

THE FAMILY FOOTPRINT

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Over the last couple of years my husband and I have been exploring our family trees. We visited Dunvegan Castle in Scotland in 2006, because Brian understood it to be connected to his mother's side of the family. As we wandered around the stately halls admiring all the beautiful portraits, we were totally taken aback when, staring down at us from a huge ornate frame, was the current Lord of the Manor, Chief Hugh McLeod. The resemblance to Brian was unmistakable and despite the sign stating that no photos could be taken, one or two sneaky pictures found their way onto our camera. He was so excited to be standing there in the middle of his own history.

I, on the other hand, come from much humbler beginnings. My great, great grandfather was exported from England to Australia on a convict ship for stealing 12 tame rabbits from a barn. Truth be told, he was probably just trying to put food on the table but he got a free boat ride for his trouble. Perhaps our history was recorded on the walls of Port Arthur prison, in Tasmania!!! As I delved into my past I found a few scandals in our family closet that some of my relations would much rather have kept buried but, if nothing else, it has made my history great party conversation.

I made the mistake of writing to the ex Lord Mayor of London to ask if we were related, and he sent me a reply on some very imposing letterhead paper, saying there were any amount of the population with our name in England and that I was not a relative of his! He would probably never want to own up to being related to criminals anyway! Now, having found most of my families' names, birth-dates dates and locations, I would love to know what each of them did for work and pleasure - maybe put some flesh on their bones to give me a greater appreciation of who they really were. When I was a child, I only looked forward to the next day but it frustrates me to realize now that I have been so busy out there living it, I haven't been systematically capturing my story on paper.

Our footprint is the most valuable legacy we can leave our family and those around us. I like to think of a footprint as the impression we have left, the difference we have made by being here on this earth. We can leave a purposeful print or a scattered print: one without direction. We can allow circumstance to toss us all over the place, or we can take control of our own destiny leaving a positive productive footprint behind us. The way to achieve this control is to recognize that we all have worth on this earth and that we each have something positive to offer our future families. It means changing our dreams into realities, making a plan, creating goals and staying with it until we achieve the desired result. It is a proactive process, not one that just happens.

Our kids need to learn how to take charge of their own destiny and how to create their footprint in the very same way. Our kids often think they go to school because they have to. We need to explain that all the things they are learning and their experiences are building up a wonderful launching pad for them to achieve great things and be very interesting, adventurous adults.

It doesn't matter which side of the tracks we were born on, whether we come from aristocracy, legend, service or a criminal background, we all make a footprint on this earth and we all create history. Do we want our history to be memorable or forgotten? I suggest this to not only be an incredible opportunity to make a difference and to create the greatest positive influence now, but to also add rich tapestry to our ongoing family history. What sort of tree are you creating?

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.