



## CHAPTER 1

# Deep Roots: My German Ancestry and Heritage

## 1.1 Genetic Origins and Recent Ancestors

Since I was a kid, I've known I'm of German descent. I'd been told my paternal and maternal ancestors lived in Germany before immigrating to the U.S. It was pretty obvious I was ethnically German. My dad, a fourth-generation descendant, and my mom, a third-generation descendant of those ancestors, spoke German at home when they were young. When I asked why they didn't use German with us kids so we could have learned it, they said that during World War II, German-Americans had to be cautious not to be labeled German sympathizers so they spoke only English from that point on. In fact, the only German words I know are the ones my parents used when I was misbehaving! When I was young, though, it wasn't unusual to hear German spoken by older relatives and townspeople, for that matter, further confirmation of my ethnicity.

Nowadays, it's possible to trace one's heritage through DNA testing. Like many, I was curious about my ancestral roots, so I took two separate blood tests and received some expected results with an interesting twist. My ancestry is a blend of European and Middle Eastern influences. While my heritage is predominantly European at 98.3%, it reveals a complex mix. I

have a strong Northwestern European influence at 56.6%, with significant Southeastern European roots contributing 24.6%. Additionally, there's a touch of Northeastern European lineage at 7.4% and Southwestern European at 5.4%, along with a distinct Finnish heritage at 4.3%. The DNA tests I took were not specific to countries but rather delved further back into history to identify regions of the world.

Adding an intriguing layer to my background, one of those tests identified a 1.7% connection to the Bedouin people of the Middle East and North Africa region. This unique blend of cultural and geographical influences hints at a fascinating history, possibly tracing back to ancient migrations from northern Africa to Europe. Since I spent nearly 40 years of my life working closely with Arabs, this connection feels potentially meaningful. Over the decades, I'd built deep personal and professional relationships within Arab communities, and this revelation makes me wonder if those experiences may be tied to a more distant heritage.

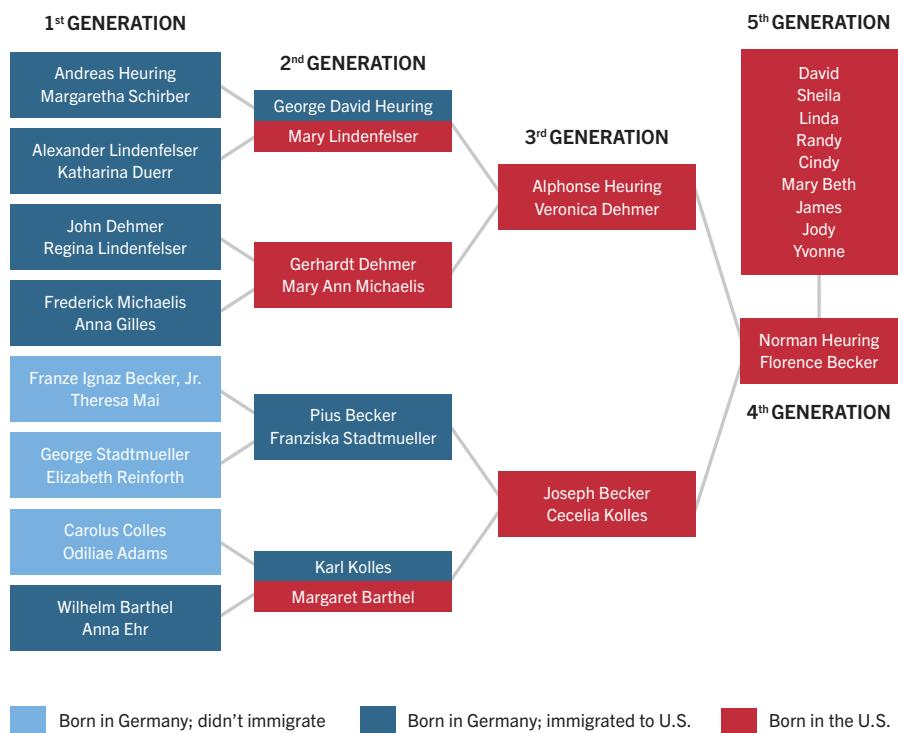
Growing up, I identified primarily with my ancestors through the immediately recognizable surnames—Heuring and Becker—focusing more on the Heuring paternal lineage as the defining thread of my heritage. It wasn't until researching this story that I realized how much I had overlooked the significance of the maternal lineages in my bloodline. Each generation fuses genes, traditions, and values from both sides of the family. By neglecting the maternal branches, I had unintentionally ignored half of the influences that contribute to my identity. This realization has deepened my appreciation for the rich complexity of my family tree and the broader narrative of my ancestry.

