

# What Your Legacy Can Tell You

Implications for personal and community evolution.

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## KEY POINTS

- Legacy is about the times we lived and how our evolution will emerge.
- It takes two to know one and many to know many.
- A genogram can be useful in searching your legacy.

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*"The past is never dead. It is not even past."* -William Faulkner.

I am currently seeing an increasing interest with friends and those I work with to revisit family narratives. In my practice for the past forty years (which I recently figured out consists of over 50,000 sessions with several thousand individuals), I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to be part of facilitating many profound family narratives. In many ways, these have been like ethnographical studies. These experiences, as well as working for many years with school reform efforts, have taught me that for all of us there needs to be an in-depth understanding of our legacies. With such reflection, we each can continue navigating our journey to better understand and celebrate our interdependencies. This is the segue to creating a more sensitive relationship with others and the world.



"My Every Sunday Ritual"  
Source: © Kenneth Silvestri

How one's legacy influences our subconscious will drive us to either maintain injurious patterns or, through differentiation, to mitigate towards novel, healthy relationships. This can be done with or without a therapist, depending on the nature and depth of what it is you would like to change. It takes the form of revisiting your past and integrating new, shared information with a trusted other with whatever is needed to maintain a healthy emotional ecology.

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A suggested starting point is to gather relationship patterns through the use of genograms, a three-generational psychological family tree. The genogram encourages a recognition of how it takes two to know one and many to know many. My genogram describes a legacy of growing up in a working-class, multi-ethnic neighborhood in Paterson, N.J. Looking for relationship patterns should always be open-ended, waiting for the flow of new information that arises. It helps to prepare for what may come up from your own past when facilitating or sharing with others. When looking through the lens of one's legacy, it opens the door to making a difference with perceived problems.

There is a simultaneous skill that drives this process. It is based on recognizing how you are a product of your family/community contexts. This will allow you to be, at times, vulnerable but willing to seek that understanding of how we are all interdependent. It occurs initially, through (as Gregory Bateson would say with the word he coined), "transcontextual" patterns. These are the multitude of wider levels that always exist and interact at the same time, in a part-to-whole systemic manner.

Exploring your legacy, as Linda Spence writes in her invaluable book, *Legacy: A Step-By-Step Guide To Writing Personal History*, "Is about life. About the times we've lived in, the people and events that have shaped us, how and whom we've loved, what has stirred us, and how we've tried. When there has been laughter and when the tears have come, those times are here, too." For example, remember yourself in your bedroom at ten years old. Enter an almost hypnotic state: what was on your walls? Other of many possible prompts (which can also be answered through poetic expression), that Linda Spence shares are relevant to what chosen developmental stage you may choose. For example, who were your childhood friends? What were you given from these friendships? What type of reading material do you remember? Picture yourself as a child in your neighborhood. What do you see as you walk through it and how did your relationships with friends, siblings, parents, etc. influence your experiences and expectations? All these contexts further enhance your genogram, and, more importantly, the foundation of who you are and can be in the present, especially when it is shared in a safe nonjudgmental way.

Our conscious mind processes stimuli at 40 per second, however our subconscious mind processes stimuli at 40 million stimuli per second. In other words, this astonishing ratio allows your subconscious to remember just about all you have ever done or seen. Therefore, your subconscious is a source to be primed during this legacy process of understanding how your family of origin dynamics affect your temperament and behaviors.

This journey replicates how nature works, the whole being more than the sum of the parts. Finding our interdependency through mutual dialogue, using the strengths of our legacies (i.e., the yin/yang of survival skills) is our personal contribution to our species' evolution. Once we stop depending on culturally-imposed constraints of narrow, cause-and-effect reasoning we enter the world of how it is to be in-between the inductive and deductive logic we have been taught. That logic, quite frankly, hasn't had a good track record in providing long-lasting ecological solutions to physical/emotional/social problems.

This place or gap is where evolution occurs; the hidden, suppressed, partly hypothetical, and unheard information that is waiting to emerge from your subconscious and the collective reservoir we share with others. It is, as Nora Bateson, president of the International Bateson Institute, believes it to be, "Aphanipoiesis: how life coalesces toward vitality in unseen ways." It happens through aesthetic, poetic, and creative improvisation that stretches our capabilities to be in tune with our potential. Here is an opportunity to have your legacy be part of that widest of contexts that some call nature or other spiritual entities...the name is not the thing named!