

How a Rose Found its Family

By Kathryn Mackenzie
Photos by Jeri Jennings and Liz Hall



The “Pulich Children” Rose

When Liz Hall and I went rose rustling last June (2008) in an old foothills cemetery, we never dreamed that one rose we propagated would connect a California family to a piece of their heritage.

Liz and I took cuttings of several roses in a churchyard cemetery in the gold country last summer and propagated several plants from the **“Pulich Children”** rose, which was named after the only headstone in the large plot.

The double headstone contains two names side by side, Michell Pulich, who died at age 4 months in 1883, and Jonnie Pulich, who died 1 ½ years of age in 1888. No other Pulich headstones were nearby, and the census records of the time do not include these babies or give any indication of who their parents were.



The Pulich Children

Children of J & H Pulich, d. 1883 & 1888

Robin Pulich, who lives in the Bay Area, grew up spending many weekends with her grandmother, Stella, who owned the City Nursery on Columbia Avenue in Stockton. Robin inherited her love of roses from her grandmother after many walks in the rose garden that her grandfather, Nick Pulich, as landscaper, had planted in Stockton’s Victory Park. About a week before the Open Garden at the Sacramento Old City Cemetery, Robin was perusing the rose sales catalog online when she happened upon the **“Pulich Children”** rose.

Robin was awestruck and could not believe what she was reading. Her family had no knowledge that any of the Pulich family arrived in California before 1900.

The Pulich children buried in the plot where **“Pulich Children”** rose was found would have been about the same age as Robin’s grandparents. Robin’s grandmother, the oldest of 7 children, left for America at age 20 from a small village in Croatia, walking the 9 miles to the boat. Her grandfather Nick followed a few years later.

Robin’s sister, who has compiled records of their relatives (the **“Field Guide to the Relatives”**) has researched their family tree back to 1850-1860, but has not found any record of a Pulich family member coming from Croatia to California in the 1880s. With the

help of cousins still in Croatia, Robin is hoping that the link of the Pulich children to her family will be confirmed.

Robin was able to purchase more than one of the Pulich children roses at the Open Garden for her family. She describes the scent as sweet, similar to that of “*Glendora*,”¹ The “*Pulich Children*” rose, however, is a much deeper pink with darker violet shading.



The “Pulich Children” Rose As Found By Liz and Kathryn

Excited about their rose discovery, Robin and her husband decided to drive up to the foothills after Open Garden since they were already half way there from the Bay Area. According to Robin, “*The Pulich children rose was covered with buds, but none had opened yet. I sat down at the corner of the plot, and contemplated the headstone for the two children, which had two roses carved on it above each child’s name, and a lamb, minus its head, carved at the top.* I found myself wondering whether their father was her (grandmother’s) sibling or cousin, or even uncle, and wondering what brought the Pulich pioneers here and how they fared.”

Now that that the “*Pulich Children*” rose has found its family, Robin is on the trail of the family mystery triggered by the discovery of this rose

¹*the medium-pink Damask Perpetual also known as “Aunt Sally” and “Portland from Glendora,” now presumed to be ‘Joasine Hanet,’ introduced in 1847 by Jean-Pierre Vibert).*

“Pulich Children”

Robin’s Research and Answers

The solution to the mystery appeared quickly, once Robin and her sisters knew where to look.

J & H Pulich were John and Hazel Pulich.

John (originally Ivo) came to the United States, followed some years later by his teenaged nephew, Nick Pulich.

In California, Ivo/John met and married Hazel, a Cornishwoman. Their first two children, buried in Plymouth were followed by two more, who survived: George, and Ray (born in South Dakota in 1895). Ray Pulich grew up to partner with his cousin Nick — Robin Pulich’s grandfather — in a Stockton nursery, where they established at least at least one Stockton public rose garden. It isn’t much of a stretch to speculate that some of the lovely old roses in Stockton’s Rural Cemetery might have come from the nearby nursery operated by the Pulich family.

How splendidly serendipitous it is that a “lost” rose, surviving in an old California cemetery came to reveal a lost history of a California family.