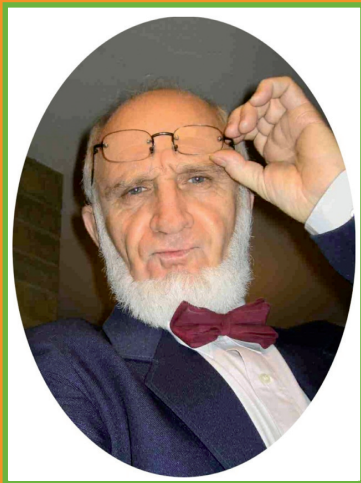


## Mgr inż. Grzegorz Mendyka

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Grzegorz Kazimierz Mendyka was born in 1944 in Żychlew (the Wielkopolska region of Poland). A 1962 graduate of Liceum im. Adama Asnyka w Kaliszu (Adam Asnyk high school in Kalisz), in 1955–1961 a student in a cello and piano class of Szkoła Muzyczna w Kaliszu (music school in Kalisz), professionally a chemist, with engineering and Master's degrees of Wrocław University of Technology, a long-term employee of Zakłady Elektroniczne ELWRO (ELWRO electronic works) and Instytut Komputerowych Systemów Automatyki i Pomiarów we Wrocławiu (computer automatic systems and measurements institute in Wrocław). The passion for chronicles and genealogy G. Mendyka inherited from his father. Chairman of the Silesian Genealogical Society in Wrocław. Author of articles on genealogy in the "Asnykowiec" periodic (14/2004, 15/2005).

## Genealogy as a seniors' hobby

**Summary:** Genealogy and writing chronicles are presented as possible seniors' hobbies aimed at strengthening the intergenerational bond, improving and re-establishing family relationships, being open to the world and providing a chance to leave a permanent trace in the form of written works, family trees and chronicles.

**Key words:** Genealogy, family tree, chronicles, seniors.

For many years I have been promoting genealogy as an impulse to become interested in one's own family history, especially among the seniors. It is natural for seniors to be the ones possessed of the greatest knowledge of family and ancestors. They are predestined to make the youth (the descendants) realize their family and

region identity. Through conducting their own genealogical research within their families they have a chance to improve, or in some cases even re-establish family relationships and intergenerational bonds, and to pass the knowledge of the history of ancestors and the region of ancestry to relatives and descendants.

Finding one's identity is valuable because it improves interpersonal relationships, it broadens one's knowledge and it is deeply patriotic in its nature.

One of the most spectacular actions aimed at the promotion of genealogy is the multimedia presentation entitled "Genealogical peregrinations with the surname" (alternative title/ subtitle – "Everyone can become a genealogist of their own family"). The interactive lecture-presentation is an introduction to the basics of genealogy and of how to start looking for one's own ancestors, family trees, etymology of surnames and their distribution in Poland and in the world and the opportunities for genealogical research on the internet. During the presentation the participants have an opportunity to look their own surname up in the *Słownik nazwisk współcześnie w Polsce używanych*<sup>1)</sup> (Dictionary of contemporary Polish surnames), consisting of 10 volumes, and written by professor Kazimierz Rymut. The dictionary contains over 300,000 surnames appearing in Poland since 1990 (data based on PESEL social security numbers). One has a chance to learn not only of the number of the people with his surname in each of the voivodships (and in all of Poland) but also of the numerous versions of the name.

Further in the presentation one is introduced to the opportunities to gain access to current data regarding the distribution of the surname (in 2002 and presently), which allows for the evaluation of the number of people who bear it (fig. 1).

Such observations encourage reflection on the mechanisms of the development of the community of those bearing one's own surname; i.e. one's distant relatives, as well the close ones. Presenting the opportunity to find one's own surname in different countries around the world is a source of inspiration to look for a chance to meet these people from abroad with the same surname. And generally, it triggers an interest in the internet as means of learning more about the world. It presents the practical advantages of sufficient computer and internet skills – the ones formerly acquired as well as new ones being taught as part of the @ktywny Senior project.

Along with taking up a wonderful creative hobby seniors are provided with an opportunity and a chance to establish relationships with younger generations and making contacts with their family members dispersed all over the world. Finding

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<sup>1)</sup> K. Rymut, *Słownik nazwisk współcześnie w Polsce używanych*, Vol. 1-10, Kraków 1994.

