

“Deep” Autobiography Exercise: The Intersection of Family History and Autobiography

List up to ten traits or aspects of yourself that you would like to understand further (e.g., these could be personality traits like shyness, physical traits such as short stature or near-sightedness, or occupational aspirations such as being a chemical engineer, cancer researcher or actor.

While many writers trace these traits to the influence (genetic or environmental) of their immediate families, others look to past generations for influence as well.

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How far back do you have knowledge of your maternal line?

Grandparents
Great-grandparents
Great-Great grandparents, etc.

Paternal line?

Grandparents
Great-grandparents
Great-great grandparents, etc.

Sometimes establishing these family lines is complex. If you are adopted or have a stepparent, you may have multiple lines of influence.

What do you think you could discover about yourself by being able to obtain more information about generations past?

Types of records available vary by country, time period and states within the US. U.S. records include such data as birth, marriage, divorce, immigration and naturalization records, military draft and service records and death and burial records. Many records are available online, although the U.S. census (and many state censuses) have a privacy screen of 75 years.

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