Beth Luxenberg was an only child. Or so everyone thought. Six months after Beth’s death, her secret emerged. It had a name: Annie.
Welcome to the Great Michigan Read! The Michigan Humanities Council’s Great Michigan Read is a book club for the entire state. With a statewide focus on a single book – *Annie’s Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* by Steve Luxenberg – it aims to connect us as Michiganders by deepening our understanding of our state, our society, and our history.

### ABOUT THE MICHIGAN HUMANITIES COUNCIL
The Michigan Humanities Council connects people and communities by supporting quality cultural programs. It is Michigan’s nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Since 1974, the Michigan Humanities Council has supported communities through family reading programs, special cultural and historical exhibits, book discussions, author tours, scholarly lectures and mentors, films, cultural celebrations, and school programs and performances that have reached millions of Michiganders.

### WHY ANNIE’S GHOSTS?
*Annie’s Ghosts* is part memoir, part detective story, and part history. Employing his skills as a journalist while struggling to maintain his empathy as a son, author and Detroit native Steve Luxenberg pieces together the story of his mother’s motivations, his aunt’s unknown life, and the times in which they lived. His search takes him to imperial Russia and Depression-era Detroit, through the Holocaust in Ukraine and the Philippine war zone, and back to the hospitals where Annie and many others languished in anonymity.

*Annie’s Ghosts* is a story about family secrets, personal journeys, genealogy, mental disability and illness, poverty, and immigration. It is a story of reframing one’s self-understanding once a family secret is revealed, providing insight into how our identities are shaped by learning something shockingly new about our family history.

### HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?
Pick up a copy of *Annie’s Ghosts* and supporting materials at Meijer, your local library, or your favorite bookseller – or download the e-book. Read the book, share and discuss it with your friends, and participate in Great Michigan Read activities in your community and online.

Register your library, school, company, or book club and receive copies of reader’s guides, teacher’s guides, bookmarks, and other informational materials at no cost. Nonprofit organizations – including schools and libraries – may apply for discussion kits, which include free copies of *Annie’s Ghosts*. Nonprofit organizations may also apply for $500 quick grants to support programs related to the 2013-14 Great Michigan Read.

For more details, including an updated calendar of events, additional resources, and to register your organization, visit www.michiganhumanities.org. Join the Michigan Humanities Council Facebook group, or follow @mihumanities (#greatMIread) on Twitter.

### A SPECIAL INVITATION FOR TEACHERS
*Annie’s Ghosts* is appropriate for high school and college students.

Visit www.michiganhumanities.org to register your classroom for the Great Michigan Read. Classrooms are eligible for free teacher’s guides, reader’s guides, and bookmarks. Classrooms are also eligible for up to 30 free copies of *Annie’s Ghosts*.

For additional copies of this special newspaper program guide, sign up with the Detroit Newspapers in Education program on their website at www.nieonline.com/detroit.

### CURRENT MICHIGAN HUMANITIES COUNCIL PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- **Great Michigan Read**: A statewide reading and discussion program featuring a work of Michigan literature.
- **Prime Time Family Reading Time**: Using children’s literature, this family literacy program stimulates critical thinking about humanities themes and bonds families around the practice of reading.
- **Arts & Humanities Touring Program**: Provides grants to support community performances drawn from a juried list of Michigan’s top 175 performing and visual artists, authors, musicians, historians, and storytellers.
- **Poetry Out Loud**: A national poetry recitation competition for high school students. By encouraging youth to learn about great poetry through memorization and performance, students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.
- **Journey Stories**: This Smithsonian traveling exhibit explores individual stories that illustrate the critical roles travel and movement have played in building our diverse American society. It is touring five rural Michigan communities in 2013-14.
- **Bridging Cultures**: A new initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities that engages the power of the humanities to promote understanding and mutual respect for people with diverse histories, cultures and perspectives within the United States and abroad.
- **Grants Programs**: Major grants (up to $15,000), Planning grants (up to $1,000) and Quick grants (up to $500) provide critical support to cultural organizations in all corners of the state.

Visit www.michiganhumanities.org for more information about the Council, and sign up for our print and/or digital mailings.

**Michigan Humanities Council**
119 Pere Marquette Drive, Suite 3B
Lansing, MI 48912

michiganhumanities.org | 517.372.7770

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**GET CONNECTED & FOLLOW US!**

Join the Michigan Humanities Council Facebook group, or follow @mihumanities (#greatMIread) on Twitter.
Q&A WITH STEVE LUXENBERG

STEVE LUXENBERG

Steve Luxenberg, a Washington Post associate editor, has worked for 38 years as a newspaper editor and reporter. Post reporters working with Steve have won two Pulitzer Prizes for explanatory journalism.

Steve grew up in Detroit, where Annie’s Ghosts primarily takes place. He attended Detroit public schools, including Henry Ford High School. He and his wife, Mary Jo Kirschman, a former school librarian, live in Baltimore. They have two adult children.

Annie’s Ghosts was a Washington Post Best Book of 2009 and a Michigan Notable Book in 2010. Following the publication of Annie’s Ghosts, Steve was invited to give the 10th annual Horace W. Davenport Lecture in the Medical Humanities, sponsored by the University of Michigan’s Center for the History of Medicine.

I never thought I’d find so many secrets, with so many levels and implications—and not just in my own family. In retrospect, I’m not sure why I wasn’t prepared for that. I suppose it seems obvious that one secret begets other secrets.

How did you approach writing Annie’s Ghosts?

