



From Proskurov to Kigali: Understanding Generational Trauma

By Larry E. Thomas

March 27, 2025

The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

My name is Larry Thomas. I am a retired pastor. I live in Washington state in the U.S. I traveled to Rwanda for the first time in 2006. It was a life changing experience for me. A year later, my wife Ann and I decided to spend a month in Rwanda to discern whether God was calling us to serve there. A few weeks before flying to Rwanda in June of 2007, I visited my parents in California.

My mother, Janice Rosenfeld Thomas, who identified as Jewish/Christian had taken a class on genealogy and was sharing with me what she had learned about our family history. The focus of my mother's study was the February 1919 Proskurov, Ukraine Pogrom.

Because they were Jewish, my great grandfather, Pinchos Rosenfeld, together with other members of his family were targeted and massacred during the pogrom. (Estimates are that over 1,200 people were murdered and 600 people injured during the three days of the pogrom.) Members of my great grandfather's family who survived the pogrom immigrated to Palestine, Argentina, and the United States in the early 1920s.

None of our Jewish family members died in the Holocaust; they were long gone by the time Adolph Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in 1933 following a series of electoral victories by the Nazi Party.

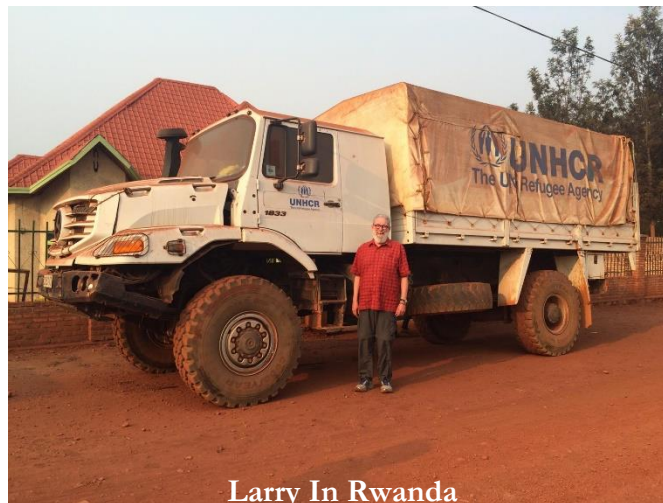
As I was visiting with my mother, I asked her if I could make copies of the handouts, she had about the Proskurov Pogrom. As I walked to the office to make copies, I wondered to myself: "Is there any connection between my newfound love of and passion for the people of Rwanda and our family history? Does the impact of the death of my great grandfather Pinchos and members of his family in a pogrom and

the deaths of 1,000,000 Rwandans in 100 days during the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi somehow touch my heart and soul in the deepest possible way? Is there some connection here?”

At the time, I knew nothing about generational, historical or multigenerational trauma. According to the U.S. Administration for Children and Families website, “Multigenerational trauma is experienced by a specific cultural, racial or ethnic group. It is related to major events that oppressed a particular group of people because of their status as oppressed, such as slavery, the Holocaust, forced migration, and the violent colonization of Native Americans.” I hasten to add this would include survivors and descendants of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi.

Recently I have found myself wondering about my grandfather, Josef Rosenfeld who was not in Ukraine during the 1919 pogrom. He never spoke of it and because I knew next to nothing about it until 2009, I never asked him. What was the impact on him? What was the impact on his brother, my great Uncle Meyer who survived the pogrom together with his wife and two children. What about my mother and her cousins? What about me and my sister? Are the challenges, anxieties, and struggles I have experienced in my 77 years of life in any way the result of multigenerational trauma? I don’t know, but I’m curious, and I want to learn more.

I cried every day I was in Rwanda in 2006. Most of the time I had no idea who or what I was crying *for*. Some days I cried tears of joy. Some days I cried tears of sorrow. I know I was grieving for Rwandans who lost their lives in the genocide and those who survived. Now I wonder, who else was I grieving for?



Larry In Rwanda