

*From the Texas Wendish Heritage Society Newsletter, Volume XXXVII, Number 2, April 2017*

*Students who applied for a 2016-2017 Texas Wendish Heritage Scholarship were asked to write an essay that cited an example of something from his or her knowledge of Wendish Culture, background, or family heritage that is unique to the Wends. Each applicant was asked to describe how he/she learned of it, and its history, practices and traditions.*

*Following is the essay written by Kacie A Krause, who is currently pursuing a degree of Master of Education Psychology in Cognition and Creativity through the online program at Texas A&M University.*

## Preserving a Culture

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### By Kacie A Krause

When I was seven, my school mascot confused me. I could not comprehend why our school had a boat on sports uniforms or why we were the “Voyagers.” Fortunately, I learned quickly about my heritage while attending St. Paul Lutheran Church and School in Serbin, Texas, home of the Texas Wends. I have vague memories of my elementary years learning about the Ben Nevis, the ship our ancestors boarded to reach Galveston over 150 years ago, and attending Wendish Fests, where I watched adults decorating eggs and making noodles. I began to see that our mascot was the “Voyager” because our ancestors made a voyage across an entire ocean to find opportunities to grow their families in faith and freedom. However, I did not truly recognize how distinct my heritage is as a Texas Wend until confirmation. My class spent several weeks studying our culture and visiting the Texas Wendish Heritage Museum. I finally understood what my ancestors risked to come to America. I decided that I loved the color blue because it was a favorite of the Wends and the color used to decorate their church. I determined that I would not wear black at my wedding to represent the “hardships” of marriage, as I learned at the museum that Wendish brides did. I realized the Wendish culture made up more of my life than I thought. Through learning at school and asking more questions at home, I discovered my heritage is special, particularly due to our values of faith, family, and food.

The more important aspect of my heritage is our focus on faith. At St. Paul, we learned about how a group of Lutheran Wends in Germany was oppressed for their faith, so they gathered in 1854 and chose to risk their lives and health to take a ship all the way to Galveston, Texas, where they established a new home and church for themselves, where they could worship God with impunity. I proudly share this about my ancestors when others ask about my background and faith. Our story is distinct from many Americans because our ancestors did not enter this country through Ellis Island; our family members suffered illness, death, even ship wreck, before arriving in Texas, our home. Because both sides of my bloodline trace to the Wends who came to Texas, I pray that others take pride in the suffering our ancestors endured to come to a place where they could practice their faith. At the core of the Wendish heritage is faith in a God who loves us, provides for us, and remains faithful, as the passengers on the Ben Nevis believed wholeheartedly. To understand my culture, I urge others to look at the lives of love

and faith that Wendish families live. Families emphasize the love of Jesus to children; that has been passed down and will continue for generations. When I visit Lutheran churches throughout Texas, I happily share that I grew up in Serbin, Texas, which leads to conversations about who they know or are related to from our congregation, or who their Wendish ancestors were. Meeting other people with similar backgrounds of faith and ancestry strengthens our earthly relationships, as God continues to prove Himself faithful through these encounters.

When I attended Concordia University Texas, a university that prides itself on its Wendish roots, I realized one of the best parts about being a Wendish family. As I met people from various backgrounds, I noticed the Wendish emphasis on family. Few friends drove home almost every weekend to spend time with family like I did, but I discovered few of them had similar bonds with their extended families. My elementary school friends experienced the same focus on family. I see it in our silly excuses to get together just to spend more time with family. I see it in family posts on Facebook and old photos of large families displayed at the museum. I see it in my father's connections with his six siblings, the laughter between my mother and her five brothers and sisters, the memories I have with my sixteen cousins. The Wends knew raising Christ-centered families was of utmost importance. Is it why I love my grandmother's story about how she and my grandfather almost could not marry because people thought they were related; my grandfather's ancestor had lost his parents as a child while travelling to Texas, and my grandma's ancestors fostered him. Family paired with unwavering faith, drives the Wendish people.

Though faith and family are important to my Wendish background, food might be my favorite. I am blessed with grandmothers who love making Wendish noodles and, because family is important, it is often a family affair. Every summer, my brother and I stayed with paternal grandparents weekly and helped them with "turning the crank" to split the noodle dough into tiny strands, then spreading them along the kitchen table to dry. When my mother's family has a big event coming up, we make our own noodles. My grandmother and my "tantes" always mixed the dough and complained about whether or not it was "too humid" to make the perfect noodles. My mother and aunts took charge of readying the ribbons of dough for noodling, and my cousins and I had the responsibility of cranking out strands of Wendish delicacies and sneaking in eating a few of the drying noodles. These are some of my favorite childhood memories, and I look forward to next year when we get to make noodles for my own wedding to share with friends of various backgrounds, including other Wends. Preserving our Wendish culture will happen most naturally through sharing my favorite food - Wendish noodles - with others, and I am blessed to take part in further preserving my culture through sharing my faith, telling our story, and raising my future family with the same values.