I saw Annie’s Ghosts as a story about a search, about putting myself in someone else’s place, about whether the truth can be found, and how to navigate the distortions that memory imposes on the truth. It seemed natural to write the story in the first person, as part memoir and part history, while separating my memories from those of the people I found and interviewed.

As you got deeper in your research, what was the biggest surprise you encountered?

I never thought I’d find so many secrets, with so many levels and implications—and not just in my own family. In retrospect, I’m not sure why I wasn’t prepared for that. I suppose it seems obvious that one secret begets other secrets.

The difficulty of getting Annie’s records also was a surprise. I had no idea that a family member would have such trouble seeking information about someone long dead. I think we need to revisit our privacy laws, and make sure that they don’t prevent us from telling our own history or, most important, learning about past medical issues that could affect future generations in the family.

What is the story’s most compelling lesson for today?

The power of secrecy cannot be underestimated. For many families, secrets can be a destructive force. They can affect generations long after the secret is created. I don’t want anyone to believe that we need to live our lives like open books, but if a secret is harming the secret keeper, if carrying that secret is causing the secret keeper pain, then my rule of thumb is to release the secret. My mother would have been a much happier person if she had released her secret.

Annie’s Ghosts

Two sisters, born two years apart to immigrant parents, grow up in Depression-era Detroit. One—Beth, my mother—escapes eight years of low-paying jobs and her family’s walk-up apartment by marrying and moving away from the neighborhood she equates with broken promises and broken lives.

The other sister? She was my mother’s secret.

Annie’s Ghosts is their story, as best as I could unearth it.

-Steve Luxenberg
Family secrets take many forms and are discovered in various ways – through a slip in conversation, by a family member doing genealogical research, through a treasure trove of old letters, or even through social media.

Family secrets are kept for various reasons and often have unintended consequences, especially for later generations. Annie’s Ghosts’ author Steve Luxenberg notes, “Shame is often the reason why many people create and keep a secret. Shame is a terribly destructive emotion. If we could avoid shame, we would all be better off.”

Secrets and their discovery can powerfully shape our identities. Steve Luxenberg states, “Identity along with secrecy is one of the overarching themes of the book. My mom took on a new identity, reinvented herself as the girl who grew up as an only child after her sister Annie went into the institution. Annie lost her identity when she went to Eloise, essentially becoming anonymous. In trying to reconstruct their stories, and the times in which they lived, I had to reinterpret my own identity – and confront how my mom’s secret-keeping defined me and my understanding of my family.”

**Letter to Steve’s Mom**

“Darling precious angel,

I’m ashamed to say this darling, I’m not making a very good soldier. It’s getting me down dear and I’m going to pieces. I just can’t take it...it’s impossible to take all that’s dished out. They just don’t seem to have any heart. I’m being worked 18-20 hours a day, and every nite lying in bed I shed a tear. I just can’t help it. Perhaps I’m not a man—at least in the army way... I doubt whether I’ll ever be the same where and if I return to you.”

“Precious, if it’s all at possible in any way regardless of price—get me out of this—if I stay much longer I’ll be in the insane asylums. I know I shouldn’t be saying this—I can’t help it. I know once and for all I won’t be able to take 17 weeks of this hell. Please, darling, do whatever you can—I really don’t know what you’ll be able to do—do something—please—please. Don’t get upset as I know you probably will be—control yourself as much as you can and try and see if there is anyway for me to get out of this mess. Even if you have to write the president—I mean it...”

February 2, 1944, Steve’s Dad at Camp Wolters, writing to Steve’s Mom in Detroit

“Shame is often the reason why many people create and keep a secret. Shame is a terribly destructive emotion. If we could avoid shame, we would all be better off.”  **Steve Luxenberg**

**Discussion Points**

**Have? How?**

Have you discovered something unexpected about your family?

If so, how did it shape your self-understanding?

**Additional Resources:**


As Michigan’s general population grew, so did its population of citizens experiencing mental illness. The state recognized its responsibility to care for those experiencing mental illness, opening the Michigan Asylum for the Insane in Kalamazoo in 1859. As the need for mental health care grew, additional facilities opened.

**MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN MICHIGAN: 1841-2013**

The history of mental health care in Michigan begins in 1841 when Bridget “Biddy” Hughes was judged legally insane and admitted to the Wayne County Poor House. As Michigan’s general population grew, so did its population of citizens experiencing mental illness. The state recognized its responsibility to care for those experiencing mental illness, opening the Michigan Asylum for the Insane in Kalamazoo in 1859. As the need for mental health care grew, additional facilities opened.

By the mid-1950s, more than “20,000 Michiganians with mental illness were residing in state- or county-operated psychiatric facilities” (Michigan Mental Health Commission Final Report, Appendix B, 13).

In 1963, the passage of the Michigan Community Mental Health Services Act (Public Act 54) empowered each of the state’s counties to establish and administer community mental health services. In 1974, the passage of the Michigan Mental Health Code (Public Act 258) established the principle of “least restrictive setting,” which solidified the trend of deinstitutionalization. As a result of deinstitutionalization, the inpatient census in public psychiatric hospitals fell to 5,000 by 1975 (Michigan Mental Health Commission Final Report, Appendix B, 15). Since 1996, person-centered planning has been required by the Michigan Mental Health Code.

