

# Finding Roots

*Plant the seeds to discovering your family tree*

**Chelle Cordero**  
Creators News Service

**A**re you digging for the roots of your family? You're not alone. Ancestry.com counts more than 950,000 subscribers and said that more than 9.3 million family trees have been created since July 2006. It's estimated that 78 percent of the U.S. population is interested in or actively researching their family history.

So whether your ancestors can be traced back to the beginnings of the British Empire or traveled through Ellis Island seeking a better life in America, there are plenty of ways to find your family history.

Your search should begin with the living, according to Cathy Burton from Ottawa. Asking relatives for the stories that were handed down through the generations may not be the most reliable, but "they are often fun to investigate," she said.

As a retired nurse, Burton's search of her genealogical roots started as a search for genetic, hereditary and environmental conditions, as well as medical issues that might affect future generations. As the branches were uncovered and more relatives connected, the task became more of a quest of love.

"Perhaps some of the fascination with family history is because, in North America, our roots are not yet as deep as in 'the old countries,'" she said. "Families are smaller and more scattered and many are losing a sense of community, so finding connections across the years replaces some of what we have lost in more modern times and does give the younger generation something to have in common with their parents while they are finding themselves."

There are plenty of techniques to start collecting. Speaking with relatives for tidbits and writing those stories down, as well as labeling pictures, will help keep the information from getting lost with time. In certain families, bibles are passed down through the generations, and may have a written record of births, deaths and marriages. Burton also recommended keeping track of where you obtain your information so that you aren't going over the same sources.

Ithaca, N.Y., resident Lisa Ann Alzo has been an avid genealogist for the past 17 years and teaches online genealogy courses for GenClass and the National Institute for Genealogical Studies. After reading a book about steel mills in Pennsylvania, Alzo, who

grew up in Duquesne, Pa., became interested in some of her own family's history.

"This was in the days before the Internet was an integral part of daily life -- before the availability of millions of genealogical websites, online census records and immigration databases. I searched courthouses, spent countless hours viewing microfilm in the Carnegie and Hillman Libraries in Pittsburgh, wrote to the National Archives, conducted approximately 30 oral history interviews, walked in my grandmother's footsteps during a visit to Ellis Island and traveled to towns such as Barton, Ohio, and Wilkes-Barre, Pa.," explained Alzo.

Alzo said for who are just beginning their quest to start close to them. "Start at home. Interview all living family members before it's too late," she said. "Ask them for copies of documents, photographs, etc. Also, be aware that you will not find all of the information you seek online. It takes a great deal of patience and persistence to research your roots, but once you begin your discoveries, you realize that all of the hard work was worth it."

Janis Brett Elspas of Los Angeles had a "sudden urge" to trace her family history shortly before her 50th birthday, just after her father passed away. She has "been able to trace my lineage to before the Civil War in America and am presently working with some resources offered by the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution)."

She is an annual subscriber to ancestry.com, which can be used for researching and printing copies of documents such as census reports, military payment records, birth and death information, wills and other helpful legal documents. Other sources have included state, county and city records for things such as wills, birth and death certificates and burial locations.

Karen Harrington, author of the novel Janeology (\$25, Kuntai Inc.), used genetics to address the question of how much is a person influenced by nature and nurture.

Harrington is an amateur genealogist along with being a writer. "Both of these interests seemed to coalesce because they held the promise of interesting stories and characters," she said. "I'm so glad that genealogy was something my father introduced me to at an early age. And now our family has an abundance of information that can be passed down to future generations."

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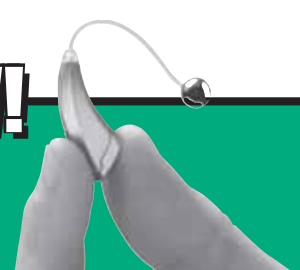
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