

Stories in Our Roots

Episode 3 • 27:18

(Edited for clarity)

SPEAKERS

Cheri Hudson Passey, Heather Murphy

Stories in Our Roots 00:03

Welcome to the Stories in Our Roots podcast. I'm your host Heather Murphy. In this podcast we dive deep into how knowing the stories of our ancestors can make a difference in our lives today.

Discovering our family history is more than a hobby. It is a way to connect deeply with ourselves, those we love and the world around us.

Heather Murphy 00:26

Hello, and welcome to Episode Three. This week I talked with Cheri Hudson Passey about family history and her life, which started playing a role when she was about 10 years old. She shares with us the ancestor she looked back on to gain strength when she faced a difficult time in her life. We also talked about choices her ancestors made that weren't positive, and the project she started to help the descendants of persons who were enslaved find their ancestors.

00:54

Cheri Hudson Passey is a professional genealogist, instructor, writer and speaker, and the owner of Carolina Girl Genealogy. Cheri is the host of a genealogy chat show on YouTube called GenFriends. She is a genealogical researcher subcontracted by Eagle Investigative Services for the U.S. Army Past Conflict Repatriations Branch. I appreciate her time and willingness in sharing part of her story. Here's her interview.

Heather Murphy 01:28

Thank you so much for being with me here today. Could you start just by giving us a little introduction about yourself?

Cheri Hudson Passey 01:35

Sure. I'm Cheri Hudson Passey. I own Carolina Girl Genealogy. I'm a speaker and a writer. I teach classes. I do a genealogy YouTube chat show. And I also work in with the Army with their repatriation program. So I'm got my finger in just about everything.

Heather Murphy 02:03

Well, thank you. Can you tell us how you first started becoming interested in your family history?

Cheri Hudson Passey 02:13

I always go back to the first time that a story ever touched me. And it was when I was, oh, probably about 10 years old. And we were talking about my mom's family and I asked her, I said, "Why do we call Frank..." who would have been my...he's actually...now that I understand, he was my step-grandfather. I call him Frank and not Grandpa. And she sat me down and she said, "Well, because my dad died in World War II. And then when I was 12, your grandmother married again. And she married Frank. And so you've just always called him Frank." She says, "I've always called him Frank. You've just always called him Frank." And so she showed me a picture of her father and I think it was the first time that I just went, "Oh, people have stories!" just at a young age. I remember when we would go... My dad was in the military, so we weren't really in South Carolina where I'm from a lot. And so every time we'd come home, I would start listening to the adults about their stories and things like that. But I really didn't start researching probably until I was about 20. I mean, I was gathering stories, but about 20 was when I figured out, "Oh, I can actually do this myself." So I started asking for photos and pictures and ,you know, anything anybody had, any family Bibles, whatever it might be. And so people started sending them to me and then I was hooked, of course.

Heather Murphy 03:42

I think that's so important that we remember that there are so many family members that have pieces of our family history that if we don't talk to them, then we lose out on those stories and those pictures.

Cheri Hudson Passey 03:52

Exactly. And I wish now looking back... There's so many I did record. I did record my grandmother and I did, well, I recorded both grandmothers and my parents, I've recorded them. But now looking back, especially with my my grandmothers, I wish that I'd asked other questions or so many other things that I think of now. Oh, why didn't I ask her that? I didn't think to ask. So, I would tell people, you know, if you've got living grandparents, great aunts, and uncles, anybody that can tell you those stories of those generations that are quickly not to be here anymore, get them interviewed. Think of everything you can possibly... You can't do it all in one interview, because they'll get tired but over over a period of time get as much information as possible.

Heather Murphy 04:38

And since it takes more than one time, you can't just wait until you're worried that they might not be here much longer. Starting now is probably the best idea.

