

Why was my Lithuanian grandmother named Annelle?

I was always puzzled about my Lithuanian grandmother's first name. It was Annelle, which sounds very French. While Lithuania was conquered by and aligned with many other countries over the centuries, as far as I knew it was never invaded by France. So I could not understand why her first name was Annelle, and not something more Baltic-sounding.

I knew a fair amount about my mother's Danish parents. Klara Marie (Frederiksen) Nielsen and Harald Emil Nielsen lived in the same town, near Detroit, that I did when growing up. I was named for my Swedish great grandmother, Ingrid Carlsen Frederiksen. I knew from childhood that my grandparents had met at the Danish Club in New York City; that my grandmother was a ladies' maid to a tyrannical Manhattanite; that my grandfather's first job in the US was as an orderly at a psychiatric hospital in Westchester County. I knew much more about their previous lives in Denmark (and in my grandmother's case, in England) and their subsequent lives in the US, and had met some of their relatives, both in this country and in Denmark.

As I began researching them, I learned a lot more, and certainly had surprises along the way. Chief among those surprises was finding some information about my grandmother's sister, Alma Frederiksen. I had been told that she died in a swimming accident off Long Island, and was buried somewhere on Long Island. That was literally all I knew. I found a record of her death, on July 17, 1915, in Glen Cove, New York. And I was able to find her arrival date in the US, May 28, 1913 aboard the Hellig Olav from Copenhagen. She was listed as 22 years old. When I learned the dates, I also learned that she came to the US, and died here, before my grandmother immigrated.

I would describe my knowledge of my father's side of the family as sketchy. It's hard to say exactly why this was so, except that my mother was much closer to her parents than my dad was to his. I knew he was born in Newark and grew up in Nutley, New Jersey, where his par-

ents lived when I was a child. I had been told that his father had brothers who had come to the US from Lithuania both before and after my grandfather did, and that my grandmother was, as the oldest child, the first in her family to come to the US from Lithuania, with the intent of later sending for her two younger sisters. According to my dad, she sailed on the last boat to leave Hamburg before World War I began.

I had been told that all four of my grandparents came through Ellis Island. Given all the knowledge I possessed, it was easy to find my Danish grandparents' immigration information, even though there were two Harald Emil Nielsens landing at Ellis Island within a few years of each other. But I could not locate either of my Lithuanian grandparents in the Ellis Island online records.

So I googled their names. Even that was a bit difficult, as my Lithuanian grandfather was either named James Frank Stanlis, or Frank James Stanlis. And my grandmother Annelle's maiden name was, according to my cousin, Kiva. The 1940 census demonstrated that my Lithuanian grandparents were pretty well established in the US. According to the census, my father was 20 years and my aunt Penny (whose real name was Genevieve Cecelia — who knew? and here's another French name!) was 14. And there they were, at 44 Freeman Place, Nutley, New Jersey, which is where I knew them. But there was virtually no information on my grandparents' immigration, and no mention of my grandmother's maiden name.

My own parents' marriage certificates (yes, plural) provided some assistance. In them, my Lithuanian grandmother was listed once as Annelle Kliever and once as Annele Kliever. Unfortunately my Lithuanian grandfather was listed once as Frank Stanlis, and once as James F. Stanlis. While this gave me a better name than Kiva with which to search the Ellis Island records, I still could not locate my grandmother. I found any number of Anne Cleavers, from

various places in Great Britain. And there were many men named James or Frank Stanlis, and many variants thereof, popping up among the Ellis Island records.

I don't remember how I stumbled across it, but my grandmother's petition for naturalization held the key to her immigration story. (I hoped my grandfather's would be equally helpful, but when I clicked on the link to it, my grandmother's petition appeared again. I'll have to keep searching.) My grandmother's birth date was listed as April 17, 1891. Or perhaps that was when she was baptized, as I'd been told that she did not have a birth certificate, only a baptismal certificate, and so the family didn't know when her birthday was. At any rate, the naturalization petition stated that she was born in Kraukas, Lithuania, and entered the US on July 7, 1914 on the *Vaderland*, a ship which sailed from Antwerp (not Hamburg), and which quite possibly was close to the last ship to leave that port before World War I began. She was married on September 10, 1916 in Easton, Pa., which was a complete surprise, although I'd seen many Stanlises listed in Pennsylvania in the 1940 census, and the history of Lithuanians in the US indicated that many worked in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. So perhaps my grandfather did, too. There was some information about my grandfather: he's listed as James, born in Kraukas on August 15, 1888, arrived in New York August 15, 1908, and was naturalized September 1, 1943. And my grandmother's name when she entered the US? It was listed as "Aniela Kleiwa" — it's no wonder I couldn't find her in the Ellis Island arrival records under Annelle Kliever.

There are still lots of puzzles to be worked through. The name Aniela appears many times in immigration records — always attached to Polish women. But I still cannot find my grandmother in the Ellis Island immigration records, even under Aniela Kleiwa. And the Lithuanian city in which it is recorded that both she and her husband were born, Kraukas, is nowhere to be found. The Internet asks "Do you mean Kaunas?" That could be — and the French connection may have a vague explanation if Kaunas is the right answer. The Grand Army of

Napoleon passed through Kaunas twice on its way to invading Russia. On the other hand, Kraukas sounds a lot more like Krakow, which is in Poland. And a Lithuanian-Poland Commonwealth existed from the Union of Lublin, in July of 1569, to its final collapse in 1795, with significant interdependence going back to 1386 when the Queen of Poland married the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Sadly, Poland and Lithuania did not become independent countries until 1918, after both my grandparents had emigrated. I read a short history of Lithuanian Americans, which stated that many times the new immigrants were simply marked as “Russian,” rather than Lithuanian.

So, there is much still to be learned and experienced. The Danish Club is still going, in Brooklyn, and someday I’ll go there and have dinner. There are Lithuanian-Americans to explore in Pennsylvania. Perhaps I’ll find my great aunt’s grave, or at least have the city of Glen Cove send me a copy of her death certificate. Countless people named Stanlis, with variations, live in the US, and some could be the descendants of those brothers of my grandfather. I wonder if I’ll find a definitive answer to the question: **Why was my Lithuanian grandmother named Annelle — or was she?**

*Ingrid A. Stanlis,
August, 2018*