

I spoke to someone in your office some time ago about the process of getting my "grandmother's" name engraved on the plaques at the Leif Erikson statue at the Shilshole Bay Marina.

She mentioned that you have someone on your staff that is qualified to do additional research. I welcome whatever help you can give me in locating my grandmother.

I did not know the name of my grandmother until about five years ago and I am now 66 years of age. My mother never spoke my grandmother's name to me during her lifetime (my mom died on November 30, 2001.)

She spent her entire life looking for some evidence of her mother, including traveling to Norway.

Not one of her relatives told her the circumstances of her real mother. So I am now on that journey on her behalf as well as my own.

I am enclosing my mother's birth certificate that shows this woman as my maternal grandmother; however, the real story is quite different.

I was told all my life that this woman died when my mother was 2 months old and that my mother was raised by another woman: Florence Naylor, the wife of my maternal grandfather, James "Guy" Naylor.

It is this person, Florence, whose name appears on my birth certificate, and not my real grandmother's (Evangeline's) name.

I just did a search at the King County Vital Records in Seattle for the death certificate for Evangeline. They cover only the city of Seattle so the search was limited. No record of her death was found.

I have requested research of Washington state records to find evidence of this person's death.

Since we had a flu epidemic in 1918 it is quite possible that Evangeline died of flu because of her weakened condition, having just given birth to my mother.

My mother, Frances Hope Naylor, and my father, Vern Dwight Thomas, were members of the Sons of Norway, and we had the Greer Thomas Lumber Company on 85th near Greenwood Avenue. We lived in the Ballard area, including Fremont and Blue Ridge.

I have not checked the records of the Sons of Norway.

So after just checking with the vital statistics in King County yesterday, I have a new theory about my grandmother.

My grandfather, Guy, was from Missouri and travelled to work in the Denny Regrade project as an engineer.

It is my belief that the excitement surrounding Seattle at the turn of the century from both the Alaskan gold rush and the arrival of the trains (including Jim Hill's Great Northern) appealed to Guy and was part of the reason for him to relocate for this job as an engineer.

And I believe that Scandinavian women who wished to have a better life were encouraged (literally solicited) to come to Seattle to be “comfort wives” to those men who came here from all across America.

Evangeline may not have even been married to Guy at the time my mother was born, and maybe she didn’t die at all but returned to Norway right after the unplanned birth of my mother.

My mother’s middle name is the primary clue that causes me now to believe this. Her name is Hope.

Hope is a name given to a child because there are no ancestors to bestow their namesakes. At least no ancestors who wanted to be connected to my mother.

In essence, what I now believe is that my mother was abandoned at birth. She was essentially loved and raised by her father, whom she always referred to as “Daddy.”

My mother was a child type, honest, sincere with no pretense, and when I was a child of 4, I came home from attending a Presbyterian church on Leary Way and asked her who Jesus was. She thought I was swearing, since that was the only context in which she had ever heard his name. She became a Christian when she realized that this man had died for her.

Mom served as the chair of the Christian Women’s Club for Washington state and spent the latter portion of her life speaking about the little boy of 4 years old who came home from church and asked a simple question that changed her life.

At my mom’s memorial in Sequim, Washington, my father stood up and told a story about my mom that I had never heard. He said Mom was asked to speak at the Adak Naval Base, Alaska, and spoke before a small group of men.

After her testimony she asked the commander of the base why he had asked her to come all the way from Washington to speak to such a small group of men. To which he replied, “Madam, you have been speaking on a Pacific Ocean Broadcast system that has just relayed your testimony to all the men we have stationed in this area.”

So today I have a moorage slip in the Shilshole Bay Marina and will be able, finally, to honor my grandmother at last in this way. My thanks to you for this wonderful privilege that your organization is granting to so many people who may have a story of their own to tell.