

Tangled threads of association connect history, genealogy, literature, and personal memories.

One Family

By Richard Seltzer

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Richard Seltzer

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Disclaimer

This book is, for the most part, a memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. The truth being told is the author's truth and may not be what others recall as truth.

Books by Richard Seltzer

Non-Fiction

One Family

Why Knot?

Trojan War Fiction

Let the Women Have Their Say

Trojan Tales

We First Met in Ithaca, or Was it Eden?

Breeze

Shakespeare Fiction

Shakespeare's Twin Sister

We All Are Shakespeare

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Part One: Our Common Ancestry

Welcome to the Family

This is a family reunion where you're going to meet relatives you never knew were yours. You thought you were alone, but you have a vast extended family. I'll give you a sense of who they are, and why they should matter to you. This isn't a list of names and dates for you to memorize. Rather, the anecdotes I share will build paths of association. Encounters with distant cousins will help you understand their connections to you and to one another; so someday you can introduce them to your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, imparting the immensity, diversity, and importance of this vast family that you didn't realize was yours.

There's a crowd. You'll be tempted to say, like T. S. Eliot (quoting Dante), "I had not thought death had undone so many."

Consider me a chatty Virgil, introducing you to all these fine and not-so-fine folks, grouped as we chance upon them, one encounter leading to another.

Why Should You Care About My Family?

You have two biological parents, four grandparents. The number of your ancestors doubles with each generation. That means you don't need to believe in Adam and Eve to conclude we're all related. Each of us could have had a quadrillion ancestors in the year 550. That's two to the power of 50: one followed by 15 zeros, or a million billion. If it took a second to count each number, it would take 31,688

million years for you to count to a quadrillion. But historians estimate that only about two hundred million people were alive at that time. What happened to your other ancestors?

Until a hundred years ago, most people lived in rural areas and seldom traveled. Families stayed in the same spot for generations. They had little contact with people in other towns, much less other countries. Unless a catastrophe — like war, plague, or famine — forced them to move and mate with strangers, they married among themselves, and everyone in a town was related. "You can be, and in fact are, descended from the same individual many times over," says Adam Rutherford in *A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived: the Human Story Retold Through Our Genes*. "Your great-great-great-great-grandmother might hold that position in your family tree twice, or many times, as her lines of descent branch out from her, but collapse onto you... Our family trees are not trees at all, but entangled meshes" (pp. 162-163).

But, even blunted by interbreeding, the effect of doubling is so powerful that Rutherford believes "with absolute confidence" that if you're of European extraction, you are descended from Charlemagne, the eighth-century Holy Roman Emperor. You are also descended from millions of other people who lived then. The general statement, based on analysis of DNA, is that 80 percent of adult Europeans alive back then had offspring who had offspring through all the generations to today, and that every one of them is an ancestor of everyone of European descent who is alive today. (See <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/charlemagnes-dna-and-our-universal-royalty>)

Another statistical model, goes even further, determining that every person on Earth is at least a fiftieth cousin of everyone else (International Society of Genetic Genealogy). As Rutherford says, "It might seem that a remote tribe would have been isolated from others for centuries in, for example, the Amazon. But no one is isolated indefinitely."

My family is your family. I happen to have found the names and dates of some of our massively numerous shared ancestors. You can and should take pride in these connections, as I do.

Our ancestors include rulers of almost every country in Europe, plus Holy Roman Emperors, Byzantine Emperors, princes of Kiev, Viking chieftains, William "the Conqueror," King John (of Robin Hood and Magna Carta fame), King Alfred "the Great," and King Robert the Bruce of Scotland (who you know from the movie *Braveheart*). Charlemagne appears 42 generations back. (That reminds me of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, where the number 42 is the meaning of life, the universe, and everything.)

Our beliefs shape how we see ourselves and how we live our lives. What difference would it make if you knew your ancestors shaped the course of history? What difference would it make to your children if they knew that they are special in that way? How would you feel about the world and its future, if you knew you had such forebears and may have such descendants?

There are over 1600 direct ancestors listed in the Appendix at the end of this book. Whoever you are, even if you don't know the names of your great-grandparents, if you are of European descent, some part of this family tree is yours. And if you have children and your children

have children for about 35 generations, a thousand years from now everyone alive on Earth, and on planets colonized by Earth, will be your descendant.

We're all one family.

The Joy of Discovery

Knowing that you are descended from famous, influential, and creative people who lived hundreds of years ago may not be enough for you. You may want to do your own research and get the joy of discovery. That's not impossible, but it will take luck as well as effort.

Few people can trace their ancestry back as many as four generations; but if you can go as far as 50 generations, you may have an experience like that of Paul Atrides ("Muad-Dib") in the novel *Dune*. Thanks to the effects of "spice," he senses the presence of all his ancestors thousands of years back. And however far back you go, building your family history may give you a pleasure like solving a massive jigsaw puzzle.

My mother was very lucky, and I couldn't have done what I did without her.

She grew up as an orphan, during the Depression, on a cobblestone street in the immigrant East Falls section of Philadelphia, in a row house crammed with seven children. She wasn't the first born, nor the baby, nor even the middle child. She was the sixth of seven — a nonentity. She got top grades in high school but couldn't afford college. She knew her father had come from Tennessee but didn't know the names or addresses of any Tennessee relatives.

Atop a nearby hill loomed the estate of the Kellys, parents of Grace, the future movie star and Princess of Monaco. Grace was nine years younger than Mom. Sometimes neighborhood kids were allowed to play tennis on their courts. Mom envied Grace and dreamed of being in High Society.

When she was 36, on a hunch, Mom wrote to Estes Kefauver. He was running for vice president with Adlai Stevenson, as a Democrat. Her maiden name was Estes, the same as his first name; and he was from Tennessee. Perhaps there could be a connection. He replied immediately, pointing her to a genealogy book published in 1939 that listed her birth and parentage.

They were third cousins.

