

How to find your Jewish ancestry

A Step by Step Guide

By

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Introduction

My name is Genie Milgrom, and I was born in Havana, Cuba, to a Roman Catholic family of Spanish origins. My family emigrated to Miami, Florida, after the Cuban Revolution when I was four years old, and I have lived in Miami ever since. My family was never a religious one, but my parents did send my sister and me to Catholic schools. I attended a Catholic grade school and high school, as well as a Catholic university in Miami, while feeling in my heart that something was just not right. From an early age, I felt very drawn to Jews and Judaism, and tried to get as close to both any time I could. These feelings were unexplainable, but they were very real. I had an unquenchable thirst to trace my family genealogy and, as a teenager, went again and again to my maternal grandparents to help me, but they shut me out at every turn and would not give me information. I did not think much about it at the time, only that perhaps they were trying to hide the fact that they were first or second cousins.

It wasn't until I was in my early thirties that I started to pursue my love of all things Jewish. I studied and learned for many years and finally converted to Orthodox Judaism with an approved Rabbinical Court in Miami and began an observant Jewish life that satisfied the personal need I had been searching for all those years.

It had never occurred to me that I might come from Jewish Ancestry.

Both of my grandparents and their ancestors had been born in the tiny village of Fermoselle in Spain called Fermoselle in the Zamora region of Spain. This village straddles the Duero River separating Spain and Portugal. I was told that the family had lived in that village for many generations until they finally moved to Cuba. It wasn't until after the death of my grandmother and a series of events that accompanied her passing that I began to search for my Jewish roots. It became very important to me to prove that I descended from a pure Jewish lineage via my maternal line, and it was this goal that drove me to finally find and document my own unbroken maternal lineage going back 22 generations to pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal. My family had been Jewish all along, and in my heart and soul, I had always known it. After many years, and through extensive genealogical research, I was able to prove my lineage and finally received confirmation letters from two important Orthodox rabbis in the United States and Israel stating that the work I had done had been verified by historians and that I was Jewish by birth. My work changed not only the face of my family and their futures, but also gave me the ability to teach others the techniques that I used in documenting my own Jewish lineage by digging through Catholic and Inquisition records.

I felt it was important to document the way in which this had been accomplished because it is a combination of family history, genealogical hard evidence and circumstantial evidence.

You are not looking for the names from the 1800s, you are looking for the names from the 1400s! The Conversos or Crypto-Jews changed their names constantly and the only way to bridge that gap is to go back slowly, meticulously, and with enough tenacity and patience to see the project through. It can be done, but it is a slow step by step process that should be followed carefully. The information you will find as you head back in time is fascinating, and you must stay on task with your goal in mind to achieve success.

The search for Jewish roots through Catholic and notarial records is a novel idea and pioneer work. Up until now, there was no guide available on how to find your Jewish lineage via the Catholic Church. The information given here will be most useful for those searching their Jewish lineage in Spain and Portugal.

I am certain this manual will cover the basics and a bit more of how to tie up the loose ends of your own Jewish history. It is entirely possible to accomplish this. You CAN go back to pre-Inquisition times and find your Jewish ancestors. I have done it. It was a painstaking task however, I was able to complete it, and therefore, I know it can be done. You can do it also, and I will try to make the steps easy to follow. The road back to the past is long. Over 500 years long. Start with the tiniest of steps and follow the clues back. Do not be intimidated. You will be surprised at how many breadcrumbs were left along the way for you to pick up. It is entirely possible to reach your goal.

Chapter

One

If you are searching for Jewish ancestors, then this guide was written for you. From the beginning, a clear understanding is needed of the requirements of the rabbi, institution or synagogue that you have been in contact with. In traditional Judaism, only a maternal lineage to pre- Inquisition times or to a Jewish person in your tree and on your maternal lineage will be accepted as proof by Jewish law, known as Halacha. To be Halachically Jewish, your lineage must come from your mother, and you must prove an unbroken chain of Jewish women leading to you. You should ask all of these questions early on and before undergoing a lengthy, expensive and detailed search as you want to be certain that you are on the right path for the goal you have chosen.

If your family lived for generations in an island nation such as Jamaica, you may be able to find proof of a Jewish lineage easier because of the smaller and close-knit populations. However, if your family was Catholic and living in Latin America or Spain, chances are that you will have to make your way back to Inquisition documents to find the truth.

Chapter Two

A Brief History

To start, it is important to understand a little about the history of the Iberian Peninsula and its relationship with the Jews. A rudimentary understanding of the migration patterns, as well as the different periods of conversions, is necessary. The history of the Jews in Spain and Portugal is a complex one. The Jews were marginalized centuries before they were expelled, and the pogroms caused them much angst as they had harsh rules and regulations imposed on them to keep them separate from their Christian neighbors. Jews had to live in separate neighborhoods many times and were not allowed to have certain occupations.

The first known mass conversions took place in 1391 in Spain due to the massacres and pogroms that had quickly spread throughout the land. Historians tell us that this first group, in many cases, had converted on their own without being forced. This idea was bothering me a lot at first, but finally realized that while they had not been forced per se, the pogroms and the marginalization was more than they could bear. The irony is that three to four generations after this first group of conversions, many of their descendants started to return to Judaism by practicing underground and influence the ones that were truly practicing Catholics. The Inquisition was started to prevent the

negative influence of these descendants at to weed out the heretics that were not true Catholics.

The second set of mass conversions took place practically 100 years later, with the official Expulsion of the Jews of Spain via the Alhambra Decree in 1492, and the third one was in Portugal in 1497 when the Jews were forced to convert by royal decree.

With each subsequent set of conversions, the Jews lost a little more of themselves. First, they lost their status and their names. Many also lost their family members who had chosen to flee the Iberian Peninsula and eventually they lost their occupations and homes. Because of the tangible evidence that was lost to history, the search for a Crypto-Jewish lineage requires different methods as one begins to trace their genealogies. For those Medieval Jews who converted with a true belief in the ideology of the Catholic Church, that lineage will be almost impossible to find. The reason we are able to find Crypto-Jewish lineages at all is because the Jews still practicing the Jewish religion in hiding were being caught by the Inquisition and those are the records that we are hunting down. If they did not go underground to pray and were true Catholics, chances are you will not find any trace of them as being Jewish.

When the Jews converted to Catholicism, they were baptized and they took on new surnames. Many of them took names of famous Catholic mayors or officials; some took on the names of their Christian neighbors; and still others were given names of topographic items or places. Names such as Ramos, or Flores (bouquet of flowers), Guerra (war), Almendra (almond) and many others that are now typically Spanish last names are traced back to this time in history. Still others took names of villages or towns and even of mundane objects such as Cuchillo (knife) or Manzana (apple). Depending on the dates that they

converted, they may or may not have kept their original names. Most did not, but they may have kept a variation. For example, the name Perez may have turned into Piriz, Pires, or even Priz. For all practical purposes, in this manual I will use as an example the surname Ramos, which is my own family name, to illustrate and draw examples from.

One of the difficulties of researching the family names is the fact that at certain times in history, people were changing their names constantly and using aliases. Let's assume that a person converted in 1391 and took the name Ramos. It was possible they would use this name for several generations. Then at one point, a family member would get caught practicing Judaism secretly, and they would start using the name Martin. If Martin got caught by the Inquisitors, the family would start using another surname such as Peña. This is just one example of a name change but it happened all the time and in every family that was in hiding as they practiced the Jewish religion. For two hundred years or so in Spain and in Portugal, names were changing continuously. That is why I insist on following step by step, generation after generation, with actual documents showing birth, marriage and death. To skip a generation would mean there would be no certainty whatsoever about the family you are tracing. This was not true for my family alone. This is true for anyone that descends from these lineages. It is important to note at this time that it will be highly unlikely that you will be able to find the original Jewish name if your family has been Catholic for over 500 years. When I started my own process of tracking the genealogy of my family, I was convinced that I would be able to somewhere, somehow, find a list of the names that had been used before the conversions to Catholicism. This did not exist for the Douro River area. I had been so sure that I would find it that I was disappointed at every turn. It is very important to know that you might come upon the original Jewish name unexpectedly, however, if you happen to find it in a notarial record or if your

family moved to another country that allowed them to openly practice Judaism, such as the Netherlands. Notarial records might read something like *Juan Ramirez, who used to be known as Yucef Abendana, was in a fist fight in the street today*, or it might say *Orabuena, who is now known as Maria, is asking for the dowry that should have been paid to her*. Statements like these are seen sprinkled throughout the notarial records in Spain, and if you have been able to trace back far enough, you may be one of the lucky ones to find your original Jewish last name. If the conversion took place in the group from 1391, this will be harder to find. I was never able to find the Jewish surname of my family. I have some clues about what they could have been but I cannot with proof positive state that I have found it. I am still today, in search of this and hope I will be able to connect even more dots as this research is so fascinating that it is usually never ending.

Chapter *Three*

Gathering Family History

It is important to put together all the information that you physically have about your family. If you have not been collecting up until now, you should start immediately. Below is a list of documents that could be useful in tracing the clues of your own family history. Find out as much as you can, and ask all family members to contribute the originals or scanned copies of as many documents and pictures as you can get your hands on. With the more elderly family members, you will have to ask them several times, but stay on it as they will be the ones with the most to contribute. Record conversations with the elders if you can. This will prove to be invaluable once they are gone. Do not discard anything! You will not know what is and what is not important for a very long time to come.

- Passports, visas, citizenship or other government types of documents
- Old pictures that show some sort of costume or countryside that will give you clues
- Pictures with writing on the back that can give you clues
- Journals or family histories written by family members or friends

- Old family trees that may have been started and never finished or maybe even finished family trees
- Checkbooks and receipts showing payments that may have been to a charity or organization in another country
- Birth certificates, marriage certificates and death certificates
- Baptism, communion or confirmation records
- Information written in prayer books or inside a bible
- Letters and postcards

After you have gathered all of these documents, you will probably have a lot more information than you originally thought you could amass. Separate everything into six distinct groups and store everything in six boxes or folders marked with the names of:

1. Your mother
2. Your father
3. Your maternal grandmother
4. Your maternal grandfather
5. Your paternal grandmother
6. Your paternal grandfather

PICK ONE BOX ONLY TO WORK WITH AT A TIME. You cannot work on your four grandparents at once. Not only will you find yourself getting totally confused, but you will be going off on tangents and chasing dead ends that will leave you totally frustrated. The point here is that you will need to work steadily and methodically, and here you are receiving the tools to do just that.

