

Why do I do genealogy?? Why do You?

What are some of the reasons that family history or genealogy interests you?
Or What are some of the reasons you are NOT interested in genealogy?
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People sometimes ask me why I am so interested in genealogy and family history . . . the truth is the answer is a very multi-faceted and complex one.

But I'll try to share some thoughts on the matter – some of the them direct answers to the questions and others more peripheral.

I am a person who relishes diversity in the world. I enjoy experiencing different cultures, languages, food, music etc. That's one of the reasons I enjoy living in Miami - probably one of the most diverse cities in the world. I speak multiple languages and like to analyze accents and lingo as to the clues as to person's origin. I like trying new foods with bold new flavors I never grew up knowing. I have a very diverse appreciation of different types of music etc. – though I sometimes dislike what many people today think is music.

The world is a wonderful place to me because of this diversity. What a boring world this planet would be if we were all robots and did all the same things and had all the same likes and passions.

One of my passions is genealogy and family history – but its perfectly ok to me that other people have other passions - - - flower gardening, restoring antique automobiles, opera singing, salsa dancing, Italian cooking . . . and the list goes on and on. But to me genealogy and family history is more than just a hobby or something I do in my spare time or an addictive giant jig-saw puzzle that grows in size the more you work on it.

I realize that there are few people in this world that have such a passion as I do in the area of family history – even though it is quite evident that it is among the top avocations in America at least.

The world would be a crazy place with millions of “me” walking around On the other hand it does worry me at times when certain people seem so clueless or indifferent to any value in understanding or studying the lives and experiences of people in the past. People who think the lives of a “bunch of dead people” are totally meaningless and inapplicable to them and their life – really worry me.

So much history predates us - the lives of billions have come before us – and millions of historic events - both glories and tragedies have been scenes on the play of this world stage.

The Holocaust comes to my mind. . . or the Civil War and its horrendous tragedy in loss of life. . . or the days of slavery that predate it, or the great conflicts of the world over power, money and all too often religion. Are we so simple minded and immature to think that we don't need to learn from the lessons of the past – so as to avoid repeating such dark and evil tragedies that often entangled millions of many innocent people. Are we really that much smarter than the billions of people who have come and gone . . .

A few quotes come to mind:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to **repeat it.**"

George Santayana

“People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.”

Edward Burke

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”

Soren Kierkegaard

“Every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Personally I think there is much to learn from our ancestors lives and and coming to know the differing waves of generations in our past

Things like:

The importance and value (across many generations) of a single united traditional families
The fact that even if we didn't grow up in a traditional united family that we can break the cyclic chain and with our attitude, actions and persistence – provide blessings to coming generations that we never had.

How religion and faith can be both a power for uniting and a power for good – as well as a force of division and evil.

The importance of education – not only for self – but for successive generations.

The effects of poverty, the effects of wealth.

How sometimes one person's small life decision (such as whether to migrate to a new country) can impact thousands if not millions of people.

How culture and custom is passed from one generation to the next.

How diseases and health issues can travel from one generation to the next.

An analysis of the age old question of “Nature versus Nurture”

So many of the root problems of society – have stayed the same over time – and not been eradicated by science and technology.

Another more direct answer to why I do genealogy – I personally believe that one day I will have the opportunity to meet my ancestors who have gone before.

I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them. Things that are part of my life – like culture, faith, physical appearance, music, food, customs and outlook on life are in some degree or another – due to my ancestors. I know there are some great people among my ancestors, but truth be told – there are surely some among them who maybe I wouldn't be nearly as proud of – as to things they did etc. But they are all part of my origins. I feel that they all deserve to be known, to be remembered, to be honored for the good things great or small that they did. I don't think its up to me to pick and choose who I want to honor or remember.

When the days comes that we are given the opportunity to meet our ancestors - will we recognize them?, will we know them?, will we empathize with what they went through in their mortal life? What will we ask them? And what will they ask us?

I believe that through family history work – we can find ways to pay tribute to our ancestors for what they have already done for us.

Between what they did for us – and what we can do for them – I think an eternal bond can be created that links us together forever.

When I meet them I expect to know them, because I have spent so much time studying their lives and its impact on mine.

I believe at such time we will have a much more clear view – of what is really important in life – and what is not. I think genealogy allows us to clarify that perception now – while we are still in this life.

Some thoughts from “your cousin”



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Why Do We Do Genealogy?

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By Lorine McGinnis Schulze

A friend asked an interesting question. "*Why do you do genealogy?*" The answer should be simple. One would think it would be something along the lines of:

"I do genealogy because I want to know who my ancestors were."



But guess what? Like most questions in life, the answer is not that simple. There are a myriad of reasons why we delve into genealogy research. Wanting to find out who our ancestors were is just the tip of the genealogy iceberg.

The reasons I currently "*do genealogy*" are not the same reasons I had twenty or thirty years ago. When I began my genealogy quest it was because my father had repeatedly expressed curiosity about our Irish origins. He died when I was 14 years old, and after his death I vowed to find out about our Irish McGinnis ancestors.

So my answer to that question, had it been asked those many years ago, would have been. "*I do genealogy because I want to remember and honor my father.*"

It was a specific reason, very narrow in scope, but it sparked a broader interest in history. In fact, that is not my main reason anymore, and hasn't been for a long time. I've grown. Genealogy has been a journey, and as on any journey, my needs and desires and goals along the way have changed.

For example I'm extremely curious. Some would say nosy. I think most of us who love genealogy would make great detectives. My personality is such that I can't let a mystery lie without digging into it. I need to find answers.

So my current answer to the original question of why I do genealogy is now much more complex.

"I do genealogy for many reasons. One is my curiosity about my ancestors - who were they, what were they like, what experiences did they live through. My love of history is part of the reason I do genealogy. My desire to solve mysteries is a huge part of my passion for genealogy. And I do genealogy because I want my children and grandchildren to know and recognize the individuals over the centuries whose lives helped make us who we are today."



Genealogy isn't a pursuit well suited for those who require instant gratification. It's a long-term process and to those who are not like-minded it seems an incomprehensible pursuit. I've spent more hours scrolling through microfilm searching for that one entry with an ancestor's name, then I care to remember. Many people would consider those wasted hours. I don't.

Some of my family are not the least bit interested in our ancestors. Some are interested to a degree. Tell them stories of the more interesting or outrageous ancestors such as our daredevil Peer ancestor who walked Niagara Falls on a tightrope and they listen. Tell them about great great grandpa, the farmer in England, and their eyes glaze over.

I once had a friend say to me *"But why do you care? They're all dead!"* I care because they made me who I am. Without them I would not be here. They are part of me, part of my genetic makeup. They also deserve to be remembered, and to continue to be part of our lives. Our children and grandchildren need to hear about those ancestors. They need to speak of them to their children, and to carry on the stories they hear from me.

Some of my relatives are not interested in my treasured photos of our ancestors. To me those are the icing on the cake! Photos make my ancestor come alive. One of my relatives told me she wasn't interested in seeing a photo of our 2nd great-grandfather. Why wasn't she interested? Because, she said *"Why do I care what he looked like? I never knew him."*



That absolute lack of curiosity is incomprehensible to me, just as my desire to know more is incomprehensible to her. A photo allows us to know our ancestors. With a photo in my hand I can study a face then ponder over whether or not great-grandma's nose is just like my granddaughter's. I can visualize the ancestors in those photos living their daily lives, just as we do today. With a photo I feel a connection I can't quite feel with only a name and a date.

I've been asked when my research will be done. Many family members want to know why I am still looking when I know the names of ancestors back several generations. Non-genealogists rarely understand that genealogists want to find as many details and as much information about each ancestor as they possibly can.

Even though my answer to the original question is complex and multi-faceted, I can sum my reasons up in one sentence:

Without the past there is no present, nor can we build a future.

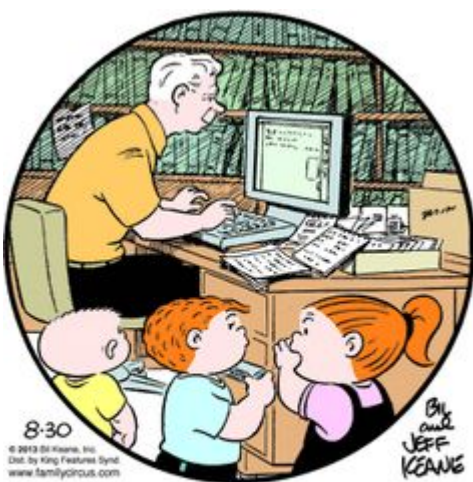
How would you answer my friend's question, "*Why do you do genealogy?*"

Lorine McGinnis Schulze is a Canadian genealogist who has been involved with genealogy and history for more than thirty years. In 1996 Lorine created the [Olive Tree Genealogy website](#) and its [companion blog](#). Lorine is the author of many published genealogical and historical [articles](#) and [books](#).



It is true that there is no king who has not had a slave among his ancestors, and no slave who has not had a king among his.

Helen Keller



8-30
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"You better be quiet or Granddad will leave you out of the family history he's writing."