

## Cam Baker's Family History – April 2010

My mother Anita was born in Barrhead, Alberta, northwest of Edmonton. Her father Leslie was killed in action in WW2, so my grandmother Elsie thought it was best to move the family off the farm and away from the -50 winters. She chose Vernon, BC, where Leslie was to train troops. He had finished his tour of duty, but was filling in for a sick sergeant and was killed leading his troops into the slaughter that was Ortona, Italy, 1943. He was 27. My mother was raised with her younger sister Maureen, and my grandmother's mother, Johanna, from Argentina. Vernon grandma took RCMP officers in training as boarders for many years to provide an income.

Johanna had married a sailor named John Henry Morhmann. He met her at a social in Montevideo, Uruguay, and immediately asked her parents for her hand in marriage. They were not excited about their daughter marrying a sailor, but John said that he would retire from the sea and become a ship's portrait painter at his favourite port of Antwerp, Belgium. They weren't excited about her marrying a painter either. He knew he would return in two years, so Johanna's parents said they could write letters for that time and if they were still in love when he returned, then perhaps they could marry. John painted a self-portrait and mailed it to them, to prove he could paint. They were impressed, and on his return the couple married and moved just outside of Antwerp, to Hoboken. John used to drink and socialize with captains, convincing them that they needed a portrait of their ship. Then he would sit in a tower overlooking the port of Amsterdam and paint. My mother's cousin Leah Joys has found over four hundred paintings in private collections and museums. When I gaze at his self-portrait in my house, I am reminded to pay attention to detail, and to make it look good.

The war clouds of WW1 began to loom in Belgium and John wanted to move his family out. His two eldest sons got tickets for the Titanic to scout Canada, but one of them broke his jaw and they cancelled the trip. They came later and found that family friends had settled near Barrhead, and the family moved there shortly after.

My mother recalls driving through Port Alberni on her way to her first teaching job at Ucluelet to see kelp hanging from the telephone wires from the tsunami earlier that year, in 1964. She was a home-ec teacher, and met my father at the school, who was a phys-ed teacher. They used to go on dates to the Wickaninnish Inn.

Not long after those dates, they were married and welcomed my brother Ian into this world. He grew up to be a star hockey player, and may have made the NHL if it weren't for his temper. He was always the leader in points, and penalty minutes. He was a fierce warrior on the ice, but a very loving older brother to my twin Malcolm and I, and we spent lots of time together growing up. He is the jack-of-all-trades in my family, and a very devoted father and hockey coach to his fraternal twins Colin and Maya. He owns an electrician company and is married to Emily, a salon owner. They live in Kelowna, BC.

Next born into the Baker clan was my brother Jason. He is the real writer in my family, with a degree in communications and an incredible wealth of knowledge of literature. Like my brother Ian and I, he was often captain or assistant captain of his hockey team. He turned me onto Hemmingway, which, believe it or not, has taught me how to express things with fewer words. He was the student council president in his final year of high school and did such a good job that the school created a new

award for him called "Exceptional Contribution To School Life". He is a real people person and works in sales in Kelowna.

My favourite aunt, Rosemary, gave birth to a son, Adrian. She struggled as a single mother in a time when it was not accepted as it is today, and Adrian was raised with us for much of his youth. Adrian passed away tragically in 2006, and left two sons, Ethan and Andrew. Their mother Viyan was born and raised as a Kurd in Iraq. She speaks many languages and worked for the UN as a translator, but this work landed her on Saddam's blacklist, while one of her brothers reluctantly fought in the Republican Guard. Her family was given refuge by the UN in Canada, where she soon met Adrian and was married to him for ten years. In 2007 she moved from Vancouver to Edmonton so that I could be a father figure for the boys, and I have tried to be, but am absent too much to call myself that. Fortunately she soon met a wonderful man named Jose, and they have married and brought the gorgeous Lydia into this world. Viyan and I remind the boys that I am trying to do important work, and that when I am finished, we will get to spend lots of time together, as I will with all of my family.