She got a copy of the book and, with it, she found her father's sister Sallie, who was living in Brownsville, Tennessee, on what had been the family plantation. In 1959, we drove from our home in New Hampshire to Tennessee, where we met Aunt Sallie and dozens of other relatives. Little Orphan Annie had a huge extended family. We saw her father's grave. The death date was 1943.

To Mom, discovering her father's family and ancestry was a dream come true. The genealogy book (*The Cary-Estes Genealogy* by May Folk Webb and Patrick Mann Estes) provided the evidence she needed to join the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) as well as the even more exclusive Colonial Dames. She encouraged my Dad to look into his ancestry, and he, too, uncovered someone who had participated in the Revolution. That enabled him to join the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). He was proud of his membership and participated in local events.

In 1979, Mom reprinted the original *Cary-Estes Genealogy* and began compiling a companion volume, covering the family since 1939. For her new book, with the zeal of someone raised as an orphan, she tried to track down everyone mentioned in the original book who was still alive. She solicited updates from them, as well as photos, anecdotes, and family history. Even after she self-published that book, *The Cary-Estes-Moore Genealogy*, in 1981, she continued to gather information for another, corresponding with and sometimes visiting hundreds of relatives all over the United States and the British Isles. Researching family history, she formed long-lasting friendships with a huge extended family. That effort also brought her the status she had craved as an orphan child. Her ancestry helped define her proper place in the world.

Ancestor Surfing

If, like me, you are fortunate enough to find an historical connection in your family history, whether by fact or tradition, start your research there. Use Wikipedia, Ancestry.com, and other online resources and see how far back those ancestral paths lead, to what people, countries, and events. Savor your personal connections to distant history. Share what you find with friends and family, and let me know, as well, by email (seltzer@seltzerbooks.com).

I always had an itch to learn about my ancestors. At the age of twelve, when visiting my Dad's parents (Pop Pop and Nana), I checked handwritten family histories compiled by my great-grandfather and by distant cousins. I took detailed notes and asked follow-up questions. Later, when Mom got the original Estes genealogy book, I did my best to decipher the formatting, the numbering system, and the abbreviations, to figure out how I fit into the overall picture. Decades later, it dawned on me that Wikipedia

and other Internet resources could enable me to trace my ancestry further back.

I started with clues on pages 83-87 of *The Cary-Estes Genealogy* (which you can read online at seltzerbooks.com/caryestescomplete.pdf). King James IV of Scotland is an ancestor. The Wikipedia entry for him shows his parents; the entries for them show their parents; and so on. I call following such a trail "ancestor surfing."

Royal marriages linked the king or heir of one country with the ruling family of another, often establishing alliances. That practice wasn't prescribed by law, but local marriages were rare. Though not the stated intent, such marriages united the ancestral pools of the most important families.

Because of the importance of the birth and health of an heir to the throne, records of ancestry were kept meticulously, like those of thoroughbred horses today. Online access to that information made it easy for me to trace many generations. Also, medieval chronicles and sagas were readily available online or in print from Amazon. And Ancestry.com often confirmed what I had found elsewhere and also provided details about non-royal ancestors.

The lists in the Appendix reveal the interconnected complexity of European royal families in the Middle Ages. I believe that our most fascinating ancestor is Eleanor of Aquitaine, mother of King Richard I "the Lion-Hearted" and of King John from the Robin Hood legends. (See more on her in Part Two: Extraordinary Women).

One line goes back 53 generations to Flavius Afranius Syragrius, who served as proconsul of Africa and prefect of Rome. He was consul in 382. His page at Wikipedia used to link to a list of the ancestors of Queen Elizabeth II, saying that he is "the earliest known ancestor of any of the royal houses of Europe." That list, which is no longer online, was identical to ours for the first 33 generations, from Flavius Afranius through King Edward III.

I became addicted, following more and more lines, further and further back; and I've just scratched the surface. I followed one line back 58 generations to a king of Armenia in 265 CE. Another line led to Odin (Norse King of the Gods) and his ancestor Thor AKA Tror, a grandson of King Priam of Troy, who was a descendant of Zeus (Greek King of the Gods). Zeus's grandmother, Gaia, Earth Goddess, was 100 generations back, at the beginning of the universe.

Internet Evangelist

Ancestor surfing came naturally to me. Working for DEC (Digital Equipment Corporation), the minicomputer maker, I was part of a small team focused on business opportunities opening on the Internet. In February 1994, soon after the Internet went public and the first web browser was released, I wrote and, together with Bertold Langer, produced a three-minute video, *A Glimpse of the Future*. The immediate purpose was to help a DEC vice president seem prophetic in a speech to his employees. But word about the video spread quickly, and the creators of Mosaic (the first web browser) and dozens of other companies, including DEC's competitors, requested and distributed thousands of copies of this video and used it to spread the word about the business potential of the Internet, which, at that time, many people found difficult to imagine. (You can see that video at youtube.com. Search for

"glimpse of the future seltzer"). Soon after that, I was asked to write a speech on the same topic for Massachusetts Governor Bill Weld to deliver at the National Governors' Conference in Boston.

A year later, DEC asked me to write the first consumer-oriented book about search engines. After *The AltaVista Search Revolution* was published, they sent me around the world to deliver speeches — all over the US and Canada, plus Bogota, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Moscow, and even Zimbabwe. This was two years before Google started, eight years before Facebook.

I believed the essence of the Internet was its ability to connect people to people. First, create a space where people can gather; then, capitalize on the business opportunities that emerge. In my many of my speeches, I highlighted nine industries that the Internet would transform over the next decade:

- publishing,
- broadcasting,
- banking/finance,
- telecommunications,
- education/training,
- manufacturing,
- government,
- healthcare,
- retail.

I had a talent for brainstorming about the impact of technology on business. The title on my business card was "Internet Evangelist." And I could speak for an hour or more, with conviction and enthusiasm, to audiences of thousands — I was preaching a new gospel, that the Internet makes it possible for people to connect

closely and in unexpected, tangled ways, no matter where they live and what their backgrounds, to truly act like members of the same family.

