

Transcript

Heather Murphy | Looking at Family History Differently Has Power to Change Your Life

Stories in Our Roots [0:03]

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 [0:27]

Thank you for listening to the very first episode of Stories in Our Roots. It is an honor to have you here with me. In this episode, I will introduce the mission of this show, introduce myself, and tell you the story of how looking at my family history differently led to the creation of this podcast. First of all, I am Heather Murphy. I am Canadian-American, born in Canada but lived most of my life in the United States.

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My interest in family history began as a child. Due to the efforts of those before me I've always known the names of all my third great-grandparents, and many of the lines beyond that. I loved hearing the stories of my ancestors as I grew up. I'm also a bit of a data nerd and loved looking at all the data, all the names and dates and places. My first family history project when I was about 11, I was taking information from a family directory that included all of the descendants of one of my great-grandparents and inputting that information into a computer database.

[1:29]

As I moved into high school, I brought family history into whatever school projects and volunteer opportunities I could the timeframe for college and I signed up as an anthropology major, even though I loved learning about my ancestors and their lives. I wasn't a big fan of history classes in high school. Those classes focused on politics and laws and wars on a national and international level. And that wasn't interesting to me. I thought anthropology might focus more on how average people lived in the past. That freshman year of college was really rough because I was so extremely homesick. I wanted to go home so badly and just attend to the little college in my hometown. But I really felt strongly that the university I was at was the place that would give me the better education.

[2:18]

At the very end of that freshman year, I sat on the couch in the kitchen of my on-campus apartment and flipped through the catalogue of majors looking for something to add as a minor. I was very surprised to discover that the university offered a major in family history and genealogy. That was amazing. I signed up for the basic intro to family history class with the plan that I would take the class and then decide after that if I wanted to change my major. As I thought about it over the summer, I became more and more excited about the idea. I got so excited that I changed my major to family history and genealogy the very first day I got back to campus. And I absolutely loved it.

[3:00]

I learned college provided the opportunity to take history classes that did not just focus on politics like social history and public history. I did take a class focused on laws. But instead of just memorizing those facts, it wove together how everyday people were affected by those laws. I loved studying family history because the study of history through the lens of family was much more engaging and interesting to me. After graduation life took me on a different route than going straight to work as a full-time professional genealogist. Over the years, I took occasional research clients, but nothing consistent.

[3:37]

A few years ago, I started having the feeling that it was time for me to work toward writing a business rather than just taking whatever clients happened to come my way. In 2019 I had a couple research client projects that started to change how I wanted to run my business. These two clients had projects that I considered pretty basic. One wanted me to learn everything I could about her father. Her parents had divorced when she was very young and she knew almost nothing about him. The other client asked me to research her biological father's family and I put together about three generations.

[4:11]

As I prepared my report for that second client, I began to feel a little bit guilty. Here I had spent 40 hours of my time researching this family, getting to know them, coming across documents and clues one by one piecing together their stories. They were on my mind for weeks as I thought about the information I found and contemplated what else I might learn about them. I felt like I had taken something from this woman that she would never have the opportunity to do herself. There is something that happens to us when we research our own family, when we are the ones to make the sacrifice of time and learn how to do something new and challenging. I'm sure she was delighted to learn the names and the stories of those people. But the benefit of spending an hour reading a 40 page report with footnotes and over 100 attached documents is much different than spending 40 hours of work to learn that information on her own.

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In the fall of 2019 that experience led me to change my business model. Instead of researching on behalf of clients, I would make a shift to only mentoring and teaching. I hired a high level business strategist, we worked on mindset, came up with new services to offer, overhauled my website and learned about marketing strategies. We put everything in place for me to run with this new focus.

Except I didn't run.

I didn't go anywhere.

I was stuck.

[5:36]

I watched what other genealogists were doing to promote their businesses. But nothing I saw felt true to me and what I wanted to accomplish. I didn't know how to move forward. I had incredible dreams and visions that ended up collecting dust.

[5:52]

At the beginning of this summer, I decided to do a quick family history project, an occupational family tree. I had seen other people do this I thought it would be fun to see a family tree with an ancestors name and their occupation. I sat at my desk got out a blank sheet of paper and sketched out a family tree. I started with my parents and quickly realized my chart was not going to look like the examples I had seen posted on social media. The ways my parents worked to support our family could not be summed up in one word like teacher or plumber. I picked three or four of the jobs they did for the longer time periods and moved on. My grandparents were a little bit easier. My grandfather's had about three jobs each and my grandmother's didn't have much else other than housewife or homemaker. When I got to my great grandparents, I pulled up my family history database and other documents. I had a general idea of what they did, but I knew there were holes in what I knew from memory. When I finished I had four generations 30 of my ancestors represented on the paper in front of me.