After physically separating all the information into six boxes or folders and then scanning into folders on your computer, you can begin to carefully review the information you already have and to take detailed notes about your own family and the history that you have been told. You will probably have a lot more information than you initially thought. Add your own personal notes to the separate folders that you have made, always keeping separate the six categories that were mentioned above. Maternal Grandmother... etc. You will always have time later to put the information into a specialty genealogy computer program, but to begin, if you have just a few names, it is much easier to follow along on paper. Always put the full names that you do know with all of their last names. Go back as far as you can. Continue with dates and places of birth, marriages, death certificates and as much information as you can gather.

After you have completed this task, you will need to start seriously interviewing your family members, starting with the oldest ones first. You will want to get family tree information from them, but you will also be fishing for customs and rituals that the family may have had that only the elders will remember. Sometimes you will only have one opportunity to do this, so it is important to get it done correctly the first time.

- Make sure that you have given your relative ample time to know that you will be coming over and the reason you want to see them. Ask them to prepare their thoughts and, if possible, notes in advance. Do not just show up at the home of Great Aunt Maria. She will be so happy to see you after six years that she will want you to eat and tell her all the latest news. If you have many relatives like this, as most of us tend to have, then Great Aunt Maria might require two visits: one for the cookies and one for the

information. (Remember what I said from the start, you need *a lot* of patience.)

- Bring a recorder with you and make sure that you ask permission to use it. If it makes the person nervous, then turn it off and take a lot of notes.
- Bring a hand scanner or a tablet or phone to take good pictures. Do not assume they will allow you to walk out of the house with their precious papers and photographs even if you promise to bring them back. If you need something that is very large, such as a family journal or cookbook, or even a family tree, you can always offer to run to the corner office store, copy it and dash back with the original. If they do allow you to borrow some of these precious records, then always be sure to return them promptly so as to always be able to have access to more material in the future.
- Bring a long list of questions that you need answered. Start with the easy ones, such as place of birth and family occupations. Sometimes the floodgates of memories need time to open up.
- Always date your notes and make sure you have the full legal name of your relative. One of my longer quests was a great grandmother that everyone in the family knew as Manuela. All the photographs I had of this grandmother had Manuela scrawled on the back. When I started my search, there was no such person. For MONTHS I searched until I finally found Maria M. and finally, Maria Manuela. Get their date of birth and the age they were when they migrated from the old country. (There is usually an old country)
- When interviewing the elder family members, make sure that you write everything down. Do not discount anything said, even if it sounds like ramblings. If your great aunt

tells you that your uncles Louis and Charles had daughters named maybe Mariana, maybe Mariela and maybe Maria and then says, “There were always many Marielas in our family.” That information is the most important you hear! This is significant because there is so much name repetition in Sephardic Jewish families that you now have one of your single most important clues. You will pay close attention any time you see the name Mariela in old genealogical records.

Ideally, you will be recording these interviews because some of what you are told may not seem important at first but will become relevant at a later date. Initially, you don’t really know what you need so it is better that you listen, record and take copious notes. If you do not understand the names of places or family names that you are being given, do not count on understanding it later with your recording. Ask, ask and ask again for clarification.

Some of the most important and basic questions to ask are the following:

- Start with their full legal name and date of birth, and then find out if they had a nickname or a family nickname
- Place of birth and other cities or countries they have lived
- Dates if possible, and if not, ask them if they remember how old they were when they lived in that town or what grade they were in
- Find out the full names of their parents and grandparents as well as their places of birth, cities lived in and occupations

- Important are the full names of all their siblings. Some may have died at birth or at a young age. Try to prod for as much information on this as you can. Sometimes we find ourselves climbing up a family tree via the siblings if other information is not available
- Names of schools they attended: kindergarten through college. The more information, the better.
- Churches or places where the family worshipped
- Place of baptism, communion and confirmation. An assumption is being made here that the family was Catholic for centuries. If they were NOT baptized, and there was NO communion or confirmation, this is just as relevant to know.
- Citizenship and visa information
- Names of ships they took and dates when migrating from one country to another
- Recollections of family information their deceased spouses may have told them. Sometimes you may be relying on information from one grandparent only
- Occupations held in the family. Maybe the grandparent has been retired for 25 years, but they knew that they came from a family of wine growers for example
- Any and all information relating to a migration pattern is essential
- You should ask if they know if the family name ever changed. This used to happen many times when arriving in a new country and wanted new beginnings
- Ask if there is a family crest or emblem that they know of. If possible, get a picture or a copy.
- Find out if anyone in the family ever wrote a book or was mentioned in a newspaper. Ask them if they have a copy

- See if they ever wrote in a journal or own a journal written by someone else in the family
- Ask to see the family baby books. Many times family trees were written inside
- Ask about the photographs. Take the time to sort and organize their old photographs. Put names on the backs with a soft pencil. A box of family photographs from 50 years ago is worthless without the family history attached.
- What types of foods were cooked and served in the home when they were young? Do they know the origin of these foods? Do they have a family cookbook you can see and copy? Women used the cookbooks as a place to jot down memories for themselves. A lot of history comes from those notes
- Ask them if they have a box with old letters and papers that you can see
- What holidays did the family typically celebrate?

Chapter Four

The Tough Questions

Unless your family has spoken openly about having Jewish lineage, it is highly advisable that you ask information about a possible link to a Jewish past at the very end of all the questions. The secret of Jewish lineage is still today heavily guarded in many Hispanic families, and you want to gather as much information as possible before hitting any kind of a brick wall. In my own family, I was unable to ask the Jewish question **at all** of many older family members. In fact, while alive, my maternal grandfather, who descends from a Jewish lineage, NEVER gave me our genealogy, but he always wanted to talk about our family history and as a child, I never wanted to listen. In retrospect, I could have eventually found the genealogy on my own, but the family history he wanted to give me was lost to me and my family forever.

After you are get all the factual genealogy information from your relatives, make sure you write it down immediately and go over with them any questions that you might have. You may have to ask an elderly person a few times about the names or places, as their memories begin to wane. You want to be certain that you have it all down accurately. Keep a register of who gave

you what information so that later you can validate some of these findings. The elderly are just so happy that you are visiting with them that they tend to say whatever you want them to say, so be very sure that you are not asking leading questions.

After your relatives give you all the factual genealogy information, you can ask some of the questions about heritage and customs. These interviews should not go on for more than an hour. If you find that they do, then you should schedule another time so that the information will be accurate. Below is a list of questions that will be indicators of a Sephardic lineage. In and of themselves, these traditions do not indicate a true Jewish identity, but you are building up a case for your own lineage. All the information will be helpful and will give you a background of the family and a lot of possible circumstantial evidence.

1. *Were there a lot of cousin intermarriages in the family?*

Crypto-Jewish families tended to marry only among themselves, and this is a tradition that in many families still goes on today. In my own family, there were so many cousin intermarriages including my own grandparents, that my family tree at times looks like a spiral and not a tree. The first person in my family not to marry a cousin is my mother.

2. *Do you remember if the family had any unusual rituals or customs that other families or neighbors did not have?*

This could be a myriad of things, and it is important to let the person freely talk. Included could be things like a ritual of washing the hands before each meal, not trusting other people at all, or being overly wary of strangers. It was embedded in the psyche of the descendants of Crypto-Jews to be wary of strangers and to trust no one.

3. *Was there ever a mention of special customs in the kitchen or while cooking that other friends and neighbors did not follow?*

Old family cookbooks might tell a tale of a family that never ate meat and milk mixed together, which is forbidden to Jews; or a family that never ate pork or shellfish which is also forbidden .It might show or mention recipes for parve desserts which are neither meat nor dairy that can be eaten after any meal. There could be an old family custom to salt the meat, which would indicate that in earlier generations the meat may have been salted to make it kosher because kosher meats were not available.

4. *Do you know what type of work the family was involved in?*

During pre and post Inquisition times, there were many typically Jewish occupations. These were shoemakers, tanners, furriers, dealers in cloth and yarn, merchants, gold and silversmiths, jewelers and many more. These occupations many times defined the family and continued through modern times. In the case of my own family, during the Inquisition times they were shoemakers and tanners in Portugal, then they were wine merchants in Spain and then through modern times they were in haberdashery and actually opened ribbon and button stores as they migrated to Argentina and Chile; my own grandfather was in the cloth business in Cuba. While the original business or trade may not be the exact one from the family today, one can still see the vestiges of what once was.

5. *Do you know if they owned shops? Do you know the names of the shops and where they were located?*

This is an interesting question if you are able to find the answers. It ties in with the previous question, of course, but also gives you an idea of the neighborhoods the family lived in and might come to give you an idea of the village they lived in as well. My grandmother had told me many stories about how she grew up in Madrid in an area called Puerta del Sol, and I even have the house number. It seems this house was in the family for many generations, and upon further research, I found that it was in the center of a long-gone Jewish neighborhood.

6. *Was the family religious? Did they always go to church on Sunday?*

Families that descend from Crypto-Jews are either very religious or not religious at all. In my case, my family was not religious at all. In fact, I can barely recall ever seeing them go to church on Sundays. My sister and I were always in Catholic school, and this required being in church every single Sunday or suffering consequences on Monday. We were dropped off and picked up. In Portugal, many families continued a Catholic observance but with a lot of unusual rituals that were from the Jewish times. It is important to know a bit about this history as well.

7. *Did anyone in the family ever mention a religion that was not Catholic that someone in the family practiced?*

Sometimes, this “secret” other religion is mentioned on the death bed of an elder. There are many stories of people asking for a rabbi instead of a priest on their death beds. Sometimes, someone in the family will just mention that they “used to be” a different religion. It is very important to pick up on all these indirect clues.

8. *Did you or any women from the family ever light candles on a Friday night or once a year on a special day?*

Catholics light candles all the time in churches and in Latin America inside the homes as well, with a prayer or a petition, and therefore, this tradition needs to be analyzed well and taken with a grain of salt. The question here is if anyone ever lit candles specifically on Friday nights or once a year during the months of September or October which is when Yom Kippur, our most solemn day of prayer, is celebrated. Jews also have a tradition to light a candle for 24 hours on the anniversary of the death of a loved one. This is called a *yahrzeit* candle. If someone recalls this tradition to light, you should ask if it was a specific day or time of the year.

