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COMING HOME

There’s an old John Denver song that talks about a man “going home, to a place he’d never been before”. On the surface it’s a nonsensical statement. But now I think I know what it means.

You see I recently visited South Australia’s Barossa Valley for the 100th anniversary of our church there. It’s a church my ancestors attended. And though I have heard all my life about the Barossa, I’d never actually been there before. This is where my family first became Australians and then Adventists. Coming to the Barossa feels very much like coming home.

For Christmas in 1976 my father presented me with a family history. As his mother had died recently, he sentimentally entitled the 313-page tome “Her Last Mother’s Day”. I remember being decidedly unimpressed. There were lots of things I wanted for Christmas that year. A whopping big volume of dense text broken only by reproductions of faded black and white photos of relatives I didn’t know wasn’t one of them. But now that old volume is very precious, and as I leaf through the pages the lives of my ancestors in the Barossa come alive.

South Australia was established as a British colony in the mid-1830s. My family arrived soon after. They were Lutheran Germans from Silesia—then part of Germany. Their form of Lutheranism grated
with the state-approved church and they lived under great pressure. They were planning to move to Russia as they believed they would be treated better there when Sir George Angas invited them to settle in the new colony of South Australia.

Fortunately for us, they chose wisely. The Barossa is a promised land of vineyards and honey.

Thomas Standish, my great-great-great-grandfather who brought our name to Australia, married Anne, a German, and went to live in the tightly-knit Barossan community. His son also married a German woman. When World War I erupted four generations after our family arrived, German Australians fell under suspicion and schooling in German was banned. But not before my grandfather had learned to speak German fluently.

Ultimately, many of my family moved away from the Barossa. But our name hasn’t entirely left. Today a celebrated wine produced there is called “The Standish”—and it’s grown in Vine Vale, an easy walk from the home of our ancestors. The Wine Advocate praises “The Standish” for its “[S]umptuous depth, and incredible richness and purity”. Oh, to aspire for reviews of oneself that are half as glowing!

I can’t comment on the accuracy of the review but it does give me a perverse joy to see the mark of those hardy immigrants hasn’t entirely been swept aside by the tides of time—even if the mark is presumably a leftover from the part of the family who didn’t join the Adventist Church.

But there’s another legacy of which I’m much more proud. And that’s the spiritual legacy left by those families of the Barossa Valley. For a very small place, it has produced many men and women who have worked faithfully for God, spreading the Adventist message across the world.

Families associated with the church in the Barossa have served the Church at all levels. They have served in ministry, in education, administration, in science and medicine, and many other areas. And they have served all over Australia, New Zealand, in the Pacific, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean and North America. All of that, from the little Barossa Valley Adventist Church. In every Adventist Record you are getting a healthy dose of South Australian German heritage as not only do I trace my heritage there but so does associate editor Jarrod Stackelroth.

There are many ways to define success in life but a definition of which I’m particularly fond goes something like this: success is to see your grandchildren grow up with love in their hearts for the God you serve.
When God introduced Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:6 He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

I’m thankful that He is also the God of my great-great-grandparents, great-grandmother, grandparents, parents and He is the God of Leisa and myself. My sincerest prayer is this: that He will always also be the God of our children. It’s my dream that all of us will, ultimately, “go home to a place we’ve never been before”. And I wish no less for your family as well.