When I was sixteen our friend Troy Bigam moved in with my family. He has been a professional hockey player in Germany for well over ten years now, and is married to a Frankfurt stewardess for Luftansa named Dani. They spend the summers at my parents' house in Lake Country, BC. He was one of the best guides that ever worked for my travel company, until he got so focused on his fitness in the summers that he decided to stay home and train. I hope to lure him back with some bighouses.

When I was seventeen I met my sister Candus from a previous relationship of my father's. I have loved her half my life now and enjoy listening to her infinite wisdom about many things, but mainly the environment. She and her husband Lee, from Australia, own a landscape design company and greenhouses in Victoria, where they grow native plants to be installed on rooftop gardens.

On Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, 1975, my fraternal brother Malcolm and I were born. I beat him out by 13 minutes, and continued to beat on him throughout our youth, but usually in a friendly manner. We are very close, but also very different people. He is able to focus on things like math, and is a voracious reader of fiction, while I have always been more interested in playing music, non-fiction, movies, and Maxim magazines. He is a cartographer, and his wife Lori is an elementary school teacher. She has given them a ridiculously cute son named Cormac, and a darling baby girl named Lyla. Their relationship and family is something that I can only dream about these days. They live in Calgary.

Growing up, there were always friends and family staying at our house. I don't remember my mother working when I was young, and was always thankful that she was there for us, and not caught up in a busy career. I had no reason to rebel as a teenager, and always got along well with my parents. I spent countless weekends fishing and hunting with Malcolm and my father as a teenager, but dad was always busy with meetings in the evenings on weekdays, being a politician. I felt like his secretary when I was young, as people used to call our house before Lake Country was incorporated and I would always answer the phone. My fear of talking to adults quickly left me, and this has helped give me the courage to make some big phone calls in my life.

My mother is not an outspoken person, but she has been a source of great strength for myself, and our family. Vernon grandma and mom taught me about honesty, and mom has a knack for grammar that I like to think I have inherited. My dad's no slouch either, but mom was there more often to help. My parents, and our hunting partner and his wife taught me about generosity growing up. I have been taken advantage of far more times than I care to remember, but I still tend to fall back to my old ways of sharing and helping whenever possible. It's a comfortable way to live, and it continues to come back to me.

We called my father's mother Lytton grandma. Lytton is a beautiful place, where the Thompson and Fraser rivers meet. She was such a sweetheart, and a very talented singer when she was young. My aunt Rosemary is an expert on opera and ballet, and she has never heard anyone sing better than my grandma Rose. A man came by the family restaurant one day, the Copper Kettle, offering to take her to Vancouver to sing, but my great grandmother needed her there to cook. She lost the ability to sing after she had a stroke, but I still have fond memories of her yodeling once in a while. She was a friend to the First Nations of Lytton, and learned some of their medicine.

My grandpa Sydney was a stubborn Englishman, but also incredibly intelligent. He attended university at the age of fourteen, and somehow ended up in Lytton where he met my grandmother and ran the restaurant, a drive in theatre, and worked as the chairman of the school board. Back then, First Nations weren't able to vote or run for school boards because they didn't own municipal property. My dad was researching the School Act for a university essay and noticed the chair of the school board could appoint a person to fill a vacancy instead of holding an election. He pointed this out to grandpa and suggested he appoint someone from the band. Grandpa appointed Ruby Dunstan to be the first First Nations person to sit on a school board in BC, which led to changes in the School Act. Ruby went on to become a great spokesperson for her band and helped to preserve the Stein Valley from heavy industry.