9. *Did the family ever prepare or celebrate a special meal on Friday nights or Saturdays for lunch?*

Jewish families have a tradition that everyone sits and has dinner together on Friday nights even if after the meal, people go their own ways. Was a special meal for Friday

nights ever a tradition in your family? Was a special meal ever made for Saturday lunch that did not require actual cooking on Shabbat? Was there a tradition for a meal that slow cooked in the oven, on the stove or in a crock pot? Traditional Jews do not cook on the Sabbath so the foods are made the day before and kept heated until lunch on Saturday.

10. Was there ever a specific day of the year that only white would be worn?

In many families, from Portugal especially, there will be one day a year that a person will wear only white. This comes from a tradition of women after the Inquisition wanting to observe Yom Kippur by putting on a white dress symbolizing purity and spending the day out in the fields. This tradition continued for many generations.

11. Did they ever fast on a random day that was not a Catholic holiday?

There are several fast days in Jewish tradition. Some are major ones, like Yom Kippur, and some are minor, like the Fast of Esther which is near to the holiday of Purim. The Inquisitors were always on the lookout for people not eating during the major fast of Yom Kippur, but the other fasts by and large, went by unnoticed. Because fasting is such a personal thing, it is entirely possible to be fasting, and no one around you would know. Because of this, the Fast of Esther became important to the Crypto-Jews, and some even started calling her Saint Esther. This holiday usually takes place during the month of March.

12. Was there anyone in the family that chanted, sang or prayed in a language that no one else could understand?

Some family traditions have children's songs that still have a sprinkling of Hebrew or prayer book words in them. These songs that were passed down would usually incorporate a melody or a nuance of Hebrew prayer. My grandparents used to speak a language between themselves that no one could understand. We have always been fluent in Spanish and English, yet it was neither one. I often thought as I was going through my research process, that it may have been Ladino or even Hebrew, but as it turns out, it was Sayagues which is a language spoken in Portugal and up and down the Duero River where my family lived for 500 years. With this said, it is important to keep digging for the truth and not jump to conclusions along the way.

13. Do you know if there was ever a mention of the family coming from a Jewish background?

Funny enough, not every family has issues with talking about their past. Some actually come out and talk quite openly and freely about it. Because you do not know in advance what you will get with your own family, just come right out and ask. If they answer that yes, there was mention of this, then you should go into details and try to find out as much as possible.

14. *Did you ever hear of a shawl being placed around the shoulders of a couple being married?*

There is an old tradition among the Sephardim to take a man's prayer shawl, known as a tallit, and wrap it around the shoulders of a couple as they are getting married. This tradition is still used today. In my family, when I got married the first time in the Catholic Church, the "family shawl" was wrapped around our shoulders as we stood at the altar.

15. *Do you recall if anyone ever touched or kissed the right side of the doorway?*

Jewish tradition dictates that a mezuzah should be affixed to all doorways in a house and especially on the front door. This is a casing that houses a scroll with some wording known as the *Shema* and is written in Hebrew. This tradition dates back many centuries. The casing is affixed to the right doorjamb, and it is touched and the fingers kissed as a sign of reverence upon entering or leaving a home. Once the Inquisition started, people had to remove the mezuzah, but they would still kiss the place where the mezuzah used to be. Interestingly enough, still today, many historians, including myself, are finding which were the Jewish dwellings in deserted villages by the smooth and worn out indentations in the stone that were made by rubbing the place where the mezuzahs used to be.

16. *Were you ever taught to sweep the floor to the center of the room?*

This is an old Crypto-Jewish tradition that has been followed by the women of my family until today. As a matter of fact, I was taught to **only** sweep the floor this

way. The custom started in Spain and Portugal after the Jews were no longer able to practice their religion and had to hide as Catholics. The mezuzahs had been removed from the doorways, but the women did not want to sweep trash out even near to where the holy mezuzah had been.

17. Did anyone ever take flour from a large batch of dough for baked goods and throw it in the fire for good luck?

This was one of the traditions that my grandmother passed down to me. Together, we would bake huge amounts of desserts from the old village in Spain and she would always take a small bit of the dough, wrap it in aluminum foil, throw it in the back of the oven and burn it for “good luck” She told me this was a family custom. This tradition is actually based on a commandment or mitzvah that is performed by Jewish women still today of taking tithe when using more than five pounds of flour. In the home, this is usually done when women bake challah. A blessing is said as a small piece of dough is separated from the rest, wrapped in aluminum foil and burned in the oven. My grandmother never taught me about the blessing. All I learned from her was to burn a small piece before starting to bake.

18. In your family, did the women check for blood in the eggs before using them and discard them if they saw blood?

Jewish dietary laws do not allow us to eat any animal or anything with blood on it or in it. By the very appearance of blood in a food as in an egg, the food would be considered not kosher. Kosher cooks will not drop an egg directly into a bowl or a pan for a recipe. They will break the egg into a cup or glass, inspect for blood and then from the cup pour it into the mixing bowl.

This was also one of the few customs that my grandmother passed down to me.

19. *Were the mirrors ever covered in a house of mourning?*

It is interesting to note that most of the customs that were passed down had to do with death and the associated rituals. A Jewish house of mourning will have cloth draped over the mirrors. This custom has lasted through to modern times.

20. *Was there ever a family custom to bury the dead within a day or as soon as possible?*

The Jewish tradition strongly dictates that burials be done immediately. As a matter of fact, if someone dies in Israel, it is oftentimes difficult to fly family out in time for the funeral. This custom was followed in my family, but I only learned about it from my mother on the day that my grandmother died.

21. *Were children taught to only marry family? Was the term only marry “one of us” ever used?*

This is something that is commonly heard in Crypto-Jewish families. What does “one of us” really mean? Many times, there was no clarification given, but it was made clear that you should be marrying a cousin. This particular custom is very, very strong. I have met many distant cousins from my family tree that have teased about this the very first time I met them. “We only marry cousins, you know. You need to be careful.” At first, I thought this was rather odd, but after my own research and the number of cousin intermarriages in my tree, I understand why. We

always married within our family. “One of us” could also mean one of us (Jews), but that meaning was long lost in Catholic families.

22. *Did anyone ever mention that mixing meat and milk could make you ill?*

Of all the laws that Jews have concerning food, one of the strictest ones is the mixing of meat and milk. Many do not know that a Jewish person can be in the business of selling shellfish or even pork, but they cannot benefit from anything to do with a meat and milk mixture. For this reason, this particular custom was passed down in such a way that some families would even tell their children that they could become ill from eating the mixture.

23. *Were nail and hair clippings burned?*

Traditional Jews will usually burn or flush hair and nail clippings versus throw them away. This practice is mentioned in the Talmud and many reasons are given for the practice. Descendants of Crypto-Jews mention that this practice has been followed through today.

24. *Were beds ever oriented to the North and South?*

There were many small things that Crypto-Jewish families could do without arousing suspicions and continue to keep some of the laws or traditions established in the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law. One of those was the orientation of the beds. It states that the head should always point to the North and the feet to the South. This tradition would continue for many generations without anyone knowing why it was done.

25. *Would weddings only be celebrated at home?*

During the times of the Inquisition, families would hold a religious ceremony at home and then go to the church to do a public one. At home, they were ensured to have a fully Jewish union. Many families continued with a tradition that the family only marries at home.

26. *After a death would someone in the family go into the room of the deceased every night?*

There is a custom that has a loved one would go into the room of a family member that has died, and they would say, “May G-d give you a good night. You were once like us. We will be like you.” This would be done for eight days. After time, the custom translated to only walking into the room of the deceased.

27. *Did the family have only icons and no statues?*

Because of the Jewish prohibition of statues and idolatry, many families used icons and pictures to show they were really Catholic. In my own family, the patron saint is that of a virgin who is depicted only as an icon and never a statue.

28. *Venerating “family” saints that do not really exist in Catholicism?*

There are many saints that some families venerated to prove they were really Catholic such as Saint Esther (from the Megillah of Purim) and Saint Moses. They prayed to them in order to follow the same rituals that their Catholic neighbors were following. This practice of praying to made up Jewish saints continued for generations.

29. *Is there a family custom to change the name of a child who is seriously ill?*

The first name of a person would not usually be changed, but a name would be added if they had a serious illness. This was done to foil the angel of death. Sometimes you can find in your search that a name was added to the original name much later in life. This was true of the Crypto-Jews and is still being done today.

30. *Is there a belief that the family descends from royalty?*

This custom is a strong one as well. I was always told for example that I descended from royalty, yet in my 22-generation search, I was never able to find it. It was taken to symbolize the descent from King David and many times used as a code to other Jews. I have heard this from many Crypto Jewish descendants.

31. *Were there any ornamental objects, pieces of jewelry or books passed down from generation to generation with Jewish symbols?*

This could be a Lion of Judah, a Tree of Life, a hand pointing to a star or a Star of David? Many times, due to the persecution, a Star of David was too overt a symbol and a hand pointing to a star would be used instead. Some are lucky to have jewelry in their possession that was passed down through the generations. I was blessed to have two pieces of jewelry received from my grandmother; a small antique earring with a tiny Star of David as well as a Hamsa (Hand of G-d). It is a good idea to have with you pictures of these and other Jewish symbols when you interview the family in case they do not know what you are asking for.

32. Did they refrain from working Saturdays?

Not working on the Sabbath (Saturdays) is one of the things that many Crypto-Jews ended up in an Inquisition prison for. It became a trademark for someone that was not being truly Catholic if they stayed at home on a Saturday and did not open their shop. This observance of the Sabbath lasted through the generations, and many families have this custom of not working on Saturdays.

33. Would they only clean the house or change the linens on Fridays?

Universally, people will prepare their house for Shabbat and make sure it is clean for Shabbat by changing the linens, sweeping and doing all other household chores on Fridays.

34. Did you ever hear anyone mention that sometimes the children were not baptized?

The more I meet people from Crypto-Jewish lineages, the more amazed I am that the custom to not baptize their children could survive through until today. It was mandatory to baptize children, yet I saw so many in the archive records of my own family circumventing this practice. What the records show is that the baby did not go to the church and was baptized at home “bajo necesidad.” This was an indicator that the family had informed the church that the baby was too ill to make the trip to the Baptismal Font. My family has many of these cases.

35. *Were there any priests in the family?*

In Crypto-Jewish families, there were always some men that remained unmarried and became priests. These priests would make sure that the family would still follow some of the Jewish laws while being openly Catholic. They conducted the secret marriages in the home before going to the church and tried to not baptize the children whenever possible.