As the chart of my family tree on the next page illustrates, I chose to trace my ancestry back to my 16 great-great-grandparents, which revealed a more complex reality. While I once considered myself to be 50% Heuring and 50% Becker, the truth is more nuanced: I'm actually 6.25% Heuring, 6.25% Becker, and 6.25% from each of 14 other lines, including Schirber, Lindenfelser, Duerr, Dehmer, Michaelis, and Gilles on the Heuring side, as

well as Mai, Stradtmueller, Reinford, Colles, Adams, Barthel, and Ehr on the Becker side. These percentages reflect the genetic contributions of the past five generations. As you trace your lineage further back, the influence of any single family becomes even more diluted, and the concept of a “pure” Heuring or Becker lineage fades, revealing the rich diversity that shapes our genealogical heritage.

It was natural to focus on the surnames of my immediate ancestors, in my case the Heuring and Becker lines. Historically, one’s identity was directly tied to a tribe, clan, or family name. These surnames weren’t just markers of identity but often carried with them a sense of place, occupation, or ancestral legacy that linked individuals to specific regions, occupations, and

## MY FAMILY TREE



social roles within their communities. The Heuring surname, for example, though relatively rare in Germany, is believed to have origins in the regions of Bavaria and the Rhineland—two areas with rich histories and distinct cultural identities within Germany.

The name itself is thought to be derived from the Middle High German word *\*huere\**, which means “herdsman” or “shepherd.” This term indicates a likely ancestral connection to agricultural or pastoral life, pointing to a family history rooted in the care and management of livestock. In centuries past, herding was an essential role in rural communities, especially in regions like Bavaria, where grazing animals played a central part in both the economy and daily life. In this sense, the Heuring family name may have carried with it not just a lineage, but an entire way of life tied to farming and the rural economy.

Similarly, the Becker name—common in Germany—has its own historical significance, often associated with the occupation of a baker or someone who worked with grain, bread, and food production, further underscoring how surnames often reflect professions or trades vital to the survival of the community. It derives from the Middle High German word “becker” or the Old High German “backo,” both meaning “baker,” suggesting that my ancestors in this lineage were likely bakers. In some cases, “Becker” may have referred to individuals associated with millstones or communal bake houses. The Becker name, like Heuring, is a reminder that our ancestors’ roles, however humble they may seem today, were central to the functioning and survival of their societies.

While we often think of family names as simply markers of heritage, they also connect us to a deeper history—a history of work, survival, and place—that shaped the identities of our forebears and, in turn, our own. Given this history, it is hardly surprising that my Heuring and Becker ancestors, after settling in Minnesota, quickly became farmers. Farming was in their blood—a continuation of the agricultural roots that had defined their families for generations.

While my DNA-derived roots stretch back thousands of years long before Germany became a unified country, my more recent ancestors settled in three specific German regions: Bavaria, Baden, and Rhineland as well as the Alsace region in France, which actually shares a border with Baden separated by the Rhine River. The migration of my ancestors to these regions was part of a broader historical movement, influenced by various factors, including economic opportunities, political unrest, and social changes.

My personal narrative begins with ten of my great-great-grandparents and four of my great-grandparents, who, over a 40 year period between 1844 and 1885, embarked on a transatlantic journey in search of a fresh start. Drawn by the promise of land and opportunity under the Homestead Act of 1862, they settled in Minnesota, primarily Otsego, Frankfort, and Hassan Townships. Escaping economic hardship and seeking a better life, these ancestors were part of a larger 19th-century migration. This wave of transatlantic migration marks the beginning of my contemporary family tree which spans five generations. Referring to the earlier family tree chart, the light blue boxes represent ancestors who did not immigrate to the U.S., the dark blue boxes are those who did immigrate, and the red boxes are those born in the U.S.