Currently, the Michigan Department of Community Health maintains four state psychiatric hospitals (in Westland, Caro, Kalamazoo, and Saline) and one state psychiatric facility for children and adolescents (in Northville). In 2013, Michigan’s state psychiatric bed capacity totaled 1,017. At the same time, 46 Community Mental Health Service Programs served all 83 counties in Michigan.

**DISCUSSION POINTS**

**HAVE? HOW?**

How have understandings of mental disability, mental illness, and mental health changed over time?

How have these understandings shaped the provision of mental health services?

**20,000**

By the mid-1950s, more than “20,000 Michiganians with mental illness were residing in state- or county-operated psychiatric facilities.”

**BRIDGET “BIDDY” HUGHES**

Eloise’s first patient, admitted in 1841. She remained there until her death 54 years later in 1895.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**


ELOISE HOSPITAL
1832-1984

The Wayne County Poor House – Eloise’s progenitor – was founded in 1832, five years before Michigan became a state. Its original property, located at Gratiot and Mt. Elliott avenues in Hamtramck Township, deteriorated quickly. In 1834, 280 acres were purchased in Nankin Township, now the City of Westland, for a new poorhouse. In 1839, 35 people were transferred to the new location.

The name Eloise is derived from the name of the post office established at the Poor House in 1894. The U.S. Postal Service required that post offices have original names – Eloise was named after the postmaster’s four-year-old daughter.

Eloise, like many of its peer institutions, developed into a “self-supporting community with its own police and fire department, railroad and trolley stations, bakery, amusement hall, laundries, and a power-house” (Ibbotson 7). Eloise also had its own farm, including “barns, a piggery, root cellars, a tobacco curing building, and greenhouses” (Ibbotson 7).

At its peak during the Great Depression, Eloise occupied 902 acres and housed 10,000 patients (Ibbotson 8).

Farm operations ceased in 1958. Some of the larger buildings were vacated in 1973. The general hospital closed in 1984.

Today, four buildings remain (two of which are habitable) on a small parcel of land.

DISCUSSION POINTS

WHAT?
What do you think it was like to live at Eloise?
What would it be like to visit Eloise?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
www.cityofwestland.com/historicalcommission
Portraits of Honor cherishes and honors each and every Michigan survivor. For so long, Holocaust survivors have not been appreciated for what they endured and for what they have gone on to accomplish in their lives after the war.

**OUR MICHIGAN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS**

New research is teaching us more about the scope of the Holocaust. On March 1, 2013, *The New York Times* reported that researchers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., have now cataloged 42,500 Nazi ghettos and camps that existed throughout Europe from 1933 to 1945. An estimated 15-20 million people died or were imprisoned in the documented sites.

After the Holocaust, some survivors immigrated to the U.S.; many of those came to Michigan. The Program for Holocaust Survivors and Families, a service of Jewish Senior Life of Metropolitan Detroit, has created an interactive educational exhibit, Portraits of Honor: Our Michigan Holocaust Survivors, to document the lives of our Michigan Holocaust Survivors for education and posterity. The exhibit is housed at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills and available online at www.portraitsofhonor.org.

One of our Michigan Survivors, Anna Oliwek, was instrumental in helping Steve Luxenberg learn more about his family history. You can learn more about Anna by reading *Annie’s Ghosts* and from her portrait in Portraits of Honor.

To be included in the permanent exhibit, survivors can contact Dr. Charles Silow at 248.661.2999 or at cslow@jslmi.org. Families of Michigan Survivors who have passed away are also encouraged to contact Dr. Silow to have their loved ones included in the exhibit.

42,500

**NAZI CAMPS & GHETTOS**

Researchers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., have now cataloged 42,500 Nazi ghettos and camps that existed throughout Europe from 1933 to 1945.

**DISCUSSION POINTS**

**DO? DID? HOW?**

*Do you have family members who left their home country because of persecution?*

*Did they find solace and protection in their adopted countries?*

*How can future generations keep their stories alive?*

15-20 Million

An estimated 15-20 million people died or were imprisoned in the documented sites.

**SURVIVOR: ANNA OLIWEK**

NAME AT BIRTH
Chayka Shlain
PLACE AND YEAR OF BIRTH
Radziwillow, Ukraine, 1923
NAME OF GHETTO
Radziwillow
ESCAPE OR HIDING PLACE
Novomoskovsk, Russia using a false German identity
YEAR OF DEATH
2013

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**
www.holocaustcenter.org
COMMUNITY PARTNERS / RETAIL PARTNERS IN MICHIGAN

