

**Dotsie Bregel,
Founder and CEO of
The National Association of Baby Boomer Women
(NABBW)**



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Climbing Your Family Tree

With

Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

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Climbing Your Family Tree
With
Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

Dotsie: Hello and welcome to the call.

For those of you who don't know me, I am **Dotsie Bregel**, founder of the **National Association of Baby Boomer Women** which can be located at www.NABBW.com and also, www.boomerwomenspeak.com, which are the number one sites on major search engines for baby boomer women. I am passionate about educating and empowering my generation of women which happens to be "boomers," and I spend a good part of my time communicating with boomers on and offline.

Our sites are proudly sponsored by **Me Again** products, which are tried and true products for women at midlife. And they can be located at www.meagainonline.com and it's interesting because we have a really great testimonial in our forum community about these products recently, so you might just want to visit our sites and click on their ad, or just go directly to their site at www.meagainonline.com. We have a few other sponsors. We're also sponsored by **Sunsweet**, and for those who are interested in digestive health, they can be located at www.plumsmart.net. We're also sponsored by Vanguard who offers information about the best and worse funds to own now. They offer excellent financial information that will encourage you to live a more financially responsible midlife. You can also find them on our site by clicking through their ad, or you can visit their site which is www.dolans.com. And then our last sponsor is **Elations** which is a daily drink supplement that offers relief from joint aches and pains. It's an alternative to taking those large horse pills, and you can find **Elations** at www.elations.com.

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This teleseminar is one of many. And as in many, I mean, approximately 50 or more that have been archived in the MEMBER ONLY area on the www.nabbw.com. So all of the past teleseminars are free once you are a member. We have audios that you can listen to while you're playing or working online, and then we also offer PDF's which are the documents you can just print out on your computer, and read pretty much, this teleseminar at your own convenience. There are also lots of other opportunities through the association for education and empowerment. That's all I really have about the association.

I'd really like to get started by introducing Sharon. She is a Certified Genealogist (CG), and partner in the research firm of Warren, Carmack & Associates. Along with specializing in Irish and Italian genealogical research, she offers consulting, writing, and editing services for a variety of nonfiction books, with an emphasis on memoirs, biographies, social histories, family histories, and annotated diaries. Sharon is the author of sixteen books including "*You Can Write Your Family History*," and "*Your Guide to Cemetery Research*," as well as, hundreds of other articles and columns. She's also a contributing editor for *Family Tree Magazine*, the host of *Roots Books*, a talk-show that airs on RootsTelevision.com, and she teaches personal and family memoir writing classes for WritersOnlineWorkshops.com. So that's pretty exciting. You've got quite a lot going on there and I would have to say that you would be the expert after all of that.

Sharon: Thank you Dotsie, I appreciate you having me.

Dotsie: Oh I'm happy to have you and would you be kind enough to share your Web address?

Sharon: Yes, my Web site is very simple. It is my name; it's www.sharoncarmack.com.

Dotsie: Okay, and tell us a little bit about what's on your site.

Sharon: Well my husband and I run a genealogical research business and so our site is mostly there for client information, but we also have other things on the site such as a number of articles that I have written for magazines, such as *Family Tree Magazine* and some of the other genealogical publications. I've put PDF's of those on the site so people can go and get those at any time. People can also go and look at the books that we've written, and we have for sale, and we have an order form there as well. It basically talks about our services and how genealogical research is done, and how we do it as professionals, and how we can help people find their ancestors.

Dotsie: So your site in itself is a really good source for people who are interested in this topic.

Sharon: Well I would hope so. There are over 5 million genealogy and family Web sites, so we're just kind of one in all of that. But yes, we try to make our site as helpful as it can be for people who are looking to start researching their family history or when they hit a brick wall and they need some help, they can come to us and we can see what we can do.

Dotsie: And tell us about the books on your site.

Sharon: Well I have a number of books as you said when you were introducing me, I've written 16 books. Not all of them are still in print; however, we still have a lot of copies of those books. The ones that are still in print such as the one that you mentioned, "*You Can Write Your Family History*," is one for both beginners, intermediate, and advanced researchers, when they're ready to write their family histories. So many people realize that gathering names, dates, and places is fun to get started, but it's kind of like, okay, what else is there? Is there something else? And I try to help people put their ancestors into historical perspective, and teach them how to do oral history interviews so that they can weave all of that information together to write a story of their ancestor's lives rather than just names, dates, and places.

Dotsie: Right, okay...very good.

Sharon: So in my books, different books I highlight different things. I have one on discovering Ellis Island ancestors and one on tracing your ancestors in the cemetery, and looking for death records, and that kind of thing. So there are a different variety of books.

