



# Massachusetts Genealogical Council Newsletter

*APRIL 26, 2008*  
*THE ANNUAL MGC*  
*CONFERENCE*

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*A Publication of the Massachusetts Genealogical Council Established in 1980*

## **GENEALOGIST DISCLOSES** **HOLOCAUST HOAX!**

*UNDERScores NEED FOR OPEN RECORDS*

A heartwarming tale of a small Jewish girl trekking across Europe and living with wolves is a **hoax**. The author's confession follows a week of intense publicity in French and Belgian media, prompted by disclosure of documents unearthed by Waltham-based genealogical researcher Sharon Sergeant, a Massachusetts Genealogical Council board member.

Misha Defonseca of Dudley, whose book, *Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years*, has been translated into eighteen languages and is the basis for the new French movie, *Survivre avec les Loups (Surviving with the Wolves)*, confessed that she is not Jewish and that she spent the war safely in Brussels. This recent and well publicized case of fraud in the publishing world, in the courts and in the public arena underscores the need for **open records** for public inspection. Defonseca's homeland of Belgium closed vital records in 1955. Massachusetts open records provided clues to the fraud, providing a pathway to Belgian records that were public and then convincing Belgian officials to release other documents. The original 1997 United States book version tells the story of a young Jewish girl living

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## **ANNUAL MGC CONFERENCE AT** **BENTLEY COLLEGE APRIL 26**



***GET ON THE BUS AND COME ON DOWN ON***  
***SATURDAY, APRIL 26<sup>TH</sup> AT THE LA CAVA***  
***CENTER OF BENTLEY COLLEGE IN***  
***WALTHAM!***

Plan for a great day of lectures, camaraderie with your peers, shopping and just some fun,

Every year the Conference has a different theme and list of lecturers but there is always something interesting for everybody. It is a wonderful educational opportunity for a professional genealogist or just someone interested in genealogy to learn and be part of a true growth experience. Read over the insert in this Newsletter and send in your registration form. Space is limited.

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among wolves in war torn Europe, traversing Germany, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and the Ukraine. Along the way, she witnesses many documented events of the war. **It was all a hoax on the public.** Sharon Sergeant assembled a team to research the facts. They uncovered the documents that showed that Defonseca was baptized a Catholic in a Brussels church in September of 1937 and was enrolled in a Brussels elementary school in 1943-1944. Her parents did die during the war in Nazi camps.

Defonseca, although partially protected by the closed records in Europe, removed identifying details in the United States version in 1997 but publication was curtailed by a series of lawsuits. An ongoing legal saga of this work is expected.

*The damage from closed records is enormous and violates a public trust with the citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the general public. Sharon Sergeant will illustrate the value of the photo time line in the Defonseca case at the Massachusetts genealogical Council's Annual Seminar on April 26<sup>th</sup>. Maureen Taylor of Norwood, MA (photodetective.com) and Colleen Fitzpatrick of California (forensicgenealogy.info) were consulted in the creation of the photo time line.*

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#### **JAY CASHMAN BECOMES A SPONSOR OF THE MGC ANNUAL CONFERENCE/SEMINAR**

Jay Cashman of Jay Cashman, Inc., the owner of one of the largest marine construction companies in the world, this year has become a sponsor of the MGC Annual Conference. Mr. Cashman is an avid archivist of his own family records, and, along with being honored by many awards, also gives of his time and resources to causes benefiting historical and genealogical research.



### **FROM THE EDITOR**

It seems like the first edition of the MGC Newsletter that I was responsible for has hardly left the mailboxes when another one was due to the membership. This Newsletter has a very special purpose: to make our readers and anyone at all interested in the great opportunity that is available to them on April 26<sup>th</sup> at Bentley College, the **MGC ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR**. This year has brought the MGC to another level in its mission in helping genealogy come into the mainstream of the general public's thoughts and to protect and advocate open records. First of all we have our own Sharon Sergeant discovering the fraud perpetrated on the public by Misha Defonseca in her book, ***Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years***. Sharon discovered something that has international implications and also has now brought the truth to the public and helped protect the countless millions of true Holocaust victim's memories. This scandal has brought the issue of ***Open Records*** to the forefront and clearly shows how important it is to not only protect these records but to allow them to be open to the public for research. Barbara Mathews, the President of MGC, understood well the implications of the Defonseca case: "The ***international scope of this case underscores the need for open records available to the public for inspection. Without this right, researchers are not able to protect the public from frauds of this type.***"

The MGC Conference on April 26<sup>th</sup> will open the doors to the attendees on many issues and the speakers will be an educational experience not normally available to members and non-members alike. Please plan to attend and bring anyone you think may be interested. Some tickets are still available.

Arthur Roberts

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### **BOOK REVIEW *Taking History to Heart,* by James Green**

Published by University of Massachusetts Press

A great book for one to read who is seeking an introduction to the dynamic field of ***Public History***. This relatively new field is meant to show how the concept of Public Memory can be both a hindrance as well as an asset in looking at the past. Of course, the subject of the need for Open Records is a discussion that can ensue from reading this great book. Add it to your summer reading list. *Professor Green now teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Boston*