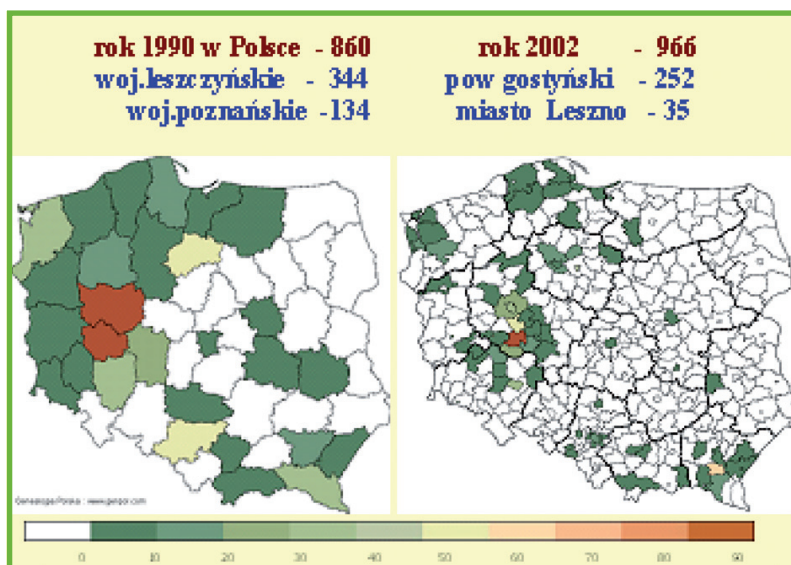


Fig. 1. The distribution of the surname Mendyka in Poland in 1990 and in 2002

Source: The author's study<sup>2)</sup>.

the ancestors of contemporary Americans with Polish roots in passenger records<sup>3)</sup> of the old economic immigration allows one to come into contact with descendants of family members. The <http://familysearch.org><sup>4)</sup> website containing a database of birth certificates of the Mormon population might also be useful.

The genealogical "game" presented to seniors gives them a chance to leave a permanent trace in remembrance to their descendants, a family heritage in the form of written genealogical works and chronicles.

Let one of the numerous chronicles written by my father – *Księgę V Rodziny Ziemińskich z Krobi 1867–1967*<sup>5)</sup> (Chronicle V of the Ziemiński family from Krobia 1867–1967) – serve as an example. A quotation from *Księgi I – Węzeł krwi*<sup>6)</sup> (Chronicle I – Bonds of Blood) follows:

<sup>2)</sup> Elaborated on the basis of: *Serwis heraldyczny Ośrodka Dokumentacji Wychodźstwa Polskiego w Pułtusk*, <http://www.herby.com.pl>, dostęp: 27.10.2010, K. Rymut (ed.), *SŁOWNIK NAZWISK używanych w Polsce na początku XXI wieku*, CD version GenPolCD001, Kraków – Warsaw 2003–2005, as well as with the use of the scripts tools from T. Nitsch's *Genpol* website, <http://www.genpol.com>, retrieved: 27.10.2010, the maps: <http://www.genpol.com/module-Mapa.htm>, retrieved: 27.10.2010.

<sup>3)</sup> Passenger records of immigrants arriving at the Ellis Island port in New York City: <http://ellisland.org>, retrieved: 27.10.2010.

<sup>4)</sup> Surname search in the Mormon population birth certificates database: <http://familysearch.org>, retrieved: 27.10.2010.

<sup>5)</sup> W. Mendyka, *Księga V Rodziny Ziemińskich z Krobi 1867–1967*, (unpublished).

"I wish to preserve the events of the path of my life for my descendants. I leave no inheritance, so let at least these brief episodes preserved in the present chronicles be a trace of our ancestors... This work that I have undertaken in 1925 is an attempt to save these facts and events from oblivion...

You – my children and grandchildren – should take part in gathering documents...

Be persistent, so that the work of my life is not lost".

A newsletter written and printed by the family is an illustration of the genealogical and chronicle activity and integration of the family.



The family newsletter (bulletin) may be edited together with other family members and distributed among the more or less interested; thanks to reading the paper with the current news related to their relatives those not very interested may increase their interest in the issues connected with the family, in the broad sense of the word.

