the history of the New York area. It was a meaningful trip for all of us.

While there we were invited to two family reunions. The first one was with Beulah (Yancey) Widrick’s family and we met at the County Fair Grounds Pavilion. I then drove up to the young Edward Yancey farm where there was a very large gathering of family members. There I met Savilla for the first time, as well as many other cousins. Once again I was able to piece together more of the puzzle. Savilla has continued to work at compiling information on her family and we are indebted to her for her

excellence.

In the year of 2007 serious work began again on this project. Contact was made with as many of the family members as possible with a request for them to list their family information, or update it. I am indebted, again, to Savilla Steria for all of her help, in addition to all of the others who submitted their family data. Savilla did most of the updated information on her family. She had good records of many of the cousins in Wayne County area of North Rose, Huron and Wolcott. She gave me much of the information by phone, and by writing rapidly as she talked, I later was able to decipher my notes upon hanging up. Letters were written to many of those persons enclosing family unit sheets, for recording family information. As those papers were returned it was possible to contact more. This moved the project along much more rapidly.

Through continuing research in the Wayne County area I was given the name of another family member who has been such a blessing as we worked on the family lines together. She is Debra Miller, daughter of Donald and Lavada (Mundy) Yancey, and the grand daughter of Benjamin Allen Yancey. Through our computers we have exchanged tons of information and worked diligently to help one another. Debb had been slowly working on her father's family genealogy for about ten years but she had not advanced very far for lack of time. Now she is moving forward with her own research.

We all know how much time is involved in compiling family information after the data is received. However, it is even more time consuming to search out and find who is willing to give us the information. Debb and I both use the Family Tree Program and access the Internet through "Ancestry.com" to gather information from the U.S.Census of the previous decades. They are now complete through 1930. The 1940 Census is not online as of this date, but will be soon. We are able to compile some data through the Social Security System Death Records. Those records are fairly complete and up to date.

A stop at the Rose Cemetery, in Wayne County, on our way back to Ohio, allowed for documentation of a number of dates taken from the headstones of family members laid to rest in that one. Unable to visit some of the other cemeteries in that area, Debb has been gracious in helping me obtain other data locally. It was my desire, and intent, on that trip, to visit in the area and talk with many of the Yancey descendants still residing in those villages, but time was short and we had to postpone that part of our trip. Debb's mother, Lavada, has been able to give us some information, and clarify more, to connect us to the past. As the older members of the family leave us we lost our ability to make the family come alive through stories of the past.

This work is offered, not as the final chapter, and not perfect, but as a beginning chapter of the lives of those living today and of those who preceded us in years past. We are grateful to them for the lives they lived, the core values they established in the family and

the example they have been to us today. May we never forget the past, and continue to learn from it as we look forward to the future. One that is bright with promise.

As this book goes to press in April 2011 plans now are in process to hold the 3rd. Michael Jantzi I Reunion in Florida.

Remembrance and honoring of our past secures the future.