

Building Bridges – It’s Never too Soon to Connect Generations through Heritage

By: Deanna Bufo Novak

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It has become very clear over recent years that genealogy is not just for our grandparents anymore. More people are getting involved at younger ages and all seem to agree—the younger, the better. The younger we are, the more time we generally have to spend with loved ones and to gather important information to share and pass down. Wouldn’t it be ideal if these concepts were ingrained in even the youngest of children, so that they could reap the rewards throughout their entire lives?

Although the average age of a person interested in genealogy has decreased, there remains a significant generation gap when it comes to younger children embracing their heritage. While there are more tools, discoveries, and technology every day, there has not been a corresponding increase in genealogy resources for children. It is upon us, the parents and grandparents in their lives, to build a strong bridge to connect them to their past and guide them to their future, like only an appreciation of one’s heritage can do. The building blocks of that bridge are made up of the stories, memories, recipes, and photos that help make us who we are. The cement that binds it all together is made up of a tremendous amount of love. There is no doubt—the stronger the bridge, the more confident and self-assured the child will be. This is especially important when they are very young because it will help guide them through those tough teenage years filled with self-doubt, questions, and peer pressure.

As bridges are not built in a day, neither is your child or grandchild’s understanding, and love, of his or her heritage. Like with building anything worthwhile, take it slowly and step by step. First, keep up with your own research on MyHeritage.com. The information you gather becomes the blueprint to build this bridge for them. Also, remember that children are truly interested in their heritage (most just do not know that is what it’s called yet). Anyone who has witnessed a young child’s inquisitive nature knows they are thirsty for knowledge and are looking to us for guidance. This is never more true than when it has to do with the people they love most in this world. Make sure to show your enthusiasm as you answer questions and talk about your family and those treasured traditions. In your discussions, be sure to adapt the tone and answers to their age level. A six-year-old will have different questions and a different capacity to understand what you are saying than a ten-year-old.

Through it all, make it an exciting journey for your child or grandchild. Exploring heritage is very much like detective work and they will love uncovering clues from the past. You can start with the countries of ancestry and show them topics in which they can relate—Pinocchio from Italy; The Great Wall from China; The Little Mermaid from Denmark. You can turn the topics, landmarks, and food into something very real for them, knowing that they share roots from the same country. You can also share your own special discoveries made, and family trees created,

on MyHeritage.com. Teach them how to use these tools that will be invaluable to them as they grow. They will love to see how the information they are learning comes together to create their very own special family.

There are many other activities you can do right at home to continue to build your bridge. Here are a few examples:

- Share old (and new) photos and make scrapbooks with your child. Helpful hint: be sure to add dates and notes next to the photos.
- Share stories of your youth. Have your child interview you and record (video is best) your answers and stories.
- Share recipes in the kitchen and cook together. Remember, traditional foods are far more than something to eat. They invoke memories, feelings, and stories of another lifetime. What an amazing gift to give your child or grandchild!

Not only is building this bridge a great way to spend quality time with your children and grandchildren, it also has important long-term benefits. In fact, the impact of heritage on a child's identity is more far-reaching than most people think. Not only does it affect them on a personal level, it also has a much broader, community-level implication. Giving them strong roots upon which to stand instills confidence and self-esteem. On a broader level, the more confident and self-assured they are, the more likely they will be to treat others with respect and to better handle stress. With all of these amazing benefits, there is no doubt it is time to get started. So, take it step by step and build the strongest, most beautiful bridge to your child or grandchild with all the love of a lifetime!