Such a newsletter may turn out to be the only means of contact with relatives (who, unfortunately, often appear to be quite *distant...*) for seniors. Especially due to the fact that in the contemporary times of a typically juvenile (!) tendency to shorten all conversation, letters and contacts with the use of SMS language the senior generation might even lose the ability to agree and to *communicate* with the young.

The notion of genealogical research often leads to organizing family meetings and get-togethers, where the young are surprised to learn from the seniors that a computer can be used not only for games, but to establish contacts with relatives, as well. Family meetings provide the best opportunity to bridge generation gaps and foster family and social relationships. Organizers of the meetings (the most vigorous ones) have a chance to encourage all generations of the immediate and distant family to join in; however, it is essential that seniors participate, because their experience can be a source of many great ideas, and the fact that they tend to have a lot of free time allows them to realize the meeting plans (and more). Apart from the obvious advantages of meeting the well-known relatives again it is also an opportunity to get to know the young, the new spouses of those who remarried, etc.

Family symbols such as flags, coats of arms (sometimes designed and made especially for the meeting), badges and other interesting gadgets can be prepared for the meeting. Below there is an example of a coat of arms designed and made for the 1st Family Meeting in 1978.

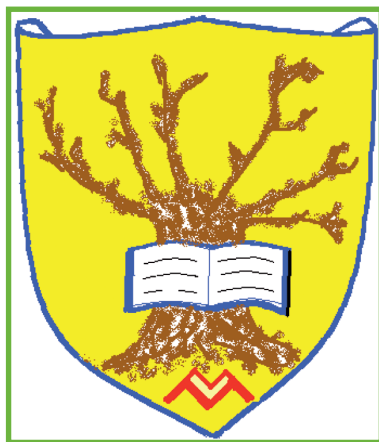


Fig. 3. DZINEK coat of arms

Source: The author's study.

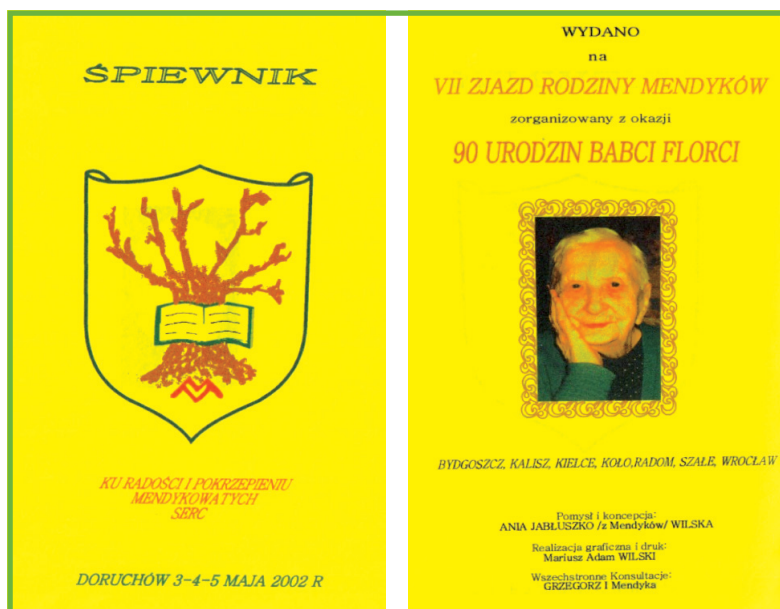


Fig. 4. Example of a family songbook (written e.g. specially for a meeting)<sup>8)</sup>

Source: The author's study.

The *Genealogical Questionnaire* (see: annex) written during the meeting plays an important role; it is also great fun. The questionnaire is a test of knowledge of the relations between the grandparents, children, grandchildren, etc. Answering the questionnaire together by e.g. a granddaughter and her parents and grandparents allows seniors to pass their genealogical knowledge on to the following generations in an enjoyable way and to have fun and appreciate being together and deepening the relationships. The same questionnaire answered again a few years later, during another meeting, allows one to observe the development of the family members' genealogical knowledge.

The meetings can – and definitely should – provide an opportunity to present the results of the genealogical research conducted by the family members. First of all, the family trees printed in the form of large posters or banners can be presented. Preparing such family trees, seeking information as well as conducting research related to the ancestors are wonderful pursuits making seniors active during long winter evenings (and the rest of the year, too).

