

## Professional Profiles



The Latin word *Dignitas* speaks to Julie Michutka. “In my genealogy research, I try to honor the person and his or her life, in recognition that each is unique and divinely-sparked and therefore worthy of being remembered.”

“I’m a language junkie,” Julie admits. She has both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in Latin, a minor in Spanish, has studied German, and taught herself Slovak. This wonderful ability with linguistics has served her well in the

genealogy field. Combine that talent with her love of interpreting old handwriting, and magic occurs. Julie can go places in her research that many of us cannot because her language skills enable her to interpret more deeply.

### Looking for the Common Person

Simplicity can set Julie off on a long research trip. “I love looking for the common person,” she says, and she has done a great deal of that type of searching. When only four years old, she studied the family tree in her baby book and wondered why there were blanks on her father’s side. Something as simple as empty spaces sent the adult Julie off on a journey that took her to Slovakia three times. The spaces on the tree are now filled in, but Julie never lacks for blanks to fill: she works on many projects and has plans for many more.

A popular teaching assistant in the Boston University (BU) Certificate in Genealogical Research program, Julie took the course herself the first time it was offered. Arriving with a wealth of genealogical skills, she soon became an important asset to the program and has been involved with it ever since, most recently working on course development.

The BU course has shown Julie that she still enjoys teaching, something she was unsure of after years away from teaching Latin in middle-school through college-level classes. “I like to lead students to that ‘ah-ha!’ moment,” Julie says. In the BU program, there are many of those, reminding Julie why she is there and why her work with the students is so important.

### Coincidences and Serious Research

Julie has been actively researching since her college years when she discovered

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that ancestors she had never heard of were buried in cemeteries not far from where she had grown up. Her life has been full of coincidences like that. When she was finally able to make her first trip to Slovakia, serendipity put her in touch with an elderly man in New York who had grown up in her grandparents' village. Asked whether he knew anyone with the two names she was researching, he said, "Oh yes, I know those families; my older brother married into one of them. I will call them up and tell them you are coming."

Of course, not all Julie's research has been as easy as that. She spent twenty years searching for her grandfather's half sister who disappeared in the late 1940s. This particular search showed how serious, tenacious, and resourceful Julie is. After twenty years of searching she discovered that the woman had ended up at a county poor farm and later in adult foster care as a ward of the state. When Julie found the death record she realized that the woman had lived into her nineties and was therefore alive for much of the time Julie was looking for her. Sad, yes. Frustrating, yes. But Julie was pleased to have solved the mystery and given a documented

and honorable life on paper to this elusive relative.

In addition to her work at Boston University, Julie is a volunteer at the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) in Boston where she recently finished writing an extensive finding aid for the Shattuck Collection. Among Lemuel Shattuck's papers is a wealth of information on colonial and Revolutionary War-era Concord, Massachusetts: wills, deeds, warnings out, and muster rolls among many other valuable and fascinating documents.

When Julie finished writing the finding guide for the collection, she celebrated by going to her favorite bookstore. There she came across *The Minutemen and Their World* by Robert A. Gross, first published in 1976. What she did not realize when she purchased it, but which she was delighted to find when she started reading, was that Gross's book drew heavily on Shattuck's collection at NEHGS. Julie takes great delight in these wonderful coincidences that seem to show up when one becomes very involved in genealogy and history.

### The Challenge of Slovak Research

Although much of her focus has been on Slovak research, Julie is currently concentrating on New England. She has been working on genealogy cases involving extensive New England families and supplements her research with reading history of the colonial period. She is drawn to New England as there are so many nearby repositories with original materials. Slovak research is more challenging because so little of it is online, the repositories are far away, and documentation of past peasant-life can be sparse. Julie is, of course, the woman who taught herself Slovak "and took myself to Slovakia for my final exam," so nothing seems to stand in her way. Whether she is researching in Slovakia or the United States, Julie is diligent and thorough,

exactly the kind of genealogist one hopes to work with.