Make sure you interview everyone. Call or write to them by e-mail or letters if they are not in the same city or country Try to cover all of your relatives. Continue to record all the information and keep it in the six separate folders or boxes as I mentioned earlier. All of this information will be crucial. Be sure that your family history is recorded and separated by maternal, paternal, etc.

You will be able to know if you have the circumstantial evidence that your family was Jewish after you finish these long interviews. Do not despair if you do not have this information or if NOTHING was kept. Remember, many conversions took place in 1391, and more than 620 years have passed. You could still have a Jewish lineage even though the customs did not survive.

Chapter

Five

A Word about Cemeteries

I want to touch on the cemeteries for a moment because it is important to know that while you may not find anything at all worthwhile in the last hundred or so years that points to a Jewish lineage in a Catholic cemetery that does not mean that you cannot find it from previous times.

People reading this manual will have ancestors that settled in many countries around the world, and in some of those countries it may be possible to find some clues on the headstones. In Mexico for example, there are still headstones that will have the Catholic cross and a Jewish symbol also present such as a shin, a chai, Star of David or even a small menorah.

On the islands of Barbados, Curacao and others, you can still find cemeteries of the original Jewish settlers, and their headstones are not only clearly visible, but records were kept. In Jamaica, for example, there has been for years a contingent of volunteers that have dug up these stones and digitized the information, and it is available on the internet. In my case, I was not able to find graves in the village of my family. As much as I walked around the graves, there were few before 1925.

Interestingly enough, I did find a strange bit of family history while pouring over the cemetery information in the village. In 1955, my grandparents, who lived in Cuba at the time, made their way over to Spain and gathered and unearthed the remains of 12 or so ancestors and put them all in one large grave in Fermoselle, Spain. The grave simply says Familia Ramos Ramos and is beautifully carved out of white Carrara marble and has a draped cross engraved at the top. In an old shoe box full of information left by my grandparents, there is a list of the names of the relatives that were put in that grave but gives no hint nor indication of why this was done. Sometimes we are able to find these interesting twists in our own family histories as we search for something else.

Chapter Six

Analyzing and Categorizing Your Work

You are now ready to build your family tree. Make it known around the family that you are in search of your roots and that any and all information is welcome. For the next several months and going back several centuries, you will be doing just that. You will be making a genealogical study of the family and a family tree. You will be piecing together what you already have and adding from what other family members give you.

When you get the word out, someone might point you in the direction of a relative or cousin who has already started or has quite a bit of this work done. Try to contact as many family members as you can for information. I must caution you that someone else in your family may have made a family tree but did not necessarily have an interest in locating Jewish roots. What this means is that he or she will have a typical family tree: name after name and dates but with no special consideration taken for the validation of a true Jewish lineage. Never forget that you are searching for your Jewish roots, and you must find every single record in an unbroken chain, all the way back to pre-Inquisition times. While your family member's tree may be well done, he or she may not have been as meticulous as you will need to be.

Remember that at some point in the future, you will have to explain your tree and prove your lineage to a historian or Rabbinical Court (Bet Din). You will not have the luxury of speculation, as all your facts will need to be crystal clear. You will need to have every single birth, death and marriage certificate, as nothing else will be good enough. On the bright side, a family tree that was already made by someone else will yield a treasure trove of information regarding the people and locations that make up your family. With the research you are doing, there will be a depth to the previous work, as it will now include folkloric and hopefully some family “secret” information given all the research you will have done.

When I was doing my own search, I came across a seemingly random family tree that had been put up on one of the genealogy websites by someone in Europe. When I started to really study it, I was certain that he and I shared the same family. I was able to contact him and tell him of my own search, and he explained to me that his father had been recording their own genealogy for decades and had never looked at the data from the perspective of a Jewish lineage. This relative was an expert genealogist, and he was actually surprised and shocked with the minute details of his own lineage that I had recovered. He thought he knew all the relatives on his tree and what their history was, but the reality is that he did not know that under all the Catholic robes, the family was really Jewish. He has helped me now in so many ways but especially in finding many Inquisition sources and he is fascinated by the new twist that his lifetime work has taken. I was lucky it turned out this way. Keep this in mind if you decide to take a small detour or shortcut. You can use the data that another family member has found as long as you are 100% convinced that the data is correct and that you have full documentary proof with baptism or birth certificates, marriage and death certificates. Nothing other than this will suffice.

There is a lot of ground to be covered when making a family tree, but after you are able to gather what you can from your family interviews, you should focus on one or two branches of your tree and no more. Preferably, you will focus on one branch only. This is fascinating work but you want to accomplish your goals which are to locate your Jewish lineage. I worked exclusively on my maternal lineage, specifically tracing back grandmother after grandmother on my maternal side.

It is important to note again, that for the traditional Jewish community; only the maternal lineage will be accepted if that is your final goal. This is true of the entire official group of institutions in the United States and in Israel as well. Other branches of Judaism will accept your paternal lineage. If the information you seek is informational only, then feel free to choose either one however if you eventually want to be recognized as having been born Jewish anywhere around the world and by everyone, in a traditional way, then you should look only into your maternal line. There is so much polarization about this topic that I will leave out more discussion at this juncture. It all depends on who you ask. I prefer to continue to guide you through the genealogy aspect and to leave the religious aspect out at this time or even to try to answer the age-old question of: Who is a Jew?

It is now time to pick up that one box or folder that you will work on exclusively. If you have followed the instructions I gave at the start, you should have six separate sets of information, documents and interviews. I chose my mother first and subsequently, my maternal grandmother. In my case, I tried not to focus on the siblings of the grandmothers or any of their cousins because the amount of information you will be gathering can be mind boggling, and you might become overwhelmed. Because my maternal grandparents were cousins , I was able to trace through two of my family tree branches that joined into one branch only at the great grandparents.

This allowed me to work on two boxes at once because my maternal grandmother and maternal grandfather were following the same line. As in most Crypto Jewish families, there was an incredible amount of cousin intermarriages. Sometimes, you will see these intermarriages come through to modern times, and sometimes you will start to see them in the 1600s and 1700s.

If you are still not convinced that you should work with one branch only I will give you some information that will make you reach for ONE BOX OR FOLDER ONLY.

If you go back 20 generations starting with yourself and look back at just one generation, you have NO grandparents because these would be your parents. At two generations you would have four grandparents, and in the third generation you would have eight. The chart below explains:

You= 1 person

Parents= 2 people

Grandparents=4 people

Great grandparents= 8 people

Great great-grandparents= 16 people

Are you seeing the pattern? Every single time you go back one generation the number doubles. Therefore, if you go back 20 generations, then the total number of great great grandparents that you would have would be 1,048,576! Yes, One MILLION, FORTY- EIGHT THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY- SIX great grandparents. Because of these staggering numbers, you probably see the need to work on one branch at a time. These numbers would vary because of cousin intermarriages.

As mentioned before, My investigation focused exclusively on finding my maternal grandmothers. One *after* the other.

After you select the branch that you want to study, organize in one place all the information and documents that you

have gathered. In my case, I had so many documents that I knew would have to be left with a historian or rabbi, that I made folders in triplicate for each grandmother that was found. I made three copies of every single piece of information, and every time I found something new, I made sure there were three copies.

I made my own folder first, and I continued with my mother and my grandmother at the same time because many of the documents would overlap. I tried to have as many of the following documents as possible.

- Birth certificate

I started with my own folder and my own birth certificate. I was born in Cuba, and I had a copy of my birth certificate and my Cuban passport from when I was 4. This certificate clearly showed the names of my four grandparents. All the documents showed the name of my mother, so I had no problem in proving the first link in the chain. I copied everything in triplicate and continued with the folders for both my mother and grandmother. Here I hit a brick wall! I could not believe that in step 1 of my search, I would have to stop. I was unable to get the birth certificates of my mother and grandmother because my family had shut down and refused to give me any relevant documents. My grandmother had already died, and my mom told me she did not have anything to give me.

I knew that my mom had been born in Cuba, and I had always heard that my grandmother had also been born there. I also knew that eventually they had settled in Oriente, the eastern most part of the island, but that is all I knew. Cuba has been under Communist control for decades, and I had no idea how to go about getting these documents Without proof of an unbroken

maternal lineage (on generation one!), I was finished before I started. I e-mailed the Jewish Community in Cuba and asked for help, and within 24 hours I had the birth certificate of my mother showing her mother's name and that of my grandmother showing HER mother's name and place of origin. I was on my way.

Each folder should contain as many of the documents below as you can find on each grandmother and great grandmother as you go back in time. DO NOT SKIP ANYONE. You are trying to make an unbroken chain in time until you have proof positive of a Jewish lineage.

- Baptism certificate (if there was one)

In my case, when my parents left Cuba, they did not have a baptism certificate for me, but they did have an affidavit that a priest had signed that I had been baptized. It showed the date, the place of baptism and the names of my parents and all four grandparents. Interestingly enough, it also listed the occupations of my grandparents. For my mother and grandmother, I do not have these documents, but they were not relevant or needed at the time I presented my documents to a historian.

- Marriage certificates

I had my own marriage certificate and copies of my mother's, but not of my grandmother.

- Death certificates

Death certificates or cards given out in the church or at a funeral home are a great thing to add to the folders at this time. It

substantiates the place and the death of a person.

- Notarial records

Many of the websites will have primary source and relevant records in their International Historical Collections. Notarial records can be found any time that a person had to go before the secular arm of any government. Notarial records will cover last wills and testaments, petty or serious criminal actions, purchase or sale of property and much more.

- Census records showing where your relative lived and on what dates.

There are many census records available on the internet as well as on genealogy websites. Sometimes, they can be obtained in the village where your family was from. I was lucky enough to locate the census forms from 1880 Madrid, Spain, that showed everyone living in the house of my great great grandfather at the time. Because of the census forms I also located siblings of my great grandmother that I had no knowledge of previously.

- Pictures of the person if you have them or drawings if any were made.

Ideally, you will have been able to determine a date for these pictures and a location if possible. Back in the day, a lot of this information was written on the back of the photographs, and then they were put in albums where they have rested for decades. As you take these out, be careful to digitize them at the same time. I have found incredible amounts of information on the back of photographs including the name of the designer of a

relative's wedding gown!

- Folkloric information such as occupations, special skills, musical or artistic talents, newspaper clippings.

