

## From Our Mailbox

### Comments on Genealogy and Ethics

I was very interested in the Summer 2014 “As I See It” column, with its reference to ethics in genealogy. When I was on the IAJGS Board (2000–2004), the topic was treated in some depth and culminated in a Declaration of the IAJGS at the Toronto Summer Conference in 2002. In fact, I chaired the IAJGS working party that led to the declaration, and we grappled with such issues as freedom of information versus the right to privacy, ownership of intellectual property so who could “control” databases, and how much should professional genealogists charge their clients. There often were no easy answers; every “inalienable right” could be matched with an equally compelling “alternative such right.”

These deliberations took place before the enormous advances in the use of DNA, which can now match parents to children in sometimes unexpected (and even disconcerting!) ways. This is very much true for those children who suspect they are halachically (that is, under Jewish law) Jewish and are not certain of their mothers. The biological (possibly Jewish) mother may not want it known that she had given a child up for adoption, but the said child is Jewish and later may want to marry within the faith. Of course their “illegitimate” status is another burden to carry because, if Orthodox communities are involved, they are restricted within the Jewish peoplehood as to marriage eligibility. Then what about heritable diseases or conditions if the parent is unwilling to confess up to their parenting but are possibly transmitting a condition the child should know he or she is at risk of acquiring (e.g., Huntington’s chorea)? It goes on!

Anthony Joseph  
Smethwick, UK

### Anyone Can Be a Family History Techie

I was pleasantly surprised to see that Marlis Humphrey singled out my 600-plus page online family history, with all its music, family voices, video and hyperlinks, as a good example of how to make a long family history come alive for today’s younger generation (“Latest Trends in Publishing for Genealogists” Summer 2014, AVOTAYNU).

I want AVOTAYNU readers to understand that I’m no “techie.” Indeed, I’m a 70-year-old, gray-haired *zayde* (grandfather), who wouldn’t know what a “content aggregator app” was if it came up and bit him on the *tuchis* (rear end). My background is in writing and research (see “Finding My Ukrainian Family,” Winter 1997, AVOTAYNU). Like many AVOTAYNU readers, I want to spend my time on pure genealogy, not the mechanics of production. However, I also realized a few years ago that if you can’t pass your genealogy work down to future generations in a form they can appreciate, all your research and writing is for zilch.

So I hired a brilliant, 30-something web designer who helped me turn my 600-page print book into a 600-page, password-protected, online, “living” family history that jumps out to young people at the click of a mouse. After all, many of us hire genealogy experts to help us research families throughout the world. So why not hire a web expert to help us present that research?

AVOTAYNU readers who’d like to see my continually updated online book can e-mail me (bshanas@aol.com), and I’ll tell them how to download it. If you’d like to contact my young web designer, that information is also yours for the asking.

Bert Shanas  
New York, New York

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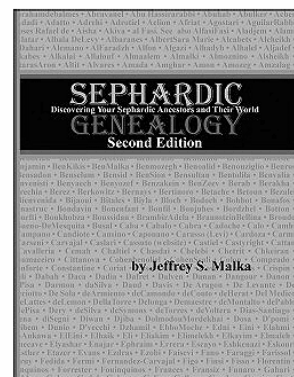
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## From Our Mailbox

### Questions XYZ or Me Generation

For the first time in all the years I have been subscribing, I am profoundly disappointed by a position you have taken.

In your "As I See It" editorial, you have praised the Marlis Humphrey article to the skies. I have read it, and I agree that it is excellent in many ways, especially for those of us who are far from the XYZ generations and who have chosen not to be constantly "connected." It is informative and wise to show how to make research more widely available via the web instead of merely in a hard-copy format. Sadly, however, in her haste to adapt to a changing world, Ms. Humphrey has accepted that her daughter's inadequate education has restricted her attention span to reading only "short snippets" of material. Later, Ms. Humphrey relates approvingly that Ology books "present information in snippets."

But then you uncritically praise the entire article and suggest that it is an article "to read slowly and carefully and to save."

For shame! One of the worst things about the XYZ or Me generation is its superficiality and infinitesimal attention span. It cannot stay focused long enough to understand that life is not a simplistic series of ten things to know about this and ten things to know about that, nor does it have short easy answers to anything. The answers to very nearly all problems in life are long, complicated, and internally conflicting. To understand and resolve almost any serious problem takes careful consideration of many aspects in much detail, and then engagement in a sophisticated balancing of all the conflicts to reach a viable solution. Reading in snippets does nothing to help achieve that goal. Promoting an article that speaks approvingly of reading in snippets undermines the whole structure of genealogical research and gives a blessing to the dumbing down of America.

Andrew Alpern  
New York, New York

### Questions FTDNA Practice

In the Summer 2014 issue of AVOTAYNU, Bennett Greenspan discusses the need to change the method for Y-DNA haplogroup naming method that adds another digit to the name with each new SNP found. The problem Greenspan notes is that this has caused some names to have more than a dozen digits. He is correct about the problem, but the new method that Family Tree DNA (FTDNA) has adopted is not user friendly. The new naming method uses the terminal or most recent mutated SNP tested. This strategy would be fine if everyone were tested on all the same SNPs but such is not the case. I belong to a Y-DNA subgroup based on a rare STR mutation that occurred after the last known terminal SNP mutation. Only one person in the subgroup of more than 100 individuals is listed at FTDNA with

the correct SNP. The others are listed under one of four different haplogroup names. This makes it much harder to determine where male autosomal matches belong on one's tree. I suggest instead that FTDNA use the first three or four digits of the old naming system, but if the old name is longer than the 3 or 4 digits, then add the terminal SNP.

Sidney Sachs  
Lorton, Virginia

### Importance of Iranian Jewish Surnames List

I was surprised and very happy to see Ephraim Dardashti's article on Iranian Jewish surnames in your Summer 2014 issue. As far as I can remember, this is the first time AVOTAYNU has included something on Iranian Jews. I have no personal interest in the topic—no one in my family comes from Iran—but I understand that this is our last chance to have exact information on the surnames of this country. Almost no Jews still live in Iran, and those with roots there do not know the language—and herein lies the importance of Dardashti's article. AVOTAYNU should ask him to complete his task and publish a booklet for the use of future generations. For my personal use, I have photocopied and bound the article. It has found its place among all my books that deal with onomastics.

Mathilde Tagger  
Jerusalem, Israel

[Tagger's *Dictionary of Bulgarian Jewish Surnames* has just been published by Avotaynu, Inc—Ed.]

### Ashkenazi and Sephardi Research in France, especially in Paris

- French Vital Records
  - French Naturalizations
  - Quai d'Orsay (Foreign Office) Archives
  - Jewish Consistory Archives
  - Shoah Records
  - Alliance Israélite Universelle Library and Archives
- and many other sources

*Personal genealogical research*  
*for more than 25 years*  
*Author of the French guide « Rechercher ses*  
*ancêtres juifs » (Autrement Ed.)*

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