COMMUNITY PARTNERS
American Association of University Women Book Discussion Group, Kalamazoo
Alden District Library, Alden
Allen Park High School, Allen Park
Artworks, Big Rapids
Auburn Hills Public Library, Auburn Hills
Bacon Memorial District Library, Wyandotte
Bay County Library System, Bay City
Baylis Public Library, Sault Ste. Marie
Beaver Island District Library, Beaver Island
Benton Harbor Public Library, Benton Harbor
Big Rapids Community Library, Big Rapids
Blair Memorial Library, Clawson
Book Connoisseurs, East Lansing
Bookbreak! Berkley High School Book Discussion Group, Berkley
Boyece City High School, Boyce City
Boyece Library District, Boyce City
Bradner Library/Pageturners/Schoolcraft College, Livonia
Canton Public Library, Canton Township
Capital Area District Library – Aurelius Library, Aurelius
Capital Area District Library – Holt Library, Holt
Capital Area District Library – Leslie Library, Leslie
Capital Area District Library – Mason Library, Mason
Capital Area District Library – Stockbridge Library, Stockbridge
Capital Area District Library – Williamston Library, Williamston
Caroline Kennedy Library, Dearrow Heights
Castle Museum, Saginaw
Charlotte Community Library, Charlotte
Chesterfield Township Library, Chesterfield
Chippewa County Historical Society, Sault Ste. Marie
Clarendon Independent District Library, Clareston
Clinton-Macomb Public Library, Clinton Township
Community Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services of St. Joseph County, Centreville
Community Mental Health Authority of Clinton-Easton-Ingham Counties, Lansing
Community Mental Health Authority of Muskegon County, Muskegon
Coopersville Area District Library, Coopersville
Crawford County Library System, Grayling
Cronin Area District Library, Hartland
Darcy Library of Beulah, Beulah
Davenport University, Grand Rapids
Delta College Humanities Center, University Center
Delton District Library, Delton
Detroit Public Library – Huberd Branch, Detroit
DeWitt District Library, DeWitt
Dimondale United Methodist Church, Dimondale
Downriver High School, Brownstown
Dundee Branch Library, Dundee
Edwardsburg Area Historical Museum, Edwardsburg
Escanaba Public Library, Escanaba
Excellent 8 Book Club, Livonia
Ferdale Public Library, Ferdale
Gusse Peace & Justice Book Club, Detroit
Gladdstone Public Library, Gladstone
Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, Midland
Grand Rapids Academic Enrichment Center of Innovations, Grand Rapids
Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids
Grandpa’s Barn, Copper Harbor
Greater Shaftsburg Metropolisian Book Club, Lainsburg
Hackett Catholic Central High School, Kalamazoo
Hamburg Township Library, Hamburg
Hamtramck Public Library, Hamtramck
Happy Bookers, Manistee
Happy Bookers, Midland
Hastings Public Library, Hastings
HELO Club, East Lansing
Henrika District Library, Alpena
Herrick District Library, Holland
Hawatha Behavioral Health, Sault Ste. Marie
Hillsdale Community Library, Hillsdale
Historical Society of Greater Lansing, Lansing
Holocaust Memorial Center, Farmington Hills
Hope College (Faculty-Student Young Adult Book Club), Holland
Howell Carnegie District Library, Howell
Interlochen Center for the Arts, Interlochen
Ionia County Community Mental Health, Ionia
Ironwood Carnegie Library, Ironwood
Ishpeming Carnegie Public Library, Ishpeming
Jackson District Library, Jackson
Jackson District Library – Grass Lake Branch, Grass Lake
Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit, West Bloomfield
Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, West Bloomfield
Kehillat Israel, Lansing
Kent District Library – Byron Township Branch, Byron Center
Kent District Library, Caledonia Township Branch, Caledonia
Kent District Library, Comstock Township Branch, Comstock Park
Kent District Library – Gaines Township Branch, Grand Rapids
Kent District Library – Grandville Branch, Grandville
Kent District Library – Kentwood Branch, Kentwood
Kent District Library – Krause Memorial Branch, Rockford
Kent District Library – Plainfield Township Branch, Grand Rapids
Kent District Library – Wyoming Branch, Wyoming
Ladies Literary Club, Wayne
Lansing Community College, Lansing
Lapeer County Intermediate School District Adult/Community Education, Aitica
Mackinaw Area Public Library, Mackinaw City
Marcellus Public Schools
Marinie, Marcellus
Memphis Library, Memphis
Metro Detroit Readers Book Club, Grosse Pointe Park
Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, East Lansing
Michigan State University - College of Arts and Letters, East Lansing
Michigan State University Community Club, Okemos
Michigan State University – School of Social Work, East Lansing
Milford Public Library, Milford
Montcalm Area Reading Council, Greenville
Morton Township Library, Mecosta
MSU Federal Credit Union, East Lansing
Munising School Public Library, Munising
Muskegon Area District Library – Dalton Branch, Twin Lake
Muskegon Area District Library – Egelston Branch, Muskegon
Muskegon Area District Library – Fruitport Branch, Fruitport
Muskegon Area District Library – Heights Branch, Muskegon Heights
Muskegon Area District Library – Holton Branch, Holton
Muskegon Area District Library – Mountague Branch, Mountague
Muskegon Area District Library – Muskegon Township Branch, Muskegon
Muskegon Area District Library – North Muskegon Branch, North Muskegon
Muskegon Area District Library – Norton Shore Branch, Norton Shores
Muskegon Area District Library – Ravenna Branch, Ravenna
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Lansing
National Alliance on Mental Illness Saginaw, MI Support Group, Saginaw
New Tech High School, Pinckney
Newly Minted, St. Johns
North Country Community Mental Health, Petoskey
Northern Lakes Community Mental Health, Traverse City
Nottawa Township Library, Centreville
Oakridge High School, Muskegon
Older Persons’ Commission, Rochester
Olivet College, Olivet
Pageturners, Dearborn
Patmos Library, Jamestown
Pentwater High School
Pinkney
Pinecrest Elementary School, Pinckney
Plymouth District Library, Plymouth
Portage District Library, Portage
Public Libraries of Saginaw, Saginaw
Pullman Library Book Club, Pullman
Putnam District Library, Nashville
Ransom District Library, Plainwell
Redford Township Library, Redford
Reed City Public Library, Reed City
Renaissance High School, Reed City
Roseville Public Library, Roseville
Saginaw Valley State University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Book Club, University Center
Sebewaing Township Library, Sebewaing
Sheldon Pines School, Holland
Southfield Public Library, Southfield
Spring Lake District Library, Spring Lake
SPRY, DeWitt
St. Clair County Community Mental Health, Port Huron
St. Clair County Library, Port Huron
St. Clair Public Library, St. Clair
St. Clair Shores Public Library, St. Clair Shores
St. Johns Booking Buds, St. Johns
St. Joseph High School, St. Joseph
St. Joseph Public Library, St. Joseph
St. Matthew’s United Methodist Church, Livonia
St. Patrick School, Portland
Sterling Heights Public Library, Sterling Heights
Swan Valley High School, Saginaw
Tamarack District Library, Lakeview
The Fred L. Mathews Library at Southwestern Michigan College
The KidSAKE Foundation, Port Huron
The Orion Township Public Library, Lake Orion
Third Wednesday Book Club, Saginaw
Thornapple Kellogg School and Community Library, Middleville
Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers
Timothy C. Hauenstein Reynolds Township Library, Howard City
Traverse Area District Library – East Bay Branch, Traverse City
Traverse Area District Library, Fife Lake Public Library, Fife Lake
Traverse Area District Library, Interlochen Public Library, Interlochen
Traverse Area District Library, Kingsley Branch Library, Kingsley
Traverse Area District Library, Peninsula Community Library, Traverse City
Traverse Area District Library, Woodmore (Main) Branch, Traverse City
Tuscola Behavioral Health Systems, Tuscola
Van Buren District Library – Antwerp Sunshine Branch, Mattawan
Vermontville Township Library, Vermontville
Wayne State University Press, Detroit
West Michigan Genealogical Society, Grand Rapids
Westland Public Library, Westland
White Lake Township Library, White Lake
White Pine District Library, Stanton
RETAIL PARTNERS
Meijer, all locations
Horizon Books, Traverse City
Kazo Books, Kalamazoo
McLean & Eakin Booksellers, Petoskey
Schuler Books & Music, all locations
as of August 1, 2013
HOW TO BECOME A PARTNER