The Heuring side of my family migrated in the 1840s and 1860s, seeking new opportunities in the United States, while the Becker side, with one notable exception—the Barthel family, who arrived in 1856—emigrated later, primarily during the 1880s. The following chart reveals the specific regions of Germany and France that these ancestors left behind, offering a glimpse into the places that shaped their early lives. The accompanying map shows that the three German provinces they originated from are in the southern part of the country. These migration patterns reflect a mix of economic, social, and political factors that motivated these families to leave their homelands in search of better opportunities in America.

- █ **BAVARIA, GERMANY**  
Heuring, Schirber
- █ **BADEN, GERMANY**  
Becker, Lindenfelser, Dehmer,  
Mai, Stradtmueller, Reinforth
- █ **RHINELAND, GERMANY**  
Kolles, Barthel, Gilles, Michaelis,  
Adams
- █ **ALSACE, FRANCE**  
Duerr



My great-great-grandfather, Andreas Heuring, was among those who left Germany in search of new opportunities in America. In 1867, he immigrated from Bavaria, Germany to the United States, settling in Minnesota where he purchased an 80-acre farm in Otsego Township. He was accompanied on this journey by his family including his son and my great-grandfather, George David, who would later acquire the farm. George David had a new brick farmhouse built on that farm in the late 1880's; it still exists today. He was evidently a prominent resident in the area, as he served on local governing committees and was featured on a plaque commemorating a bridge across the Mississippi River in Elk River, highlighting his local political significance.

My grandfather, Alphonse Heuring, was born and grew up on that same family farm. He had 11 other siblings but sadly three passed away at a young age, two from scarlet fever when they were eight or nine and a third when he was only six months old, reflecting the harsh reality of life in those times. A year before marrying Veronica Dehmer, Alphonse purchased a farm near Albertville, Minnesota, on County Road 19 in November 1912, where they would raise their six children. It was on this farm that my father, Norman Heuring, grew up alongside his five siblings: two older sisters, Marie and Lucille; two older brothers, Guido and Leander; and a younger brother,

Owen. Farming was deeply rooted in the Heuring family, with all four of my father's older siblings eventually becoming farm owners and operators. Farming was truly in the blood of the Heuring clan—a tradition passed down through generations.

Alphonse's farm was purchased by Uncle Leander and his wife, Aunt Monica, where they raised their three sons: Gordy, Jerry, and Rick. I remember visiting the farm and going into the barn, where I came to know that Uncle Leander would wake up early every morning to milk the cows. During family gatherings, Leander and the other relatives with farms typically left in the evening to return to the farm for the same chore. I was always impressed by their dedication to this daily task, reflecting on how committed they must have been to the farm to carry out this responsibility year-round.

On the Becker side of my immediate family, great-grandfather Pius Becker arrived in Minnesota in 1883 and settled on a plot of land along the Crow River in Hassan Township, near his half-uncle, Henry Becker, where he purchased a farm and later a second farm nearby. His son, my grandfather Joe—who, for reasons I never quite understood, was called “Pa Becker”—was born and raised on that farm. While Pa Becker worked on the family farm, he also learned carpentry, likely picking up the skill at his uncle Kilian Becker's nearby homestead.

However, when Pa Becker married Cecelia Kolles and began having children, he faced a practical dilemma: the two family farms owned by his father, Pius, were set to be passed down to his younger brothers. As a result, Pa Becker and Cecelia needed to find a new place to live for their growing family. In 1924, they purchased a farm two miles north of Albertville on County Road 19, where two years later my mother, Florence Becker, was born and raised. This farm was a place I frequently visited during my childhood, where I had many happy, fun-filled memories of what it was like to live on a farm.

My mom grew up in a close-knit family on this farm, surrounded by her five older sisters—Melanie, Monica, Delvina, Caroline, and Tillie—and

two younger siblings, her brother Andy and her sister Zita. Andy would eventually acquire the family farm, continuing the Becker farming tradition for another generation. Monica and Caroline, too, married into farming families, further strengthening the family's deep ties to the land and the farming community that had been such a central part of their lives.

The intertwining of families in the area adds a fascinating layer to the story. Aunt Monica, one of my mother's older sisters, married my father's older brother, Uncle Leander, meaning I am doubly related to their children. Additionally, my maternal grandmother Cecelia, born a Kolles, was the older sister of Lawrence Kolles, who was married to my father's older sister, my aunt Lucille. These deep familial connections underscore how closely intertwined the families in the region were, with bonds of both blood and marriage shaping a shared history.