[6:55]

This episode is brought to you by my premium service stories and Your routes. Many people wander the internet hoping to come across information that will tell their family 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.

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I sat there and looked over the information, taking in the variety of ways my ancestors supported their families, even though they were mostly in farming or other rural labor and occupations. Then suddenly, I caught my breath as a realization hit me. The only female ancestors that worked at a job outside of running the family farm were forced to when tragedy struck their family. You see, when my mother was 32, my father was injured in an accident at work. She was suddenly thrust into the position of financially supporting our family with five children, a high school diploma, and no work experience for the previous 10 years. Moving back generations, I saw that when my mother's grandmother was 27, her husband died, leaving her with five children and the necessity to scrape together a living with an eighth grade education.

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I realized in that moment that I had an internal belief that in my family, married women only worked at a job or career if it was absolutely necessary for the survival of their family. And I wasn't in that position. My husband earns enough for us to live without worrying how we will pay the bills. I realized that one of the limiting beliefs that was holding me back from running this amazing business I envisioned was that I shouldn't do it if I didn't absolutely have to.

[9:03]

That wasn't the only realization I experienced from this seemingly innocent family history project. Out of the 15 women on that chart, only one of them had what I would call an educated job. One great-grandmother was a school teacher before she married. Then, when her husband joined the military during World War Two, she taught school again and raised their two children. When he got home from the war, he had new skills as a steam engineer, but there were no jobs for him and their little town and he wanted to move to the city. She didn't want to and since she had a way to support herself, she stayed where she was while he moved to the city. Now I'm sure there are details. I don't know about the story, and there are more factors to consider. But what I see is that the only example of a married female ancestor in my tree working and it contributed to the crumbling of her marriage.

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As I looked at this family tree I had sketched out and held in my hands, I realized I held fear within me that the same thing could happen, that if I chose to work, I could risk losing my marriage. And those moments, I was able to recognize those limiting beliefs that I unknowingly held. I recognize the events in my family history contributed to the way I was feeling about running my own business. And then I could have a nice one on one chat with myself and tell myself that just because my ancestors endured certain hard challenges, does not mean that I am limited to live that way as well. It is okay for me to follow my heart and have an influence on the world around me. And I don't need to feel that if I have one, I will lose the other. I have looked at my family tree thousands of times over the last 25 years and I still had things to learn by taking an opportunity to look at it in a little different way.

[10:53]

After that experience, it was like a floodgate opened in my mind, I realized a podcast was a perfect platform to help inspire people to research their family history, even though I had entirely dismissed the idea of a podcast already. There are a few podcasts and innumerable online webinars and YouTube videos that help teach you research techniques and skills to improve your family history research. This project is going to be different because my guests will share ways their lives have been impacted by researching or learning the stories of their ancestors. While there will be some episodes that will help you pull those stories together, the main focus will be to give you ideas of how you can look at your family history differently by listening to the experiences of others.

[11:38]

Within a week of the birth of this idea of a podcast, I received an email that said, Are you thinking of starting a podcast? My friend is launching a course this month. My response to that was how did you know I signed up for the course and those wonderful women incentivized a launching by September 1 that has been a huge help because the closer I get to the launch, the more anxious I become. It is like going up that first time on a roller coaster and you don't know what's going to happen after you reach the top and the laws of physics take over.

[12:11]

When I was 21, I gave a speech to an audience of over 1000 college students with the intent to inspire them to research their family history. My sister was in the audience. And afterward she told me I did a great job. And I even almost convinced her that she needed to research her family. In other words, she felt the power of what I had to say. She could tell I was speaking truth. But she wasn't willing to do anything about it.

[12:43]

As you hear myself and my guests speak to you each week, choose to act on what you feel or the ideas that come to mind. Your life and the lives of those that you love can be positively impacted by learning the stories of your ancestors, but it takes action I'll offer up all the social proof I can to help you see the results are worth the effort. But it is up to you to decide whether or not knowing the stories of your ancestors, learning from their successes and their tragedies is worth your time. Remember family history as more than names and dates. It is learning the stories we carry within us learning the stories in our roots.

Stories in Our Roots [13:27]

Thank you for joining me today for Stories in Our Roots. Please hope this podcast grow by subscribing, leaving a review and sharing it with your friends. If you have feedback, or would like to recommend someone to share their story, head to storiesinourroots.com and fill out the form. Thanks again for listening and I look forward to being with you again next week.

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