To host a program, register online at: www.michiganhumanities.org/programs/tgmr/

To find out more about participation, or a program in your area, contact Michigan Humanities Council program officer Carla Ingrando.

E. cingrando@mihumanities.org
P. 517. 372. 7770
michiganhumanities.org

Scan for more info.
Before writing *Annie’s Ghosts*, author Steve Luxenberg knew little about his family’s history. He calls himself a storyteller, not a genealogist, but he taught himself as much as he could about the techniques that genealogists use. He began by talking with family members. Then he traced the paper trail that most of our ancestors leave behind: census records, birth and death certificates, old city directories, court and immigration records, photo albums, and much more.

Archives of Michigan Senior Archivist Kris Rzepczynski says that the first step to researching family history is to ask “any and all family members key questions such as who, where, and when?” Before delving into census and other records, he says, it is very helpful to be able to narrow your research by name, location, and time period.

You can begin your search for census and other records by using online databases such as familysearch.org and ancestry.com. These and other resources are available to the public at the Archives of Michigan in Lansing. Online databases are also available through many public libraries, and for a fee, you can subscribe to them yourself and have access from your home computer.

Available for free at Seeking Michigan (seekingmichigan.org), the Archives of Michigan has developed a step-by-step guide to help researchers get started. With the combination of onsite research at archives and libraries, online research at subscription databases, and the network of local genealogical societies across the state, exploring your family history has never been easier.

**Online databases are also available through many public libraries, and for a fee, you can subscribe to them yourself and have access from your home computer.**

**DISCUSSION POINTS**

**HAVE? WHAT?**

- Have you tried to research your family’s history?
- What was the most interesting thing you learned?
- What was the most difficult roadblock you encountered?

**WHERE TO BEGIN YOUR SEARCH**

- **CYNDI’S LIST**
  
  www.cyndislist.com
  
  An excellent starting point for online research.

- **FAMILY SEARCH**
  
  www.familysearch.org
  
  This free website has an impressive array of records from across the world.

- **SEEKING MICHIGAN**
  
  www.seekingmichigan.org
  
  The free, digital platform for the Archives of Michigan.

- **ANCESTRY.COM**
  
  www.ancestry.com
  
  Access billions of genealogy records including Census, SSDI & Military records.

**GET STARTED**

Online databases are also available through many public libraries, and for a fee, you can subscribe to them yourself and have access from your home computer.

Discover your family history – start your family tree – who knows what hidden family secrets you might uncover.

Before delving into census and other records, it is very helpful to be able to narrow your research by name, location, and time period.
IMMIGRATION & MIGRATION TO MICHIGAN

The growth of the auto industry in the 20th century brought a new wave of immigrants to Michigan, including Arabs, Poles, Russians, Hungarians, Romanians, and Greeks. Joining them were African Americans from the south and whites from southern Appalachia.

In the 1830s and 1840s, freed slaves migrated north to Michigan, often settling in rural Cass County (Dunbar and May 243).

The 19th century also saw numerous ethnic groups – Swedes, Finns, Dutch, Norwegians, Irish, Cornish, Italians, Chinese and Canadians – flow into Michigan to work in its lumber, mining, and agricultural industries. The growth of the auto industry in the 20th century brought a new wave of immigrants to Michigan, including Arabs, Poles, Russians, Hungarians, Romanians and Greeks. Joining them were African Americans from the south and whites from southern Appalachia (Frazer 712; Hassoun 33; Glazier and Helweg 70).