My predominantly German heritage on both sides of my family, along with the larger German farming community, undeniably shaped my values as I was growing up. As I reviewed the census data of my extended ancestors for the family tree chart, I was amazed to discover how many families in my community were actually related to me—some several times removed, yet still part of the same bloodline. While I had been told this when I was growing up, it became even more striking when I realized that I shared a great-great-grandparent connection—Margaretha Schirber—with one of my best friends from high school, Joe Scherber. The spelling of his last name was later slightly modified but we're definitely related. No wonder we got along so well!

Upon arriving in America, German immigrants often gravitated toward communities where they could preserve their language and cultural traditions. They established vibrant neighborhoods, built churches, and formed mutual aid societies that not only helped them adapt to their new surroundings but also created strong support networks. My hometown of St. Michael, incorporated in 1890 in Wright County, about 25 miles northwest of Minneapolis, is a prime example of such a community. Rich in

German heritage, St. Michael, named after the Roman Catholic Church at its center, was shaped by settlers like my ancestors, who brought with them their customs, language, and traditions. These included Catholic religious practices, lively German festivals, and a deep sense of community.

#### ST.MICHAEL

YEAR	POPULATION
1900	305
1910	401
1920	406
1930	385
1940	389
1950	487
1960	707
1970	1,023
1980	1,519
1990	5,411
2000	9,099
2010	16,399
2020	18,235
2023	21,034

The village of St. Michael has undergone transformations I never could have imagined as a child. The town sign back then proudly displayed a population of 808. Today, that number has skyrocketed to 21,034 residents as of 2023, and the small, quiet, close-knit community I knew has grown into something much larger and more bustling. As shown in the Wikipedia population chart displayed here, the town's growth remained relatively steady until I left in 1970 for the Air Force, underscoring my feeling of growing up in a "bubble", as reflected in the title of this book.

After I left, however, the population surged exponentially, reflecting the rapid changes that have reshaped St. Michael into a place that has changed much in size and appearance since my youth.

Despite many changes over the years, the historical essence of St. Michael, rooted in its German heritage, still endures. The grand Catholic church, inspired by its Bavarian predecessors with its neo-Gothic architectural design, majestic bell tower, and four clock faces, continues to reach skyward as it did when my ancestors gathered there for Sunday Mass. During a recent visit after a long absence, I stood at the front of that familiar church and felt the immense weight of generations who had passed through its heavy, towering doors—from my great-great-grandparents to my parents—each seeking peace, faith, and a sense of community within its sacred walls. I thought of myself and the countless times I had entered those same doors, peering at the high, sloping ceiling anchored by grand arches and gazing at the stunning stained-glass windows my ancestors had once admired. It served as a powerful reminder of the enduring connection between the past

and present, highlighting how deeply rooted my history is in this place.

As I strolled through the adjacent cemetery, I came across gravestones bearing not only Andreas Heuring and my name sake, George David Heuring, but also the names of other relatives and familiar figures from the community. I was struck by the realization that many of these individuals were my ancestors, now an integral part of me. Seeing those names on the gravestones filled me with a strong sense of the enduring legacy of those who came before me, their presence felt more deeply than ever.

Across from the front entrance of the church, originally built in 1892 and recently replaced by a newer facility just a few blocks away, stands the convent, constructed in the early 1950s. This was the home of the Notre Dame nuns, who taught me for eight years at the adjacent Catholic grade school. The nuns belonged to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, a global Roman Catholic order founded in Bavaria in 1833. The first three sisters arrived at St. Michael in 1876, and the continued presence of their religious order serves as a meaningful link to my German heritage, as they uphold their historic mission of education and spiritual guidance.

The convent now serves as the administration facility for the adjacent grade school where I spent eight formative years. The exterior of the one-story part of the building has changed little in the 66 years since I first attended. The school continues to serve the surrounding communities as a religious private school for students from PreK through Grade 8. All of my younger siblings also attended this school, as my parents were willing to pay tuition to ensure we received religious instruction alongside our academics.