Dotsie: Okay. Great. Now Sharon do you mind telling us how you got started and where your interest came from with this topic, and then we'll jump into the other questions.

Sharon: Okay. Personally, I got started when I was pretty young. I was about nine or ten. Most baby boomer people probably remember the soap opera called *Dark Shadows*. Do you remember that? In *Dark Shadows*, they did a lot of time traveling. They would go back to the past and meet their ancestors, and then come back to the future. And that's really how I got interested in the past and the ancestors. My family and I were living in California at the time, and we had gone back East to New York to visit family and friends. Some friends of ours knew that I had an interest in *Dark Shadows* and so they took me to an old cemetery. It must have been fate, because there was a man there copying down headstone inscriptions. He turned out to be a genealogist, and so he's the one who got me started. He gave me a Pedigree Chart and a Family Group Sheet which we'll probably be talking about here in a few minutes and getting started. And that's how I got started. Unfortunately, boys became more interesting than dead relatives after a while, so genealogy got pushed aside until after I got married and had my daughter, and then I started really getting involved by going to society meetings and that sort of thing.

Dotsie: Okay very good. Tell us how to get started. Because there may be some beginners, but I'm sure there are also some people who have been doing this for quite a while. But if you want to talk about how to get started and then also apparently, there are some forms at the *Family Tree Magazine* Web site. So if you want to kind of just start off with that; that would be great.

Sharon: Sure. Well if you aren't as lucky to be in a cemetery and find a living genealogist there to help you get started. What we recommend you do is to first just take out a piece of notebook paper, and start writing down what you know. The names of your parents, when they were born, where they were born, if you know when they were married—just start jotting down information about your family—your parents, grandparents, whatever information you can get down. And then from there, you want to put it in kind of an organized form so that you can see the relationships. Genealogy uses two forms in particular. One is called a Pedigree Chart, and that keeps track of your ancestors, your parents, your grandparents, your great-grandparents, your great-great-grandparents; it looks like a family tree. And then the other form is what we call a Family Group Sheet and that keeps track of a couple and their children so you can see all the children of that couple.

And so once you start by just writing down what you know, or going through family papers at home to get that information, then you want to put it in an organized method by using one of these charts. Now if you are so inclined and want to use a genealogy software program, those are widely available. Family Tree Maker is probably the most popular one. You can get that at Best Buy and any of the electronic stores; probably even, you know Wal-mart or Target. And you can enter the data in there and that will print out the forms for you. Or if you want to do it by hand, you can go to www.FamilyTreeMagazine.com and there are downloadable forms, blank forms; that you can print out and then fill in the information that way.

Dotsie: Now do you have to join that site, do you have to pay a fee, or is this free?

Sharon: No, it is absolutely free; you can go on their site. And there are other sites as well, you know, I'm pushing *Family Tree Magazine* because that's who I write for and I'm a contributing editor for them, but there are plenty of other sites where you can download free forms, as well. In fact, if you just put in Pedigree Charts and "Google," you would probably come up with a lot of sites that would have the blank forms that you could just print out.

Dotsie: Okay well what would the benefit be to buying the program? Just a lot more information in the program and it probably stores it differently?

Sharon: Right. The program comes with a little booklet that tells you how to get started. A lot of people nowadays, especially since we are so computer-oriented, find that that's a quick and easy way to enter the data and you can print out different types of forms very easily whereas when we had to do it by hand, the old fashioned way, you were recording basically the same data on the Pedigree Chart, then on the Family Group Sheet, and then perhaps on another chart. Whereas with a software program, you enter the information once, and then you can tell the program what kind of chart you want to print out. Say you have

information on your ancestors that goes back to the sixteen hundreds. Well, you can print a chart that starts with you, and takes you all the way back to your ancestors; or you can print a chart that starts with the first ancestor in the sixteen hundreds and then comes forward. So it's just a matter of printing out different ways of looking at the same information.

Dotsie: And about how much are those programs, if you were to buy one?

Sharon: That's a good question. I have not priced them in a while. I'm just guessing. I don't use the software program, but I'm guessing they're around \$35.00. They're very reasonable; they're not super expensive programs or anything like that. They're very reasonable.

Dotsie: Okay and I think that might be a fun way to do it; just have all of your information in one spot, too, which can keep us organized.

Sharon: Sure. Exactly. Exactly. As I always say, I started doing this long before we had computers so I have everything hand written and I have offered to every single audience member that tries to convince me to enter all this data into the software program, I'll be happy to use it!

