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Since 1979

It's All Relative for Highland Village Genealogist

By Steve Gamel, Contributing Writer

Dan Nelson has never been the type of guy to throw up his hands and quit when a trail appears to have run its course. So when a new client swore up and down that his ancestors were nothing more than regular people who led quiet, uninteresting lives, Dan took it as a challenge to find a few hidden branches on that family tree.

To his credit, the client was somewhat correct. Dan, a Certified Genealogist who has unearthed some fascinating stories in his day, found plenty of farmers and Midwesterners in his initial search. They were all salt-of-the-earth types who worked extremely hard and lived off the land until the day they died, but their stories were few and far between and certainly not that intriguing. That is until Dan started looking into one ancestor by

the name of Benjamin Smith.

"Here was a guy who was a Revolutionary War hero and patriot," Dan said. "He escaped three times from captivity and suffered immensely. He became a privateer, and when the war ended, he went home and farmed for 40 years. Along the way, he thought, 'Maybe people will want to hear about what I've done.' So he wrote down his story.

"[The client] told me, 'You won't find any neat stories. We were boring.' Now he has a fabulous story to share with family."

Online research into one's family history has become a booming business over the past decade, including the birth of websites such as 23andMe, MyHeritage,

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Dan Nelson spends his time shaking family trees. (Photo by Nick Allen Photography)

Ranch Owners Lead Vision for Future Development

By Mark Smith, Digital Editor

The owners of the 2,068-acre Furst Ranch in far west Flower Mound have a big dream for a future mixed-use community on their family ranch land.

Jack and Debra Furst bought their first 55 acres in 1991 in Bartonville. Over the years, they added additional acreage of adjoining property encompassing Hwy 377 and FM 1171 as they built their horse and cattle business at Furst Ranch. They donated the northernmost part of their land for the construction of Cross Timbers Church and Liberty Christian School.

The ranch served as a great place

for people to connect with nature. Boy Scouts of America and American Heritage Girls troops used the property for meeting and camping. Several television shows were filmed on the ranch including "Dallas" and "Walker, Texas Ranger." Some of the family's favorite times were horseback riding, fishing

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The vision for Furst Ranch is to protect the natural scenic views and environmental features in western Flower Mound, while providing an active lifestyle for the community. (Photo by Ken Vaughan Photography)

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Dancestors

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and Ancestry.com. But there are also plenty of people across the country who spend a great deal of time as independent genealogists. Dan is one of them.

A former executive who worked for 42 years in corporate America but grew up with a passion for history, ancestry, research, and plain old “figuring stuff out,” Dan retired in 2018 and took his business, Dancestors Genealogy in Highland Village, to the next level. The idea was that he could help everyday people who don’t have the time, patience, or know-how to make sense of all those disorganized and dusty boxes of family photos, stories, maps, and partially complete family histories. He could also work one-on-one with people who tried online sites and had just enough new information to whet their appetite for learning even more.

Dan and his wife Andrea track your ancestors across oceans and continents to fill in the missing gaps, then take all of that information and complement them with factual stories and narratives in an exquisite family legacy book that can be customized and shared as a gift for the holidays. They’ve completed roughly 50 books over the last several years.

“Genealogy isn’t something that people know a lot about or how it works,” Dan said. “We’ve had people who are adopted and don’t know anything about their family. We’ve had others who have stuff but want to put a pretty bow on it. There are people out there who will do some research for you, but we tend to go from soup to nuts. I do the research, and Andrea tries to make it as presentable as possible by creating something enjoyable and personable. There’s nothing more personal than knowing your story and where you came from. That really resonates with people.”

Needless to say, Dan has never met a client who hasn’t been bowled over with excitement when they learn about their heritage. According to his website, the average family history goes back 184 years, which means most of us can learn quite a bit about our family tree — including a few surprises. You just have to know where to look. That doesn’t automatically mean you’re a descendent of Thomas Jefferson or cousins eight times removed from Billy the Kid or Winston Churchill. But the odds are high that Dan can help you discover a past you never knew existed.

Imagine learning that you come from a long line of blacksmiths, carpenters, clockmakers, physicians, preachers, soldiers, or innkeepers. Your ancestors may appear to be ordinary people. Still, with a little digging, you could learn they had regular run-ins with hostile natives, have fought in and survived wars, or perse-

vered against an unforgiving frontier.

Every once in a while, Dan says he comes across more than he bargained for. For example, Andrea happens to be the descendent of a Salem Witch named Mary Towne Estey. But it doesn’t stop there. Estey’s sister is none other than Rebecca Nurse, who was accused of witchcraft and executed in New England during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. Most of us heard of Nurse’s story when we were in middle school, but likely figured it was a myth. Well, she’s actually Andrea’s aunt. And there’s plenty more where that came from. One client they had a few years ago is related to Patrick Henry, a founding father best known for his declaration, “Give me liberty, or give me death.” Another is, in fact, related to Henry Clay, and yet another is a descendent of one of the richest people in America in the 1600s, Augustine Warner.