Behind the church stands the Catholic high school I attended for two years, now repurposed as a community education center. This school drew students from St. Michael, neighboring towns, and the surrounding farms, offering the religious education so highly valued by the descendants of German Catholics. The construction of these parochial schools was a testament to the community's deep commitment to fostering a strong moral foundation.

It reflected their belief that education and faith were inseparable in shaping responsible and compassionate individuals. This dedication not only nurtured the spiritual growth of students but also strengthened community bonds, ensuring that the values of their heritage would be passed down through generations.

My childhood home, just a few minutes' walk from the schools and church, was a place that was always alive with the energy of my eight younger siblings rushing around. I remember many chilly, snowy mornings when I walked those two blocks to church and school, often accompanied by family members and neighborhood friends. Large families were the norm in our German-American community; the Kesslers, who built a house in the neighborhood behind us, had 15 children. It was rare to find a family with fewer than four kids. With so many big families nearby, it was easy to find neighbors that shared similar values and beliefs. In this environment, faith, family, and tradition were woven into the fabric of daily life. These places—the church, the schools, and my childhood neighborhood—were more than just landmarks; they laid the foundation of my early years and shaped my values from a young age.

Although St. Michael has since become more integrated into broader American society, the safe, close-knit environment of my upbringing has always stayed with me. Doors were never locked, neighbors watched out for one another, and kids rode their bikes around the community without a care in the world. There was always an implicit sense of connection and belonging. The community felt like an extension of family, where everyone knew one another, and where relationships were built on trust and mutual support. It was a place where life was unhurried, and where the focus was on simple joys—gathering for holidays and taking part in shared traditions.

I've traveled far and wide, lived in bustling cities and tropical villages, and experienced both financial hardship and affluence, but I remain that small-town boy at heart, forever anchored to memories of a place that always felt reassuringly protective. In a sense, it was a life in a bubble—one where

the world outside seemed distant and irrelevant. It was so easy to take for granted the simplicity and comfort of that bubble, where the sense of community, safety, and belonging was a constant, and the outside world felt like something to be observed from a distance.

During my youth, St. Michael was part of a thriving dairy cattle farming region. As I detailed previously, my immigrant ancestors played a role in this community, establishing farms that were a part of the local economy. These farms, often passed down through generations, are a significant part of my family legacy. I have lasting memories of family gatherings at my relatives' farms—playing in the barns, hiding in the cornfields, climbing silos, and even using an outhouse, since indoor plumbing wasn't yet available at one of the farm homes. One of my favorite summer activities was visiting Uncle Andy's farm, my mother's childhood home, just a few miles north of Albertville. There, I would help bale hay and ride their Shetland pony up and down the gravel road leading to the old, but later remodeled, farmhouse.

I was always fascinated by how my farmer uncles could predict the weather simply by observing the clouds and wind patterns. I remember a Heuring family gathering at an Albertville picnic area and baseball field when my Uncle Guido glanced up at a few clouds in the sky and confidently predicted a rainstorm, saying it would arrive within a few hours. Sure enough, later that afternoon, it poured. Without the modern weather forecasting we now take for granted, my farming ancestors likely passed down these weather prediction skills from one generation to the next.

I came to understand that farming is hard work, but the strong German work ethic I observed left a lasting impression on me, instilling a deep respect for farm life. Throughout my life, I've recognized that same work ethic in myself—always willing to put in the extra effort when needed and maintaining a commitment to early morning starts. As a 'city' boy who spent time on my uncles' farms, these experiences not only shaped my childhood but also deepened my appreciation for the practical wisdom that comes from living close to the land. I've always felt a quiet sadness over the decline of the

family farm, lost to large agribusiness conglomerates, and the fading of the simple yet meaningful connection to the land that my ancestors experienced. Growing up with German roots in a small town surrounded by a farming community instilled in me a deep sense of pride and tradition. It also shaped my worldview in ways I only fully began to understand as I ventured beyond those familiar borders. My German heritage—steeped in values of discipline, a strong work ethic, and a deep appreciation for family—remained a constant presence in my life. However, this upbringing, in the quiet predictability of a small town, was in many ways like a bubble, a world unto itself that kept me insulated from the broader complexities of the world beyond.

While my small-town environment provided stability and a solid foundation, I soon realized that it also limited my exposure to the vast diversity and dynamic challenges that exist beyond its borders. It was a controlled world, where things were familiar and safe, but it was also narrow in scope. As I ventured into the U.S. and then lived in different parts of the world—Asia and the Middle East—my perspective began to shift.

