

## ARE YOU A HYPHENATED AMERICAN?

**I sometimes think of myself that way ... my kids don't.**

**by Vic Berecz**

My in-laws were born in Germany. They both came to the U.S. in the early 1920s as young adults to escape the economic turmoil that was post-World War I Germany. My wife has more first cousins in Germany than here. She knows what it's like as a young girl to have the FBI search your toy box because your mom was a wartime "enemy alien." Is she a German-American? Probably. Does that make her any less an American? I hope not!

All four of my grandparents were born in Hungary ... the historic Hungary of the pre-World War I era. They each came to America for different reasons a century ago. But once here, like my in-laws, they became a part of the typical American immigrant experience ... learn some English, get a job, work your butt off so your kids would have a better life. In the process, whether intentionally or not, they contributed to the growth and well-being of our nation.

Those of you that know me surely realize that I take my hobby of family history very seriously. For that reason more than any other, and recognizing that my ethnicity *creds* aren't as good as my wife's, I do sometimes think of myself as a Hungarian-American. Does that make me any less an American? I hope not!

Yes, my wife and I are proud Americans, though we might think of ourselves as hyphenated Americans from time-to-time. What about our kids? Into their adult lives, they knew and loved their German-born grandparents, and one of their Hungarian-born great-grandparents. But, I'm sure they'd never think of themselves as hyphenated – besides, how many ethnicities can be hyphenated together? And as for our grandchildren, their heritage ... in addition to Hungarian and German ... is Irish, Puerto Rican, English, Slovak, Scottish, Cuban, Croatian, and who knows what else. They're *purebred mutts*. That's good!

One of America's great strengths is the immigrant experience. Most immigrants, whether they came to these shores in the 1700s or much more recently, worked hard to become good, honorable Americans. After a couple of generations their history in the *old country* – memories both good or bad – is pretty much forgotten. Families use and later discard the ethnic hyphenation. That's how it was, that's how it is, that's how it will likely continue. My wife, daughter of immigrants, has twin granddaughters eligible for DAR membership. The *melting pot*, that's what makes America great!

People who disparage recent immigrants who refer to themselves as Hispanic-Americans, Indian-Americans, or whatever, either likewise disparage their own immigrant forbears ... or more likely are just exhibiting their biases.