**THE CASE OF THE CROOKED CORONER**

**My maternal grandfather was born somewhere near Odessa, Russia, around 1880. In those days, the hatred of Jews was common place. Nicholas II and his Empress, Alexandra shared this disdain and through laws and overt anti-Semitism, made it extremely difficult for Jews living under their rule.**

**When my grandfather reached the age of conscription, he knew that for a Jew to be in the Army was almost a certain death sentence.  So, in order to avoid the draft, he cut off most of one ear. Unfortunately for him, but fortunately for me, that didn’t work, so he decided to come to America.**

**While he was here, back in Odessa, his mother took in a girl named Esther, who had run away from home. The story was that Esther and my great grandmother were quite the revolutionaries and were actively working to overthrow the Tsar.**

**Meanwhile, hearing his mother was in trouble because of her revolutionary activities, my grandfather traveled back to Russia to help. Well, you guessed it. My grandfather then met Esther and two sons, Joe and Mike, were born.**

**Realizing that there was no future in being a Jewish revolutionary in Russia and his sons would probably only inherit a dead father, my grandfather took off for America once again. This time his route took him to a rather large German border town where he had heard, there was a coroner who might help him.**

**Actually, the coroner was running sort of an underground railroad for all the Jews coming through. For a price of gold or jewelry, the coroner would house and feed them until someone in his town croaked. Then he would sell the Jew the papers and therefore the identity of the corpse. So, my grandfather then became Hyman Zissen, which wasn’t his name at all.**

**We, the descendants of Hyman and Esther Zissen, never knew their real name. Once they came to America they didn’t want to talk about Russia or the life they had led there. Only this story survived and also how my grandmother and their sons, Joe and Mike got here.  But that’s another story.**

**Suzanne Schuster**