To sum up I wish to present a letter written by one of the participants of the workshops – who herself does not belong to the senior age group, but she has established relationships with them – with the attached *postscript to life*:

<sup>8)</sup> *Śpiewnik* prepared by the Mendyk family for the 7th Meeting in Doruchów (unpublished), Doruchów 2002.

"I pride myself on my work with the family tree – which is going very well – with the All Saints' Day being an opportunity to visit cemeteries with note book in hand and put down the dates of birth and death of my ancestors. The entire family thought I was crazy, but with time they 'got crazy' themselves. When we came back home everyone, recalling family memories and interrupting each other, made me include 181 people of 5 generations in the tree. Furthermore, I visited the aunt that I didn't like, whom I mentioned before, and who turned out not so bad and provided me with valuable information regarding my great-great-grandparents".

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Annex: Genealogical questionnaire devised by the author of the present article

LITTLE GENEALOGICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

\_\_\_\_\_ // For genealogical use ONLY! \\\\_\_\_\_\_

Please write strongly and clearly – CARBON PAPER!! – what you know or ask Mum, Dad or anyone nearby who can help!

- 1. My name I, II, III: \_\_\_\_\_,  
pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_  
/> Now you can ask mum – information important for the horoscope  
Born:  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ exact time \_\_\_\_\_ place \_\_\_\_\_  
I'm a member of generation I II III IV – circle the correct one – to make it simple: Florcia – generation I
- 2. Below write ..... Name(s) ..... I, II, III? ...../ date of birth ...../ place of birth  
– Father \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
– Mother \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
maiden name: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. My grantparents: ..... name – surname ..... / date of brith /place of brith  
– Grandfather from the father's side \_\_\_\_\_  
– Grandmother from the father's side \_\_\_\_\_  
maiden name: \_\_\_\_\_  
– Grandfather from the mother's side \_\_\_\_\_  
– Grandmother from the mother's side \_\_\_\_\_  
maiden name: \_\_\_\_\_  
– Great-grandparents from the father's side: \_\_\_\_\_  
– Great-grandparents from the mother's side: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. My husband /wife: /names: \_\_\_\_\_  
! / \_\_\_\_\_  
– His/her parents \_\_\_\_\_  
– His/her grandparents \_\_\_\_\_  
– His/her great-grandparents \_\_\_\_\_



5. My children and grandchildren – names, dates of birth, exact time of birth, places of birth, other: baptism, wedding, etc.

1) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....  
 2) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....  
 3) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....  
 4) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....  
 5) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....  
 6) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....  
 7) ..... / ..... / ..... / .....

6. My parents' siblings: names, surnames, dates of birth, places of birth, etc.

– ..... - ..... -

Spouse ..... -

– ..... - ..... -

..... -

– ..... - ..... -

..... -

– ..... - ..... -

..... -

– ..... - ..... -

..... -

– ..... - ..... -

..... -

7. My professional CAREER and education / dates! /

–

Preschool ..... events .....

–

Schools .....

Places of work, jobs, promotions, retirement

.....

.....

.....

8. My family life:

– Baptism, godparents

..... / .....

– First Communion

.....

– Engagement .....

I x .....

– Wedding ..... in ..... at (exact time) ..... best men, maids of honour

.....

9. My important events  
since the last meeting – Karlów 1991  
/ .....  
– “” – in the II Millennium – to 31.12.2000 .....  
– “” – in the III Millennium – since 01.01.2001 .....  
– It is my resolution to: “start” – underline, “stop” – cross out  
Smoking, drinking, doing good deeds, sinning, reading, not reading, learning  
foreign languages, lying, not lying, other: .....  
– Lately I’ve managed to change: underline, cross out, put down  
/ .....  
My job, my image, my car, hobbies, my flat, political ideas.....  
I’ve lost<.....
10. At last I’ll write what I think of the family newsletter and the fun of it
11. In genealogy, seeking out family roots and relations – underline, cross out,  
put down:  
a – Continue – how  
...../ .....  
b – Let the matter rest .....  
c – Leave people alone .....  
d – Other ideas  
.....  
e – In my opinion  
.....
12. Write some more???
- .....  
/You may use the other (blank) page/

If you wish to pass you SIGNATURE to future generations, put it down HERE: