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JiraksaSae-wong

## The Guggenheim Family

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The Guggenheim is an American Jewish family whose ancestors can be traced back to Switzerland since 1696.<sup>1</sup> Due to the disputes among Jews and Christians in Switzerland during that period, the Jews were marginalized and forced to lead an under-privileged and bleak life. Their daily activities were restricted. It was almost impossible for them to break out of their poverty cycle and to be at an equal standing as the Christians. Simon Guggenheim and Rachel Weil, in an effort to start a new family, migrated to The United States of America where there was lesser discrimination during that time. Today, the Guggenheim is known for their success in mining and smelting, philanthropy in modern art, aviation and scientific research and technology, due to their entrepreneurship and bravery.

Guggenheim's name lasts till today probably due to the courage to stand up and make a change for what they believe is right. Since the start of the family line, there were records of family members being active in various social-right participations. For example, Jacob Guggenheim was a representative of over two hundred and fifty Jewish families to express their dissatisfaction towards expelling them from the Surbtal.<sup>2</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup>Roy Oppenheim. "THE SWISS ROOTS OF THE GUGGENHEIM." *Peggy Guggenheim collection*. 9 Feb 2012. <[http://www.guggenheimvenice.it/inglese/museum/guggenheim\\_roots.html](http://www.guggenheimvenice.it/inglese/museum/guggenheim_roots.html)>

<sup>2</sup>Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein. "Jewish-Christian Relations." *Jewis Virtual Library*. 10 Feb 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/anti-semitism/christjew.html>>

even brought the case to the Zurich government, in a hope of acquiring some justice. Jacob also contributed to the rise of Lengnau. Presently, Lengnau is still a popular place for watch production, where many renowned watch brands set up their factories, giving rise to the fame of quality Swiss watch. These leadership acts mean more than what we imagine. Thinking back to those times, laws were not strictly reinforced. It was all about wealth and power rather than right and wrong. Thus, it means life and death to go against someone or a group of people who have an upper hand, in other words, more powerful. Eventually, Simon Guggenheim and Rachel Weil took a risk to migrate as their marriage was not approved by the local authority. They knew that staying at their hometown would mean a simple life with no drastic change or risk. However, without taking any risk, there would be no gain. The United States of America is probably their glimmer hope and they had chosen the latter choice.

When people look for information about the Guggenheim, the first thing that appears is probably their story of success in many business areas especially mining. Mining is the first proper business the Guggenheim is engaged in. Among all of Meyer Guggenheim's son, Benjamin played the most part in mining business.<sup>3</sup> At the age of twenty, he was appointed to be in charge of family's mining industry. It was then that he realized the possible benefits they could reap from smelting as well. His far-sightedness proved to be correct within a few decades. It is possible that his father saw the great leadership skills and the potential in him that he chose Benjamin to manage the most important family business. The Guggenheim mining and smelting turned out to be the top

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<sup>3</sup>New York Times. "Benjamin Guggenheim." *Encyclopedia titanic*. 10 Feb 2012.

<<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/benjamin-guggenheim-1.html>>

player of mining and smelting industry in The United States of America soon afterward. They expanded their business to England and France as well. It was no surprise when it was reported that Benjamin and his mistress, a French singer, were among the victims of the sunken Titanic. Benjamin became an outstanding victim of her maiden voyage, Titanic. He was impersonalized to be a character in numerous films. Without the capital from this business, the family would not have invested and ventured into aviation, scientific, medical research and technology. As a result, we see the importance of a strong base of their family business, mining, in order to achieve something even greater in future.

There is a common saying; to enjoy happiness is to share. At a certain point of being successful, the Guggenheim members start to realise that there was more they could do to the society. Having witnessed and experienced the under-privileged life since their forefather, they decided to start their philanthropy act and contribute back to the society. Peggy Guggenheim, daughter of Benjamin Guggenheim, was an avid art collector.<sup>4</sup> She built Art Museums first in Venice and, even after her death, her art collections are being exhibited in major cities such as New York, Bilbao, Berlin and Abu Dhabi. She also encourages the young artistes by giving out scholarships and organising educational programs by Guggenheim foundation. Through her philanthropic contribution, she has made an impact to the influence of culture and art appreciation.

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<sup>4</sup>Wikipedia contributors. "Peggy Guggenheim." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 8 Feb 2012.<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peggy\\_Guggenheim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peggy_Guggenheim)>

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation has supported many Nobel Prize winners by financing their research.<sup>5</sup>

On other hand, life is not all about wealth and power. It was reported on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1939 on Sarasota Herald-Tribune newspaper that George Denver Guggenheim, heir to American Smelting and Refining Company, committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. He was the only son after his brother was dead due to a life-threatening illness. It was suspected that George committed suicide due to the pressure of the responsibility he had to handle. During that time, his parents had been ill for some time and that could mount to the stress. Perhaps, this demonstrates to us what it means by success comes with responsibility.

The Guggenheim shows how a humble family can turn into a powerful player in an economy. They may take generations to get to where they are today. The crucial part is the start. There must be someone who steps out of his comfort zone to make a change and to demand the right for himself. If they had stayed in Switzerland, they would always be taken advantage of by the Christians, for example, being taxed at a higher rate. It may be risky but without a risk there may be no gain. Perseverance is a key too. Success does not come easy. Certainly, at the earlier stage of their life in The United States of America, they faced a lot of hardship but they did not give up on their fate. Meyer taught his sons to be resilient and to take over the responsibility of their family business dutifully. Eventually, when you made a change and became successful, they help the less fortunate and create opportunities for others to become successful like them. One is truly wealthy

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Schaub. "Guggenheim Family (The)." *Learning To Give*. 10 Feb 2012.

<<http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper267.html>>

and successful only when he has learnt to share them with the others. The Guggenheim has surpassed that point and made a mark on the world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Wikipedia contributors. "Solomon R. Guggenheim." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 9 Feb 2012.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon\\_R.\\_Guggenheim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_R._Guggenheim)>