Cheri Hudson Passey 04:48

Exactly. I've got a good friend who this person's name kept coming to her mind. "Oh, I need to call him I need to call him because he's probably got some great stories." And she waited too long. He passed away and she's so upset about that. So don't wait too long. Get get some information while you can.

Heather Murphy 05:08

Now you have been researching for decades, you've had lots of experience with your family, what times come to mind about how family history has impacted your life in different?

Cheri Hudson Passey 05:22

There's been a few different things. I think all of us as we start to research start to see some parallels with our family. One of those parallels that I found was I had several ancestors who adopted children. They had their own biological children, and yet they adopted children. And we did the same thing. I've got biological children and I've got adopted children. And so that was really interesting to find. Is that some kind of trait passed down? I mean, but we don't really want to say that because, you know, sometimes we find our ancestors are doing things we don't like. So we've got to be careful when we want to say, 'Oh, yes, those are my ancestors. They did these great things.' Because we've got to go, "These are my ancestors, and they did things that maybe weren't so great." But it was just really interesting to me to see how many had adopted children.

06:14

And then the second thing that really hit me, I'd seen it as I'd research, but how many children were lost, how many didn't live and how many outlived their children. And we had a son pass away about almost five years ago. And I looked back at some of their lives and what was going on with them and I thought, you know, they were able to move on. They had good lives afterwards, they were strong. I can use that as an example in my life. And so those are two things that really, really stand out. As far as things that parallel, I've got a step-grandfather, it's interesting in his life, parents would die and children would be raised by grandparents. And there's several generations in his family that happened to. So I just find it very interesting how we see those patterns sometimes.

Heather Murphy 07:14

Yeah, absolutely. Are there any of your ancestors that you particularly gravitate to their story?

Cheri Hudson Passey 07:22

Um, I think my maternal grandmother because of the hardships that she went through with losing her husband, and having to raise two kids. I mean, I was very close to her anyway. But so her story. It's actually it's her story, but it's her husband's story. He died on the island of Peleliu. And he had two brothers that were also fighting in World War II and they passed away as well. And so their mother, that goldstar mother, you know, she had three soldiers that she had to bury all within a short period of time. One had been missing for a year. But the telegram telling her that the military officially determined that he was deceased, my grandfather's telegram, and his other brother came all within months of each other. So it wasn't spread around. It came within months of each other. And this is a woman too, that had 12 children, and so six of them passed away before she died. And so I don't know, it depends on who I'm researching too, you know, who I'm researching at the time whether I am excited about them or not.

Heather Murphy 08:39

What are some of the things that you do to learn more about someone's story rather than just their dates and places?

Cheri Hudson Passey 08:48

Newspapers are wonderful. I have found some wonderful articles in newspapers about... I have one ancestor that the story was he and his son went out to... They were worried about one of their neighbors that they hadn't seen in a while. And so he got his son and they went out and they were talking about how they got on their horses. And they rode over to this guy's place and they found he'd passed away in his barn. And so they got him and they they buried him and all that and think he... You don't know stories like that... Stories like that don't get passed down usually. There are a lot of different things you can find in newspapers or look for manuscript collections. You can find old letters and all sorts of wonderful things and ask and see if the family has letters or journals. I don't have any journals, unfortunately. But I do have old letters. And those are fun to find stories, you know, and sometimes I've got a couple of going, "Huh, what do they mean by that?" Like, was there some kind of rift in the family that you know... I'm not sure. So those are wonderful too. And I've got a Bible that my great aunt had. And in it her mom, her dad and her husband had passed away and she wrote in it, "All my best friends are gone." Oh, you know, so there's so many different ways you can pull those stories and it makes them real. Instead of those just names and dates, you really need to find those stories that ask... That's another reason to interview. What are your family stories? And don't just say, "Well, I asked Grandma, I don't need to talk to anybody else." But if she's got sisters left or you've got cousins, whatever, ask everybody because everybody's going to have a different take on the same story.