After the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act ended racial discrimination in immigration policy, immigrants increasingly came from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

In 2011, 11.4 percent of Michigan’s immigrants were born in Mexico, 8 percent in India, and 6.4 percent in Canada (“Michigan Fact Sheet”).

IMMIGRATION & MIGRATION TO MICHIGAN

“The original settlers of Michigan were the Paleo-Indians,” descendants of people who crossed the Bering Strait from Asia roughly 14,000 years ago (Glazier and Helweg 19). Between 1000 BCE and 1650 CE, the Ojibwa (Chippewa), Ottawa, and Potawatomi migrated to Michigan from the eastern seaboard, settling in the upper and lower peninsulas (Clifton, Cornell, and McClurken v).

In the 17th century, “the French were the first Europeans to come to Michigan” as explorers and traders (Glazier and Helweg 22; Dunbar and May 17).


DISCUSSION POINTS

HOW? WHAT?
How do you connect to your ethnic heritage?
What does it mean to you?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
The secret emerged, without warning or provocation, on an ordinary April afternoon in 1995. Secrets, I’ve discovered, have a way of working themselves free of their keepers. I don’t remember what I was doing when I first heard about it. If I had been thinking as a journalist rather than as a son, I might have made a few notes. As it is, I’m stuck with half-memories and what I later told my wife, my friends, my newsroom colleagues — and what they recall about what I told them.

It never occurred to me that it was a little odd how often Mom worked those “only child” references into her conversations. I simply accepted it as fact, a part of her autobiography, just as I knew that her name was Beth, that she was born in Detroit in 1917, that she had no middle name, that she hated her job selling shoes after graduating from high school, that she would have married a guy named Joe if only he had been Jewish, that she was the envy of her friends because of her wildly romantic love affair with my Clark Gable look-alike father, that she was kind and generous and told us growing up to, above all else, always tell the truth.

A sister? “Where did you hear that?” I asked Sashie. Sash and I are close, although she is twelve years older. When I first learned to talk, I couldn’t say her name, Marsha. What came off my untrained tongue sounded something like “Sashie.” The mangled pronunciation stuck. She is Sashie, or Sash, even to her husband and some of her friends.

As Sash would say, Mom was not in a good place in the spring of 1995. Her health, and her state of mind, were often topic A in the long-distance phone calls among her children. (Our family, like many, is a complicated one. My parents, Beth and Jack, married in 1942 and had three sons. I’m the middle one; Mike is seven years older, and Jeff is three years younger. Sash and her older sister, Evie, were my father’s children from a first marriage that lasted seven years. The girls lived with my parents for a large chunk of their childhood, particularly Sash, who thinks of herself as having grown up with two families and two mothers—and double the worry when both moms began having health problems as they aged. Evie moved out just before I was born, so I never knew her nearly as well as I knew Sash, my “big sister”; Sash married and left the house when I was about eight, but our relationship remained close as we managed that tricky conversion from childhood to adulthood.)

My mom was still working at seventy-eight years old, still getting herself up every morning and tooling down one of Detroit’s many expressways to her bookkeeping job at a tiny company that sold gravestones, a job she had been doing for more than thirty years. But her emphysema, the payoff from a two-pack-a-day smoking habit that began in her teens, had gotten worse. So had her hearing; she fiddled constantly with her hearing aid, frustrated that she could no longer understand the quick mumbles that punctuate everyday conversation, but also frantic to avoid the sharp whines that burst forth from the tiny device whenever it picked up a sudden loud noise, such as the shrieks of happy grandchildren.

On top of Mom’s periodic trips to the ER for shortness of breath, her doctors believed that she was suffering from anxiety attacks. It was a chicken-and-egg problem: The shortness of breath made her anxious, and her anxiety triggered the feeling that she couldn’t breathe. She emerged from a February hospitalization with a fistful of prescriptions and a fear that her days of good health were behind her. The Xanax made her less anxious at first, but within a few weeks, she was fingering the medication as the cause of her insomnia and jitters. “It makes me want to crawl out of my skin,” she said.

As if that wasn’t enough of a roller coaster ride, she was following doctors’ orders to quit smoking. She called cigarettes her “best friends” in times of stress, and these were certainly stressful times, for her and for us. There was so much going on with her—the nicotine withdrawal, the reaction to Xanax, the shortness of breath, the sleepless nights—that it seemed impossible to find a way back to the equilibrium that had once ruled our lives. We bounced back and forth, thinking one minute that everything would work out if she would just give the medication a chance, and the next that, no, this was crazy, the medication was the problem, maybe everything depended on getting her doctors to switch her to some other magic pill.

Just as secrets have a way of breaking loose, memories often have a way of breaking down. They elude us, or aren’t quite sharp enough, or fool us into remembering things that didn’t quite happen that way. Yet much as a family inhabits a house, memories inhabit our stories, make them breathe, give them life. So we learn to live with the reality that what we remember is an imperfect version of what we know to be true.

What I know for certain is this: On that April afternoon in 1995, I picked up the phone and heard my sister Sashie say something like, “You’re never going to believe this. Did you know that Mom had a sister?”

Of course I didn’t know. My mother was an only child. Even now, I can hear her soft voice saying just those words: “I’m an only child.” She told that to nearly everyone she met, sometimes within minutes of introduction. She treated her singular birth status as a kind of special birthright, as if she belonged to an exclusive society whose members possessed an esoteric knowledge beyond the comprehension of outsiders.