Not Me, I'm Jewish

If, like my daughter-in-law and my girlfriend, you believe you are 100% Jewish, check your DNA. Your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents may all be Jewish as far back as anyone in your family can remember, but chances are that at least 1% of your DNA is non-Jewish. Not all putative fathers are genetic fathers. Don't be shocked at the possible infidelity of some of your ancestors. Severe penalties kept indiscretions hidden; but romance, sexual attraction, and the lure of the forbidden have always been powerful motivators. Perhaps infidelity has an evolutionary benefit, expanding the ancestral pool. Also, war and pogroms often led to rape. Jewish tradition takes those factors into account, tracing ancestry by the mother, not the father. Her contribution is certain. His is not.

One generation back, you are 50% your mother's DNA and 50% your father's; two generations, 25% of each grandparent; three generations, 12.5%; four generations, 6.25%; five generations, 3.125%; six generations, a little over 1.5% of each great-great-great-great-grandparent. So if around 200 years ago, one father-of-record was not the father-of-fact and was not Jewish, you would have about 1.5% non-Jewish ancestry. And going back 36 generations from that non-Jewish father, the number of your non-Jewish ancestors at the time of Charlemagne would be over 68 billion — two to the power of 36.

If you are less than 1% non-Jewish, that pushes the date of your first non-Jewish ancestor back further. If you are 1% of 1% non-Jewish,

the anomaly happened six generations earlier, and the number of your non-Jewish ancestors at the time of Charlemagne is two to the power of 30 — over a billion.

So you, too, may be descended from Charlemagne.

"First Night" and Other Ways the Ancestral Pot Was Stirred

In medieval times in Europe, feudal lords had the right to bed any woman who was their subject, often doing so on her wedding night. It's impossible to gauge how frequently this right was exercised. But the children of such matings were raised as peasants and mated with other peasants, which spread the ancestry of nobles among the peasant population.

That practice had a long history. It was true in the days of Gilgamesh, the legendary Sumerian king. "He is king, he does whatever he wants... takes the girl from her mother and uses her, the warrior's daughter, the young man's bride" (*Gilgamesh* translated by Stephen Michael). And, according to Wikipedia, *The Babylonian Talmud* mentions a draconian decree imposed on the Jewish community that made all Jewish brides subject to rape by their Syrian-Greek oppressors before their wedding.

Religious conversion also impacted ancestral lines, changing the definition of the in-group and the out-group. In many places and for a long time, Jews were subject to serious penalties and restrictions; but if they converted, they became Christians, with all the rights of Christians, including the right to marry other Christians. The children of such marriages had both Christian and Jewish ancestors.

Also in the centuries after the fall of Rome, there were instances of mass conversion from other religions to Christianity. Several of our ancestors were credited for such events:

- Around 496, at the prompting of his wife Saint Clotilde, Clovis, the first king of France, converted to Christianity and had his troops do likewise.
- King Borivoj I (852-889) and his wife, Saint Ludmila (860-921), grandparents of "Good King" Wenceslaus, converted Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) to Christianity.
- Rollo (d. 933), the great-great-great-grandfather of our ancestor William "the Conqueror," converted his Viking warriors to Christianity as part of the treaty that gave him rule over Normandy.
- Saint Vladimir "the Great," Prince of Kiev (958-1015), made Christianity the national religion of his country.

And not all conversions were to Christianity. One of our ancestors, the Byzantine Emperor Michael II "the Stammerer" (c. 800), belonged to the Athinganoi sect, which adopted Jewish faith and rituals. According to Wikipedia, in that era, the Athinganoi were numerous in Anatolia and the Balkans and formed the backbone of the Byzantine army.

What You Believe Has Consequences

Charlemagne, your ancestor, was the seven-greats grandson of Clovis, the first king of France (see the Line of Brunhild the Valkyrie in Lines of Descent in the Appendix). Clovis was reputed to be a descendant of Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ. (The plot of Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* is based on that legend). As unlikely as that story is, its implications are interesting. Apocryphal texts such as the

Gospels of Thomas, Philip, and Mary in The Nag Hammadi Library portray Mary Magdalene as a visionary and leader of the early church whom Jesus loved more than he loved his disciples. She truly understood his teachings. And according to legend, she was Jesus's wife, not a prostitute. Pregnant at the time of the Crucifixion, she fled to Gaul, where she was sheltered by the Jews of Marseille and gave birth to Sarah, an ancestor of Clovis.

By that way of thinking, everyone with European ancestry is descended from Jesus, who was Jewish, with lineage going back to King David and Abraham.

Maybe you don't consider the arguments about Charlemagne compelling. And maybe you think the legend about descent from Jesus absurd. But what would be the consequences if you believed them and if nearly everyone did? Where truth can't be determined, belief is a powerful force. This belief could help us think and act like we are all one family.

Ancestral Pool

In this mosaic of historical and personal anecdotes, fact and fiction are intertwined. I'm following threads of memory and of family history. I'm also ancestor surfing through history, looking for connections. We lie to ourselves and to one another, and coincidence shifts the paths of our lives this way and that. We believe what we're ready to believe, and what we believe is more important than what actually happens. And we all share a common ancestry, connected as one family.

I'm writing about what people believed in the past and what they believe today, independent of and sometimes in contradiction to

scientific facts. For instance, without any proof one way or the other, today some of us believe in an afterlife and some of us don't. And in medieval Europe, many people had detailed ideas about what comes after death and how the dead are connected to the living. Such ideas can have a major impact on our individual lives and on the course of history.

To avoid confusion, I won't use words like "genes" and "gene pool," but rather, "ancestors" and "ancestral pool." And I'll include legends of heroes and gods and fantastical creatures that scientists would never consider but that have impact on human aspirations and reputations and notions of self-worth. And I'll try to convince you to believe that we are all one family, not because of the truth of that proposition, but because of the benefits that could redound to all of us from such a belief.

Thomas Malthus saw the dark side of population growth. He observed that human population grows faster than the food supply, until famine, war, or disease reduces it. He presumed that would always be the case, and he didn't see any benefit from it.