This information will come from the interviews with your relatives and the notes that you took. Hopefully, you were able to get a lot of leg work done with the interview process and you were given all of this family history information.

- Copies of citizenship papers, visas, steamship tickets and anything else you were given in the family interviews

Ideally, after this step, one of your original boxes will be empty, and you will have copied in triplicate and passed everything over to the folder created for the person. The idea is to document each grandmother in a row as much as you can so that your genealogical chain will be unbroken. As you have probably seen by now, a lot of the information will overlap several generations such as the case with my mother's birth certificate that I mentioned earlier showing the names of my grandmother and great grandmother as well. If this is the case, scan the documents to have several copies available for each folder.

- References found on the internet and Sephardic genealogy sites as to the “Jewishness” of the last name as a Crypto-Jewish name as well as Inquisition references to the last name.

Information that will be found on internet sources will be covered in a separate chapter.

When you finish with your folders, one for each grandmother, you should have at least some proof that the next grandmother is a link in the unbroken chain. You will now need to have as much proof as you can find that the name was used as a Converso Jewish name in the time of the Crypto-Jews. Try to find between five and ten references to the name being Jewish or being used as a Jewish name. The more the better, as long as you are using sources that are valid such as the many ones listed below. The ideal is to find a reference to the name being used as a Jewish one, and if you can find that reference in the same village that your family is from, that is the optimum. In any event, you should make a list of these references to the name being Jewish and document this list carefully to add to the folders you have been making (in triplicate).

Chapter Seven

Names, Names and More Names

Now you can understand why I said it will be overwhelming to try to do more than one branch at a time. The reason I said to make these folders in triplicate is because you will be showing or giving these to other people at some point in time and you do not want to have to be scanning all the documents again and again. You will always want one set for yourself.

I STRONGLY urge you to make physical folders, the old fashioned way with papers inside as I have mentioned. Trust me that you do not want to show up at a rabbinical office in Israel or anywhere else with flash drive in hand. You will need to have your folders physically, and you will probably be given an hour maximum to explain your journey of 500 years. CLARITY is the key.

You should also have this information saved on one or several flash drives of course but you would give all the physical documents to a historian. You need to make this as easy as possible for the person that will be reviewing your work.

Naturally, it will be impossible to accumulate all the documents I have mentioned when you first start, but for sure

you can look for all the references to the names being Jewish. There are many websites that you can look at, and the more references that you find for each name, the more certainty you have that the name was used as a Converso Jewish one. Make sure you record all of the information carefully for each name and print out as much as you can when you find it. Remember that you are working your way 500 years back through a tangled web of names. It is exciting to know that in 1935 the name of your grandparent was used by Converso Jews, but you will still have to go back a long way to actually prove it and see if the name was still in your family during the times of the Inquisition.

I will again caution strongly that a name alone is not enough to prove anything! Names were bought and sold and taken on at a whim, they were picked out of the blue and even given by a priest. The reason I am adding this step to research the name fully via the internet is so that you build a case of circumstantial evidence that will accompany your genealogical search with all the full primary sources. With every grandmother you find, you will find a new last name to research. I made sure that I had no less than five to ten officially referenced sources for each of the last names of my grandmothers. Again, there was much overlap, but I continued to put copies in folders with all the information that I would find as I went along.

Assuming your last name is Ramos, for example, you then will want to do internet searches for the names by searching with the following possibilities:

- Ramos Judio Converso
- Ramos nombre Judio
- Ramos Converso Jew
- Ramos Jewish name

- Ramos Spanish Inquisition
- Ramos Inquisicion
- Ramos nombre Marrano
- Ramos Marrano name
- Ramos nom Juif
- Ramos nome Judaico
- Ramos Heraldica
- Ramos Heraldry
- Ramos famosos
- Famous people named Ramos
- Origenes de la familia Ramos
- Origins of the Ramos Family
- Origenes Da Familia Ramos

The more searches in different languages that you make, the more information you will be able to gather. Once you get results in each and every category above, you should not just read the first three or four hits on your search engine. You really need to go all the way through each result. The more obscure results are usually the richest with information. Use many search engines because many times, they will yield very different information.

You will notice that I am focusing only on the last names at this time. If you do your search in this way, you will eventually find some common ground in the city of origin of your ancestors. This will be very, very helpful if you do not know where they are from. The results should point you to a region of the Iberian Peninsula at best. When you start to see, for example, that the name Ramos was usually used in the Spanish city of Zamora, then

it is important to start documenting the Jewish population of the city as well. You are building circumstantial evidence.

Those searches should look something like this:

- Ramos + Zamora
- Ramos + Spain
- Ramos + Zamora + Spain
- Ramos + Zamora + España
- Jewish Zamora
- Judíos Zamora
- Judíos Conversos en Zamora
- Historia Judia de Zamora
- Jewish history of Zamora

This should yield a rich insight into the villages where your ancestors lived. You will learn much about your family history while trying to find the Jewish connections to your names.

Print out and have handy a map of Spain and Portugal that shows the areas clearly marked with the words Aragon, Castilla, etc. This will help when trying to find the area of family origin. Note that contrary to what most people think, in the late 1400s and early 1500s, people were moving around a lot and going from place to place. They did not sit still. My own family went from locations in Portugal to locations in Spain and back to Portugal before they settled down in the same village where my grandfather was born, only 100 years ago.

There is also a major challenge in looking up Converso names for one or more of the following reasons, so keep these in

mind as you search so that you follow the correct family back. This is why I insist on primary sources.

The Challenge of Converso Names

- Name changes took place in the Iberian Peninsula as a way of insulating families from the Inquisition
- A family would take on or buy an old Christian family name
- A priest sometimes gave a person a last name that was randomly selected when he converted and baptized them
- Names were sometimes chosen by the person converting
- Names were made up during that time period, utilizing names of objects like Cuchillo for knife or the names of flowers or trees such as Lavanda or Pinos. Names of animals, bridges, and even villages were used.
- Having a typically Converso Jewish surname today is not enough to claim ancestry. A lot has happened in the last 500 years.
- It is easier to trace a surname from a paternal lineage. Many have survived the centuries, but most people are looking for their maternal lineage, where the surname usually changes with each generation.
- Interesting note in my own history, the first names repeated themselves often from the 1400s through today
- The surname was sometimes taken from the mother and at other times the father and sometimes a grandparent or another relative. Therefore, if Maria Ramos and Jose Ramires would have a boy, usually his name would not be

Juan Ramires. It might be Juan Ramos or even Juan Fernandez. There was neither rhyme nor reason for these changes.

- Many lived with several aliases.
- Always ensure that you go slowly, birth certificate after birth certificate, so that you are looking only at your family.

Inquisition processes will need to be found for family in your direct line. If you are looking for a maternal lineage, then those processes must sit squarely on your mother's line, some 15-18 generations ago. You will need to know the villages where your family lived between 1492-1650 or so. These were the years that have a lot of documentation in the archives of the Inquisition tribunals. Each major area in Spain and Portugal was governed by a different tribunal. For example, if one lived in Sevilla which is in the South, his or her records would be in a totally different tribunal than if they lived in Zamora in the Northwest.

Chapter *Eight*

Internet Resources for Jewish Ancestry

There are thousands upon thousands of resources available on the internet, but only the best and most interesting for gathering historical information useful to Crypto Jewish lineages will be covered here.

www.JewishGen.org

Genie Milgrom Crypto Jewish Collection

JewishGen now houses my collection which has over 55,000 entries from the Inquisition Tribunals, and over 80 Books, dissertations and many other sources. It is the most comprehensive collection available to search lineages on the internet.

You find “databases” on the search bar and go to the Genie Milgrom Crypto-Jewish Collection and start searching! Put a name in surname but also search for a name under anywhere because there is much genealogical data available in many fields.

www.ancestry.com

Ancestry.com is a large site that widely advertises and is used for all types of genealogy. It is not the best one for Crypto-Jewish lineages, but given the amount of information it contains, it bears mention. Ancestry will usually give you a 15 or 30 day free trial, so it's important to start when you have the time to dedicate yourself to Ancestry, or become a member. Given our need to research in Spain, Portugal, and other foreign countries, the world membership is the way to go. On Ancestry.com, you can search immigrant ships that came to and left from the country you are researching. For example, if you live in Honduras and

you know that your family was from Spain, but you do not know what town, you might get clues by looking at all the ships' manifests. In colonial times, most ships sailed from Vigo or Barcelona in Spain, or Porto and Lisbon in Portugal and stopped at Ellis Island in New York before continuing to Central and South America. The Ellis Island records and the ships' manifests are a great source of information.

Ancestry.com will yield thousands of matches and results from your inquiries. Some relevant and some not, yet it can be daunting. While all of this is fascinating, you need to stay focused on your goal. If you already located and have all the documents

for Grandmother No. 6 and start finding a lot of family history, I suggest you take a note of what is available and come back later. Go on to Grandmother No. 7 and continue your documentation process.

You will meet many people along the way that truly are from your tree and that are your relatives or ancestors from generations ago. Try not to get sidetracked on these tangents or you will have a hard time reaching your goal. Remember that you are trying to chase down one branch of the tree only and working one grandmother at a time.

www.familysearch.org

I mentioned familysearch.org earlier. This is the website of the LDS church. The information they have gathered is rich in detail, but be sure to only use information that comes along with microfilm reproductions of the actual records, as you must have the actual records to prove an unbroken lineage. They have historical collections of baptism records from countries around the world as well as other Church records under special collections. When you use the search field, you will see a map of the world and you can click on your country of interest.

www.MyHeritage.com

MyHeritage has many collections that will aid you in locating your genealogy. It is rich in content and soon will be adding much more information that will allow a user to search for Inquisition records.

MyHeritage is a must visit site, where you will find millions of historical records.

www.sephardicgen.com

This site, in my opinion, is truly the best one and not because it has more historically Sephardic names than other web sites but because it houses so many specialty collections. Mostly they are data bases of Sephardic Jews that left the Peninsula but still worth a mention. It is very rich in content because it covers much more than just name information. Jeff Malka has worked on this site for decades and has amassed an incredible amount of resources for anyone to use. It contains information for Sephardic heritage around the world, including other websites by country and many other resources. The site has information available for Converso name aliases in the Netherlands and much more.

pares.mcu.es

This is the website for the national archives that are digitized in Spain. Please note that there is no soundex which is a program That is installed in most of the genealogy search engines where you type a word and all the results will “sound like” the word you were searching for so be cautious of this if you don’t find something right away. You must type it in a myriad of ways. While there are very old records as well as ship records and some Inquisition records, you can also find notarial records , information on land acquisitions, royal orders from the kings,

heraldry, special royal instructions and in some municipalities, you can find criminal records. This is a great location to search for your family name to determine what village they may have come from. It is tedious, but if you type in the name of your family as I did for the name Ramos for example, I was able to filter the results. For example, in the 15th century alone, I had results in the following categories when searching for Ramos.