Heather Murphy 10:35

That's absolutely true. Now, I've seen on your website that you have a project called Releasing Their Names. Could you tell me about that?

Cheri Hudson Passey 10:48

Sure, because I am a daughter of...or I should say descendant of...a daughter of the South, but I'm a descendant of slave owners. A lot of times through my research in my family, I come across records of the enslaved. And I can tell you that the first time I saw that it was heartbreaking. You want to just think, "Oh, my family would never..." And my grandmother said, "Oh, our family was too poor to own slaves." Well, that's a myth. And it's not just in the South. Our ancestors all over the United States may have owned slaves. People would bring their slaves from the East coast to the West coast, even though those were not slave states. They would still take them, nobody would say anything about it. So I think sometimes we feel like oh, well, it wasn't my... I don't live in the South. It wasn't my ancestors. But you'll be surprised at what you can find.

11:47

So what I do is when I find those records, I will extract the names of the enslaved. And then any information about it, if it was a will, whose will it was, if I can figure out who the owners were, were they sold to somebody else, and kind of put that all in a blog post, and then get that out. And it's called Releasing Their Names. These names have not been spoken in decades, well, centuries, you know, they haven't been spoken and many, many, many years. And that way, I'm releasing their names. And they go out on Google. Because when you put something in a blog post, and you publish it, and it goes out on Google, well, Google will crawl through. And anytime somebody is doing, say, they're looking for information on a slave owner in a certain county in a certain place. If they searched for that, and I've put

information up, they're going to find it. Or even if they know some of those names, and they just google those names with a county, it will come up. So my purpose in doing that is to help the descendants of these enslaved people be able to find their family and that's my hope.

12:56

And I actually have had a couple of people contact me. So that that has been amazing. And then we can work together and see how those families fit together and who they may be missing and see if we can make some connections. So that has been a really wonderful thing to be able to do. And sometimes I will try to see if I can go down the tree myself and see if I can make any kind of connections.

13:23

I do have a list that I found at a plantation that my family used to own. And I went inside and well, I got there and I was like, oh, this beautiful plantation, it was so wonderful. And then they showed me the cemetery, the slave cemetery, and it just, I mean, hit home. I mean, it's always in your head, but to see it, it hit home. And so when we went back inside the house, I said, Do you have any records? And she handed me some things and one of those was a list of the enslaved that had been on that property. And it wasn't just a few names. It was generations of names so you could see the mother and the children. There was no fathers listed, but the mother and the children and then you could see those same names as they would grow up and have children. And so I asked if I could copy it. The only problem is I don't know who did it. It was typewritten list. I don't know where the original is, but I took a copy of it. And then I donated that copy down to Historical Society down in Charleston, South Carolina, so that anybody who was researching that plantation, it's in the file for that plantation, or that family name.

So, there's things that you can do to help because it is one of those things. It's like somebody just, I don't know, it just takes your breath away. It just absolutely takes your breath away. And I know some people are afraid and they want to hide and "I don't want people to know." But you know what, you didn't do this. You're not responsible for what your ancestors did. But you can do something, like I've said before, you can do something positive. You can pull those names out and try to see if you can help connect those families. And we need to remember that the descendants of the enslaved and the descendants of the slave holders, they have the same history. They lived on the same plantations. And a lot of times that DNA is in there too. And so you're not just connected because your ancestor owned their ancestor, but you're connected through DNA as well. So their family history is your family history. So we need to work together. So that's why I do that.

Stories in Our Roots 15:32

This episode is brought to you by my premium service Stories in Your Roots. Many people wander the internet hoping to come across information that will tell their family's story. And while technology has made records more accessible than ever, wandering the internet will not provide the answers you are looking for. You need to know what questions to ask, where to look for the answers and what to do with the information once you find it. To learn more about how you can have a family history coach help you

maximize your discoveries go to heathermurphygenealogy.com/coaching. That's heathermurphygenealogy.com/coaching.

