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Hello fellow family researchers,

What do you know about the ancestors in your tree? You may have just started family history searching or you may have been at it for many years. A lot of times we fill in the blanks with the typical information such as birth, christening, marriage, death, burial and then we think we’re finished.

But…remember it’s not only a numbers game. The person with the most people in their tree doesn’t win anything. What more could you find out about your family besides these basic facts? Don’t you ever wonder about what their lives were like? I have gotten interested in finding out more about my family. A lot of times I think we get stuck in a rut by clicking on leaves or hints and then we think that’s all there is to find. The other day, I googled one of my first cousins, 2x removed and the area he lived in. I found a little website that seemed to be abandoned, but up popped at little blurb about my cousin. It said that lightning struck his general store and burned it down. That little story got me thinking I need to try looking in different places. Everything that we’re looking for is not on Ancestry or My Heritage. Newspapers.com has some good information on the places our family lived. Newspapers can give you context for your ancestor’s life by giving you a feel for what they did day in and day out.

Another fact I have started adding in to my tree is cause of death. Sometimes you find bizarre info on death certificates or even in an obituary.

I also add in occupations for my family whenever possible. Knowing their occupation can open up other avenues of research. My husband’s grandfather was a photographer in Chicago and we have found some of his work in books about the Pullman Train Company. These types of clues make your family come to life.

While you’re at it, add any military information you can find. Knowing that your relative fought in a war can explain many things such as why you can’t find them in a census or why they are buried in a different location from the rest of the family.

These are just a few ideas of other research you can do on your ancestors. I’m sure as you go, you will think of even more.

See you soon,

Kim Van Vorst

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