Archivo General de Simancas

- Contaduría Mayor de Hacienda
- Cancillería. Registro del Sello de Corte.
- Consejo Real de Castilla

Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid

- Real Audiencia y Chancillería de Valladolid

Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica

- Delegación Nacional de Servicios Documentales de la Presidencia del Gobierno
- Armero, José Mario

Archivo Histórico Nacional

- Archivo de Luis Rosales Camacho
- Archivo de Margarita Nelken Mansberger
- Colegiata de Santa María la Mayor de Calatayud (Zaragoza).
- Delegación Provincial de Hacienda de Madrid
- Fiscalía del Tribunal Supremo
- Ministerio de Hacienda

- Colección objetos
- Cancillería. Registro del Sello de Corte.
- Colección sellos en tinta
- Archivo de Salvador Damato y Phillips
- Colección Códices y Cartularios
- Monasterio de Santa María de Melón
- Universidad Central

Archivo General de la Administración

- Estudio Fotográfico "Alfonso"
- Ministerio de Información y Turismo
- Gobierno General de Guinea/Comisaría General de Guinea

Sección Nobleza del Archivo Histórico Nacional

- 1. Archivo de los Duques de Osuna
- 7. Archivo de los Marqueses de Mendigorriá
- 81. Archivo de la Familia Ovando
- 3. Archivo de los Duques de Fernán Núñez
- 5. Archivo de los Condes de Luque
- 128. Archivo de los Vizcondes de Altamira de Vivero
- 2. Archivo de los Duques de Frías

Archivo General de Indias

- Casa de la Contratación
- Patronato Real
- Ultramar
- Indiferente General

- Diversos

Archivo de la Corona de Aragón

- Ramos de Alós

Each of these subsections has between 50 and 100 individual references to look at. The original images in many cases are scanned and digitized. Some are notarial records, others are land sales or leases, while some are documents from private family collections. You will have no shortage of information to sift through to find what you need. Laborious? Yes. Productive? Very.

Following are other sites that are off the beaten path but have vast amounts of information that could be very helpful in finding information directly relevant to your family tree and that can also help you understand the Crypto-Jewish phenomenon

more in depth.

<https://genealogy.cjh.org>

Ackman and Ziff Genealogy Institute –Center for Jewish History

This site will be able to give you a guide to some other places to search that includes international sites and written books. The information in this site should be very useful to you and will also direct you to other research areas I may not have mentioned.

www.genealogia-es.com

This Spanish site will allow you to look up the names in Spain, and there are blogs and some family trees already up on the website. Some links are broken, but there is a lot of information available. You will not find anything Jewish on the site but you can find indicators that will point you in the right direction.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/

This is one of the most helpful websites. It is a step by step guide on how to read ancient scripts with tips and techniques for sifting through the different lettering used by scribes. It is a MUST read for anyone who will need to be sitting in a dusty library in Spain or Portugal trying to read the myriad of available manuscripts.

Inquisition records data available on the internet

Inquisition records in Spain are sometimes available digitized on the National Archives website that was mentioned earlier at <http://pares.mcu.es/> but in general, many of the actual records must be found in person in Madrid at el Archivo Historico Nacional. Each region in Spain was governed by a different Inquisition Tribunal. The records for each tribunal are kept in different places around Spain. At Archivo Historico Nacional, I was able to find records for the village of my family in the Northwest of Spain in the Zamora region. Madrid also houses the records for Toledo and Murcia. They are not digitized and often times are not yet catalogued. You would have to go there in person or hire someone to search for you. This holds true for most of the other regions of Spain. The Cuenca records are housed in Cuenca, the Canary Islands ones in Gran Palma and others where the Tribunal was located. I am working to get all this digitized.

<http://antt.dglab.gov.pt/>

This data base on line houses the files of Torre Do Tombo which are physically located in Lisbon, Portugal. Under *pesquisas*, you can type in a name and the desired results should pop up. This “simple” search can be a challenge at times, however, because the records that you are searching for have been written in Medieval Portuguese. You must type your search in many

different ways as they also do not have soundex. For example, if you are searching for Zamora, you would also look for Camora and Samora and even Zamorra and Camorra and Samorra. There is no “Sounds like” feature. Usually, you will see the following information:

- The name of the person that was accused
- What they were accused of (Here it will usually say Judaismo.)
- Their age at the time they were caught
- Their place of birth and the city they lived in (You will usually see both cities and both are important to your research. The rest of the relatives were probably still back in the village of origin.)
- Their spouse’s name
- Their parents’ names

Once you do find the long list of records, there will be brief overviews in modern day Portuguese and in most cases, an ability to access the actual hand written Inquisition process where you will often times find a complete genealogy that a person who was caught would generally give over to the Inquisitors. These testimonies were given under much duress, and some historians feel that they need to be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, the information is invaluable. The Torre Do Tombo Archives’ main page will give you background information on the files that are available in the archives. Baptism records can also be located

in those files as well as some criminal and notarial records.

If your family lived in or near a city with an Inquisition tribunal, there is probably an incredible amount of information available to you that would not be available to others.

Below is a list of the tribunals in Spain and the years they were started. You will notice that many began before 1492, and this goes back to the original reason for establishing the tribunals was to weed out those Jews who had falsely converted to Christianity and were still practicing Judaism underground.

Locations of the Permanent Inquisition Tribunals in Spain, Portugal and Goa, India.

INQUISITION TRIBUNALS CITY, COUNTRY AND DATE IT WAS

Spain

Córdoba 1482	Cuenca 1489
Granada 1526	Las Palmas (Islas Canarias) 1505
Llerena 1485	Logroño 1512
Murcia 1488	Santiago de Compostela 1574
Sevilla 1482	Toledo 1485
Valladolid 1488	Mallorca 1488
Barcelona 1484	Zaragoza 1482
Valencia 1482	

Portugal

Coímbra 1541	Goa, India 1560
Évora 1536	Lamego 1541
Lisboa 1536	Tomar 1536
Porto 1536	

The Inquisition moved into Latin America also, and there

were several distinct tribunals. One was in Mexico City for North America and Panama. That one was used for the Philippines as well. The others were in Lima, Peru and in Cartagena, Colombia. These two tribunals were put in place to handle most of the cases in South America. The one in Cartagena had governance over the Islands of the Caribbean.

In Mexico City, the Inquisition records are kept at the Archivo General de la Nacion (AGN) and to the best of my knowledge are catalogued but not indexed nor digitized at the date of this publication. This collection is on JewishGen.

The records of the Inquisition in Lima, Peru, survived, but the ones from Cartagena for the most part did not yet most of them are digitized and on line. However, in Madrid, at the Archivo Historico Nacional where most of the records are digitized, there is correspondence between Spain and these outlying locations. Some Cartagena documents can be located.

Notre Dame University has a website with some rare Inquisition manuscripts and much information on the Inquisition processes themselves. It is well worth a look. That site is below.
<http://rarebooks.library.nd.edu/digital/inquisition/collections/RBSC-INQ:COLLECTION>

Below I have listed other ways to fully research internet resources. You may decide to get creative and look for different websites, as I can almost guarantee you that I did not even scratch the surface. The only thing I would like to caution you about is to be sure that the information given is by someone or some group that is reliable.

Genealogy Blogs

Some of the best genealogy blogs can be found on genealogy websites that are for Spain alone. A blog in Spanish is called a “foro.” So you would for example, be searching for “foros apellido Ramos” which means blogs for the last name Ramos, or you would search for “foro de Zamora” in which you are looking for a blog of a particular city. There is a website www.genoom.com that has many blogs for individual last names and villages. I found many entries for my own family names there.

If you are looking for the blogs or foros of a particular village in Spain, many times you will find these on the website of the Village Council, also known as the ayuntamiento in Spanish. Those websites have blogs of people looking for each other and descendants of people from a particular village. In most of these foros you can leave a message on a message board type of display with your e-mail address, and people write you back. It is interesting to see that even after many months you will start to receive e-mails. I found cousins in Chile and Argentina in this way, and we have kept our relationships going solely through the internet.

Facebook and other social media

You can look for groups on Facebook using only the surname you need information about after joining the group, you can ask for specific information to contribute to your search. You can also search for a specific region, and if you find an active group you are in luck! For example, I am a member of the Dutch

Jewish Genealogy Group on Facebook because a lot of the

Spanish and Portuguese Jews went up into the Netherlands. The group is very helpful, and the people are incredibly knowledgeable. Whenever I ask a question of the group, I get at least 10 good answers.

On Facebook, you can also search for “apellido Ramos” and get results such as *Apellido Ramos cuantos somos*, *Mi apellido es Ramos* and many more. I joined the group and have been in touch with other genealogists searching for the same thing. A search for the name of the village will also yield rich results. Joining all these groups is tedious and time consuming but will give you great results.

Another fabulous resource on Facebook is the group called Tracing the Tribe - Jewish Genealogy on Facebook with thousands of experts but not necessarily for the Iberian Peninsula.

I have also used the Cuban Genealogy Group and many others. There are too many to mention. The best thing is just to search for the group you want, and it should pop right up. If it is not there, then you should consider starting it and having other knowledgeable people join in with you.

Chapter Nine

Researching the Town Where Your Family Originated

By now, you will probably know what village or town your family was from in Spain or Portugal, and you will need to start researching the Converso Jews from that town in much the same way you were researching the names.

It is important that you do the search on Jewish life in the village of your ancestors as eventually you might find some clues about your own family. You should be doing this in different languages and with many google searches. If you know your family was from Cordoba, Spain, for example, then these are some of the possible searches you would make:

Cordoba Judíos, Cordoba Judio Conversos, Cordoba Familia Judia, Cordoba Jewish life, Cordoba Aljama, Cordoba Juderia, Cordoba Jewish Ghetto, Cordoba Marranos, Cordoba Converso Jews, Cordoba Sinagoga, Cordoba Synagogue, Cordoba Esnoga, Cordoba Inquisicion, Cordoba Spanish Inquisition.

