

Chapter 1

Presaged

October 22, 4004 BC or 13.8 billion years ago

“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. (Acts 17:26)”

Genealogy

Every human life enters a world in flux. Ancestors drift behind and descendants stream ahead. Based on information provided by the Population Reference Bureau, I have calculated my birth event to place about ninety-six billionth out of the one-hundred-eight billion souls who have ever inhabited planet earth. That places eighty-nine percent of humanity prior to me and eleven percent subsequent to me. With the number of newborns arriving at a rate of four per second, I may move down to the eighty-eighth percentile before I myself drift into history.

Can it be true that God has determined the times set for Chris Alan Foreman and the exact places where he should live? Did God Himself set 1949 for his birth year and place him in the state of Ohio as the fifth child of John and Jenny Foreman? I believe the answer is *yes*. Along with the psalmist, I affirm: “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

I believe an all-knowing and all-powerful God could certainly decree my placement in space-time. I further believe that an all-loving Father would situate my soul in a time and place where my free will would be most likely to seek Him and to find Him. The means by which our sovereign Lord might accomplish this mind-boggling task far exceed my ability to comprehend.

Just how much time has passed from the act of creation to the present moment is a matter of conjecture. Archbishop James Ussher served as the primate of Ireland between 1625 and 1656. He developed a chronology of world history formulated from a literal reading of Hebrew scripture. His calculation produced a creation date of October 22, 4004 B.C. Of course, this date has near-zero acceptance today, even among the religious community. However, some Christian creationists continue to propose Genesis dates of eight thousand to one hundred thousand years ago.

In contrast, most enlightenment scientists proposed a universe both infinite and eternal, reflecting the view of Greek philosophy. Only in the last century have cosmologists rejected this ancient steady-state model in favor of an expanding cosmos with an absolute start point. The current consensus among scientists is that the universe began 13.8 billion years ago with a big

bang. Before that instant, there was nothing—no matter, no energy, no space, no time. In fact, there was no “before”.

As human being number ninety-six billion, I was presaged in multiple ways. The atomic particles that compose my body trace back to the moment of creation. Indeed, I am stardust. The origin of my biology may go back to Adam if one is religiously minded or to primordial ooze if one is not. The Population Reference Bureau sets the arrival of modern Homo Sapiens at 50,000 B.C. or two thousand six hundred generations ago. All but the most recent of my ancestors are inscrutable to me; no faces. names, or stories.

I do have a narrow window into my distant past. Based on a sample of spittle, *Ancestry.com* assessed my genome to be 99.1% European and 71.3% eastern European. I should have saved my spit. I could have guessed that outcome. The same source tells me that my DNA displays 266 Neanderthal variants. I could have guessed the cave-man component as well.

I have observational knowledge of only four generations: five siblings, two parents, two grandfathers, and one great grandmother. Peering back into the mid-nineteenth century, my ancestors vanish into the chaotic mist of Eastern Europe. Shifting boundaries, mass displacements, two world wars, and an Atlantic crossing have conspired to obscure my DNA trail.

Once my four grandparents arrived in the New World, they shed the ways of the Old, embracing a new language and new way of life. Over the decades, their ethnic names and Slavic spellings Americanized in the crucible of a great melting pot.

As a second-generation patriotic American, I never held stock in my human pedigree. I assumed my dad’s attitude of rugged individualism, “The president puts his pants on one leg at a time, just like everybody else.” In my youth, I took little interest in my eastern-European roots. Being a “Polack” was a source of humor, not esteem. My sense of identity and value derived from my family and my faith.

Grandparents

My father’s parents were Joseph Formanski and Frances Novak. He was born in Zelen, Poland, in 1881 and she in Kosten, Poland, in 1887. They married in Recklinghausen, Germany, and emigrated to the USA in 1910. Four children were born to them: Steve and Victoria in Germany, Frank and my father John in America.