Undisturbed, people tend to stay put, in pockets, isolated from one another. Population growth leads to pockets colliding with one another, which triggers war, famine, pestilence, and mass migration, all of which lead to the mixing of ancestral lines, which seems to be important for the survival of the human species. But, today, large-scale mixing can occur without catastrophes.

Economic globalism, made possible by advances in communication and transportation, is bringing together previously remote and separate populations. In isolation, ideas and beliefs, as well as

ancestral lines, tend to be group-specific, emphasizing differences and exclusivity rather than commonality. But now that we can mix without the need for catastrophes, we may be able to live together as one family.

More than genetics

Your connections to the past and to the future involve more than genetics. Philosophers and scientists have long debated whether nature or nurture is more important in shaping our lives. For those of us who were raised by our genetic parents, those factors are combined. But you might have been raised believing that you have one set of parents when, in fact, you were adopted. Or perhaps your mother mated with someone other than her husband. Maybe you don't know the names and dates of your grandparents or great-grandparents, but you think of yourself as part of a cultural tradition.

Also, people other than your parents may have shaped who you became, as guardians, mentors, or role models. Mom's aunts, who raised her after she became an orphan, were very important to her, especially Aunt Lil, who laid out the rules and administered punishment, protecting her and looking out for her — both feared and loved.

In ancient Rome, choice mattered more than chance. A man could adopt a child and make that child his heir even if he had birth children. Octavian/Augustus was adopted by Julius Caesar, Hadrian by Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius by Marcus Antoninus. In Plato's *Republic*, children are deliberately raised not knowing who their parents are so they will all be treated equally. Some Christian denominations revere the "apostolic succession," tracing the current ministry of the church through a chain of predecessors that leads

back to Saint Peter. Some scholars see themselves as part of a chain of teachers extending hundreds of years into the past. Poets and novelists learn from those who came before them, modeling their writing on "teachers" who may have been dead for centuries.

If you build your own family history, you can choose to include adoptions, family traditions, legends, and other influences, not just genetic ties. I came across some bizarre legends. One ancestor was a sea monster, a Quinotaur (a bull with five horns). According to the seventh century *Chronicle of Flaccidus*, a Quinotaur fathered our ancestor Merovech. The historical Merovich was one of the warlords who, in alliance with the Roman general Flavius Aetius, fought against Attila and his Huns at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains in 451, ending Attila's invasion of Gaul. (Attila, too, is our ancestor).

King John, our ancestor, by his incompetence, prompted his barons to rebel and demand he accept the terms of the Magna Carta, a foundational document of democracy in both England and America. An historian of his day, Ralph de Diceto, wrote that John was descended from Odin, king of the Norse gods, and — adding a dash of magical evil — from the demoness Melusine. With ancestors like those, no wonder I love fantasy.

Dukes of Ferrara in Renaissance Italy

Mom associated her maiden name "Estes" with the House of Este in Ferrara, Italy, which was prominent during the Renaissance. The Este family was famous for patronizing the arts and also for brutality. The poem *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning portrays Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, telling his new bride, Lucrezia Borgia, about his first wife, warning her that she better be faithful to him or else.

from **My Last Duchess (Ferrara)**

...

She had

A heart — how shall I say?— too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace — all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men— good! but thanked

Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody's gift.

...

Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive....

According to *The Cary-Estes Genealogy*, the line of descent runs as follows, going back 32 generations starting with Mom. (In my lists she appears as generation 3, I as generation 2, my children as 1, and my grandchildren as 0).

3) Helen Isabella Estes (1920-2010) married Richard Warren Seltzer

4) Smith William Estes (1881-1943) married Mae Griffith

Our Common Ancestry

- 5) Louis Powhatan Estes (1849-1902) married Lily Yates Moore (1853-1929)
- 6) Albert Monroe Estes (1804-1863) married Mildred Colman
- 7) Joel Estes (1780-1833) married Sara Langhorne Bates
- 8) Benjamin Estes (1753-1816) married Cecilia Thorpe
- 9) Abraham Estes, Jr. (1697-1759) married Elizabeth Jeeter
- 10) Abraham Estes, Sr. (1647-1720), emigrated from Ringwould, Kent England to St. Stephens, King Queen County, Virginia married Barbara Brock
- 11) Sylvester Estes (1596-1667) married Ellen Martin
- 12) Robert Estes (1555-1616) Ringwould, Kent, England, married Anne Woodward
- 13) Sylvester Estes (1522-1579) born in Deal, Kent, England died Ringwould, Kent, England, married Jone Estes
- 14) Nicholas Estes (1495-1533)
- 15) Robert Estes (1475-1506)
- 16) Francesco d'Este AKA Francisco Estes AKA Francisco Esteuse, born in Italy and died in England (1440-?)
- 17) Leonello d'Este, Marquess of Ferrara etc. (1407-1450)
- 18) Niccolo III d'Este, Marquess of Ferrara etc. (1383-1441)

Leonello became Marquess of Ferrara on his father's death. But when Leonello died, he was succeeded by his brother Borso, instead of his son Francesco, our ancestor. Francesco went to northern Europe, eventually settling in England. Considering the culture of violence at that time and place, he probably fled for his life. On the death of Borso, Ercole, another brother succeeded and transformed Ferrara into a cultural center. He was a patron of Leonardo da Vinci as well as the poet Ariosto. The second wife of his son and heir, Alfonso, was Lucrezia Borgia, the illegitimate daughter of Pope Alexander VI,

portrayed in the Browning poem *My Last Duchess* above, and also in the Showcase series *The Borgias*.

Alexander, who became pope the year that Columbus discovered America, drew the Line of Demarcation which gave Brazil to Portugal and the rest of the Western Hemisphere to Spain. He rose to power and stayed there by murder. His illegitimate son, Cesare, commanded an army, with which he sought to control central Italy. Machiavelli addressed his infamous book *The Prince* to Cesare. It provides practical advice on how to seize power and expand it. Believing that "the end justifies the means," Machiavelli hoped that Cesare would unite Italy by conquering it.