Dotsie: Right. Right. That's right. That's really something to consider.

Sharon: Right. I would rather spend the time doing more new research than sitting there entering the data in.

Dotsie: It's interesting. One of my cousins is very interested in this topic and she has done everything by hand also.

Sharon: Yep, there's still a few of us out there.

Dotsie: That's right! You talk about the importance of talking to relatives and I have to say that one of the most memorable conversations, actually I wasn't even in the conversation; I was in the background listening, was when my son, and I guess he was only in middle school, interviewed my aunt who was 88 at this time. He did a video interview with her about her family, and you know, what she recalls from—at the very youngest. And I just thought, oh boy, what a blessing to be able to sit here and listen to this because had he not interviewed her, we never would have had that information. So do you want to talk to us a little bit about the importance of talking to our relatives and trying to get back as far as we can?

Sharon: Absolutely. Talking to relatives, especially the older relatives, is so important because we don't know how long we have them with us. There's an old African saying that once an older person dies, a whole library of knowledge disappears. And that's true with family history. Once older family members go,

your family history is going with them. The records that we're going to talk about later, in finding ancestors in records, those are going to be around for a long, long time. There are lots of ways these are being preserved. But our older family members are not going to be around forever. So if you still have grandparents, or maybe even great-grandparents, but probably not, but if you still have grandparents still alive, definitely take the time to talk with them; either over the phone, or better yet in person if you can, and record the conversation. Now of course, you want to get genealogical information if you are just starting out. You want to get the names, dates, and places. You know, when was somebody born, where, when they got married, that kind of thing. Keep in mind though that those kind of details you're going to find in the records anyway. And it's often stressful for an older person to try and remember all of those details. So what I encourage people to do is get the skeleton information that you need to get to propel your research, but then spend more of the time talking about what life was like for them growing up.

Recently when President-elect Obama was talking about in his speech about the 106 or the 108-year old woman who was voting, of all the things she has seen in her lifetime. Imagine what a wealth of information this woman is. She has first-hand knowledge of history. When she goes, yes...we can read about it in the newspapers, we can read about it in the history books, but we have an eye-witness who was there at all these events. And so that's the kind of thing in talking to relatives, besides getting the details about our ancestors, getting them to talk about what was life like during The Depression, or what was life like when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor? Those kind of things—again, we can read about them in the newspaper, but here we have an eye-witness who was there, and heard and saw those things, so I really encourage you to talk to all of the relatives you can; as soon as you can.

Dotsie: Well it's interesting you know because my kids are so intrigued by hearing our generation talk about the 60s, you know, and we were there. So this is the same thing just a little bit further back in history. And you know I think—I'd just like to mention that I know there are places, little small businesses, that are doing videos of you know, the matriarchs and patriarchs of families. There's one called *Biographica* in Sparks, Maryland, and while it is not exactly the same, it's another way of recording history. You can give them old photos, you know, and any kind of memorabilia you have from years and years ago, and then they use all of the technology to incorporate it and include music from the era, etc. And then they have the interview, you know, with the matriarch or patriarch and it's just—I've seen some of them, not for someone in my family, but through the companies Web site and it's just really remarkable. So another great way.

Sharon: Yes. And if you're looking for someone in your area who can do that kind of thing, there is an organization called, "*The Association of Personal Historians*" and you can click on your state and look for a personal historian in your state, or your area who, a lot of the personal historians specialize in this

type of multi-media biography of a person. And so, what a wonderful gift to give someone or to have for a family reunion. So yeah, there are lots of people around the country who specialize and do this kind of thing.

Dotsie: And it's very different than us just going out and trying to do this on our own. It might be costly, but they know the questions to ask which I think really makes a big difference. Okay, let's move on. Can you tell us about the Family History Library and Centers?

Sharon: Yeah, the Family History Library is the world's largest genealogical library. It's located in Salt Lake City, Utah, where I happen to live, and in fact, I moved here because of the library. It's part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint's or the Mormons, and in their religion, they believe that they can, and I'm not LDS so if I get this a little bit off, I hope any LDS members listening, will correct me, but they believe that they can baptize their ancestors after death and seal them with other family members. And that's part of their religion and why they started doing genealogy. Well in the process of gathering information to help their members complete their religious obligation, they opened up this absolutely, wonderful library to all of us. It's absolutely free of charge, anyone can go in there and do family history research, the library receives anywhere from 1500-2000 visitors a day, and what they have there right now besides books, you know they have family histories and they have general histories, and they have abstracted records, but they also have on microfilm, records from all over the world. They have over 2 million rolls of microfilm of records from all over the world. Now that's not to say that they have every record from every time period from every country, but they do have a lot of information.