I have vivid memories of Grandpa Foreman who died in 1972, but none of Grandma Foreman who passed away in 1952. The story of their marriage has a tragic element and has passed down as follows: Frances had no intention to marry, wishing to become a nun. Her older sister was engaged to Joseph when the bride-to-be became ill. As her dying wish, she made Frances promise to wed Joseph. Frances kept her vow and the couple married. The union was fruitful but joyless.

Joseph served a few years in the German army. We have a portrait of him in cloak, plume, and spiked helmet. He became a coal miner in Silesia and took up that trade once he settled in Ohio. He once said that the big difference between European and American mines was that in Germany, a miner had to dig coal on his belly, but in America, a man could stand erect. Even as a child, I saw the metaphorical significance of that statement.

My mother's parentage is more complicated. Maryana Koba was born in Koba, Poland, in 1899 and emigrated to America in 1907 along with her parents, Vincent (born in 1862) and Rose (born in 1868). Mary spent a short time in an orphanage while her father spent jail time for bootlegging. At age sixteen, she married Frank Chinchek, and soon after bore my mother Genevieve. But even before my mother was born, her father died. In 1916 my grandmother re-married to Joseph Dydek who was born in Poland nineteen years earlier. Four more children were born to Mary, but the two girls died early. I have fond memories of my two uncles, Stutz and Joe. My mother says she never looked upon herself as a step daughter or step sister. She was just one of the Dydek family.

Memories of my Grandma Dydek are fleeting. She died of cancer in 1954, which devastated my mother since they were close friends and only seventeen years apart. My Grandpa Dydek lived into his eighties. I have a photo of this crusty old man holding my new-born son.

Father

My father was born on September 19, 1914, in Bellaire, Ohio. He was the youngest of four children born to Joseph and Frances. The earliest documents show his surname to be "Formanski". The manner by which his name morphed into "Foreman" is uncertain. The best guess is as follows: The marriage between my grandparents was difficult. Frances sought to leave Joseph and return to Germany with her four children. We have a photograph of Steve, Victoria, Frank, and John posing in new clothes. We also have a passport photo of John. In 1921, Frances returned to Recklinghausen. Her home was not as she had left it ten years earlier. The Great War had devastated her city. Reluctantly, she returned to her husband in Ohio. We speculate the name "Formanski" was transformed into "Foreman" when Frances applied for American passports.

John was not raised in a religious home. His father was antagonistic toward the Catholic church and his mother remained bitter. Although not church going, John did acquire the rudiments of Christian faith in public school. He spoke of learning the twenty-third Psalm and whispered it to himself as he walked through the spooky Indian mounds.

We have an early newspaper clipping of "Johnny Formanski" sitting at the feet of "Jenny Dydek" while posing for a fourth-grade portrait. They attended school side by side and knew each other through most of their school years. John did not do well in academics, but excelled in sports. He played football and might have garnered a track scholarship to Ohio State, but by 1933 times were tough and money was tight.

This is a letter John wrote on July 4, 1933. In it my dad addresses his parents, his three siblings, and his girlfriend. The words paint a better picture of this eighteen-year-old man than I could compose.

Hello Everybody, how is everything out there? I hope you're feeling fine that is just how I feel. We left Chicago Saturday night because everything looks bad. Louis worked for the World's Fair and has \$160.00 worth of checks but can't cash any of them. Tony is working and she don't get paid regular either so we decided to keep on going. We stopped at Wilma's place but she wasn't home then we took a look through Lincoln Park and went down to the station. We caught a train there about 1a.m. and here we are in Cheyenne, Wyoming. How is that for time?

Well, we expect to stay here till tomorrow, then keep on going. We expect to be in Los Angeles in about three or four days, that is if we don't get a job on a ranch before we get there. We met a couple of fellows that said you get \$40.00 a month and board so if we can hit, we'll stay for a while.

Well, mother, here I am away in the West and eating regular, feeling good. Well, just now I am sitting with a couple, talking with dirty hands and face, but we'll soon find a place to clean up and rustle up some food. I don't think I'll be home as soon as I thought, but you don't have to worry about that. If you sent that letter to me in Chicago, Louis will send it to Los Angeles and it will be waiting there for me.

