

The Missing Story!

Have you ever looked at your family heritage information and wondered, “what’s the missing story”? What happened that caused your ancestors to choose a certain set of actions? Or what events brought them to a particular situation? Unfortunately, your ancestors are not around to fill in these “missing stories”. So you don’t really know why an ancestor immigrated, for example. Or what happened that caused great-great grandpa to change occupations.

Although there may be no way of knowing or verifying why something happened, a little deduction can create the likely “missing stories” of your ancestors’ lives. The following example illustrates the idea. The cited couple are a fellow researcher’s great grandparents. The facts are:

1. At the time of the marriage (1898) the husband was 31 years old and the wife-to-be was 17. The wife had an older sister who was 28 and also living at home. It was the mother of the bride who applied for the marriage license.
2. The couple’s first child was born slightly less than eight months after the marriage.
3. In 1909 the wife filed for a divorce, citing his disregarding his marital duties by being “willfully absent”.
4. The 1910 census had the husband, the kids, and the unmarried, older sister living together in the same residence. His occupation was listed as “rig builder”.
5. The older sister married the ex-husband in early 1911.

What circumstances prompted the divorce? Why was the wife’s unmarried sister living with the ex-husband in 1910? Why did the husband have the kids, rather than the wife? Then there is the fact that the older sister later married the ex-husband. Obviously, there is a missing story here that goes beyond the “facts” - there are too many oddities. Since no one is alive that can tell the “missing story”, the researcher reasoned the following using the stated rationales:

The “missing story”: *“Although the husband was courting the younger sister (his soon-to-be wife), he and the older sister may have developed an interest in each other.”*

Rationale: The older sister was much closer in age to the husband-to-be and the fact that she later married him means a romantic interest had to develop sometime. Although he could have been courting the older sister, his causing the younger sister’s pregnancy would certainly have upset the older sister, making it unlikely that she would have ever wanted to marry him.

The “missing story”: *“Unfortunately, he got the younger sister pregnant before any marriage was planned, so the girl’s mother insisted they get married right away.”*

Rationale: Although not unusual as pregnancies go, the less than eight months time between marriage and birth is somewhat soon after the wedding night. Add the fact that the girl’s mother applied for the marriage license and it would seem that “mom” had an urgency in getting them “hitched”.

The “missing story”: *“Since it was a “forced” union, the husband may not have really loved his wife and eventually began to ignore her. The wife could not tolerate his absence any more and a divorce was inevitable. The wife was unable to support the kids, so they lived with their father.”*

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Rationale: His absence, stated in the divorce decree, implies a lack of concern for his wife, perhaps motivated by his having to marry her and/or his interest in the older sister. Since he had a livelihood, he could provide financial support for his children so they lived with him.

The “missing story”: *“The unmarried older sister and ex-husband, wanting to pursue their interest in each other, had the sister move into his home after the divorce under the guise of caring for her younger sister’s children. They eventually married following a reasonable waiting period after the divorce.”*

Rationale: The fact that she later married him again implies a romantic interest and that she was perhaps supportive of him, rather than her younger sister, during the divorce. Caring for the children seems a plausible excuse to the community to justify her living with her sister’s ex-husband. Even then, her living with him may have been considered scandalous at the time.

Although the researcher doesn’t know if this is what actually happened, the facts support the possibility... and it does make an interesting ancestor “soap-opera”!

You may also be able to infer reasons for ancestors’ actions based on history. Perhaps the potato famine in Ireland caused your ancestors to migrate. Or was a family breakup caused by political events? For example, it was not unknown for brothers to fight on different sides during the Civil War.

Maybe you can deduce sibling bonds. Our great grandfather and one of his brothers enlisted together and served in the same unit during the Civil War. Whereas a third brother enlisted separately and served in a different unit. This might indicate that the brothers who enlisted together had a close bond and wanted to stay together during the fighting.

There are probably a myriad of deductions you can make based on your family history facts. If you include them though, be sure to state that they are only opinions based on facts, and are not verified.

So think beyond the facts! Deduce what you can about what happened in your ancestors’ lives and you can turn your heritage facts into heritage stories.

For more info:

The Mechanics of Writing Your Family History

http://www.genealogy.com/202/lesson5/course5_01.html?Welcome=1020794621

Family Legends – Can they be trusted?

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~swadling/famhist/legends.htm>

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