

A Trip In Search of My Ancestors

by, Joe Chabra

Going back to World War II when I was on my way to Europe my Mother wanted me to go to visit her mother. Her mother was still living and I had a chance to go. When I went to see about my trip I was advised not to go due to conditions at that time. When I got home my mother was upset at me saying others had gone. I told her I would go when conditions were better. I was recalled into the service and as other people I got married, got involved in raising a family, which I told one day I would search for my roots. Christmas before last my daughter started the plans for me to return to my parents place of birth.

I called several of my cousins to get names and addresses. Plans were made with an itinerary which had a strict time schedule. We boarded a plane in Greenville, S.C. flew to Atlanta, then on to New York. We changed planes, flew to Germany where we were refueled and on to Prague. We spent the night and then by car we went to Bratislava and stayed the night. Next morning we were driven to Strbske Pleso, Slovakia. That evening I went down to the desk and asked the clerk if this call was local or long distance showing him a list. His reaction was that he knows that lady picked up the phone and called my cousin. Her husband asked who I was and I told them I was a cousin. In a few minutes she comes to the hotel and had dinner with us. When she arrived she said, "Oh God who do I speak with?" She was amazed when I responded. Later that evening, we went to her home and met with her husband, brother and his family. It was a very nice visit.

My cousins lived in what would be considered here an apartment in America. It was nice. People there take off their shoes when they entered the home. After our visit my cousin escorted us back to the Hotel Patria which in winter is a ski resort. We returned the next evening. The following day my wife, daughter, our driver our interpreter and myself drove to Stara Lubovna and asked for directions to Starina. The people at the hotel were not sure of the correct way to travel to Starina so a map was purchased and off we went. Our trip took us past Maly Lipnik. We drove until a sign was seen and it showed Starina, 1 Km. The driver stopped and a Slovak man presented me with bread and salt. I am told that is a tradition when a person or a relative returns to their ancestor's village of origin. I started at the top of the town and walked toward the church. Along the way I passed a man leaning against the fence talking to a lady working in her garden. I passed by taking video pictures and for some reason after walking 100 feet I told my daughter I'm going back and see if I can converse with those people. I found out my uncle had lived in the house next door to her. The house is empty now and was also told my uncle's son lives in the house across the street. They were at that time not at home. I asked about my mother's side of the family. They no longer had anyone living in Starina. This was odd I thought because the man who drove up to ask questions of the lady had the same last name as mother's maiden name.

I proceeded to the church went inside and took pictures. They have added pews since Dad & Mom worshiped there. I then went to the graveyard and found my grandfather's grave and uncles and aunts graves. We then left Starina and returned to Stara Lubovna. We were taken to the castle, which I understand the name of which is Stara Lubovna Castle. In viewing the castle in the basement, which was lit poorly, I walked and looked up a stairway, which blinded me. I then went up a couple steps and fell down into a pit, which in the old days was a gun pit. I sprained my ankle and when we returned to the hotel I was unable to return to the apartment where my cousin lived. We left the next day went for Bratislava, spent the night and the next day we were taken to Vienna. We stayed in Vienna for 2 days, returned to Prague for 5 days and then returned home. After being home 2 weeks I received a letter from an aunt I never knew I had. She was my mother's sister who lives in Stara Lubovna and was told by the lady I talked to in Starina who was working in her garden. I am planning to return before fall and spend more time in that area and I hope meet all my kin.