

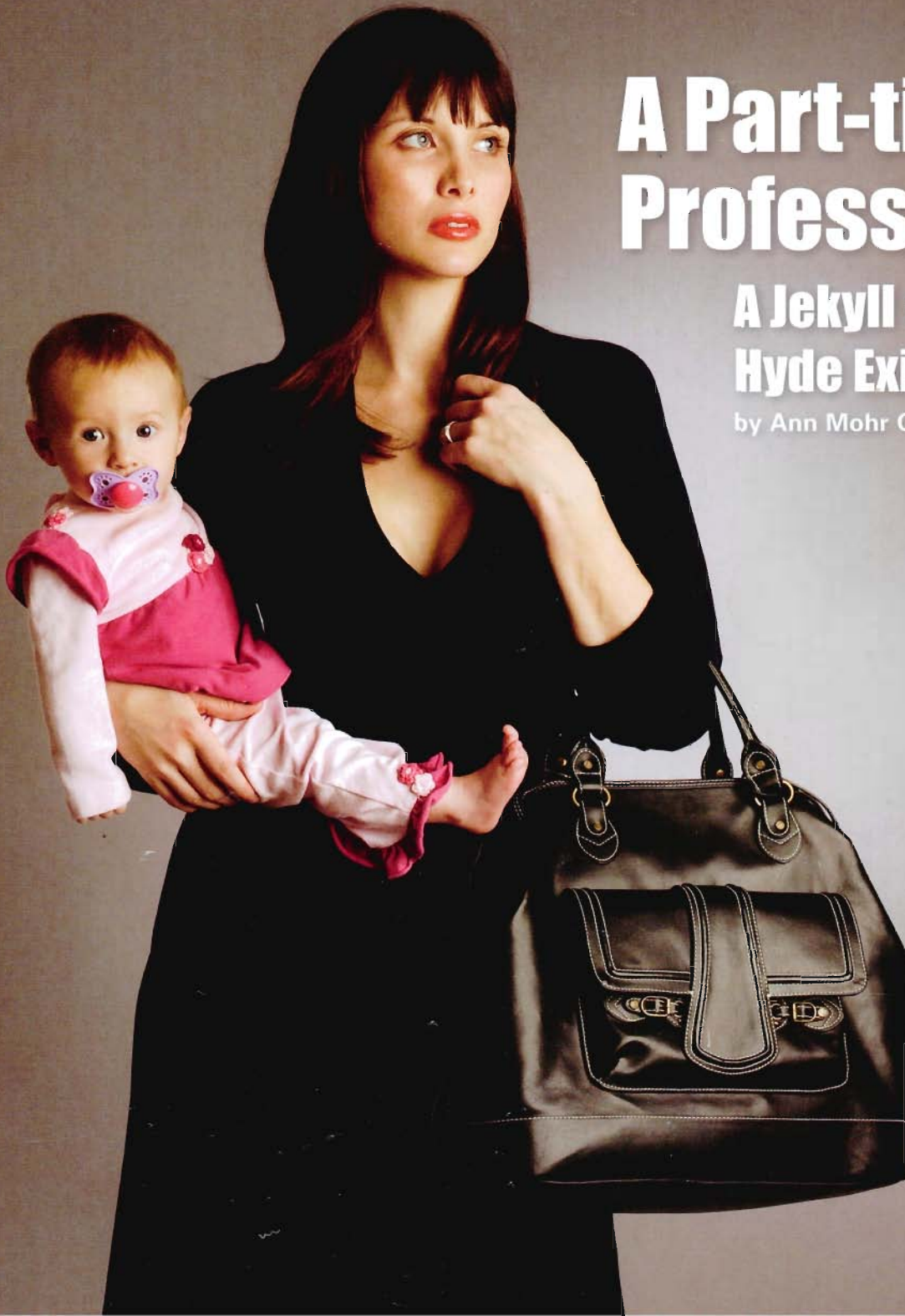
"The Professional's Voice"

March 2009

Association of Professional Genealogists

QUARTERLY

Volume XXIV ~ Number 1



A Part-time Professional

A Jekyll and Hyde Existence

by Ann Mohr Osisek

Supporting Standards

Elissa Scalise Powell, CG

Certification: daunting, intimidating, scary, nerve-racking.

Elissa Scalise Powell hopes to remove the fright from becoming a Certified Genealogist. "The message I like to spread is that certification is achievable to many who may think they cannot meet 'the bar,'" she says. "People imagine the bar to be steps higher than their current level of expertise, when, in reality, they may be ready."

Working on the application portfolio can be, in itself, a gratifying learning experience. Elissa has heard the testimonials: "Applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, say they value the learning process which doing the portfolio requires. Part of that process is reviewing successful portfolios online, or at the Board for the Certification of Genealogists booth at conferences, which helps provide confidence to researchers who otherwise have self-doubts. Whether applicants are successful or unsuccessful, the judges' comments are meant to help the individual by giving positive suggestions for improvement. These observations can save you time and money if you direct your continuing education to their suggestions, instead of gravitating to the things you already know."

"I Love My Job!"

Elissa's passion for professional genealogy prompts a daily excitement about her work: "I love my job! My dad always said the worst feeling in the world is if you wake up in the morning and think 'Do I have to go to work?' I wake up and can hardly find time to get dressed before turning on the computer and jumping into my day. I enjoy the total concentra-

tion that it can demand. I enjoy spotting something that no one else saw or correlated in the records. I enjoy giving the client a sense of belonging and identity through their ancestors' stories. I enjoy teaching people how to fish as well as fishing for them."

