

U3AM at Home

The Road to Getting Started on Family Research

When we were growing up, how often did we ask our parents what they did to amuse themselves when they were growing up? And our fathers on what they did during the war?



Their responses now form part of our memories. It is these memories in times like we now face that we should start to use to form part of a family story.

I am sure that at some point in time the thought has crossed your mind, that you must write down what you know about your family and that includes your own life for your children. They might not be interested in knowing about it now, but at some point in time, they will.

Now is the time to go on that road trip in starting your family research, and it's not that hard. Detailed below are some steps to start you off, ones that can be done from the comfort of your home. It's also a great way to spend a couple of hours, once you start you may find the time you spend researching will fly by.

1. **What tools do I need?** – pen, paper/exercise book and a computer would help before investing in all those genealogy programs that are regularly promoted and can be costly. There are numerous sources that you can access and are freebies.
2. **Where do I start?** – With yourself and work back, then your parents and grandparents. Don't be tempted to jump out of sync and do another relative just because you know something interesting about them. It's like doing a large jigsaw puzzle, where you start with the boundaries and work in. Starting with yourself and extending to your grandparents will give you a solid foundation for your start in researching your family. Focus initially on just your own heritage, you will have time later to do your partners and branch out with other relatives. Work back.
3. **Next step** – Around your home you will have references from your family's past, photos, letters, cards, videos and various mementoes. Group these by individual/family and put in a large envelope and as you progress add information you come across to the appropriate envelope. In your notebook document under each individual the references and mementoes obtained to date.
4. **Talk to your relatives** – ask your closest surviving relatives about their memories when they were growing up, especially about other family members they remember. They can be a good source on information about grandparents. Ask them what records they have of past family members and ask for a copy. Don't limit these approaches to close at hand relatives, but approach those living interstate and overseas.

Relatives can frequently be one of your best sources of information on getting information about family members you were not aware of. It should be one of your first actions as it will add to your resources.

5. **Go on-line** – the web is like a lake full of fish waiting to be caught, but it is a case of catching the right fish. There are many sources of reference, but it's a case of getting the right one. A toe in the water approach is:
 - a. Type in the name of the relative you are researching; you may be lucky and get the right relative along with some useful web site sources of information.
 - b. Go to Google search tips for genealogists – comes up with a number of helpful sites for researching. But don't become bogged down by going through every site!
 - c. FamilySearch.org – a free site with a large collection of helpful records. I would be surprised if you could not find family references on this site.

When going online there are two very important points to consider:

- A lot of very good reference sites will be sourced, like Ancestry and Myheritage, they will be free up to a point and then to continue to use they will ask for a subscription. When you first start off on your research there is no need to invest in such subscriptions. Free access can be obtained from your library or local historical association – when they re-open. At the end of this guide I have listed a number of free sites worth checking out.
- In going on-line, you will find a lot of data-based information relating to DoB, marriage dates, children born, names and DoD. Don't take this information for granted as there is a big chance it may be wrong, as it can frequently vary from tree to tree. Seek out the original documentation, like birth, marriage and death certificates.

6. **Check out your local library or history centre** – local libraries are a great source of information, with the larger libraries providing free access to a number of the major subscription services along with a good reference centre. In Victoria we are lucky in having a very good Family History society. It's called Family History Connections, located in Blackburn and its is worth joining, the volunteers are very helpful.

Frequently we will have relatives who we are researching that come from many points of the globe. If you know some of these locations where the relative you are researching came from, go onto the web and check out to see if there is a local historical society in the area. If there is it may be worthwhile contacting them to see if they can assist in your research with family related information.

7. **Check and share** – For all the records that you come up with and add to your tree, make sure you note their source in your notebook. While I maintain an on-line family tree with references, I also maintain a hard copy record of all the documentation I have collected, especially originals. File such information in that large envelope I suggested at the start of this journey.

If you have started to develop a family tree with specific information supporting your research to date, share it with another family member who is interested in family history. Use them to check your research accuracy from their knowledge and maybe they can enhance it.

Researching family history can be a long drawn out journey, with a lot of frustrations, but it can also be an enjoyable one as you uncover the story of your family. There will be surprises and confirmations of what you had been led to believe, but most importantly you will gain an appreciation of the historians that have gone before you in documenting past events. You are joining them on this journey of recording the past, but on a much more personal basis.

The above seven points to starting your journey are by no means exhaustive in providing all the information needed to do the job, but they will get you started. If you have questions or need help in getting over that inevitable brick wall in your research, please contact me at – tonyrobinson6@me.com

Sites worth checking out:

- FamilySearch
- WikiTree
- Find a Grave
- Google News Archive
- Free BMD – England and Wales
- WorldGenWeb Project
- Cyndi's List
- Rootsweb
- FreeReg
- **National Archives in Canberra**

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