My mother's middle name was Isabella. And one of the daughters of Ercole I was Isabella d'Este, who became the Marchioness of Mantua. Leonardo da Vinci did a portrait of her. A drawing survives, but there may have been a painting as well. *The Cary-Estes Genealogy* quotes an art critic (Raymond S. Sites) speculating that Isabella d'Este was the model for the *Mona Lisa*.

Mom believed that a family resemblance had survived for 14 generations and that her niece Joyce was a dead ringer for the Mona Lisa. To prove her point, in her genealogy book, Mom published a photo of Joyce facing a photo of the Mona Lisa.

Mom was also obsessed about Pocahontas. Her grandfather's middle name was Powhattan, so she concluded there must be a link. The connection was collateral rather than direct. A cousin married into a family that proudly traced its origins to John Rolfe and Pocahontas. But no evidence could convince Mom that she wasn't a direct descendant. She took great pride in her native American roots.

Orlando

Throughout the ages, authors have transformed family legends into inspiring tales for the many. In his epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1516), Ludovico Ariosto, who, like Leonardo da Vinci, was patronized by our Estes ancestors, wove together fantasy, history, and Estes family legend in a romantic chivalric tale, with wizards and war and love, as well as a sea monster and a flying horse. He even included a trip to the moon. Orlando, also known as "Roland," was one of the Paladins of Charlemagne, who, like King Arthur's Knights of the Roundtable, were the subject of many medieval tales of chivalry. In this story, Orlando is obsessed with Angelica, a pagan princess who doesn't return his love, which drives him mad. The historical figure on which Orlando is based was also the subject of the eleventh century French epic, *The Song of Roland*, about a losing battle against invading Saracens in 778, during Charlemagne's reign.

In *Orlando Furioso*, Ariosto invented a common genealogy for both his legendary hero and his patron, the Duke of Ferrara.

Canto 36

LXX

"Of Trojan ancestors are we the seed,
Through famous Hector's line," (Rogero said,)
"For after young Astyanax was freed,
From fierce Ulysses and the toils he spread,
Leaving another stripling in his stead,
Of his own age, he out of Phrygia fled.
Who, after long and wide sea-wandering,
gained Sicily's shore, and in Messina reigned.

LXXI

"Part of Calabria within Faro held

The warrior's heirs, who after a long run
Of successors, departed thence and dwelled
In Mars' imperial city: more than one
Famed king and emperor, who that list have swelled,
In Rome and other part has filled the throne;
And from Constantius and good Constantine,
Stretched to the son of Pepin, is their line.

(translated by William Stewart Rose)

According to Ariosto, Astyanax, son of Hector, wasn't an infant when Troy fell and wasn't killed there. Rather, he was a young man (a "stripling"), and he left someone else to be killed in his place. He fled to Sicily, where he became the ruler of Messina. The Roman emperors Constantius and Constantine were descended from him. The "son of Pepin" is Charlemagne, who we're all descended from.

Echoes of Lancelot

Was Robin Hood real? Was King Arthur? Legend and history, fiction and fact are interwoven. As Yeats put it, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

While William, soon to be "the Conqueror," rode toward the Battle of Hastings, a minstrel named Taillefer entertained him with *The Song of Roland* which made legend out of an historical battle in the days of Charlemagne. Taillefer sang so well that William granted him the honor of striking the first blow, and the minstrel died in battle, the teller of one legend becoming part of another.

Ripley's Believe or Not points out says that Taillefer (meaning "hewer of iron") died on October 14, and Eisenhower (which also means

"hewer of iron") was born on October 14. The one invaded from Normandy, and the other to Normandy.

Chrétien de Troyes (1160-1191), author of chivalric romances, lived at the court of his patron, Marie de France (1145-1198), Countess of Champagne, another ancestor of ours. She was a daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and King Louis VII of France. At the age of eight, Marie was betrothed to Henry I, Count of Champagne. She married him at 14 and served as regent when he went on a crusade to the Holy Land. Shortly after his return, he died, and she became regent again. She didn't remarry.

According to the scholar Urban T. Holmes III and the novelist Roberta Kalechofsky (in her excellent, but neglected novel *The Anonymities*), Chrétien de Troyes was the pen name of a convert from Judaism to Christianity who wanted to disguise his origins. Those were the days when troubadours composed tales of courtly love. He wrote rhymed romances about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. His most popular was about the adulterous affair of Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. He and Marie were close friends for years. Her husband was no love match and was often absent. One or more of her children (perhaps our ancestor) may have been fathered by Chrétien.

Another ancestor of ours, Cerdic of Wessex, 52 generations back, was the leader of the first group of West Saxons who invaded England in 495. He ruled as King of Wessex 519-534, in what is now the south of England. In the movie *King Arthur*, Cerdic and his son are portrayed as killed in battle by King Arthur and Sir Lancelot.

Odin and a Hint of Middle Earth

My research took me to the earliest recorded times, when the boundary between humans and gods was fuzzy. According to *The Ynglinga Saga* by Snorr Sturluson, written in Iceland around 1300 (the time of Dante), Odin was a king before he became a god. He reigned in Scythia, in what is now Ukraine and Russia. His capital city, Asgard, was east of the Don River, which flows into the Black Sea. He invaded and conquered Scandinavia, where his sons and their descendants reigned as kings in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. After his death, Odin and some of his sons, like Thor, Balder, and our ancestor Njord, were worshipped as gods. Njord became associated with the sea, seafaring, wind, fishing, wealth, and crop fertility; and Asgard became the dwelling place of the gods, comparable to Mount Olympus. Sturluson listed 25 generations of Swedish kings, each the son of the one before, leading from Odin down to Olaf "Tree Feller," our ancestor.

Odin was often portrayed as a wandering one-eyed god, with a staff and a hat. He sacrificed an eye, gouging it out himself, as the price for being allowed to drink from the Well of Cosmic Knowledge. (In Marvel comics and movies, he lost his eye in battle.)