Dan’s side of the family also has interesting stories. Growing up, he would listen to his grandparents and great uncles and aunts tell stories of the past. One was of his great great grandfather, who was in the Civil War and lost his eye in a battle just outside Vicksburg, Mississippi. He kept a diary during that time and also wrote letters home to family. Dan ultimately managed to possess this diary and put it all into a book for his family to cherish forever.

Dan inherited his love for genealogy from his mother, who began researching their family’s history after she retired in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, Dan picked up where his mom left off and was able to fill in more of the family tree through letter writing, phone calls, and visits to libraries, historical societies, and family members. Once the Internet was in full force, even more information became available.

“It’s not like I have some sort of special access to certain information that only genealogists have access to. The more common a name is, the more difficult the search, but it’s all about knowing how to search and tie things back to what you’re looking for,” Dan said. “Most genealogists are good with sharing, so I’ve been able to tap into work other people have done. There are also newspaper archives and tons of county and state archives that you can look into. We’ve honed our techniques over the years to find what we need to find.”

If you’re interested in learning more about your ancestry, visit dancestorsgenealogy.com.

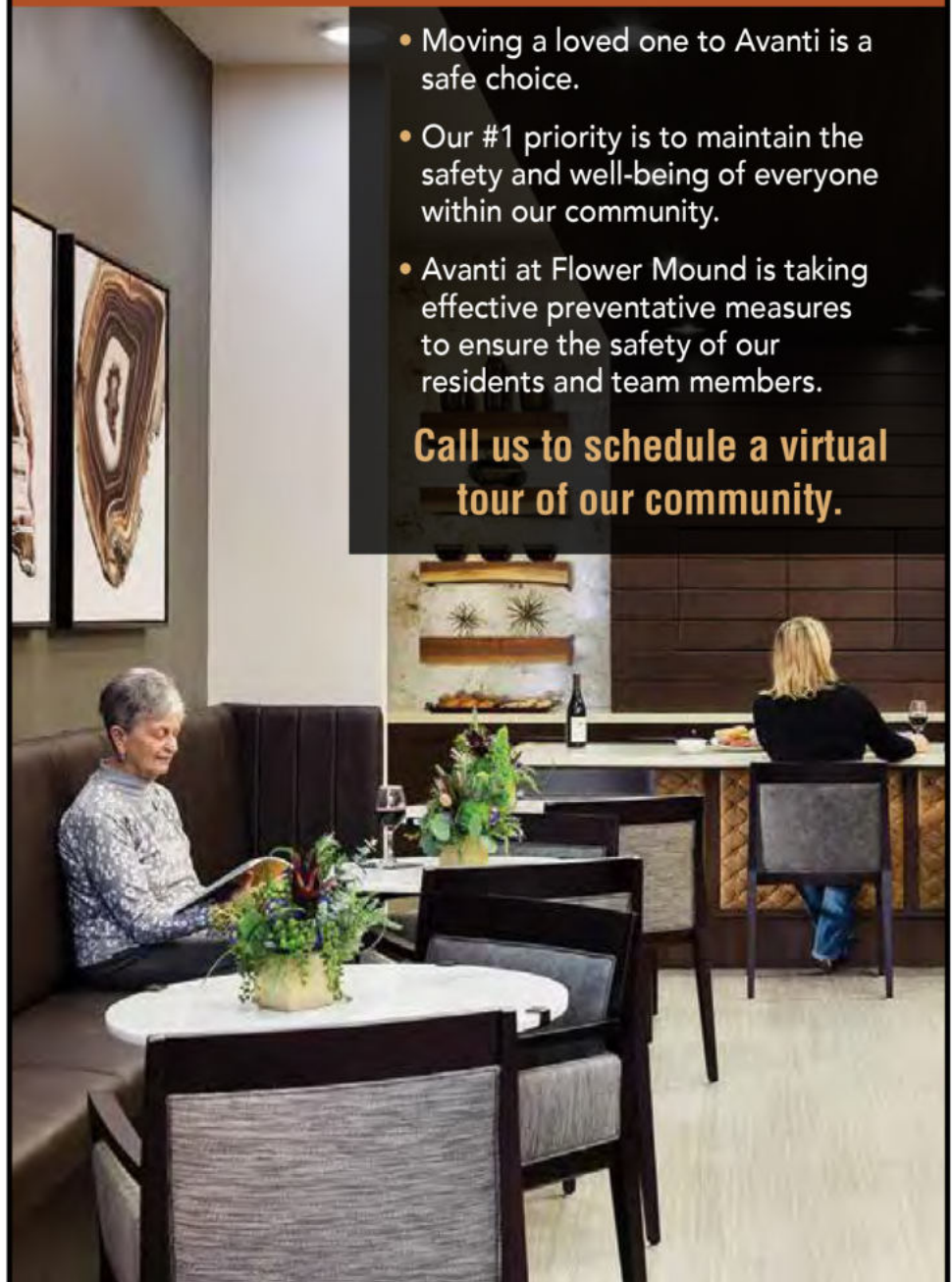
“This is a passion for me,” Dan said. “When you retire, you do need to keep your brain busy, and this helps fill that void for me. If people just want to have a conversation about it, they can always call me. There are some great stories out there.”



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