For example, I was able to trace my Italian ancestry before I ever even went to Italy, back to the seventeenth hundreds just from using the microfilm records from Italy at the Family History Library. So it's an absolute, wonderful resource. Now again, in order to help not only their members, but everybody else in genealogy, they have centers throughout the world. There are something like over 4,000 centers throughout the entire planet and you can go to the Family History Library Web site which is www.familysearch.org and click on "library" and it will tell you where these centers are located. Almost everyone has a center near them. And from the center, you can borrow the microfilm from the library in Salt Lake City.

Now there is a cost to do that, but it's just the cost of postage; it's something like four dollars, five dollars. You can order anything on microfilm from Utah to your local Family History Center, and view those records there. Books you cannot get on inner library loan unless they've also been microfilmed. They do not lend their books out. But if that books also happens to be available on microfilm, you can get it that way. Plus the Family History Library is undergoing a project to eventually digitize and put online all of those microfilm records. It's a huge, huge

undertaking and I just hope I live long enough to see it. But they're in the process of doing that right now and they've already got quite a few records online. And again, the Family History Library makes all of this available to people for free. There is no cost to use the Web site, and the records that are on the Web site, and there is not cost to use the library. The only cost you have is if you're renting the microfilm from a Family History Center.

Dotsie: Wow, that's really great to learn all of that. Anything else about that before we move on?

Sharon: Well the main thing with the Family History Library or the Center is so many people—it's very sad to me when a client comes to me, you know, and they've hired me to write their family history; they've either already done research themselves, or they've gotten their ancestor across the ocean and they hired a researcher in Italy, England, Ireland or wherever, and they've paid all this money to pay a researcher overseas when they didn't realize those records are right here in America. They could have researched them themselves. So definitely check. The Family History's catalog is also online on their site, so you can go to their Web site and see all of the resources that they have catalogued in their library. It's just incredible.

Dotsie: It's amazing what's out there for free now, especially with the Web, so let's talk about doing a little online searching; tell us about that.

Sharon: Okay, like I said, there are more than 5 million family history and genealogy Web sites; so obviously, it can be a little overwhelming. The sites you want to start with—there are both subscription sites where you pay a fee to use the databases and collections, and there are also free sites. The Family History Library, like I said, is a free site. So you can go there and they have some records and databases and indexes already online that you can use there for free. Another free site is called www.rootsweb.com. And www.rootsweb.com is volunteer-driven. That means that people all over the United States or in other countries, have gone through and say have transcribed cemetery tombstones and then put them online, or they've transcribed records; they've gone to a county courthouse, and they've transcribed Wills, or deeds, or birth, marriage and death records, and then put those online for other researchers to use. So www.rootsweb.com is a completely free site, volunteer-driven, if you have the urge to go and transcribe a cemetery and contribute that, you can do that. So those are the first places that I would suggest you go, is obviously, go to the free sites first.

Then a couple of the subscription sites, of course the most popular is www.ancestry.com. And www.ancestry.com has a wealth of records and databases online as well. Their subscription fee varies depending on whether you want to just join for a month, or three months, or a full year. And now you're going to ask me what the subscription fee for that is, and I don't know that either.

Dotsie: That's okay. Go ahead.

Sharon: But again, it's online, so it's very easy to check. Obviously, prices change, so I would rather you go to the Web site and see how much it cost, rather than me tell you one thing and then you go on there and find out it's gone up or something. But I would say it's under \$200 for a year's subscription to www.ancestry.com. But they have records such as censuses, which we're going to talk about in a minute because that is the backbone of genealogical research. They have some newspapers; they have some vital records meaning births, marriages, and deaths. They have some land deeds, they have some tax records, they have some Wills and inventories, WWI draft records. You know it's really beneficial. There's a lot you can do for free on there just to kind of play around and see what's available. Where you get stopped and you have to pay the fee, you can even type in an ancestor's name and that will tell you what databases that ancestor is in, but then beyond that you've got to pay to get that information. So I highly encourage people to go onto www.ancestry.com and just play around with it and just see what's there.

If you use the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, or a Family History Center, they will subscribe to www.ancestry.com, so you can use it for free by going to one of those repositories, and some public libraries also subscribe to it. So again, that's why I don't know what these fees are because I just go to the Family History Library and use it for free. So you don't have to subscribe unless you want to use it in the comfort of your own home, of course. That's one subscription site.