According to Sturluson, Odin was a "songsmith," speaking in rhyme. With a song he could open earth, hills, stones, and burial mounds. He was also a shapeshifter, able to make himself into fish, worm, bird, or beast. He could go to distant lands in a twinkling and could quench fire, still an ocean storm, or change the direction of the wind with words alone. He could also call the dead out of the earth. He could take strength or wit from one person and give it to another. He could blind or deafen his enemies and could make their weapons blunt. His men rushed forward without armor, like mad dogs or wolves, strong

as bears or wild bulls, and could kill with a single blow. Neither fire nor iron could hurt them. They were called "Berserkers."

Another Sturluson book, *The Prose Edda*, provides a different genealogy, tracing Odin's ancestry 21 generations further back, to King Priam of Troy, saying that Troy, in what became Turkey, was the same as Asgard. Priam's grandson Tror AKA Thor travelled widely, battling giants, dragons, and other beasts. In the far north, he met and married a prophethess named Sif (our ancestor). A volcano on the planet Venus is named after her (Sif Mons), and Marvel Studios included her in the movie *Thor* and the TV series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

That fantastical genealogy has the same starting point as the one the Renaissance Italian poet Ariosto invented for the Dukes of Ferrara (our ancestors).

There's also a connection to the fantasy world of Tolkien. According to Sturluson's *Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, Halfdan the Black, brother of Olaf Gudrødsson (our ancestor), waged war against and defeated King Gandalf.

Should we give any credence to such legends? Sturluson recommends that we do. "Although we cannot say what truth there may be in these, yet we have the certainty that old and wise men held them to be true (*Heimskringla: Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, p. 3)

I believe I may have seen Odin once, in the form of a hawk, in the living room of our house in Boston. When my daughter was five

weeks old, a hawk flew down the chimney, alighted on a railing of her crib, and stared at her. She didn't cry. She stared back.

This was a big brown bird, clutching the railing with sharp talons. Shocked and frightened, I walked around him slowly, not wanting to scare him. I opened a window wide, then moved back, facing him, and, with hand gestures, encouraged him to fly out. He did, and was gone. The incident probably took less than two minutes, though, to me, it felt like hours. We had a bird-proof screen put on top of the chimney so that couldn't happen again.

Now I wonder what he told her and what she told him during that moment when their eyes locked.

Beowulf

Growing up, I didn't read Norse sagas or *Beowulf*. At Mom's prompting I dove into Greek myths instead. When, at age 10, I had read a dozen books on the subject, I presumed that I knew everything there was to know about Greek mythology. So I sent a letter to *Giant Step*, a quiz show where 7 to 17 year olds competed. That was the heyday of quiz shows, with the *\$64,000 Question* at the top of the ratings.

One day, right before supper, I answered the phone, even though Mom and Dad were home. I had never done that before. Nobody ever called me. By chance, the caller wanted to talk to me, not them. He said he was from *Giant Step*. He wanted to know if I could compete in the broad category "mythology" rather than the narrow one "Greek mythology." Without hesitation, I said "no." I knew nothing about Norse myths and didn't want to be humiliated. End of discussion. End of opportunity.

Now, writing this book at age 78, I stumbled upon ancestors connected to *Beowulf* and finally dove into that story with gusto. I even watched the 2007 movie with Ray Winstone, Anthony Hopkins, Robin Wright, and John Malkovich.

The historical/legendary Beowulf was an ally of our ancestor Eadgils. When King Ohthere of Sweden (our ancestor) died, he was succeeded by his younger brother Onela, and his sons Eadgils and Eanmund sought refuge with Heardred, King of the Geats. When Onela went to war against the Geats and Heardred was killed, Beowulf, Heardred's first cousin, succeeded him as king. Then, with Danish help as well as help from Beowulf, Eadgils struck back, defeated Onela, and regained the Swedish throne.

In the Anglo-Saxon epic, Beowulf faces not just one but three monsters, in succession: Grendl, Grendl's mother, and a dragon. Heroes are defined by the challenges they face — the more powerful the monsters and the more of them there are, the greater the acclaim for the victor. Perhaps that's true not just in legend, but in everyday life as well. When the going gets tough, we should take pride in what we can do despite the difficulty.

Nibelungenlied and Attila the Hun

Reading the medieval German epic *The Nibelungenlied* for the first time, I didn't realize that Attila was a main character. I also didn't know that he was an ancestor of ours. (See Lines of Descent in the Appendix). In the epic, he's called "Etzel;" and he's portrayed as a civilized, honorable, and courteous European king, not a barbarian leading a murderous horde. *The Nibelungenlied* was written around 1200, over 700 years after the events purportedly occurred, by a poet who presumed that the chivalrous manners and morals of his day

applied back then as well, that nothing had changed. Etzel is a High Middle German variant of the name Attila, and his people are "Huns."

The Attila of history lived from about 406 to 453. Known as "the Scourge of God," he invaded both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires and built an empire of his own in Europe. Even before he came to power, the borders were nebulous and westward moving. As the Huns advanced, they pushed Germanic tribes into territory controlled by Rome. Under Attila, the Huns battled the Romans directly and advanced inexorably, with an army estimated at over half a million, until they were stopped in 451 at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, near present-day Orleans, south of Paris.

As praetorian prefect of Gaul, our ancestor Tonantius Ferreolus, was instrumental in organizing the Roman defense that led to that battle. And the allied army led by Roman general Flavius Aetius included the forces of King Merovech of the Salian Franks (our ancestor) as well as those of King Gondioc of Burgundy (also our ancestor). Gondioc was the son of Gunther and Brunhild who appear in *The Nibelungenlied* as well as in Wagner's four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Brunhild is renowned for her "vast strength and surpassing beauty" (Hatto translation). She falls in love with Sigfried "the Dragon-Slayer" and has a jealous feud with Kriemhild, who is Sigfried's wife. Brunhild has Sigfried murdered; then Kriemhild marries King Etzel (Attila) and, with his help, wreaks revenge, causing the massacre of thousands. In Norse mythology, Brunhild is a Valkyrie, a female figure who guides souls of dead warriors to Valhalla, where

they enjoy fighting one another until Ragnarök, the cataclysmic battle at the end of time.

