

# Diane L. Richard says, “Stop and smell the roses!”



**A**s we do research, we occasionally get stuck. Some call it a brick wall. Regardless of how you refer to it, we can find ourselves banging our head against it. That’s usually not helpful or productive. And, it’s not fun. I like to enjoy researching ancestors, whether my own or those of a client.

One of my favorite ways around this is to change my perspective – I shift from the hunt to exploring the minutiae – or, as the title says, I “stop and smell the roses.” All too often we are so focused on objectives, that we truly don’t see what is often right in front of us, nor do we think to look at things seemingly unrelated to our quest. We see the pretty rose garden, ooh and aww over it and yet, how often do we get down close to the roses and really look at them? Smell them? Touch them? Look around them? Marvel at their existence?

Are you frustrated by your apparent lack of forward research momentum? Whenever I am frustrated by a lack of forward momentum, I just research anything associated with the family – the church they attended, the social organizations they belonged to, their school(s), their activities, their house and neighborhood, any interesting nearby history, how they traveled as emigrants and about the town where they previously lived, how they voted, where they worked, how much they moved around and changed

jobs, and so much more.

## Each of these explorations provides me with:

- (1) details about ancestors lives that enrich my telling of their tale;
- (2) new knowledge about a piece of history that they experienced;
- (3) new inspiration for future research;
- (4) renewed enthusiasm for the research.

These ancestors became less names on paper and unique roses now more fully bloomed, though some blooms are a bit bedraggled! They have beauty, a pretty scent, and a neat texture, all more fully explored! As I kept looking more closely at the rose garden, I just “saw” how much I didn’t know and that I could try and learn about.

## Through my personal explorations:

- (1) a photo of my great-great grandfather was discovered;
- (2) humorous (and not humorous) and intimate stories about various family members were shared (ask me about the wallpaper “event” or the worm or what a congregant thought of my great grandfather!);
- (3) knowledge of hobbies and fun family events were gleaned (ask me about who was the teetotaler, the award-winning pianist, the actress?);

- (4) evolving modes of transportation were better understood (the first motorcycle);
- (5) the hardships of life were more keenly appreciated — those who died way too young or too gruesomely.

Most importantly, each time I “stopped to smell the roses,” I really did appreciate them so much more.

When you are stuck – explore the little details. Look closely at the roses in your family history garden – they are more than just thorns, and beauty, and pretty scents. Deeper exploration can reveal textures and variability, interesting characteristics, unusual history, and more, that can really enrich the story of your family. You may discover pleasant surprises in the process and find yourself rejuvenated and re-energized and ready to battle those brick walls. ☞☞☞



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