Julie lives outside of Boston with her husband and their newly adopted black Labrador Retriever. She has two grown children. The family trees in their baby books are completely filled in and documented.

—Kyle Ingrid Johnson



In 1833, Elder John Parker, his sons Benjamin, Silas, and James, and a few other families from Crawford County, Illinois, arrived in their ox-drawn wagons near what is now Groesbeck, Texas, and settled along the Navasota River. There they built Fort Parker for protection against the Native Americans.

In May 1836, less than two months after the now-historic massacre at the Alamo, Indians approached Fort Parker waving a white flag of peace, requesting food and a place to camp. As Benjamin Parker brought them beef, he was surrounded and killed. The attackers rushed the fort, killed the defenders, and kidnapped two women and three children. The hostages were soon ransomed and returned, except for two: Cynthia Ann Parker, nine, and her brother John, six (both children of Silas Parker), remained with the Comanches. Cynthia Ann eventually married Comanche chief Pete Nocona, bearing three children, one of whom became Chief Quanah Parker, the "Last Chief of the Comanches."

Fast forward nearly two hundred years, and meet Karla Lang, a direct

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descendant of Elder John Parker, through his son Benjamin. Karla is a Texas gal, through and through. Born in Texas, she moved away for a spell during her childhood but returned after graduating from high school. Married with four children (one still at home) and six grandchildren, Karla is the librarian over Special Collections/Genealogy/Local History for the Palestine Public Library in Palestine, Texas. As the only librarian on staff with knowledge of genealogical research, she is often called upon to answer genealogical queries and research questions for library patrons.

### Community Involvement

A member of the East Texas Genealogical Society for more than seven years, Karla has also just completed a term as the very first Vice President of the Second Life Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogists, which meets online in the virtual world Second Life.

In “real” life, Karla’s main interests have gravitated toward cemetery research and preservation. Over the past seven years, she has been creating a database at her library of the cemeteries in Anderson County. Not only do she and her team of volunteers locate and photograph each cemetery, but they also find obituaries, research death certificates, and write short biographies for people buried in the county. So far they have done this for more than 20,000 people. This amazing database is currently available only at the Palestine Public Library, although they hope to find the funding to digitize the records and make the database available online as well. In regards to cemetery preservation, Karla takes every opportunity she can to remind folks that chemicals, especially bleach, should never be used to clean headstones.

### Family Influences

Karla’s father began researching his family’s roots before she was born. Through his influence, she began helping him in her teens. Personal computers and the Internet were not available back then,

so everything had to be done the “old-fashioned” way, by researching in libraries and courthouses and sending handwritten letters to ask questions.

Karla says her dad was, and still is, a great researcher. She also has a second cousin who does research and has taught her a lot over the years. “My whole family tree is full of teachers,” she says. “And I think that I enjoy ‘teaching’ people how to begin their genealogy just as much as working on my own family.”

Karla’s genealogical research was set aside for a while as she started a family, but when her oldest daughter was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of five, she turned to family history to try to find that genetic link to her daughter’s disease. She has not discovered any mention of type 1 diabetes in her ancestry so far, but has not given up yet either.

### Sharing Finds

Karla enjoys learning about the everyday lives of her ancestors—how

they lived, what they saw and did. She and her husband travel around their home state of Texas, often visiting places her ancestors lived, like the replica of the original First Baptist Church brought to Texas by the original Parker family. As a benefit to other researchers, Karla leaves short biographies and pedigree charts of her ancestry in the vertical files of the Texas libraries she visits. She includes her contact information and has met many new “cousins” this way.

As a special collections librarian, Karla can appreciate the value of shared genealogical research. “I’ve seen the way people here in this library react when locating a long-lost relative,” she explains. “Sometimes it becomes so personal to them that they break down in tears when they locate a long-lost obituary or will. It’s important to them, and that makes it important to me.”

—Tami Osmer Glatz

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