Heather Murphy 16:14

And you mentioned you have Google search for this person who held the enslaved people. Can you extrapolate a little bit about how that plays into when someone's trying to reach their African-American roots?

Cheri Hudson Passey 16:29

Okay, so just a few weeks ago, I was at an institute, I was at MAAGI Institute. Of course, I was there virtually because of COVID, but we had like a meet and greet for everybody and all the different classes one night. And so I got on and it was a Zoom call and I got this little private message to the chat and, and it said, "Are you Carolina Girl Genealogy?" like, "Yes, I am." And he said, "I need to connect with you because of your Gibson line." And we are connected through my ancestor who was a slave owner and in Clarendon County, South Carolina, and his ancestor was enslaved by my ancestor. And he said, "I have seen your posts about the Gibson family on your blog." So that was a direct connection of those releasing the names and trying to get that information out there. And I was able to give him some more information and got him back another generation in his family and so that was so wonderful. I was like, I'm sure that the ancestors are just jumping up and down because their families being connected again. So that was a wonderful thing to be able to experience.

Heather Murphy 17:59

Yeah, I was in a class with Kenyatta Berry once and I found that interesting that she said, once you get back to that pre-1870, then you start researching the people who owned slaves in the area. And that's how they're able to get a little bit farther back.

Cheri Hudson Passey 18:16

Exactly. A lot of people believe that, okay, this is our family names, or the slave owner should have this name. And statistically, no, but it's a place to start. You know, it's a place to start if you don't know anything else, but you really need to research. If you can't find any connections with descendants of slave owners in the county, which is a really good thing to try to do, just research the whole county, all the plantations, all the records that you can, and see if you can make any kind of connections that makes sense to you based on what you were seeing in the census. But we need to make sure you understand that names change, you know, they just change all the time, and just because your ancestor's name was something in 1870 it could be something different in 1880. But it's also a myth that there are no names. Pre-1870, there are names you can find. There are first names for sure. But you can find records of two names, you know, a last name. So a lot of, some of the enslaved were allowed to use a surname. And then you've got your free people of color too, of course, who, you know, of course, you still first name and a surname. So, but that's a whole new that's a whole nother podcast, right?

Heather Murphy 19:38

Absolutely. But I think it goes to show that some people worry that they can't find their family story. From what you shared here it shows that you can, sometimes you just have to go about it a little bit differently.

Cheri Hudson Passey 19:53

It's that whole FAN club that Elizabeth Shown Mills talks about, that cluster research, you know, research everybody around your family. So if it's African-American, then you need to research all the enslavers. It's whatever...it may be whomever your people met up with day-to-day. We didn't just live, you know, they didn't live in their little houses. I mean, we don't...well we do now, we can't see anybody. But we still have people we talk to and deal with. And they had people on a day-to-day basis. They probably went to church or they, you know, went down to the nearest market. And there may be a log book from that market. And you can see, oh, my gosh, they were buying this, this and this, and that adds to their story. I don't have any journals. But I do have an 1889 little book that my great-great-grandfather wrote about his day-to-day life on the farm. You know, this was we were doing this today. It rained a lot today. He would talk about people who had died in the community and people who had come to work on his farm and so a couple of them I've gone on and I have actually researched these names to find out who they were.

20:58

So there's so many different ways... I think we get blinders on sometimes and we think, okay, if we don't have a journal, or we didn't find that amazing article in the newspaper, then we're just out of luck. But no, there's so many different ways. Just as we research that things will come. Every record that you find you can create a story out of it. Think about the census and everything that census record tells you. That's a story about your family. I like to take the agricultural census and see how much land they had. What were they growing? What kind of farm animals did they have? Do they have an orchard? Were they doing something as a second line of business? You can also get a story from a will. The probate package and inventory is a wonderful place to get a story, what kind of things were being sold. Can you tell if they had any kind of hobbies? Were they selling musical instruments? Were they selling a still? Can you tell what kind of occupation there was or a side occupation? So every record that you get, you can pull some information out and it can become part of your ancestor story.

