



# Tribble: A Family Story

BY DONNA POTTER PHILLIPS

ON A TRIP TO EGYPT IN NOVEMBER 2015, WE MET MICHAEL Tribble from near Coos Bay, Oregon. At dinner one night we asked him about his surname. Being big Star Trek fans, the Tribble name brought recollections of a favorite episode, “The Trouble with Tribbles.”

Michael told us this story. The show first aired on 29 December 1967 when Michael was only seventeen years old. While he liked the story, he and his mother kinda took issue with the use of their last name for the furry critters in the episode. His mother suggested that he write to Gene Roddenberry, creator of the series, so Michael wrote to him.

Michael said the letter went something like this: I like the show and I enjoyed this episode but how come you're using MY name for these non-intelligent and quickly reproducing furry little life forms?

Shortly later he received a reply from Gene Roddenberry saying he couldn't remember who came up with the name, but he appreciated Michael writing and invited him to the studio whenever he could come to Los Angeles.

And he sent Michael a “real” tribble!

Fast forward a few years to when Michael was in the Navy stationed at Long Beach, CA. He remembered Gene Roddenberry's offer, called him up and the offer was still good. Michael was met at the studio and given a pass..... and then Gene took him all around, introducing him to the entire cast.

Michael said they remained friends until Gene's death in 1991. He attended several Star Trek conventions and was on a first-name basis with the cast. All because his mother said, “Well, write him a letter.”

Isn't that a super genealogy story?



Image of Gene Roddenberry (cropped) from photo taken 17 September 1976 at the rollout of the Space Shuttle Enterprise. (Courtesy NASA. Photo in public domain)

## Addendum:

The origin of this English surname seems dubious at best but for sure one Peter Tribble, born about 1670, immigrated to colonial Virginia and died in Essex County in 1738. His wife was Elizabeth and they had two daughters and three sons, George, John and William.

When I visited the Clallam County Genealogical Society library, Port Angeles, Washington, in June 2022, I was delighted to find a six foot long typescript genealogy of the Tribble family that began with the above Peter Tribble. The printout was titled, *The Tribble Family To About 1850,* but no author was indicated. There also was a letter that the Society had inquired about a family history, *The Tribble Families II: Descendants of Peter Tribble of Essex County, Virginia,* by John Keith Rozendal. Originally published in 1986, it was republished in 1992 and (I just checked, June 2022) the six-pound tome is available from Amazon books. But you may freely access it digitally at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). The letter also mentioned a 1993 addendum, but the CCGS library did not have these updates. ©

DONNA POTTER PHILLIPS has been learning, doing and teaching genealogy since 1975; wrote a weekly newspaper column for 15 years; taught genealogy through community college for 20 years; wrote for most of the major genealogy magazines; is an active blogger and past president of her local society. Her favorite thing is teaching genealogy!