She suggested as much to my wife, Mary Jo, during their first getting-to-know-you conversation. That was 1976, four years before Mary Jo and I were married. The two of them, girlfriend and mother, were sharing a motel room while I recuperated from an emergency appendectomy that had abruptly ended a weekend camping trip. (I still wince at the memory, and I’m not referring just to the surgery.) As soon as Mom learned of my plight, she hustled to the Detroit airport and found her way to rural West Virginia. During their evenings together in the motel, Mom made a big point about how she felt an unusual connection to Mary Jo, her fellow traveler in the only-children club. “I understand what it’s like,” Mom assured her. “I know how it is to grow up without brothers and sisters.”
She had been feeling so lousy that she didn’t even want to drive. That was a bad sign. Henry Ford himself would have smiled to hear her talk about driving with my father during their courtship days, the feeling of flying along on the open road, your hair free in the wind, the sense that the world was yours for the taking as long as you had wheels. Not even Dad’s sudden death in 1980, which sent Mom reeling like nothing else I had ever seen, had slowed her down. Her Chevrolet Beretta wasn’t just a car; it symbolized her independence, her vitality, her youth, and her freedom.

But for several months now, Mom had left her car at home, relying instead on a counselor at Jewish Family Service, social worker Rozanne Sedler, to take her to various doctors’ appointments. Rozanne had gotten to know Mom pretty well during their car rides and counseling sessions, and had urged her to visit a psychiatrist. Mom, who had always disdained psychiatrists and psychiatry, consented to go — another sign that she was not in a good place.

When I heard Sash’s voice on the phone, I assumed that she had a disabled sister. She said she didn’t know what had happened to this younger sibling— the girl had gone away to an institution when she was just two years old and Mom was four. Rozanne was confused when she heard this; Mom had already informed her, during their many times together, that she was an only child. So Rozanne called Sash to resolve the contradiction.

That was it. So little information, so many questions. Institutionalized? Mentally ill? A quick calculation: If Mom was four, then her sister went away in 1921. What sort of place for me. I made a mistake coming here.”

Besides, this wasn’t the best time to probe Mom’s psyche. Her anxiety level had reached a point of incapacitation. Mom’s psychiatrist, Toby Hazan, had concluded that depression, not anxiety, was at the root of her problems. He wanted to take her off Xanax and treat her with an antidepressant that, in rare cases, could lead to respiratory arrest. Mom’s emphysema increased the risk. Hazan didn’t feel comfortable putting her on the medication at home; he recommended that Mom voluntarily enter a psych ward for a two-week treatment regimen, which would allow him to monitor her closely for any adverse side effects.

Naturally, Mom was resisting. Whenever I called her, as my siblings and I were doing almost daily, concern about her health trumped any curiosity about an unknown sister. It didn’t seem fair to ask her now, when she was so vulnerable. Best to wait, I thought, for her return to the strong, self-sufficient woman we had always known.

Besides, she was as much in the dark about her sister as we were. It seemed pointless to ask her a lot of questions. She might feel betrayed if we revealed that we knew, and to what end?

That question hung in the air when Sash went to visit Mom several weeks later. Her report wasn’t good.

“Steven,” she said, panic evident in her voice, “you have to come take me home. I can’t stay here, I can’t breathe.”

Sash has no trouble being straightforward; that’s been her modus operandi most of her life. I learned long ago to deal with her no-nonsense style, and even to appreciate it. If nothing else, it simplifies decision-making that otherwise might drag on, to no one’s gain. By early evening, I was sitting in Mom’s apartment.

That night was a rerun of the previous one. Moans, groans, no sleeping for Mom, or for us. The following afternoon, in a hastily arranged meeting in Dr. Hazan’s office, Mom reluctantly agreed to sign herself into the geriatric psych ward at Botsford Hospital so she could get off the Xanax and start taking the antidepressant.

It seemed the best of the options, and we needed to do something. We took Mom there the next day around 5 p.m., as soon as a bed became available, and left her there for the night. At 7:30 a.m., the phone rang. “Steven,” she said, panic evident in her voice, “you have to come take me home. I can’t stay here, Steven. You don’t understand. This is not the right place for me. I made a mistake coming here.”

I stalled for time to think, unwilling to say anything I might regret. Inside, though, I had plenty of sympathy for her reaction. I had seen the other patients on the ward; everyone was suffering from Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia. Grim was not too strong a word for what she was facing.

“Mom, we’ll be there soon,” I said. “We can talk about it then.”
“You don’t understand,” she said. “They took away my pencils. I can’t even do a crossword puzzle.” That was bad. Finishing the daily crossword, she often said, was her way of proving to herself that she still had all her marbles.

“We’ll be there soon, Mom.”

If that earlier night had been the worst of Sash’s life, then that Friday was the worst day of mine. On the way to the hospital, Sash warned me that Mom would put on a full-court press, begging to go home. Sash had already concluded that Mom needed to stay, but I was ambivalent. “If you decide to take her home,” Sash said, with her usual directness, “I can’t be a party to it.” So the pressure was on me.

Mom wasted no time making her case. She was unrelenting. I can still remember sitting tensely in a chair, in the ward’s bright and airy day room, with Mom draping herself over my back, cajoling, coaxing, crying, sweet-talking.

“I can’t stay here,” she pleaded. “Steven, please, please. I’ll do anything you say, if you just take me home.” Our roles had reversed: She was the child, employing every manipulative trick to get her way. I was the adult, resisting, observing, comforting her as I tried to figure out the right thing—or at least the best thing—to do.

