

iGeneration

The importance of family history

By Alyssa Christianson

Sitting in a small, weathered kitchen, within a house that has been a home to countless many people; I listen to my grandmother as she reminisces about her teenage years, comparing them fondly with my own.



Hearing her laugh and smile as she recalls her memories makes this moment truly special. Not just because we are joyfully spending time together,

which of late I've been hard-pressed to find, but because I am learning.

Family history is one of the most important things we can learn about and appreciate during our short time in this world.

In school we do fine to just learn about the general history of the world while we put our own personal histories on the backburner.

Many families gather less and less often with each passing year because the inability to span increasing distances due to time or money constraints.

With the rush and urge to move forwards in the world today, it seems almost impossible to take a minute to just sit and reminisce.

Inside of each of us, as Americans, there

is an immense amount of history and a strong desire to share that history. Who better to tell than our own families?

I've heard countless tales of adventure, disaster, celebration, and mischief countless times. No matter how many times I hear a story from my grandparents or my aunts and uncles or parents, I never grow tired of it.

I take pride in my heritage, coming from a Finnish, Swedish, Italian, and French background. The influences of each of these backgrounds have had a profound effect on me in numerous ways.

Knowing about your family's past and heritage is, as I see it, a duty of Americans. We are part of the most diverse country in the

world and should take advantage of and be proud of where we come from and what we have become.

But history goes much deeper than that. There is so much to find beneath the skin of ethnicities.

Hearing stories from my grandparents and even great-grandparent's childhoods is a source of gratification for me. Learning about a different time period and a world much different than ours today ... it helps me appreciate how far we've come at times.

When a story is told and shared, a memory is, in a sense, reactivated and passed on. Though the stories may be woven with some exaggeration here and there, they almost always contain a good life lesson.

It brings a family closer by bringing the past closer. While some people think that it's best to move forward continually, I think it's necessary to stop and look backward every once in a while.

The best part of learning about your family history is that it doesn't cost anything. You don't have to go anywhere or really do anything. You don't have to be shy either because as I've learned, someone is always willing to share.

I know how happy it makes my grandparents when I ask them about when they were younger. They love being able to share just as much as I love to listen.

Not only does reaching back into family history bring out some good discussions, it also instills a sense of pride within the members involved.

Kind of like, if you knew your grandfather was a soldier at some point and he told you war stories ... the difficulties he had lived through ... you would feel proud, I'm sure.

Knowing the contribution that a family member has made, especially one as powerful as becoming a soldier, begins a desire for the listener to improve themselves as well.

Sometimes it's easy to get bored or embarrassed when a family member starts reaching back into the imbroglios of history, but most of the time there is something that will pique the interest of even the most blasé person.

So take a moment. Visit or call up a grandparent or an aunt or uncle, or even just sit down with a parent and listen. That's all you need to do.

You'll be amazed at how excited they'll be to tell you everything. And you'll be amazed at how happy, fulfilled, and proud you'll feel afterwards.

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Dr. Brassard is a graduate of Boston University in Boston, MA and Georgetown University in