The whole family used to work at the Copper Kettle, except for the oldest Baker boy, my uncle Wade. He was always off hunting or fishing. He is my super cool uncle, of movie star quality, and even owned a 1957 Chevy in 1957. My dad used to work at the drive in too, and when there were no cars in the lot he would crank Buddy Holly and Elvis so loud that the whole town could hear. Quite often when my aunty Autumn is in the room we're laughing with her, or at her, and she's laughing either way. She's so much fun to be around. My first look at traditional medicine was about twenty-five years ago when she scrubbed her hands with stinging nettle to help with her arthritis. My aunt Virginia and her husband Walt owned a real estate company and have lived in the biggest house on Osoyoos Lake for my whole life. It feels like staying at a resort when I visit them, and sometimes uncle Walt lets me play his ancient Gibson guitars.

My parents took care of my grandparents in our home until they passed, with the exception of my grandpa Sydney who lived his very last days in Osoyoos, and this has had an effect on me. It was always nice to be around them, and my great aunt Virginia who also lived with us, and it has driven me to provide for my parents as they have provided for theirs.

In 2002 I was asked to move to Edmonton to play guitar in a heavy metal band with some incredibly talented brothers that I had played with in the mid nineties. I was

just launching my travel company so I had to hold off for a year, but joined them in 2003 until we broke up in 2009. Probably five years ago now I asked my singer, Kelly Dodd, to write some lyrics about people that would rather buy that second Ferrari than pick up the phone to use their wealth and influence to help. It's called Pulling Triggers. It was pretty neat to read a year or two after we finished the song, and a couple years into working on the film, that the most powerful man in Hollywood, Ari Emmanuel, traded in his Ferrari for an environmentally friendly Prius. He never heard the song but it was a cool coincidence, and a sign of progress.

Many years ago I read an article written by Robert Kennedy Jr. about the influence of media on our lives. He mentioned that Ronald Reagan got rid of something called the "Fairness Doctrine" and I believe Kennedy stated there were only six corporations that controlled the news in the US, at the time of publication. I was ranting and raving about this, Fox News, Rupert Murdoch, and Bill O'Reilly for months and inspired Kelly to compose lyrics to a song called Media Dictatorship.

It is always easier to divide than to come together. I believe strongly that our media has led us to war, and harmed us immensely, but I also believe that same power can be harnessed for good if we are able to bring the right people together.

In 2002, I brought on a partner in my travel company, Douglas Bevans, and moved in with old family friends, the MacQuarries, who gave me firm ground to launch Nomad from. Douglas was the only person I had ever met that had spent more time on the phone than me, and he is the better negotiator.

The Smalls were formed in 1990, when Douglas was studying art at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton. He played guitar, and met three other young men studying music there. Together they quickly emerged as the leaders of independent music in Canada. They toured Canada countless times over the band's career, as well as the United States, and Europe, and retired in 2001 as legends of Canadiana.

Out of thousands of shows, one of their greatest honours was being one of the first western bands to play in Bosnia after the war, making them feel like cultural ambassadors. They turned down some lucrative offers to remain independent over their career, and along with bassist Corb Lund, Douglas managed all aspects of their business, never sacrificing the art.

It is this work ethic and integrity that Douglas brings to Nomad, and they are the same principles that I strive to use in all of my work. For the last five years, Douglas has taken the reins of Nomad, weathering storms and building us back stronger than ever, while I have immersed myself in research and writing. It is his patient faith that has allowed me to learn so much, and I am very grateful to have such a valuable partner in business, and a great friend in life.

Douglas is the recent recipient of a composer's grant from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and spent February to May of 2010 at the Banff Centre. He experimented a lot with composing music in his dreams, and trained himself to better remember the music. In another experiment he put tinfoil on his windows, bought two weeks worth of food so he couldn't count the days, got rid of all his clocks, and only allowed himself to compose when he wasn't sleeping. A friend knocked on his door at the end of a week.

I have been very fortunate to grow up in a beautiful part of the world, surrounded by beautiful people. I have been blessed with many incredible opportunities already in my short life, and they give me great hope. I believe that by sharing knowledge and wealth, and encouraging others to do the same, that the world will change for the better, and soon. We just have to work together, create irresistible opportunities, and ask nicely for help.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I look forward to the future.