It took all my strength not to give in. I tried not to cry, and I failed. If seismographs could measure tremors in the human voice, I’m sure that mine registered a slight earthquake on the Richter scale. As gently as I could, I took a good, long look around, and what I saw depressed me, too: patients who couldn’t feed themselves, patients muttering unintelligibly, patients exhibiting every form of senility I could imagine. Mom was the healthiest person there, by far, and it made me cringe to think that I would be leaving and that she would be staying. That vision of Mom, surrounded by dementia patients, trying to get a pencil so she could do her damn crossword puzzle, stayed in my head. I retreated to a nearby room to make some phone calls to other facilities, hoping to find something better. I found one with a much younger clientele, primarily teenagers who had tried or were threatening to kill themselves.

As soon as I returned to the day room, Mom resumed her campaign. “Please, Steven, please. I can’t stay here.” It went on for what seemed like hours. Late in the afternoon, the three of us—Sash, Mom, and I—met with Hazan in one last attempt to settle her down. Hazan’s notes on the meeting are part of Mom’s hospital record.

If you leave the hospital, Hazan asked her, what will you do?

“I have no plan, I just want to go out,” Mom said angrily. “I don’t think this is the right place for me. This is not home.”

Home, Hazan bluntly reminded her, had become hell—sleepless nights, moaning, groaning.

“My mind tells me I should stay here,” Mom conceded. “Rationally, I know I should stay here.” Then, desperately, she turned to me. “Please, I just can’t take it.”

Sash couldn’t take it either. She left the room. I looked at Mom. The sight was not pleasant. Her glasses magnified the tears in her round, expressive eyes. Her face, so striking when she smiled, sagged under the pressure of the long day and the exhaustion of several sleepless nights. Her blouse hung loosely on her bony shoulders. She had lost twenty-five pounds from her five-foot-six-inch frame over the past two years, so she now weighed less than one hundred. My heart went out to her, but my head told me that it would be a mistake to take her home.

“Mom, I think you should stay for a few days. As Dr. Hazan said, the law allows him to keep you for three. If you want to leave after that, even though he’s saying that it’s against his best judgment, you can sign yourself out.”

I had abandoned her cause. Her son, her own flesh and blood, had gone over to the other side. Out of options, she gave up the battle, at least for that moment. The look of pure fear remained in her eyes, though—a fear that I wouldn’t truly understand until much later, when I learn the truth about Mom’s sister—and that’s the image that stayed with me long after Sash and I exited the hospital and drove away in May’s cool night air.

Two weeks later, her new medication working well, Mom went home. My older brother Mike flew in from Seattle to help her for a few days. A month later, she told Hazan she felt “fantastic.” She had survived the ordeal; so had we.

While she was sick, it never seemed like the right time to ask her about her sister. Now that she was doing better, Sash and I thought she might reveal the secret on her own. But she never did. So we let it rest. Hard as it is for me to fathom this now, we never asked her about it; since she didn’t know anything about her sister’s fate, I guess I didn’t see much point.

Mom went back to work, back to driving herself, back to the independent life that had once seemed intact, as far as she knew—until six months later, when it surfaced once more, unforeseen, uninvited, nearly forgotten.

This time, though, the secret had a name.

She died in August 1999, her secret intact, as far as she knew—until six months later, when it surfaced once more, unforeseen, uninvited, nearly forgotten.
The Michigan Humanities Council will be known as a unifying force throughout Michigan, whose programs help people connect with one another and the places where they live, by fostering a greater understanding and engagement in the cultures, histories, and values which tell us who we were, are, and hope to be.

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PINCKNEY
Tuesday, September 24 @ 9:30 a.m.
Jane Tasch Performing Art Theatre – hosted by Pinckney Community Schools
2150 Route 36

LANSONG
Tuesday, September 24 @ 7:00 p.m.
Michigan Historical Center – hosted by the Michigan Humanities Council
717 W. Allegan St.

PORTAGE
Tuesday, September 24 @ 6:30 p.m.
Portage District Library – a joint event with Kazoo Books
300 Library Lane

BOYNE CITY
Wednesday, November 13 @ 6:30 p.m.
Boyne District Library
201 E. Main St.

SAULT STE. MARIE
Thursday, November 14 @ 7:00 p.m.
Bayliss Public Library
541 Library Drive

SAGINAW
Tuesday, January 28 @ 9:00 a.m.
Swan Valley High School
8400 Omer Road

SAGINAW
Tuesday, January 28 @ 12:00 p.m.
Castle Museum – a joint event with the Public Libraries of Saginaw
500 Federal Avenue

MIDLAND
Tuesday, January 28 @ 7:00 p.m.
Grace A. Dow Memorial Library
1710 St. Andrews St.

MOUNT PLEASANT
Wednesday, January 29
TBD

*TRaverse CITY
Tuesday, April 8 @ 7:00 p.m.
City Opera House – a joint event with the National Writers Series
106 E. Front Street

*WEST BLOOMFIELD
Wednesday, May 21 @ 11:30 a.m.
Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit
6555 West Maple

FARMINGTON HILLS
Wednesday, May 21 @ 7:00 p.m.
Holocaust Memorial Center
28123 Orchard Lake Rd

WESTLAND
Thursday, May 22 @ 10 a.m.
Westland Public Library
6123 Central City Parkway

FERNDALE
Thursday, May 22 @ 7:00 p.m.
The Rust Belt Market
22801 Woodward Avenue

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