

Orphaned siblings reunited after 75 years apart

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Press Photo/Paul L. Newby II Pleased to see you: Chester Wasiuk embraces his sister, Isabelle Metty, as the two meet Saturday for the first time in 75 years.

GRANDVILLE -- After 75 years of separation, Chester Wasiuk and Isabelle Metty's broken family circle is complete again.

"Oh, wow. This is my sister," 78-year-old Chester said softly as Isabelle walked up the driveway of their brother's Grandville home Saturday morning.



Press Photo/Paul L. Newby II Together: Chester Wasiuk puts his arm around his sister, Isabelle Metty. The two were among six children orphaned by their parents in 1932, when their father, Victor Kicinski, dropped them at St. John's Home.

"You're my brother!" Isabelle said as they hugged, ending an estrangement that began in 1932, when their destitute father dropped off six of his children at St. John's Home, an orphanage then that operates today as a home for neglected children.

Saturday's reunion between Chester, of Vancouver, Wash., and Isabelle, of Flat Rock, was the last in a series of reunions brought about by a handful of dim childhood memories, a few deathbed revelations and, ultimately, a series of Internet searches.

The family's story began in 1921 on Grand Rapids' West Side, when 33-year-old Victor Kicinski, a cabinet maker working at American Seating Co., married Sophia Kruchanetz, an 18-year-old who had just arrived from Poland.

By 1932, the couple had seven children and things were not going well. Family members still aren't sure why, but Victor surrendered their six oldest children to St. John's Home amid allegations of neglect.

The youngest infant, Dolores, stayed with their mother, who apparently divorced their father soon after.

Chester, who was 3 when he arrived at St. John's, did not remember his siblings, most of whom were sent to adoptive families.

"I have so many memories of being in so many houses, but I was always alone," he said.

In 1936, Chester was the last sibling to leave St. John's. He was adopted by a family whose father struck up an acquaintance when he noticed Chester sitting alone on a bench outside the home.

Although he was raised near John Ball Park, Chester, a retired railroad worker, did not know he had siblings until 1972, when he was approached at his adoptive mother's funeral by a man named Ted Sellner, who told him he was his brother. Chester said he didn't make much of it and returned to his home in Vancouver, Wash.

Chester's interest in his childhood was reawakened two years ago by his wife's research into her own family. She encouraged him to track down his roots.

With the help of records at St. John's Home, Chester discovered he had seven siblings. His search of Internet records led him to the family of his sister, Dolores, who died in 1986.

The search heated up after he contacted Beth Fiedorowicz, Dolores' daughter-in-law. Curious about her mother-in-law's deathbed claim that she had brothers and sisters, Fiedorowicz helped Chester find the other siblings.

The trail led to Ted and Joe Sellner, two brothers who remained together when a family from Manistee adopted them.

Ted died in 1994, but Joe Sellner was alive and living with his son's family in Grandville.

They also were able to track down two surviving sisters: Louise Holzwarth, who lived in Kentucky; and Isabelle Metty, who lived in Flat Rock on the east side of the state.

This weekend, three of the siblings and family members gathered in West Michigan to make the final link. Chester flew in from Washington to visit Joe, who is in hospice care with a brain tumor, and Isabelle's daughter drove her from Flat Rock on Saturday morning.

Louise, the other surviving sibling, is recovering from hip surgery and was unable to make the trip.

Chester, the lonely boy who never knew his parents and siblings, shook his head in amazement Saturday when Isabelle proudly told him she had eight children, 15 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Said Chester, a father of four and a grandfather as well, "It's just mushrooming. Every time I talk to someone, there's more."

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Comments

almostpeevd says...

What a nice ending. I have also traced my family back into the 1400's, something I encourage everyone to do. It gives extra meaning and understanding as to why and who we are. Blessings to this family.

Posted on 04/20/08 at 8:14AM

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