Typical of the genealogist, Elissa savors cemetery work: "One of my favorite client projects was for a man who wanted to move his immigrant great-great-grandparents out of a flood-prone cemetery in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, to higher ground. His brother, a lawyer, said before he could get the court-ordered exhumation hearing he would need to notify all living descendants of his intent. He only knew that the immigrants came with five children. I found they also had thirty-one grandchildren, one-hundred one great-grandchildren and over two-hundred great-great-grandchildren in the living generation." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published a story about the family event titled "Long Road for Long-Dead to Dry Ground."

Spaghetti and Homemade Wine

Elissa, the oldest of five children, grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania. "I was a quiet and shy child," she says. "When I was young, I remember selling strawberries at a roadside stand on my grandmother's five-acre farm. She was an Italian immigrant and our dinner table always held a large bowl of spaghetti and a jug of homemade wine. For entertainment, I would walk to the post office and buy the latest commemorative stamp. I went to college one mile from my house, from where I graduated in three years with a B.S. in Mathematics."

Travel Tips

During one of our conversations, I discovered Elissa has developed quite a knack for traveling economically. She has honed flying across the continent on a budget down to a fine art: "Attending conferences and institutes requires a few tricks to keep the costs down. I use the frequent-flyer points earned on credit card purchases, which were of great benefit to me when my



children's colleges accepted credit cards for tuition costs. Flexibility on scheduling is a must since free seats have restricted availability.

"Whenever an airline oversells a flight, they ask for volunteers to give up their seats for some sort of reimbursement, in addition to getting you to your destination. If you want a greater chance of this happening, fly Friday through Monday. Gate attendants arrive at their posts one hour before flight time, so take this opportunity to ask if they need any volunteers to give up their seats (they prefer the volunteers who are totally flexible with no checked bags). Whenever flying, do bring lots of reading material. It can be as long as twelve hours or more before the next available plane to your destination has an empty seat."

A New "Hobby"

Even avid genealogists and devoted conference-goers need a break. Elissa's interest has been captured by an animal rescue cause: "Awhile back, I realized my hobby had turned into my profession, and I wanted a new hobby. After competing in the obedience rings with my own Keeshonds, [pronounced *kayz-hund*], I began doing dog breed rescue. I have fostered eighty-five purebred keeshonds in my house over a period of three years, and have found them all adoptive families while administering to foster dogs in other people's homes. By following rescue and adoption standards, I've been able to prepare and train the dogs and match them to households who were required to submit to an interview and reference process. As advocates for the dogs, we need to ensure they wouldn't find themselves homeless again. It was such a rewarding experience, one which easily could have turned into a full-time volunteer job, but I needed to spend the time on my genealogy business. I still hear from many of the adopters and how they have enjoyed life with their 'recycled' dog."

Research in the Old Country Andras Koltai

Andras Koltai lives in Budapest, Hungary. The Hungarian Jewish Roots website <www.jewishroots.hu>, where you may find his services, displays two language selections: English or Magyar. What is Magyar? Andras explains, "*Magyar* is [the word for] *Hungarian* in Hungarian. It is an interesting situation. There were several tribes in the area a few thousand years ago. The Huns and the Magors were among them. While we call ourselves Magyars, which comes from Magor, several other nations call us Hungarians, which comes from Hun."

Hungarian Jewish Roots

Andras shares the philosophy and mission of Hungarian Jewish Roots. He speaks of how the Jewish communities in Hungary flourished before the Holocaust, but then were completely wiped out: "If I look at the family trees of our clients, or my own family, there was just a huge number of family members in each family. Hardly a few survived the war. And many of those who survived left the country after the war. So I believe it is our mission to bring back some parts of the colorful Jewish past of Hungary. When we research the old newspapers and documents we find proof that there was a rich Jewish history in Hungary. We owe our perished loved ones this much."

The Hungarian Jewish Roots website has multiple goals. The first is to give information about Jewish genealogy in Hungary and how research can be done. Another goal is to give information about its services. Andras also strives to make it a deep information pool for researchers who can use the guest book to exchange information about the families they are looking for. The database and the resource list are both tools that researchers can use to find out more about their ancestors.

Research in Eastern Europe

Andras explains some aspects of Hungarian research: "The parish records until 1895 are kept at the National Archives in Budapest. They are easily searched—you order them one day and get them the following day. Civil recording was introduced in 1895, from then on it is the civil records we have to search. (Several Jewish communities stopped keeping their own religious record books in 1895.) These records are held at the various county archives around the country. The most important rule to follow centers on privacy protection: you are not allowed to search the birth records of the past ninety years, the marriage records of the past seventy-five years and the death records of the past thirty years. Anything within these years is out of reach." When this occurs, you must use other resources.

Cemeteries can be very difficult resources as well, because plots in Christian cemeteries must be paid for again and again. If a plot is not paid for and the space is needed, the headstone and coffin are removed. In Jewish cemeteries it is a different story. "In Jewish cemeteries you do not have to renew the payment," says Andras, "because according to the Jewish laws, the remains of the dead are not to be moved. However, after the Holocaust, several of the old cemeteries have become abandoned: nobody lived to take care of the old graves. So, these cemeteries fell apart, the stones have been vandalized, or stolen—there is nothing to be checked."

There are some formidable obstacles for Hungarian research. Andras writes, "The censuses of the twentieth century are not publicly available, either. What remains to be checked are phone books and some registers. There are several databases about the Holocaust, too, so we often have some indications from 1944–45 about what happened to the families."

Hungary is a lot smaller than the United States; the farthest you have to travel from one border to another is 350 miles, and Budapest is located more or less