Living and experiencing life in such diverse regions exposed me to new cultures, languages, and ways of thinking that were worlds apart from the small-town life I had known. These international experiences expanded my understanding of human nature, resilience, and the different ways in which people navigate life's complexities. Each place I lived, each culture I encountered, added a layer to my understanding of the world and to my personal growth.

As we conclude this exploration of my historical and childhood roots and how they have shaped who I am, I hope this background has sparked enough of your interest to inspire further exploration of my life's journey in the following chapters. Now, if you will, let's jump to 1952, when I first entered this world, marking the physical beginning of both my life and this story.



**St. Michael Catholic Church:** The Bavarian-style church is no longer used but still towers high above the town representing the German heritage of St. Michael. The clocks and bells still work.



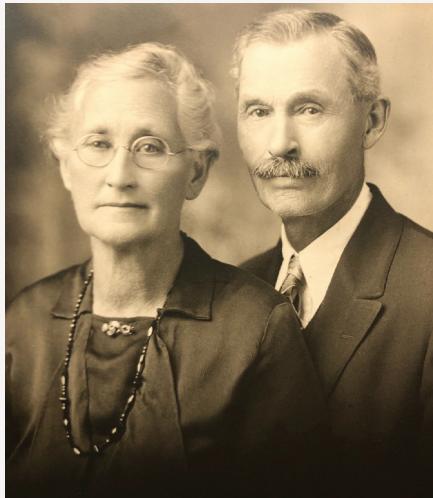
**Catholic Grade School:** The front exterior of the school looks the same as it did 66 years ago when I started there. The “new” edition is visible at the far end and along Central Avenue.



**My Future Neighborhood:** In 1950, my neighborhood was all woods when Dad worked for Barthel's Feed and Seed as a hammer mill operator. He would have been able to view the prospective lot where he built our house in 1955. In this photo, you can see the Catholic grade school (1), Harold Barthel's home (2), the lot where Dad built our house (3), Barthel's Feed and Seed where Dad worked (4), Alex and Clara Heuring's home (5), Eddy Lenz's farm (6), the Corner Bar (7), and the Dance Hall (8).



**18 2nd Street Home:** This photo of the front view of my home is rather drab. It was recently taken long after 2010 when we sold it. In our day, it looked cheerful with flower beds along the house and lots of activity.



**George David and Mary Heuring:** My paternal great-grandparents had 12 children; three died young: Anna and Valentine Andrew of scarlet fever and Valentine Joseph of the croup; two became nuns.



**George David Heuring Farm and Family:** Back l-r: Barsaba, Great-grandfather George David, Grandpa Alphonse, and Alex. Front: Clara, Great-grandmother Mary holding Louise, Davida, Helen, Henry, and John; photo taken 1903.



**Alphonse Heuring Family:** Back l-r: Leander, Owen, Guido, and Dad. Front: Marie, Grandma Veronica Grandpa Alphonse, Lucille; photo from grandparents' 35th wedding anniversary in 1948.



**Alphonse Heuring Farm:** Farm where Dad grew up; the barn was built in 1937 and burned down in 1940; Dad once told me he accidentally did it. The farm was later purchased by Uncle Leander and Aunt Monica. We'd get our kittens from this farm.



**Pius and Franziska Becker Family:** Back l-r: Philomene, Mathilda, Joseph (Pa Becker), Theresa , and Alois; Front: Margaret, Great-grandfather Pius, Henry (standing), Thomas (kneeling), Great-grandmother Franziska holding Clara, William; photo taken circa 1907.



**Joe (Pa) Becker Family:** Back l-r: Monica, Delvina, Caroline, Pa Becker, Mom, Tillie, and Melania. Front: Andy and Zita; photo taken circa 1938 at one side of the farmhouse.



**Pa Becker:** Dapper-looking Pa Becker in his later years posing on the steps of St. Francis Convent in Little Falls where his daughter Delvina (Mother Yvonne) was the head; wearing glasses with the smoked lens after losing his left eye in a farming accident.



**Joe (Pa) Becker Farm:** Farm where Mom was born and raised. I used to ride Uncle Andy's Shetland pony up and down that long driveway.