Well, Dad, here I am way out in the wooly west. Never had any trouble at all and when we hit Los Angeles we're going to stay for a while and try to find a job. They say it ain't so hard out there if you really want to work.

Well, Frank, are you still working in the glass house? I hope you found a better job so when I come back, I might get a lend of the car you're going to buy. How is Vic and Andy getting along? Still working every day? Well, tell them I said hello. Is Steve a Daddy yet? Tell him I'll try to bring home a nickel if I can. Tell Steve and Mary I said hello and hope them lots of luck. You better tell Jenny I said hello or she might get mad at me. Well, so long till I get a chance to write. Your loving son, John.

John never found his job in California. He told me he "peed in the Pacific" then slowly worked his way back to Ohio as a day laborer. He eventually found a position in the Ohio coal mines and married Jenny in 1935.

Mother

My mother Genevieve Maria was born on December 30, 1915 in McMechen, West Virginia, and was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church on January 8, 1916. She was the daughter of Mary Koba and Jack Chincheck, a father who never saw her face. The story goes that Jack emerged from a hot coal mine, drank a few cold beers, passed out, and never woke up. This one-quarter of my grand-parentage is untraceable to me.

As a seventeen-year old widow with a newborn daughter, Mary wed Joseph Dydek on February 29, 1916. Although never formally adopted, Genevieve assumed her step father's surname. Jenny—as she was known—grew up in an immigrant Polish family. She once recounted how she was squatting in an outhouse as a child while reading a Polish language newspaper. That was remarkable to her in retrospect, because in her adult years she could read no Polish at all.

By all accounts, this was a loving close-knit family. My mother's Grandma Koby along with aunts and uncles were a big part of her early life. Jenny was a big sister to Stanley (Stutz) and Joseph (Joe). Sisters Helen and Josephine died young, surviving in a single photograph.

While John excelled in sports at Bellaire High School, Jenny succeeded in academics. She was proficient in secretarial shorthand. We have an exchange of personal letters between my mom and dad partially coded in shorthand. Fortunately, my sister Eileen was able to translate the mushy comments.

After graduating from high school in 1933, Jenny joined family members to work at the giant Imperial Glass Company along the banks of the Ohio River. She held that job while John was on the hobo out west. I think it was that separation that convinced the two lovers to marry.

Roots in Ohio

Mom and dad were married on January 15, 1935. We have a portrait of the wedding party. Besides John and Jenny, we recognize my Uncle Stutz at sixteen years old and Uncle Frank at twenty-four years old. The rest are unknown.

My parents struggled during these years of the great depression. They lived in upstairs apartments and cracker-box homes. Jeanne Louise was born on June 27, 1935, and Charlotte Anne came along on November 16, 1937. Both girls were baptized into the Catholic Church and Aunt Anne became their godmother.

My father was finally able to establish his own home in 1940. The address was Box 87, Route 4, Bellaire, Ohio. Jeanne relates how this house came together. There was labor strife at the time and coal miners were striking for months at a stretch. About a dozen idle workers and friends pitched in to pour concrete, frame walls, and tack on roof. My dad became a lifelong handyman after picking up skills by erecting his own home. Both Jeanne and Charlotte have fond memories of this two-bedroom square home and delight in naming streets and neighbors.

In the early 1940s, Jeanne remembers waiting on the front step as dad walked home from work covered in coal dust. She would run across a baseball field to greet him dashing along a road paved with a coal waste called red dog. Dad would always kneel to her level, open his lunch pail, and present her with a “prize”—a wildflower or shiny stone that he would pick up along the way. These were her happiest days she says.

Charlotte recalls contracting a childhood illness then called “Saint Vitas Dance”. This condition caused her limbs to spasm. At times she could not walk and Jeanne had to pull her to school in a wagon. Dad took her to a chiropractor in Wheeling, West Virginia, and after a time all symptoms disappeared.