The historical Attila died of a nose bleed during revels in celebration of his last marriage. There was no wound. Like me, he may have had a blood condition that made him prone to uncontrolled bleeding. (We'll touch on that in Part Seven: Blood).

The Welsh Discovery of America

According to another legend, a Welshman named Madoc, son of Owain (an ancestor of ours), discovered America in 1170, three hundred years before Columbus. After the discovery, he returned home, recruited colonists, and made ten more trips back and forth, taking them to the New World.

Richard Haklyut, a British historian of voyages of exploration, first recorded that legend in 1582. At the time, it stirred up interest as the basis for England having an older and better claim to the New World than Spain had with Columbus.

Two hundred years later, that legend was resurrected with new forms of proof — not artifacts, but stories that could inspire more stories and become a meme. Frontiersmen in the newly opened territories along the Ohio and Missouri Rivers reported that they had encountered a tribe of light-skinned natives who spoke Welsh among themselves. They concluded that Madoc's colonists had interbred with the natives, and these were their descendants. In his book *Undaunted Courage*, Stephen Ambrose mentions that President Jefferson thought the Madoc myth might be true and instructed Lewis (of the Lewis and Clark Expedition) to look for Welsh-speaking Indians (p. 285).

When truth intersects with fantasy, sometimes they become interwoven, making cloth far stronger than that made from truth alone. Neither logic nor evidence can break it asunder. Such is the tale of the Welsh discovery of America.

The Warner Family

The trail of my associations led from Leonello to his brother Ercole to the writings of a poet patronized by Ercole. I also entertained the speculation that Chrétien de Troyes was a Jew by birth and that he fathered children of Marie de France. Professional genealogists would dismiss such tales, preferring direct genetic lines and facts without literary embellishment.

I delight in stories that have lives of their own, that get entangled with history and ancestry. I relish the coincidence that Chrétien lived in Troyes, a medieval city in what is now France, named for the ancient city of Troy, home of Hector, whom Ariosto claimed was a forebear of both the Estes family and his fictionalized hero Orlando. As Sir Walter Scott would say, "Oh, what a twisted web we weave."

If Mom had known of it before she died, she would also have loved our collateral connections with the Warner Family, which lead from indentured servant to queen.

A Warner cousin found me on Ancestry.com and generously shared with me the results of his research. He added my tree to his and assembled a chart which he printed and laminated for me. It now hangs on the wall by my desk.

The chart begins with Augustine Warner, Sr. (1611-1674). It ends with me, and includes George Washington, Meriwether Lewis of

Our Common Ancestry

Lewis and Clark, Robert E. Lee, and Queen Elizabeth II. Those famous people are cousins of ours, not direct ancestors, but I value the information. I hadn't realized how closely Washington, Lewis, and Lee were related to one another, much less to us.

Here are the twelve generations of descent from Augustine to Elizabeth:

- 12) Augustine Warner, Sr. (1611-1674) married M. Mary Townley (1614-1662)
- 11) Augustine Warner, Jr. (1642-1681), Speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses married Mildred Reade (1642-1693)
- 10) Mary Warner (1664-1700) married John Smith (1662-1698)
- 9) Mildred Smith married Robert Porteus, Sr. (1679-1758)
- 8) Rev. Robert Porteus, Jr. (1705-1754) married Judith Cockayne (1702-1789)
- 7) Mildred Porteus married Robert Hodgson, Sr.
- 6) Rev. Robert Hodgson (1766-1844) married Mary Tucker
- 5) Henrietta Mildred Hodgson (1778-1844) married Oswald Smith (1794-1863)
- 4) Frances Dora Smith (1833-1922) married Claude Bowes-Lyon
- 3) Claude George Bowes-Lyon (1855-1944) married Nina Cecilia Cavendish-Bentick
- 2) Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (1900-2002) married King George VI of England (1895-1952)
- 1) Queen Elizabeth II (1926-2022) married Prince Philip Mountbatten (Duke of Edinburgh) (1921-2021)

When Augustine Warner, Sr., the illustrious ancestor we have in common with Queen Elizabeth, emigrated to Virginia at the age of 17, in 1628, he was an indentured servant, owned by his master until his term of servitude came to an end.

The Uncertainty Principle

If you find a link to the historical past and decide to ancestor surf or to compile your own family history, don't be discouraged if you can't establish facts with certainty. Sometimes data doesn't exist or it's inconclusive or contradictory. But don't give up. The effort itself may bring joy and lead to unexpected knowledge.

Historical records are wreckage that has been picked over and rearranged by people with biases and motivations that may differ from your own. *Caveat lector!* (Reader beware!)

In your research, you are likely to use Wikipedia often. If I don't specifically say where I got information, presume it's from Wikipedia. In 2023, an estimated 4.3 billion unique visitors accessed its files, which were the equivalent of over 60 million printed pages. Currently, over 800 administrators and nearly 8000 reviewers check submitted content and propose corrections. Since it's published online, there's no need to wait years for a new print edition. Changes appear when approved. That's great for the accuracy of what's online; but, as a consequence, the entry that you read and quote might be changed or deleted without your knowing. So even if your work is published online rather than in print, you can't update what you've written every time there are changes in the Wikipedia text you relied on. Other websites you reference will also change their content or may disappear. So you should always save copies of web pages that are important to you, not just record their web addresses.

And when you write about your results, be open about your doubts and rely on your judgment rather than on the authority of supposed experts. Genealogists and historians make mistakes that, unquestioned, may be copied many times over. Raw original data, like words engraved on tombstones, are likely to be more reliable than anything you find in a book. Fortunately, databases accessible through Ancestry.com allow you to see photos of many gravestones as well as handwritten entries in record books. But negotiations over what to say on gravestones can become contentious and lead to family feuds. And sometimes the engraved words and dates are lies.