Another one is simply called www.genealogy.com and again, it has similar content to www.ancestry.com, it also has censuses, but it has other types of records. There's another database that I really like. It's called www.genealogybank.com, and that has newspapers so that you can type in an ancestors name and see if they appear. If you are looking for their obituary, their marriage announcement, or something like that, you can go and look for that information.

And then another site, again there are tons of them but these are the main ones, called www.footnote.com and there you can find military records and other sources of documents as well. So there are bunches of these different subscription sites, and in fact, if you subscribe to all of them, you will probably not be able to make your house payment next month so I don't suggest doing that. That's why I suggest you go to a Family History Center, go to the public library, see what they have available for free before you start subscribing to some of these databases.

Dotsie: I can understand that. But I'm sure people are willing to spend a couple of hundred dollars to join one of these sites because I'm sure the information, right at your fingertips, it's just worth it.

Sharon: Absolutely. If you're one of those people who works best in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning and your library is not open, or you are just really involved in tracing your ancestry, absolutely www.ancestry.com or any one of them, it is well worth the money to subscribe to them because you're going to get a lot of information, you're going to be able to do a lot of leg work. Again, just like all of that microfilm at the Family History Library, not everything is available online and not all of the records are available online. A lot of times it's just the database; like an index to the records and it will just get you so far but you want to go the extra step and get the original records. So for example, you may be able to go to a Web site and find an index or a database of death records, but the actual death record is not online. So you want to get the basic information and then order the death record because there is more information on the actual death record.

Dotsie: Okay, what about the census? You say, you know, to search the censuses. Tell us a little bit about that and is there a way to access them online and offline; how to do that.

Sharon: Okay...first of all, a quick definition of what a census is. A census is a enumeration of the population. Censuses began being taken in this country in 1790 and have been taken every ten years every since. They are available to the public through 1930. After that, they are restricted by privacy laws, and every 72 years, a new census is released. So 72 years after the 1940 census was taken, that's when that census will be released to the public. They are available online through www.ancestry.com, www.genealogy.com, and again, some of the censuses are free, the 1880s census is free, the Family History Library site right now; once they get all the censuses up there, they'll be free. But right now, you have to be a subscriber to one of the databases. And again, you type in the ancestor name and what you know about them to pull up the census information.

Ideally, you want to start with the most recent census meaning 1930 and work your way backwards. That's the mantra of genealogy. Start with yourself and work backwards in time so that you're not skipping generations. And what you will get from the census is a snapshot of that family on a particular day in that census year. It will give you the names of the father and mother and all the children, their ages, depending on the census, it might give you their birth month and birth year. It will give you their occupation, where they were born, if they were born in a foreign country, when they immigrated to this country. For women, it will tell you how many children were born to that woman, and how many are still living. And again, it depends on the census year. Each census took different information. For example, in 1930, they asked people whether or not they had a radio, and that was the only census up to that time that ask people whether they

had a radio set in their house. So each census tells a little bit different information.

If you don't want to subscribe or don't have access to www.ancestry.com, you can do it the old fashion way on microfilm. You can get the microfilm through a Family History Center, or their national archive branches throughout the United States where you can do and they have all of the census on microfilm. So there's two different ways to get them.

Dotsie: This is all amazing to me because I have never done any searching and it seems like there is this whole other world out there. But how neat that you can see the census, the whole thing that they filled out, basically...I mean, not the form, but the information, right?

Sharon: Right, exactly. And for some of us baby boomers whose parents were born 1930, by 1930, you can find your parents on the census. And then you go back to 1920, you know, and you've got your grandparents, you know, and you just keep going back. It is such a thrill the first time you find your parents or grandparents, and you see their names on the census. Nothing can beat that as far as I'm concerned, it's really a thrill.

Dotsie: Alright, now what about documenting what you find. Tell us a little bit about that.

Sharon: Okay. As you go along, you want to take out—like say for instance you find your ancestors in the 1930 census. If you're finding them online, you want to make a printout of the whole census page so that you have the information where they were in the 1930 census. As you gather information, write down where you got that information because I promise you, as you get further into your research, you're going to find another record that conflicts with that information. And you're going to go back and scratch your head and go okay now, this is different, where did I get *that* piece of information from? Which one is most likely correct? So that's why it's real important to write down.

Plus you don't want to be duplicating a search unnecessarily. You know, if you've already checked the source, you don't want to waste time going back and checking it again when you could be checking something else. So write down where you got each piece of information. Just to keep yourself organized and keep yourself straight and so if you come up with conflicting information, you can say oh okay, well I got this from this source and this one may not be as reliable as this source. So that's why it's so important to document what you find.