My father, two uncles, and two grandfathers labored in local coal mines. During the late 1930s and early 1940s they carpooled to various mines in eastern Ohio, the panhandle of West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. Sometimes they would stay for weeks in tiny company towns. The subterranean jobs were dirty, dangerous, ill-paid, and subject to labor shutdowns. In 1944, my dad was hired at the Lorain Coal and Dock Company. He eventually led his own crew of ten. As “Foreman Foreman” he was authorized to hire his own sixty-four-year-old father for three months. That was just long enough to qualify the old man for social security. My father spoke of that deed with pride.

My dad was a hard-working man who enjoyed relaxing with his buddies. His carousing days came to an end one evening when my mother tagged along to one of his card-playing sessions. As a cohort of twenty-somethings, they were whooping it up. My Aunt Anne was the instigator having gained experience while a tavern waitress. She kept the liquor flowing, stuck cigarettes in the mouths of non-smoking women, and encouraged hapless men to make fools of themselves. At one point she maneuvered my dad to sit on the lap of an unmarried woman. The whole group burst out laughing

During the car ride home, my mother couldn’t stop crying and my dad didn’t stop shouting. Little Jeanne sat in the back seat terrified. After a few days of male contrition and female silence, my dad pledged never again to become a drunken fool. And to my knowledge, he never did. After that event, his priority shifted from party animal to family man.

Economic hard times came to an end when the United States declared war on Japan. My uncles Stanley and Joseph joined the army air corps and piloted aircraft over Germany. My Uncle Andy served on the home front as an army trainer. My dad was reticent to speak of his wartime experience. He explained that at twenty-eight years old and with two children in grade school, he was never conscripted. Plus, his job in the coal mine was considered strategic. When pressed why he never volunteered for military service, his response was, “My priorities were always at home.”

The home front was not without action for my parents. John Joseph (Jack) was born on March 15, 1943, and Eileen Marie followed on May 5, 1945. We have a demobilization photograph of my mother’s extended family standing on a hillside in West Bellaire. My great grandparents,

Vincent and Rose, sit as centerpiece. Charlotte and Jeanne stand beside their uniformed uncles. Dad is seated with Jack on his lap and mom sits next to him with baby Eileen tucked under one arm. After ten years of depression and five years of war, it was time to celebrate.

My parent's journey of faith is reconstructed through Jeanne and Charlotte. The Foreman family was Roman Catholic by heritage. Dad and mom were married in a Catholic church and the first four children were baptized into the Church. Their faith was nominal and they seldom attended mass.

One evening, my dad answered a knock at the door to greet a priest from the local parish. He informed my dad that the Foreman family was listed on the church roll and he dropped by to collect money for the local parish school. My dad informed the cleric that Jeanne and Charlotte attended a public school. The official nodded, but said as a registered Catholic he was still obliged to support the parish school. My dad muttered something and closed the door to the priest—and also to the Catholic Church.

It appears the two girls provided impetus toward a Protestant reformation. In 1944, Jeanne came home from school with a note. One of her teachers was offering a release-time Bible class. Attendance was voluntary and sessions were held during the lunch hour. My dad gave permission and for a year Jeanne and Charlotte learned stories from the Bible.

In 1945, the girls were taking piano lessons. During the summer, their instructor asked if they could accompany her to a Methodist vacation Bible school. Again, my dad agreed. However, after a week, their participation abruptly stopped. Jeanne had brought home a note, a pledge for each girl to sign stating that they “would not drink alcoholic beverages.” It wasn't that my dad favored liquor consumption by his kids, but he bristled at the thought of some church asking little girls to sign a pledge.

After that event, my mom and dad began visiting churches. They stopped at several local churches before settling on the First Christian Church of Bellaire. My dad was welcomed by several of his high school buddies and felt at home. Mom was embraced by a friendly group of women. My older sisters joined the choir. A few weeks later, my father, mother, three sisters and brother, walked down the aisle to join. The church was small and Jeanne remarked with the addition of six members it was like a “mini-revival”.

According to my sisters, the last few years of the 1940s were idyllic. The family was situated in a comfortable home, dad worked a stable job, mom nurtured four children, and the whole family worshipped together in a local church. But when I came onto the scene, at the tail-end of the decade, the situation began to change.