Heather Murphy 22:10

Yes, in some future episodes that I'm going to do, I'm going to be diving into that policy that you have to have a journal to have their story. And just those little documents have their little stories that you can pull together into a bigger story.

Cheri Hudson Passey 22:26

Absolutely. And then lead you to more records to add to your story.

Heather Murphy 22:31

You just have to do the writing of the story is not just handed to you, right?

Cheri Hudson Passey 22:36

And think about possessions that you're...that may be you've... My mom calls me the Keeper of All Things because anything anybody had I said, I want it, I want it, you know. And so I've got some really fun things. Like I've got a an old Coke thermometer that used to sit out my great-grandmother's back porch. And when she passed away my dad made sure he grabbed that and I got that when he passed away. So, just that story of that sitting there and that reminds me of all the good food she used to cook. And so even the things that you can collect jewelry, books, whatever, can tell a story. If you're going through somebody's belongings, and you can say, wow, they really liked this because of the things that they had. So, always look for those stories, see where those things can lead you.

Heather Murphy 23:24

Great. Now you've already told us to interview everybody that we can and to look at those other people that were in your ancestors network like neighbors and other family members. Do you have any advice for someone who's just starting out researching their family?

Cheri Hudson Passey 23:40

Yes, home sources. Call everybody first. Forget about going onto Ancestry. Forget it. I mean, it's so tempting, isn't it, just to jump on there and create your tree and click, click, click, click, click? The first thing that I tell people... I do a lot of beginning genealogy classes. I've got some you know, webinars out there on beginning genealogy. You've got to take advantage of those people that are still living, see what they have, make those connections.

24:07

I had a cousin send me... I think it was in middle school she was assigned to write a family history and a story about our shared great-grandparents. And I learned that my grandparents eloped, my great-grandparents eloped. She was watching her baby sister... From this report that she had written, she had pinched her baby brother, because she was watching him, and when he cried, the mom came. She climbed down the ladder and they ran off and got married and had the 12 kids. And she's the mother of my grandfather who died in World War II.

24:44

But reach out to everybody that you can think of. What's out there? And you know, it'll drive you crazy though, because people say, "Oh, I didn't know you wanted that," you know, 10 years later, when you see that they have it. You know, just really reach out so that you're getting that information as you're building your tree to add to it. There's so many things that might be around your own house, your parents' house, your grandparents' house. Go see what they have. What pictures do they have hanging up on the walls? What books do they have laying around? Is there a family Bible? What do they have? Are there funeral memorial books that they have? Make sure you're very explicit. You know, just don't say, "I want information on the family." Maybe make a list and say, "Do you have this? Are there any journals? Are there any letters?" And make sure you're letting them know that you're not asking to keep them. You would like copies, maybe come over and look at them and take some photos, but you're not asking for them to be sent to you. Because I think sometimes people get, "Oh, she just wants to take everything that I have." So I would start with that.

Cheri Hudson Passey 25:51

And I'd also get some education because if you start doing your genealogy correctly, and avoid some of those beginner mistakes. And things are going to go smoother for you. And so I would encourage people to get a little bit of education and just don't be that quick click genealogist. Because that's how you make mistakes, and then you end up a decade later, realizing you have been very nicely researching somebody else's tree, or branch, and you're just gonna have to pass it over and start over again. So education, and start with what your family knows.

Heather Murphy 26:32

Well, thank you so much, Cheri, for spending your time with us and sharing all these experiences and advice that you have.

Cheri Hudson Passey 26:40

I sure appreciate being on. This is a wonderful thing that you're doing. I'm looking forward to hearing other people's stories.

Heather Murphy 26:45

Great. Thanks so much.

Cheri Hudson Passey 26:47

Thank you.

Stories in Our Roots 26:50

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