In my own case, when I had already found all the genealogical information that my family had lived in the small village of Fermoselle, Spain, for 521 years, I set out to find the Jewish population that had lived there. Internet search after internet search yielded nothing. Zero.

For the information on my village, I had to go there in person and dig through etchings and writings on the walls, talk to the local people, gain their trust, and finally, I learned and compiled what had been lost to Jewish history. Had I not been able to find anything, I do believe I would not have been able to take this project through to the end. I did find a Jewish presence in the Village that corroborated my findings on paper.

What happened to me is unlikely to happen to everyone, and I learned to take all of the setbacks in stride while trying to compile my own data. I know that G-d works in mysterious ways, and I am now certain of his hand in my own journey. Had I not had all of these experiences that seemed negative and brick walls at the time, I would not have been able to share with you how to get around all of the hurdles.

For most locations in Spain and Portugal, you will be able to find Jewish history that is recorded or even buried deep within PhD dissertations on the internet. You just need to search for it.

I recommend the following website that was initially compiled by Dr. Mario Saban who wrote several books on crypto Jewish names while in Argentina.:

www.tarbutsefarad.com

This website was put up for the purpose of disseminating cultural information about Jewry and Jewish history in villages all

over Spain. Tarbut Sefarad has appointed a representative or expert for just about each town and village. Those specialists have taken great time and pains in documenting the Jewish history of their town. I am now considered the specialist for the village of my family which is Fermoselle in Spain. You can e-mail the specialists and garner even more useful information on the Jewish background of the people from the village of your family.

This is also a painstaking process but you must prove that not only was your family Jewish, but you will be called upon to prove that they lived in a town or village that had a Jewish community. Most of the time, the internet will be full of reliable resources to that effect.

Chapter Ten

Going ALL the Way Back

You will eventually have to go to Spain or Portugal, or at least be in contact with the places of origin of your family, but if you have worked your way through the internet and blogs as I have mentioned, you will have been able to find information on your family.

Always document where you got the information so that you don't have to search for it again and again. You have a lot of ground to cover so make sure you are only going forward.

If you are lucky, you should have been able to travel back to the early 1800s or the late 1700s, and this is where your search will start to become harder. You should already have been able to document perhaps four or five generations of grandmothers and great grandmothers and all the Jewish references to the names. This is a very painstaking process and you must have a lot of patience to see it through. Do not become discouraged. Day by day, more resources are available on the internet, as records are being digitized and put on the internet all the time.

By now, you should have been able to collect information that you have meticulously been putting in the folders of the direct lineage that you are following. Always keep in mind that your objective is to find Jewish roots from pre-Spanish Inquisition

times. You are not trying to just make a family tree. The interesting thing with this search is that you will have a family tree at the end, but that is not your goal. You are collecting the data and documents that you will require later to prove this lineage. There are many who do not believe that this search is possible. There are many that appear on blogs and say that this is all hype. Those people have not met me and a few others like me. We have all these documents, and it is possible. Stay on task and be patient.

When you have exhausted all the internet searches that relate to the genealogy of the family, it will be time to head to the physical records of Spain or Portugal. It is important to note at this time that you will be looking for any and all records from the village of your family relating to the line you are studying. You will be able to locate records in the Catholic churches that date back to 1545.

All of these records will look identical no matter what village or city you are looking into. In 1545, the Council of Trent convened and ordered all the churches to record the baptisms, marriages, and deaths in exactly the same way. The good news is that via these records you will be able to see your relative, the name of the parents, grandparents and the name of the witnesses, as well as the name of the scribe who wrote the information in the book. In those days scribes were used for all official documents. It is important to not only document the next generation of family but also the names of the witnesses and the scribe. This information will be useful later as many specific scribes and witnesses were found to have been judged in the Inquisition for hiding Jewish marriages and passing them off as Catholic ones.

Speaking of Catholic, if you are now in the 1700s you may start to find priests and nuns in your family tree. This is very good news which supports the many pieces of circumstantial

evidence that you will start to collect if your lineage is truly a Jewish Converso one. Many times, there will be a priest in each generation or in every other generation. The Converso families needed someone that would be present at all the Catholic rituals and make sure that to the best of their ability, some Jewish rites would be observed secretly and that the Catholic ones would not be kept fully.

You will need to start contacting the city councils or ayuntamientos in the city or village that you are searching in. I would suggest that your first contact be a phone call, and once you establish a contact, you can begin to communicate via e-mail. It is possible that they still have the records you want, and they will charge a nominal fee for copying them and mailing them to you. If they are more technologically oriented then they will scan and e-mail them. Many of these archivists will not e-mail them, and they will not accept credit cards. This is a very lengthy process, but you can usually get one or two records at a time. Most of the time, they will only go back 100 years and then the records are sent to the municipal archives of the largest and closest city. In that case you will have to go in person or hire a professional genealogist who is used to working in these archives to obtain the records for you.

The older the records, the harder the Spanish is to read. Be sure that you have a working knowledge of the old Spanish before you get into the field work. You do not want to waste precious time trying to decipher documents if you are overseas and with limited time. I mentioned a website earlier in the internet references that will teach you the basics of reading medieval documents.

In the larger cities such as Madrid, you can obtain census records that are very detailed. Those census records will show you in detail that lived in the house with your relative, where each person was born and what they did for a living.

You should have been able to follow along back on your tree by now, and you may even have had to jump from city to city to follow the lineage to its origin. At each and every turn you should continue to document the last names as being Jewish Converso ones. Every time you find a new name, you must do the internet searches for the Jewish connection. This is important as you should now be in the early 1600s or late 1500s. The records become harder to read and sometimes pages are ripped out. If that happens, you will have to find a brother or a sister of the relative to continue back.

When you do make the trip to Spain or Portugal in search of the final record that you need, the best advice I can give you is PLAN PLAN PLAN.

Below are some pointers on doing this research:

- Before you go overseas, make sure you have a valid library card, and if you can get a card showing that you are a student or a researcher it is even better. Your local university library may be able to help you with this type of identification. Many of the overseas archives will require that you show some type of ID. I have gotten away with a library card, but at one time while visiting the Central Archives in Amsterdam, I was given a “research card” and I have used that one to enter all other archives since.
- Always make a contact in the archive you are planning on visiting. Cultivate this contact via e-mail and even some phone calls if possible so that when you get there it will be just a little bit easier for you.
- You should be making a special trip just for this work, or if you are adding your research to a tourist type trip, make sure you leave several days at the end of the trip for your work. I say at the end because this will be time consuming, and you don't want to be thinking about other things you are missing out on. After all, this is an

expensive trip, and you want to get the most out of it. Do not think that you can pop into a city, see the sites, pop into the archive and get something done. It just won't happen, and you will end up frustrated.

- Slow down. When you are in Spain and Portugal, slow down or be miserable. Everything is different and people are moving at different paces. You need to be respectful and be available at their pace.
- Make sure you are aware of the exact times that these archives are open to researchers. Sometimes the doors are open 9-5, but the reading rooms or the historical collections rooms may only be available for a few hours.
- Copying, scanning and taking pictures vary from place to place. Some allow to take pictures of all the pages with a phone or ipad . In other places they will copy and charge a nominal, and in some, they allow you a hand scanner. The idea is that you should have all the equipment that you need with. you and use the one you are allowed. Find out beforehand.
- Be prepared for leaving all your things in a locker at the entrance and walking into the collections and reading rooms with only a pencil and no pen. I usually will carry my ipad, a pencil and a pad of paper. More than this will likely be turned away in many places. You can take pictures with your phone many times, but I find the ipad will allow a larger space to be photographed.
- If you do not see what you need and it is not in the computer files or indexes, always ask. It could be that what you need has not yet been catalogued. This has happened to me as well. I was searching for the notarial records of all the ships with cargo owned by Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam and I had exhausted all the digitized sources that were indexed. After asking, I was

given boxes and boxes of index cards that had not yet been put on any computer or index.

- My last advice is Patience, Patience and more Patience. Remember this is a treasure trove, but the work is painstakingly slow.

Remember that you are in search of an unbroken lineage. That means one grandmother after another. Any break in this link and the work will be of interest but not valid for official traditional Jewish Institutions. This is a slow, yet very important life altering process. If your search is successful, you will have made an important contribution to Jewish history.

Some recommended books are listed below. You will notice that many are very specific to a particular location (Argentina, Chile, Jamaica, etc.).

A History of the Jews in Christian Spain by Yitzhak Baer

A History of the Marranos by Cecil Roth

A Life of Menasseh Ben Israel by Cecil Roth

A Origem Judaica dos Brasileiros by Jose Geraldo
Rodrigues de Alckmin Filho

Conversos on Trial by Haim Bienart

Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World:
1391-1648 edited by Benjamin R. Gampel

Crypto-Jews Under the Commonwealth by
Lucien Wolf

Dicionario Sefaradi De Sobrenomes
(Dictionary of Sephardic Surnames) by Guilherme
Faiguenboim, Paulo Valadares y Anna Rosa
Campagnano

Die Sefarden in Hamburg by Michael Studemund-Halevy

Finding Our Fathers by Dan Rottenberg

Genealogia Hebraica: Portugal e Gibraltar by Jose Maria Abecassis

Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation by Miriam Bodian

Historia de la Comunidad Isralelita de Chile by Moshe Nes-El

History of the Jews in Venice by Cecil Roth

Jews in Colonial Brazil by Arnold Wizhitzer

Jews of the Canary Island by Lucien Wolf

Judíos Conversos by Mario Javier Saban

Luis de Carvajal (The origins of Nuevo Reino de Leon) by Samuel Temkin

My 15 Grandmothers by Genie Milgrom

Noble Families Among The Sephardic Jews by Isaac Da Costa, Bertram Brewster and Cecil Roth

Pyre to Fire By Genie Milgrom

Precious Stones of the Jews of Curacao Jewry
By Isaac Samuel Emmanuel

Raizes Judaicas No Brasil by Flavio Mendes
Carvalho

Sangre Judia Vol. I and Vol. II by Pere Bonnin

Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews
by David Gitlitz

Sephardic Genealogy by Jeff Malka

The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain by Haim Beinart

The First English Jew by Lucien Wolf

The Jews of New Spain by Seymour B. Liebman

The Jews of Rhodes by Marc D. Angel

The Jews of the Balkans, The Judeo-Spanish Community,
15th to 20th Centuries by Esther Benbassa
and Aron Rodriguez

The Sephardic Jews of Bordeaux by Frances Malino

The Sephardim of England by Albert M. Hyamson

Epilogue

When it finally became necessary to travel to Spain and make my own research in the archives of the Church from the Parish of my family in Fermoselle, I was only able to physically travel there five or six times. Personally, I did not have the time and at the end of the day, I also did not have the patience. It meant staying in a town or village where the library or archive would only be open a few hours a day. I enlisted the help of a professional genealogist who helped me to find all the information on my genealogy and build a proper family tree while only searching through my maternal lineage.

