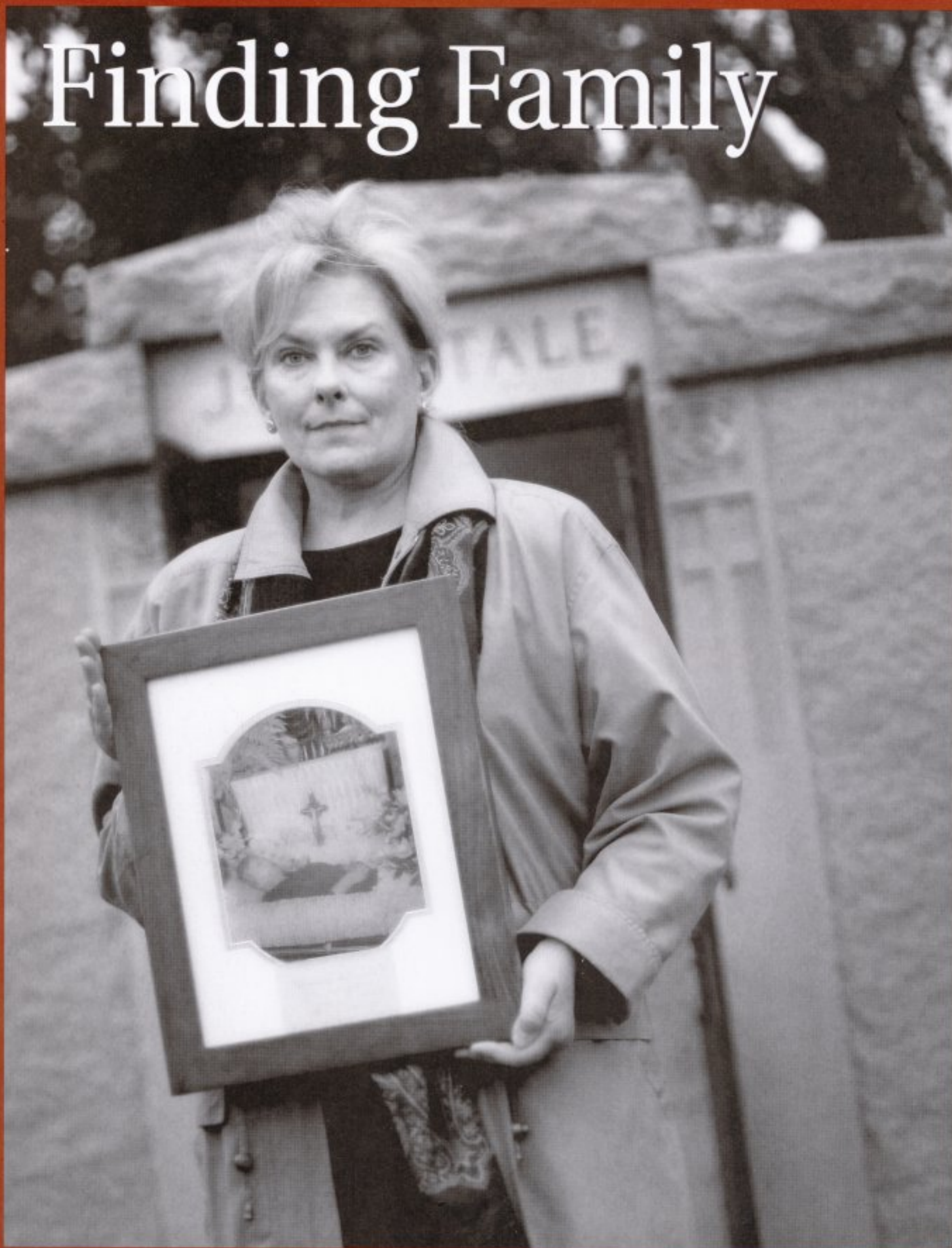


# Finding Family



*Ceil Wendt Jensen holds a post-mortem photo of John DiNatale, her cousin's grandfather, who died in 1966 and is buried in the mausoleum behind her at Detroit's Mt. Olivet Cemetery. DiNatale had the mausoleum built for the burial of his wife, Margharita, in 1942. Jensen, a genealogist, used the photo in a book about Detroit cemeteries. "My goal is to have Polish genealogy as easy to pursue as English and German," says Jensen. She discovered through research that some of her ancestors are buried at Mt. Olivet without tombstones. "I want to encourage those who have Eastern European ancestors to pursue their heritage," she says.*

# Rochester Hills genealogist uncovers ancestral mysteries and honors loved ones never known

By Lynne Meredith Schreiber Photo by Daniel Lippitt

Ceil Wendt Jensen grew up in Detroit within blocks of grandparents and cousins, with at least 30 people attending family get-togethers. But for being surrounded by so much family, the Rochester Hills resident – who's since become a genealogist – says she knew very little about them.

When she was younger, Jensen interviewed her father, Frank J. Wendt, for a school project on family history. She says he pulled out a brown canvas pouch and showed her three small pieces of paper with German writing: birth certificates for her grandfather, great-uncle and great-grandfather, who all immigrated to America.

Jensen was fascinated. But when her father died a few months later, "his death cloaked our family history in a mystique that lingers today," she says. "I was determined to find out where the documents came from."

Although Jensen began interviewing relatives in the 1970s, she did not make genealogy her full-time endeavor until retiring from a 30-year teaching career at Rochester Adams High School in 2002. Now, Jensen devotes her days to tracing not only her own but other people's roots, and writing books about her findings.

She's authored *Detroit's Polonia*, published by Arcadia Publishing, and *Detroit's Mount Elliott Cemetery* and *Detroit's Mount Olivet Cemetery*, both released in November. All are available at local bookstores. The latter tomes include details about Catholic cemeteries where some of Jensen's

relatives are buried without tombstones. She'll use royalties to pay for headstones.

"There is a spiritual journey in the research," says Jensen. "When I [learned] that my grandparents lost half of their children in a few weeks to a cholera epidemic, I felt like I had just attended the funerals."

Another new Jensen book, *Sto Lat: A Modern Approach to Polish Genealogy*, was published by the Chicago-based Polish Genealogical Society of America and explains how to trace family roots through traditional and electronic methods. The book is available through the Web site [www.pgsa.org](http://www.pgsa.org). Peg Pasternak, who designed the book's cover, has also traced her roots, with Jensen's guidance.

"I wanted to know more about where I came from," says Pasternak, 37, an art teacher at Lahser High School in Bloomfield Township and former student of Jensen's. "These people worked hard to provide me with a better life; studying genealogy is a way of honoring [them]."

The two followed Pasternak's family to villages in Poland through ship manifests and World War I draft cards.

Says Pasternak, "Ceil is like an archaeologist who keeps digging up these crazy bones." ❖

## CEIL WENDT JENSEN'S TIPS FOR TRACING YOUR ROOTS

1. Start with what you know. Work your way back, generation by generation.
2. Check U.S. Census records, which are open from 1930-70.
3. Ask your oldest living relatives questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
4. Look through photographs with older relatives. Photos often trigger memories.
5. Ask for family Bibles, prayer books or funeral cards.
6. Search for death certificates, which often identify the parents of the deceased.

