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APRIL 2013

Return to Your Roots

MEET FIVE TRAVELERS WHO EXPLORED THEIR ANCESTRY.
AND DISCOVER HOW YOU CAN, TOO



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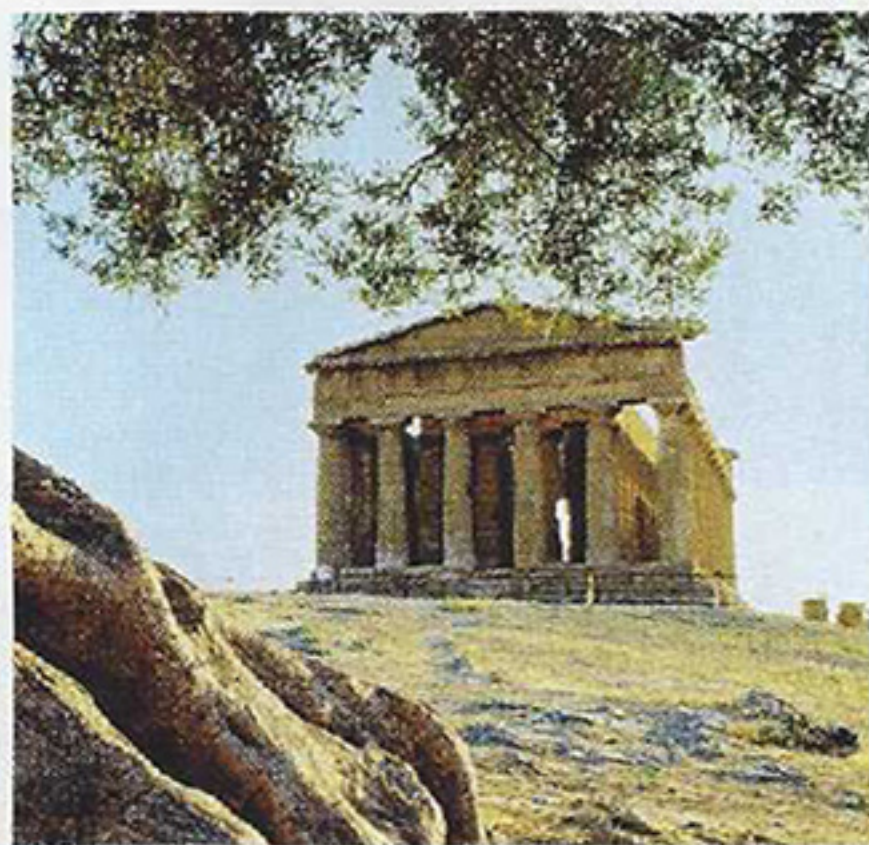


Going

FIVE WRITERS RETURN TO

Home is much more than your current address. Home means birthplace, family, roots, culture, tradition. It's a deep longing that a growing number of Americans are addressing by tracing their lineages across oceans and continents to

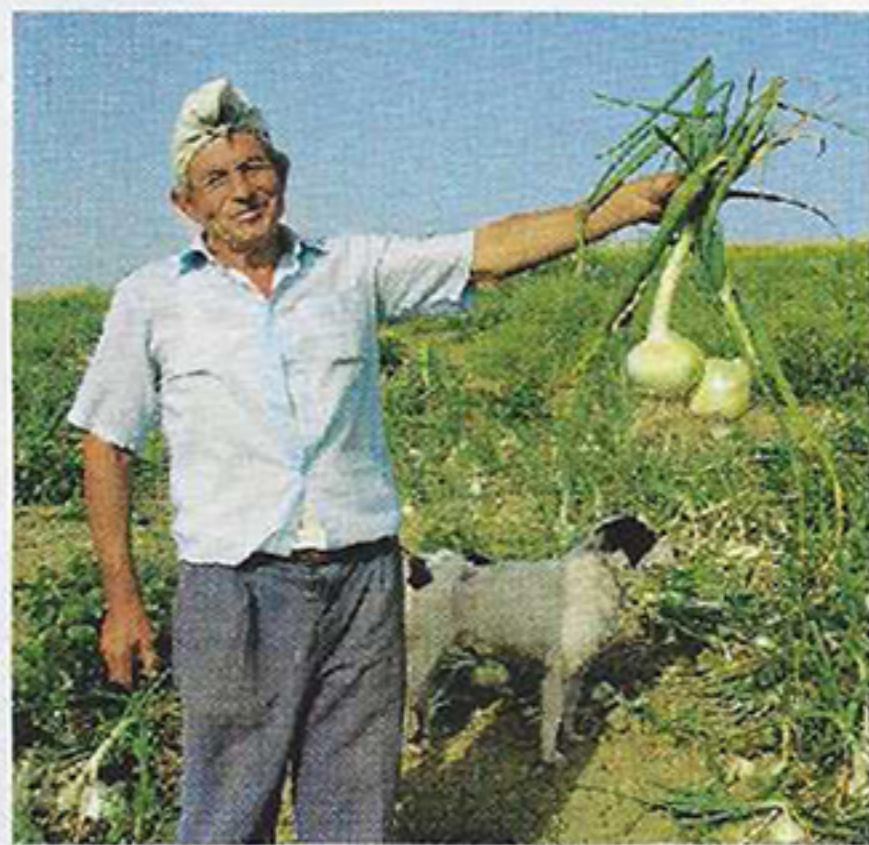
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LIZ BEATTY, GUY VANDERLST/GETTY IMAGES; JOE MOZIN/30, DAVE U. NELI/2011/30; TTY IMAGES; JUST-Y GUAR/GETTY IMAGES; ANDRÉ SAFFRON/30; LIZ BEATTY/30; TTY IMAGES