He was able to obtain for me all the baptism certificates and marriage certificates as well as death certificates and notarial records. Every night, after his searches he would update the tree and all his sources and e-mail them to me.

As I mentioned in this book, I then took each name and each village and made all the research for a Jewish past. His help and work was invaluable. His faith in MY faith was commendable. I cannot imagine what my life would be like today if God had not placed Fernando Gonzalez del Campo Roman in my path. Below are his words about the journey that he and I travelled together-

Genie

Helping Genie Milgrom in her efforts to discover her 15 Grandmothers and confirm their Jewish origin has been one of

the most fantastic experiences of my life. I think that Genie is one of those people who not only have an incredible drive and enviable faith but I also feel she has been especially blessed by G-d to have been able to achieve what she did, given the fact that she was brought up in the heart of a Catholic family. She was able to attain her very difficult goal because she started with a profound conviction of her Jewish Origins that was reinforced by the legacy from her grandmother.

When I started to work with her, I told her that it was highly improbable that we would find documents that would enable us to prove that her grandmothers had been Converso Jews in the sixteenth century.

The fact that she might have a Jewish ancestor in Fermoselle was plausible because there were some tax papers showing it had a Jewish presence before 1492 but that her direct and unbroken lineage of women would be Jewish would be one chance in tens of thousands. To be exact, 28,859 is the number of ancestors that corresponds to her 13th grandmother, Maria Rodrigues or Roiz probably born in 1510. The daughter of Maria Rodrigues or Roiz was Ana Neta Rodrigues who was born in Miranda do Douro in Portugal in 1539 and her granddaughter, Catalina Ramires lived in Fermoselle and had abundant descendants in that village.

I started to pull the threads in search of documents in the old parish books of Fermoselle which are preserved in the Diocesan Historical Archive of Zamora, in the town of Zamora, Spain. I started with the books of baptisms until 1720. I found the names of all the grandfathers as well. With the help of those records, marriage and marriage blessings records, and burial records, I managed to reach the marriage blessings that took place on November 3, 1594 of Maria Ramirez or Rodriguez to her husband Gaspar Rodriguez de Cubillos. Their marriage is NOT in the marriage records of 1591-1600, but the velaciones or

wedding blessings after the ceremony were recorded. I suspect that Gaspar, a viticulturist, lessee of the butcher shop and iron merchant was also a Converso Jew because his first cousin Maria de Cubillos said that she was from Santa Maria de Cubillos in Galicia and we know from history, how quickly the converso Jews had to change their location and names to not be detained nor discovered by the Inquisitions of Spain and Portugal.

Because of the annotations made on the compliance of a last will and testament that was in the book of Baptisms, deaths and confirmations 1626-1671, I was able to determine that Maria Ramirez also had the last name of her father which was Garcia and that she had died at the end of 1647. This allowed me to find in the notarial protocols of Fermoselle, that are located at the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora, the last will and testament of Maria Ramirez in 1645. In this document, she does not mention her parents. I believe this was due to the fact that a cousin named Isabel Fernandez la Cebollera of her maternal Grandfather Francisco Ramires born in Alcañices (Zamora) and a resident of Miranda Do Douro in Portugal was condemned by the Inquisition of Lisbon in 1559. On the other hand, the husband of Maria, in his last will and testament of 1630 does mention his father, Bartolome de Cubillos, even though we know by his burial record in 1595 that Gaspar Garcia, father of Maria gave a dowry letter to his son in law but this was not preserved and the reason is that this must have been written by a travelling Scribe from the City of Zamora. We do know of one such Scribe that in 1673 would go around to various towns offering his services to the región of Sayago, which includes Fermoselle.

Getting to this point was not a simple feat. Most people who come to me are interested primarily in their paternal genealogy and later, their other branches. Genie, however, was eager to obtain recognition and proof of her status of Jewish

blood, and she wanted only to find her matrilineal genealogy by jumping from grandmother to grandmother until she could embrace the grandmother who had been baptized under duress by parents who had been forced to convert when they chose not to abandon Sefarad.

By tracing a maternal lineage only, this normally means that in each generation, you will find a different last name. In Spain, the one that is usually transmitted through the generations is the paternal last name. This, even though the Crown of Castille gave a lot of liberty in the use of last names until the start of the 18th Century and it was not rare that a person would take the name of the Mother and not the Father. This custom was especially true for the women of the West of Spain from Galicia to Andalucia and is precisely the region that Genie's family descends from.

It is because of this that from Manuela Alvarez born in 1843, the Great Grandmother of Genie, we pass to Teresa Garrido, Jacinta Mayor (already in the 18th Century), Josefa Martin, Ana Maria Funcia, Teresa Fernando, Maria Rodriguez (Montaña from her father in the 17th Century) to Catalina Rodriguez, daughter of Gaspar Guerra and another Catalina Rodriguez, daughter of Gaspar Rodriguez and another Catalina Rodriguez daughter of Gaspar Rodriguez or de Cubillos and Maria Ramirez.

Here was a moment in time however, that I had almost exhausted all the books of La Asuncion Parish in Fermoselle and we still did not know who was the Mother of Maria Ramirez. We knew the name of her father, Gaspar Garcia, whose son in law Gaspar de Cubillos was mentioned in his burial documents but there was no document that mentioned her Mother.

Almost like a miracle, in stepped to help us a relative that Genie had located via her genealogy through the internet and currently living in Belgium. This cousin of Genie's from 8

generations ago was a master genealogist of unfathomable value and whose family was originally from Fermoselle. He was able to retrieve for Genie an archival record from the Inquisition of Lisbon, preserved in the files of el Arquivo Da Torre do Tombo in that city. This was the proof positive that Genie required to prove that she descended from an unbroken maternal Jewish Lineage. The Inquisition Process that he found was from 1643-1645 against Antonio Ramires, son of Fernão Ramires and grandson of Francisco Ramires and Ana Neta where they mention a paternal aunt named Catarina Ramires, whom, he said to the Inquisitors, he knew when she was already very old and widowed and he added in his statement that she had a daughter in Fermoselle. The name was not mentioned. This alone explains why I had been unable to find the burial documents in Fermoselle. After she became a widow, she returned to Miranda and left in Fermoselle, her daughter Maria .Maria was the ONLY person in Fermoselle to have the last name of Ramirez in all the Parish books and records from those years and in that town. She had so much love for her Mother that she named her first daughter Catalina. When that daughter died as a child, she named her second daughter the same and when she also died as a child, she again gave the name to her third daughter, the 10th Grandmother of Genie Milgrom.

This was the missing link that we needed in the chain to confirm that Genie descended from a Crypto Jewish family. After this, much more information was located as one Process led to another and then another. In the Tribunals of the Santo Oficio in Lisbon, I also located the Inquisition process of Diogo Neto, condemned for practicing Judaism in an auto da fe in 1563. He was a shoemaker born and residing in Miranda do Douro in Braganza, married to Maria Roiz or Rodrigues who was also a new Christian or Crypto-Jew. They had five children and one of those was Ana, 22 years old. He also had a sister, married in Miranda Do Douro whose name was Branca Fernandes and Diogo

himself was a witness in 1558 in the Inquisition judgement of Isabel Fernandes a Cebolleira in whose house he had lived.

Finally, everything squared away. There are many more Processes of Judaizers from Miranda that include relatives of Genie that we have not yet been able to study in depth . We were never able to locate any exact Inquisition records for Genie in the Spanish Inquisition Records housed in Madrid at the Archivo Historico Nacional even though this archive is immense and has many Inquisition special collections .The records of proof of all the ancestors of Genie were found in the Torre Do Tombo Archives of the Tribunal of the Portuguese Inquisition in Lisbon.

Finally, even though there are other sources that we can consult in diverse other archives I must say that the Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Zamora yielded a precious trove of many carats. I had been searching through the *Guia-Inventarios de los Archivos de Zamora y Provincias*, which is a type of index written by Antonio Matilla Tascon and I found *El Libro de la Obra Pia* which is a Foundation that was founded by Lic. Jorge Rodriguez Cubillos, priest in 1673. As you can see by his last name, this religious man who was the Priest of Fariza in Spain, a town very close to Fermoselle was the son of Gaspar Rodriguez de Cubillos and Maria Ramirez. He was one of the three boys that survived their parents. This foundation, as seen in his last will and testament of that year, was funded to give dowries to the young women of his family with the stipulation that they had to be legitimate descendants in a straight line of his brother Francisco, his brother Melchior, and his sister, Catalina Rodriguez ,which is one of Genie's 15 Grandmothers. As we know, there is no mention of her parents in the last will and testament of his Mother, Maria Ramirez.

Year after year, until the Ecclesiastical Confiscation in the 19th Century there are registered abundant lists of all the young women who were graced with money from this foundation that

came directly from the family of Genie. The list contains the name of the young woman, her affiliation to the family and who was gifted monies to get married, to become a nun or in the case of young ladies with disabilities, ensuring that they would have enough money to be taken care of for life. The dowry given was 100 ducats, the monetary measure of the time. (For information, each ducat contained 3.5 grams of gold and valued at the Price of today, each bride would have received the equivalent of \$ 15,300 U.S.Dollars) These foundations were sometimes funded by priests but they were also very common among the Jews. The foundation started by the family of Genie is very similar to the one known as *Santa Companhia de dotar orphas e donzellas* ("The Holy Company for dowries for orphans and young ladies"), created by the Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam in the 17th Century. In the case of the from Genie's family, only direct family descendants could receive the money.

I hope that these few lines I have written will have resumed adequately the experience I had in the investigation of the maternal genealogy of Genie Milgrom to whom I am immensely grateful, as well as to her husband Michael for having given me the opportunity to continue to grow as a genealogist and to continue to learn as well as to know of my own branches of Jewish ancestors that I have located in my search for Genie's. I thank them most of all, for their friendship.

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The End.
Or is it the
beginning?