

Along the

Galician Grapevine

Fall 2002

An informal annual newsletter to some 750 dispersed descendants of the 1880's emigrations from the Austrian crownland of Galicia (or Kleinpolen in the German) to North America. Its purpose is to foster the communication, preservation and knowledge of our collective past for present and future generations.

Do We Have A Lift-Off? -- Yes!

Editor's Note: Ellsworth 'Elzie' Gerrels (8-14, rj 6.253512) is the son of Hilda (Rupp) (8-14, rj 5.25351) and the late Martin Gerrels. Elzie and wife Esther live in the foothills of the Sierras at 16979 Big Falls Trail, Sonora, CA 95370. Elzie states: "I use the term Rocketscientist loosely. There is no degree as such, but with 38 years on the forefront of some of our nation's major space endeavors, I have been called, for lack of a better description, a 'Rocketscientist.'"

Little did she know that when she delivered her babies on July 3, 1934, there would be two - a boy and a girl. My mother Hilda, daughter of Jacob and Emilie (Schweitzer) Rupp (8-14, rj 4.2535), and my father, the late Martin Gerrels, only expected one. My sister Elwanda and I were a handful! Mom and dad strictly and faithfully reared us in Pillager, MN, a very small community in north central Minnesota. Our lives revolved around church, school and hard work. Dad built our home and a small Standard Oil station in the middle of the Great Depression. I learned to chop wood and wait on cars at a very early age. . . Hard work, a solid faith in God, a love for learning and several minister and teacher mentors were major influences on my life.

I always had an interest in automobiles. I liked to draw pictures of

cars that were designed and built by my imaginary company, the Ellsworth Motor Car Company. I soon learned of the Fisher Body Craftsmen's Guild, sponsored by General Motors, offering money, gifts and college scholarships of winning futuristic automobile models. I entered the contest at age 14 and 15 and designed/styled two model cars. I didn't win a national award, but was awarded an honorable mention. Then and there, I wanted to be an automotive engineer/stylist.

Studies came easy to him, and he never needed to do homework. Valedictorian of his high school class of twenty-six graduates, disregarding that in the early 50s, most schools didn't offer the advanced math that he needed. After two years at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN, he transferred to the University of Minnesota where, in 1957, he graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering with an option in Nuclear Engineering.

Soon after graduation, Elzie joined G.E.'s engineering training program in California where he worked in terrestrial nuclear power development, as well as in support of our nation's hydrogen bomb project. With the nation's space program in its infancy, he was offered a position as a systems engineer on the development of the Atlas and Thor missile systems.

In 1963, Elzie and Esther (Benson) were married. At about the same time, Elzie was offered a position on the ground floor of project

Apollo, so it was off to Florida for the newlyweds. The couple then moved to Philadelphia where Elzie had the opportunity to work with Dr. Wernher von Braun on a project to put 12 men on Mars by 1985. It was here, in Philly, not on Mars, that their only child Scott was born in 1971. By 1973 the Mars mission had been terminated and Elzie brought his family back to California where he worked as a consultant to NASA on our Strategic Defense Initiative, better known as 'Star Wars.'

Elzie retired after 38 years of working with our nation's space program, but by no means slowed down. Personally coming to the realization that there has to be a 'master designer' of the Earth, the solar system, and the universe, he now travels the world lecturing to schools, colleges and universities giving talks entitled "God and Space."

Elzie and Esther were promoted to doting grandparent status with the arrival of Scott and Carolyn (Akker's) first child, Patton Bradley, on June 3, 2002. Scott and Carolyn were married on October 3, 1993, and live in San Jose, CA.

The Gerrels' are thoroughly enjoying their retirement. Elzie has been oil painting for many years, and Esther works in water colors. Elzie enjoys golfing but doesn't brag about his game. A major part of their lives is centered around the church they attend and its opportunities for lay ministry.

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To Readers: GG endeavors to present a few interesting slices of life, past and present, plus relevant statistical data. Elements which have formed, and continue to form our collective heritage bequeathed us by our Galician forbears must be recalled to each succeeding generation. To this effort, in part, is this newsletter dedicated. Many thanks to contributors of copy and funding. Your input is appreciated.