Home

THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS

their ancestral sources. The urge to glimpse the life of one's forbears by traveling to their homeland is powerful, says genealogist Megan Smolenyak. "Once you get a taste, it's like your own mystery novel; you just can't stop turning the pages." From Krakow to Taipei, here are stories to inspire you to visit your own past.



C. COVATSIK: (TOP) LEFT: 24 VEE RESIUNO; II. STIN SUABING; (A/N) NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK; JOI ANVA; I. JIBER/SIM; I. RENEI NESTIVO; LIZ BEATTY (PECH); CONNEYS; PETER MCCAB; (R) (PECH) IMAGES; NINA; ETHIOPIA

The Route to Your Roots

Fueled in part by TV shows such as NBC's hit *Who Do You Think You Are?* in which celebrities like Blair Underwood and Marisa Tomei discover their ancestral heritage, interest in roots travel has taken off in the past decade. In an Ancestry.com poll last year, four out of five Americans said they were interested in learning about their family histories, which can often be accomplished in a series of mouse clicks, thanks to the extensive collection of digitized records on the Web at places like *ancestry.com* and *familysearch.org*. But now more resources are becoming available to help families on the ground in the old country, whether it's locating grave-stones, retracing immigration journeys, or meeting long-lost relatives.

Collect data: The trend taps into a collective yearning for connection in our transient culture, says genealogist Megan Smolenyak,

whose latest book, *Hey, America, Your Roots Are Showing*, delves into her experiences tracing the ancestry of the Obamas and other prominent Americans. "Families have dispersed so much, [genealogy] gives us a way to feel we belong." Before you jump online, Smolenyak suggests gathering names of ancestors and dates (births, deaths, marriages)—as many as possible. Look through old memorabilia, such as military discharge papers, Bibles, and yearbooks, and chat up older relatives. "If you have a few



Arrival at Ellis Island.

specifics in hand, you may avoid barking up the wrong tree."

Search the Web: Use genealogical websites to help you fill in the blanks. At *ancestry.com*, a \$35 monthly subscription buys access to a trove of ten billion records. Other sites, such as *lowcountryafricana.com*, which explores African-American genealogy in the Southeast, are geared toward specific diasporas. The granddaddy of ancestral record collections, however, is Family Search in Salt Lake City, run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with the names of three million deceased people. The records are still being digitized, but armed with key dates, you can order microfilm to be shipped to one of the library's 4,500 branches.

Make connections: Tourism offices can also be a resource. Discover Ireland (*discoverireland.com*), for instance,

has a section on its website devoted to helping Americans trace their heritage, as well as a toll-free number that helps connect callers with ancestral towns. A government initiative this year is capitalizing on the roots travel trend by inviting anyone in the Irish diaspora to the Gathering 2013, a series of events in the country throughout the year.

Go the extra mile: Once you're on the ground, dig further or search for original documents at local archives or churches, depending on the country. In Ireland, some hotels even have genealogy butlers. Or just page through the local phone book to look for residents with family names. "Call them up and start comparing names of ancestors," suggests Michelle Ercanbrack, Ancestry.com's family historian. "There's something incredible that happens when you go to these places. It's an absolute adventure." —Margaret Loftus