I suggest that you treat family traditions with respect, even when they seem far-fetched, like the Quinotaur and Odin. Sometimes what people believe guides their decisions and shapes the course of their lives. Sometimes beliefs are more important than facts.

Bugle Boy

In 1943, my Dad was a private in the U.S. Army, stationed in Georgia — a bugle boy waiting to be shipped to the war in Europe. The day before he was due to leave, he got orders to attend Officer Candidate School at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. His company eventually ended up at the Battle of the Bulge. He heard that they were all captured and that the train taking them to prison camp was bombed by the Allies. There was only one casualty: the bugle boy, the man who replaced him, died.

Some might see that as chance. But Dad felt he owed his life to that bugle boy, and he had an obligation to live a life that mattered; he had a personal destiny. At every decision point in his life, he remembered his debt to the bugle boy who took his place.

I'm reminded of the final scene in the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, at the cemetery near the Normandy D-Day beaches. The man who was saved stands with his children and his grandchildren at the grave of the man who saved him. Not a word is said. But you get the sense that Private Ryan's whole life was predicated on that sacrifice and that debt.

At the age of 85, Dad surfed the Web and found veterans from his old company who had been shipped to the Battle of the Bulge. He learned that the bugle boy didn't die. He got in touch with him by email, and they shared life experiences.

So there's the story that gave Dad a sense of debt and destiny; and there are the facts, which are very different. And the story that Dad believed for so long gave his life shape and meaning, in a way that the facts did not and could not.

Love at First Lie

Mom and Dad both had movie-star looks. As Dad got older, he aged like a Robert Redford. Even after his stroke, in a wheelchair and unable to speak, he kept his looks. More than 90% of the residents in his nursing home were women. And after Mom died, they all flirted with him.

Women live longer than men. Mom was three years older than Dad. Later in life, they joked that that meant they'd die at the same time. But when they met, she had no idea that she was older than he, and he wasn't about to disillusion her. He was in Officer Candidate School (OCS) at the University of Pennsylvania. That assignment had saved him from going overseas with his first unit, as a bugle boy. He was Pennsylvania Dutch and had a basic knowledge of and feel

for the German language. He could improvise hilarious skits using made-up German gibberish. German training was the reason he was in Philadelphia when he met Mom at a social for servicemen at the Stage Door Canteen.

She was gorgeous. He was in seventh heaven that she would dance with him, talk to him, that she seemed as taken with him as he with her. That night, on the way back to his housing, he literally danced with the lamp posts. (They both reported that tale).

He looked mature but was only 20. He knew she was 23, soon to be 24. He was embarrassed to tell her his age. He finessed that question when she first asked. Then he was careful not to say anything that was out of sync with his adopted persona. He had no idea how she'd react when she found out. He didn't want to lose her.

They were both inexperienced and rigidly religious. Both thought sex before marriage was sinful. Both believed they were in love and wanted to marry. It was 1943, wartime. He might have to leave for Europe any day. He would probably be dropped behind enemy lines. She wanted to get married as soon as possible. This might be the only time the two of them had together. Her younger sister, Mildred, had married a fighter pilot, and after only a few weeks together, he had shipped out. He had died in the skies over Cassino in Italy. But Dad wanted to postpone the wedding until June 5, which was six months out.

He came up with lame excuses. He wanted his father as best man. He wanted this relative or that to attend. The soonest they could do it was June 5.

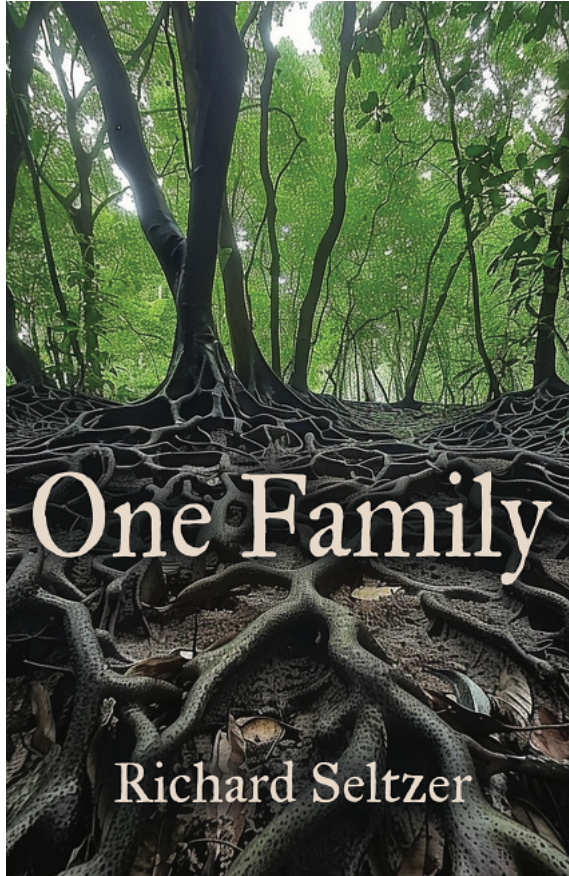
That made no sense to Mom. They both knew theirs was a match made in Heaven. And they both wanted to get on with the physical side of love, pronto, while they had time and opportunity.

Dad wouldn't budge and wouldn't tell her the real reason.

He would turn 21 on June 5; and to marry before then, he would need written permission from his parents. He was embarrassed to ask and embarrassed to tell Mom that he had to ask. His lies weren't plausible, but he had acting talent. With a look, a touch, he could make her believe anything. Besides, she wanted to believe him. She was in love.

Mom laughed when she learned of the lie and often told that story. It became part of the fairy-tale true-love story they both told.

They were lucky. The wedding took place on June 5, 1944. The next morning, they woke up to news of D-Day. Both invasions were successful.



Tangled threads of association connect history, genealogy, literature, and personal memories.

One Family

By Richard Seltzer

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