Dotsie: Yeah because if you're printing forms, it want necessarily have the address across the bottom of the page. What about some of the pitfalls of online research. Are there any?

Sharon: Absolutely. Like I said, not everything is online, so there are going to be some records you are going to have to write for, or you're going to have to look for in microfilm form, or some other means to get the actual records. So that's the first thing is that not everything is online. The other thing to remember is that there is a lot of misinformation online. A lot of people get so excited about tracing their ancestors back to the fifteen hundreds and they'll post their genealogy online, but they don't add the sources. And again, here is where a problem comes in. If that person didn't document where they got the information from, and you have conflicting information, you're going to wonder, okay well, who's right? Where did they get their information from? So that's why you need to be looking at it and documenting it yourself, is to keep yourself straight.

I have two, what I think, are really helpful articles for online searching on my Web site. If you go to www.sharoncarmack.com, on the left side, if you click on articles, there's one called, "*Secrets of a Cyber Sleuth*," and one called "*The Tree Doctor*," where I talk about researching online and some of the pitfalls to watch out for; some of the red flags to be looking for.

Dotsie: Ah, that's good information to know. Okay. Very good. Let's see, you suggest reading a good guide book about genealogy. Any book in particular, I mean of course, other than your own? Or any specific ones of yours?

Sharon: Well obviously, in the amount of time we have as you can tell, there's a lot of information out there, and in the time we have to do just this teleseminar, I can't possibly tell you everything there is to know, and what's available for genealogy. And so the book I always recommend, and probably, it's probably *THE* best beginner guide book, and even if you are not a beginner and you've done some research but you're just kind of gee I'm not sure where to go next or what to do next, Emily Croom's, *Unpuzzling Your Past*. Emily Croom's *Unpuzzling Your Past* is probably the most overall guidebook on how to get started, what records are available, how you get access to those records, and more importantly, how to analyze and use those records.

My books are more specific; like you know, my book on Ellis Island is specifically for those who are researching their Ellis Island ancestors. Or my book on cemetery research is specifically for records involving death, you know, death certificates, coroner's records, funeral home records, that kind of thing. So unfortunately, my one general guide book is long out of print, so I recommend Emily Croom's *Unpuzzling Your Past* as the best book to get for that.

Dotsie: Okay, very good. Let's move along. You share that there's more help available if you've been doing research for a while and you know, you've kind of hit a brick wall and don't know how you can learn more. How do we go about that?

Sharon: First of all, there's probably is a local genealogical society in your area, and one of the best ways to get over brick walls and if you've been doing research for a while, is to network with other genealogists. Even though our family's eyes kind of glaze over when we start talking about dead ancestors and how excited we were that we got a death certificate in the mail, there are people who are like-minded and so if you go to genealogical society meetings, you can network with those people and bounce ideas off of them. There's also a fabulous guide book by Marsha Rising called, "*The Family Tree Problem Solver*" and that's for when you truly have been doing a lot of genealogy and you've just hit a brick wall, and you don't know where to go. *The Family Tree Problem Solver* is a fabulous book for that because she talks about things like what happens if you find two men of the same name living in the same community. How do you separate them out? And, you know, other obstacles you'll run against in genealogy. So that's the book I definitely recommend. It's a really good book. I refer to it a lot.

Dotsie: Okay and I'm sure you can probably find it at Amazon, right?

Sharon: Oh yeah.

Dotsie: Now are these books pretty newly published, or even if they were written five years ago, they're still up to date?

Sharon: Well yes. *The Family Tree Problem Solver* came out maybe four years ago; four or five years ago, so it's still pretty up to date. *Unpuzzling Your Past*, the most recent edition, again, that within the last five years. Some of the Web sites may not be there anymore, but most of them still are. Genealogy is one of those things where, especially the bigger Web sites, like www.rootweb.com, www.ancestry.com, and all of those, they stick around. There may be newer ones out there, but that's why I suggest going to a genealogical society meeting and networking. Usually those meetings have programs every month, or seminars once a year, to help their members learn about new records, new Web sites that have been released, so yeah, there are ways to do that. But for the core, regardless of whether it's up to date on Web sites, the core methods for researching, the core sources for researching are still going to be up to date on those books.

Dotsie: Let's see. How about people who are extremely busy. I mean my interest is peak now, but I'm so busy. I need my sleep, so it's not the kind of thing I could do in the middle of the night, but I bet people lose hours of sleep now that this information is available online; that you can just get wrapped up in it and lose sleep over this.

