



Confessions of a Geneablogger

Lisa A. Alzo shares her thoughts on the process of creating, building, and maintaining a better genealogy blog



IHAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE. I'M NOT always the best blogger I can be. I have been writing my blog, The Accidental Genealogist, since June 2006, see www.theaccidentalgenealogist.com/2014/06/eight-great-years-of-blogging-for.html. When I started blogging, I really didn't have any lofty goals. I simply just wanted to write about my two favorite subjects: writing and genealogy.

Why am I telling you this? Because as someone who has lectured about the importance of starting a blog to preserve and share family

history, and who has even demonstrated how easy it is to start a blog using the Blogger, <http://blogger.com>, platform during an online Blogger Boot Camp in August 2014 with Thomas MacEntee), see <http://backgenealogy.com/blogger-boot-camp>, I don't want to appear disingenuous. With this article, I hope to candidly share some of my personal thoughts and experiences with blogging (both positive and negative) to help others who may have questions or reservations about the process of creating and maintaining a genealogy/family history blog.

Five Reasons to Blog:

Below are five reasons why I think creating and maintaining a blog can be a very positive experience.

1 Giving Ancestors a Voice. One of the many reasons I started my blog in the first place is because it is a forum where I can share stories about my family and document my genealogy research. I don't have a famous pedigree. Most of my ancestors were peasant farmers from Eastern Europe, and not likely to have made the news unless they did something wrong or broke the law. I can use my blog as a platform to write about those ancestors who might otherwise remain in obscurity.

2 Connecting with Cousins. In the genealogy community, blogs are affectionately known as "cousin bait". Without my blog, I likely would not have made contact with family members I had previously not known. Several cousins have found me because of my online presence, so this is definitely a good thing. I have since met many of these newly found relatives in person.

3 Inspiring and Educating Others. As a writer, instructor, and lecturer, my blog provides me with a free way to reach a worldwide audience

with whom I can share my knowledge about Slovak genealogy, researching female and immigrant ancestors, and writing. I am always grateful for the positive comments and for those who contact me to say they learned something new or were inspired by one of my blog posts.

4 Engaging with Other Genealogists.

Many of my fellow bloggers have become some of my closest friends. I get to meet and socialize with them at conferences, connect via Skype, or interact with them on Google Hangouts or through Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media. We help, encourage, and inspire each other and collaborate on projects or research problems. This is one of the biggest benefits to being a genealogy blogger. A special thanks to author and educator, Thomas MacEntee, for creating the GeneaBloggers website, <http://geneabloggers.com>, which currently lists over 3,000 genealogy/family history blogs.

5 Marketing. As a genealogy professional, I feel the need to market my skills and abilities so that businesses, groups, and organizations will hire me to write articles, give presentations, and teach courses. Having a blog is a good way to freely advertise my services and reach a wide audience, although I try to strike a balance, so people don't stop reading.



Five Things that Stop Me from Blogging

Since I don't feel I blog as often as I should, I would like to share with you five reasons why I don't, besides the convenient excuse of "not having enough time".

1 Privacy Concerns. By nature, I am a private person. I don't feel that I need to share every single detail about my life (or the lives of my ancestors) with the world. I admit, I still find it difficult to strike that fine balance between revealing enough, but not too much, information about myself or my family.

2 The "Who Cares?" Syndrome. I have had this concern from day one. Will anyone want to read what I write? Writing interesting and engaging content is essential so that you can build a blog following. Some bloggers post daily, or several times a week. Ideally, that is the best way to build and cultivate your audience and establish a faithful readership. Despite working as a writer, I am much more reserved when it comes to my blog. I find it challenging to come up with posts on topics that are not only fresh and relevant to my interests, but will also appeal to readers. Usually my posts will be about a research process or a story about one of my Slovak/Carpatho-Rusyn ancestors, or some topic related to my Fearless Females Blogging Prompts series, which I started in March 2010, for bloggers to celebrate and honor their female ancestors during National Women's History Month (see www.theaccidentalgenealogist.com/2014/02/back-for-fifth-year-fearless-females-31.html). I happily discovered that people did want to read it. One of the first bloggers to welcome me was

Randy Seaver who writes the Genea-Musings blog, www.geneamusings.com, (it is Randy who is credited with coining the term "geneablogger").

3 Technology Glitches/Issues. I admit I am very impatient when it comes to computers and technology. I am one of those "plug-and-play" type users. I don't want to have to spend a lot of time learning a complicated program, tool, or technology, and I want things to work seamlessly. For the most part, this is why I like Blogger — it is fairly simple to use. I have zero knowledge of HTML, coding, or other computerese, so I just want to be able to log in, write my post, add a nice photo or two and let Blogger work its magic. When my internet service is down, or if Blogger experiences technical issues, or if I can't connect to Wi-Fi easily when I travel, then I tend to just give up, and end up not posting at all.

4 Finding Good Images. I've heard many blogging experts say that a compelling image or photograph is especially important to help drive traffic to your blog. I don't have a lot of fabulous photographs of my ancestors (they were poor and didn't generally take photographs), but I have shared most of the ones I believed were appropriate, and I do not post pictures of living relatives without consent. I know there are many royalty-free, stock image sites out there, but I often find the Terms of Service/Use confusing for many of these sites, and so I

avoid using them (I know that with a little effort, I could probably solve this problem).

5 Fear of Rejection/Fending Off "Trolls". I believe that all writers fear rejection at some point. It is risky and scary to put yourself out there. Whether it is an article, blog post, or presentation that you offer up in a public forum, you must expect that people will offer their analysis, critique, and even criticism about the material you have created and shared. This is especially difficult when it is your own personal research and family stories. If you enable comments on your blog (especially those without required moderation), you often run the risk of spammers posting questionable or offensive content. There is also the risk of attracting "trolls" — those who surf the Internet looking for opportunities to post negative or unfavorable reviews and comments. Many bloggers have also had to deal with the unpleasant situation of others lifting content from their blogs without permission. These negative aspects can be a huge drain and imposition on a blogger's time and energy.

Conclusion

Blogging about genealogy and family history can be a fulfilling experience, but it also can pose some challenges. The above observations are just a few I've made during my eight years as a genealogist. I hope you find them helpful as you begin or continue your own journey through the blogosphere. ©

Author, instructor, and lecturer, LISA A. ALZO is a frequent contributor to *Internet Genealogy*. She blogs about her ancestors at www.theaccidentalgenealogist.com