

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020

2003 Grandma was an Alien

by Laurel Fisher

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We knew Grandma as a German-speaking migrant who worked hard and enjoyed a good social life in East Perth. As a young woman, she was a registered 'alien' and along with many other migrants survived wartime and the depression era. When I was still at school, I wanted to know more about her, so started learning German. Grandma spoke excellent English with an accent of sorts yet I wanted to write to her in her own language. I treasure the faded hand-written reply to let me know that she came from the town of Neu Stettin in Pomerania [located to the east of modern Germany on the Baltic Sea].

Many years later, we found some truth in the family stories of Grandma's life and with decades of careful work on existing records filled in the rest of her story. At last we can make sense of these bits and pieces in formal documents. We can follow the many variations in the names she used to suggest some errors and others as omissions, alterations or diversions; no doubt Grandma had sound reasons. In this account, the details of Grandma's life are noted in date order. In reality, as with any family history, tracing her journey took many side paths with false leads and intriguing distractions.

'Grandma Mac' is for McGillivray [not her birth-name]. Dad thought his mother's name was Neumann, Newman, perhaps Nimz or Nimitz. Yet birth registrations in the Province of Neustettin in Pommerania cover hundreds of Nimz and Neumann families. There are few left who knew her yet someone remembered her birthday as 12th of September. So it seems Grandma was 'Marie Bertha Johanna Nimz' born on 12 September 1889 to Johanna Louisa Henriette Neumann and Christian Carl Wilhelm Nimz, known as Carl Nimz, a railway worker, in the town of Neustettin in Neustettin province in Pomerania.

Family stories suggest Marie travelled to London to live with an Uncle after her mother died and her father re-married. Of course, Pomerania has a long history of invasion and re-population, and few records remain after WWII. Yet we were stunned when officials at Neustettin Town Hall denied German-speaking people ever lived there. Fortunately, Greifswald Archive have some records. Recent online searches show Marie's mother, Johanna died on 18 Feb 1900 (aged 37) at Neustettin. Her father Carl Nimz re-married on 13 Jan 1901 to Auguste Dux and then on 7 Aug 1901, Carl Nimz died (aged 39). Marie was an orphan aged 11 and it remains unclear what happened to her siblings.

On 15 August 1903, a woman named 'Marie Nanz' was a passenger on the ship *Silvia* to London although noted age 21. In any case, later details partially support the story that Marie lived with an aunt and uncle no doubt among the many Nimz and Neuman families working as tailors in London. We trace Grandma through her daughter, my aunt Hetty. On 7 Aug 1906, Hetwig daughter of 'Louise Maria Nimz' was born at Shadwell London and on 25 August 1906, 'Marie Louise Nimz', tailoress (daughter of Carl Nimz, railway driver, decd) married Arthur Robert Pluhatsch at Stepney London. On 4 Nov 1907, a son Arthur was born who died in infancy and then her husband left. Marie was just 18.

At some point, Marie was living with Grandpa, Ernst Kreibig. He was a German migrant of Bomemian descent who arrived in London on 9 May 1908. On 8 Oct 1910, Marie noted as 'Mary Kreibig' with daughter Hetty and Ernst Kreibig migrated to Australia on the ship *Armada* to arrive in the heat of summer on 29 December 1910 at Fremantle.

Documents of 1916 and 1927 show 'Mary Kreibig' a registered alien naturalized in WA who was born on 12 September 1889 in Neustattin Germany. Grandma and Grandpa raised the children Hetty, Hilda, Wilhelm, Connie, Marge, Mick and Clarrie at Waroona and Amphion

near Dwellingup in WA. The WA land records show on 23 March 1931, 'Marie Luisa Anna Kreibig' bought five acres at Amphion for a market garden. Then Marie and Ernst separated and family dispersed. Fortunately, we can follow Marie to Dwellingup where she ran a hat shop and then to Perth where she worked as a cook.

The next record shows that on 3 January 1935, 'Marie Newman aged 38 (sic)' daughter of 'Johanna Nimz and Charles Newman engine driver, dec' married to Robert McGillivray in Perth. There is no way to know if mixing parental surnames was a clerical error or deliberate. Then Marie and Bob went to Reedy near Cue, Leonora and Bullfinch where he worked as a miner and Grandma ran a shop/post office and other work. Those who know the area can only admire the will to survive. By 1943, Marie and Bob separated; he later married again and Grandma Mac moved back to Perth as 'Marie Anna Louise McGillivray'. She lived with family in Bayswater, Flinders, Bassendean then East Perth.

On 6 May 1971, the elusive 'Marie Anna Louise McGillivray' died aged 81 in Perth WA. Once the official records noted Grandma as an 'alien' and the death records noted her parents as 'unknown'. It is rewarding that the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages recently accepted the correct details for her birth, the names of her parents and children.