Sharon: It was addictive before we had the Internet, it's even more so now that we have the Internet. If you have a limited amount of time, even if you only have fifteen minutes, a half hour on your lunch break, or after you've got dinner done

and cleaned up you just have a half hour, you can still go online. That's the beauty of using the Internet and what's online. And it takes me a fraction of the time to find somebody in the census now than it did on microfilm where I had to go to one microfilm for the index, and then go to the next microfilm, and crank thru it, and find the person. So the Internet has become a real time saver. It can also be a real headache if, you know, if you didn't hit your ancestors name exactly the way it was spelled in the database, so you have to get kind of creative. But a lot of it you can find information very quickly, record it, and then the next day move on to the next thing. And that's one of the beauties of being a subscriber to these databases is you don't have to go anywhere. You can research, if you're able to, from work, because you can log on to your account from any computer. So it doesn't have to be your home computer. So on your lunch break you can spend a half hour on www.ancestry.com doing family history research, as well as, doing it at home or in the library. There's ways to sneak in a few minutes here and there but again, it's just really addictive.

Dotsie: I'm sure the programs give you ideas on keeping it organized. Do you have any articles on your site about that? Like once you start collecting all this information, do you keep it organized by years, or generations, or how do you do that?

Sharon: Well, I wrote a book on organizing your family history called, *"Organizing Your Family History Search,"* unfortunately it is out of print right now. We have a few copies left, I believe. I'm hoping to bring it back into print. Another publisher is interested in it, and I just have not had time to update it because it needs updating. But again, the basic principles are the same. You can probably find used copies online or go to your library. If your library doesn't have *"Organizing Your Family History Search,"* you can get it on inner-library loan. And that will help you keep organized. Plus there's an article, a mini version, on my Web site as well about organizing your family history. If you can find the book, that would be the best thing because I go into great details on how to keep all of these people straight, how to create files, and that kind of thing. What to take with you when you go on a research trip, and that sort of thing.

Dotsie: So when you say "how to organize files," are you talking about online files?

Sharon: That's why the book needs updating. When I wrote it, we were just on the cusp of starting to use computers and the Internet, so there's isn't a whole lot about organizing your stuff computer-wise, but regardless, we still have paper. You're still going to print out census, you're still going to print out forms, you're still going to print out vital records, and so the book is still good in that regard because it talks about, okay, should you file by family groups, or should you file by individuals, or should you file by a numbering system. You know, how do you handle all of this paper that you're going to be printing out? So in that regard, it's

still a good source but that's where it needs the updating. I need to update it and talk about filing your stuff on the computer.

Dotsie: Okay, now do you have anything else to share before we see if anybody has any questions?

Sharon: Not really. Again the topic is so huge that we could talk for days and there would still be more to talk about. The main thing is to get started. And it's easy to get started by just simply writing down what you know, going through your family papers, talking to some relatives, going through their family papers with their permission, of course, and just, even if that's all you could do. Even if all you can do is talk to some relatives, and write down what you know, and put it in a file folder, at least you have something of your family history written down for other people; a child or a grandchild who wants to pick it up and get started with it. So if you can do nothing else, get that information together in one place and get started.

Dotsie: Well this has really peaked my interest because my dad is getting elderly and failing, and my father-in-law has Alzheimer's, and it's progressing. But he is still at a point where he really remembers the past. You know, the whole short-term memory, that's gone, so I think there's still a chance there for even for us to just have some conversations with him and make some notes. So thank you very much.

Sharon: Oh you're welcome!

Dotsie: Yeah and I have a question that was sent in from someone who couldn't be on the call. It has to do with the DNA. Has that started to play a part in finding people's relatives nowadays?

Sharon: Yes and no. Of course, this is another complex topic we could spend a couple of days talking about, but basically, when you do DNA studies, what you are doing is you are linking up to other people who have a common ancestor. The DNA test cannot tell you WHO the common ancestor is, only that you have a common ancestor. And in that particular case, that's where traditional genealogical research comes in. And that's where the documentation comes in, so if there are conflicts, you know, those can be resolved. So what you do is you do your traditional genealogical research so you know WHO your ancestors are, and then somebody else does the same thing, and then let's say you're at a brick wall, and you're not sure, okay am I related to this John Smith or that John Smith, and this guy says he thinks he's on this branch, and I think I'm on this branch—the DNA can tell you, okay, is there a common ancestor between these two people?

And the other thing about DNA research which, when I was a baby genealogist and hearing about DNA, you think, oh my gosh, do we have to go dig up some

relative to get the DNA? It doesn't really work that way. Again, it works because you link yourself with other living people, documenting everybody's ancestry, and then seeing who the common ancestor is. Now you can do that just thru traditional research. I just recently discovered that I am Barack Obama's tenth cousin, twice removed. So we don't need DNA test; I'm happy with the paper trail, that will work just fine for me.

Dotsie: That's amazing. I don't know how you figured that out or was it something that you knew and had his name in your files already, or no?

Sharon: Well fortunately, whenever somebody runs for President, the people at www.ancestry.com and other organizations jump on the opportunity to trace the candidate's ancestry, and then they post it online. And so when they did that, I was looking thru his ancestry, and I saw a common ancestor; one I knew I had in my ancestry, and so then my husband, who does use a genealogical software program, *Family Tree Maker*, he plugged all the information in and then we were able to print out the chart and figured out that I'm his tenth cousin, twice removed. So I'm just waiting on the invitation to the family reunion. I'm sure it will be in the mail. <insert laughter>

Dotsie: <Insert laughter> Right! Okay let me get back to this DNA. If you do use it, is it expensive?

Sharon: It depends on the DNA testing company and how many what they call "markers" you want tested. It's really kind of confusing in some ways. There are several DNA genealogy testing sites. In fact, if you go to www.ancestry.com, they have a link to a genealogy DNA testing company. And you can go online and find prices for how many markers. You can get a DNA test for just a couple of hundred dollars, or if you want more markers done you're going to spend 500.00 dollars or whatever it is. That's not something that I recommend. I recommend doing the traditional research and then using DNA testing as a tool to help you with our research. If you just do the DNA testing, they're going to be able to tell you, okay, you're ten percent Swedish and twenty percent this, and whatever. And it's like okay, but that doesn't tell me anything.

Dotsie: Yes, like "now what?" But is that available to the general public? I guess for genealogy research, it definitely is?

Sharon: Oh yes, yes. In fact, you should type in your surname in Google plus DNA study. There are a lot of Web sites now for different surnames that have started DNA Studies. Like if you think you are related to—you know, a lot of people have in their family stories that they are related to Pocahontas. Well, there is a DNA site for descendents of Pocahontas that you can participate in.

Dotsie: And it's interesting. My daughter was just telling me that there is a Facebook Group for people with our last name. So more and more things are

going to be popping up all the time. It's really wonderful though that all of this information is there if you have the time to gather, and record, and just really work at it. Because honestly, when you started this, it was a major chore to find anything, I'm sure.

Sharon: Oh yeah. It was a lot more work. You spent time writing letters and waiting weeks for the letters to be answered, if they ever were, and you had to go places, go to the courthouse...

Dotsie: Travel!

Sharon: Yes, and go to the Family History Library and do research, and now, it's become so much easier and quicker. That's not to say you still don't run against brick walls. Because you do. You still have challenges; you still have the same problems.

Dotsie: And if somebody does run against a brick wall, can they email you?

Sharon: Well they can email me and they can go to my site and I'd be happy to discuss with them my fees and what it would cost, and whether it is even realistic. Some brick walls are just not going to be overcome. If you are tracing a John Smith, and there are fourteen of them in the county, that may be one where, "No, let's work on another line." Yes, there are some brick walls. And a lot of times, it's simply because the records aren't there. You know African-Americans have a big challenge in tracing their ancestors because records were not as widely kept on slaves. Now if your ancestors, your slave ancestors happened to be owned by a large plantation where they kept record books of the slaves that were born and died, and those still exist, you've got a wonderful source. But a lot of African-Americans are not that fortunate. So simply, that's the problem. They just run out of the records; they just aren't there.

Dotsie: Right.

Sharon: And so like Oprah, she had her DNA done to try and tell her from where in Africa her ancestors would have come from. So that's how DNA can help in that particular case.

Dotsie: Right, right. Okay, we are just about out of time. Let me just see if anyone on the call has a question. Does anyone on the call have a question? Okay, maybe not.

Well, I don't have anything else to add other than to mention your Web site again which is www.sharoncarmack.com and of course, we always like for you to visit www.nabbw.com, and we have tons of articles on that site about all things boomer women at midlife, and we welcome you to join that site; and also our other site which is www.boomerwomenspeak.com, and there we have a forum

community with about sixty different forums where women post 24/7 about things that are near and dear to their hearts. So we welcome you to visit any of those sites and we want to thank you for being on the call. And feel free to email either myself or Sharon, and we'll do what we can to help you out. So thanks so much and have a great day!

Sharon: Thank you Dotsie, I really appreciate it!

Dotsie: Thank you; and have a great day!