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# Toning Your Family History Physique

by Lisa A. Alzo, M.F.A.

**R**eady to tone up your family history physique? When we're working out our family histories, we want results—and we want them *yesterday*. But sometimes we're our own worst enemies. We hesitate. We procrastinate. We hem and haw. We even close our minds to certain details or limit ourselves to a few tried and true methods of research.

How do we get over these hurdles? Empowerment. The initial steps in genealogy may be the most challenging, but they're also the most essential. If we empower our family history research, we assert authority over our most difficult research problems—road blocks, misconceptions, myths, and plain old frustration. And once we're conditioned to stay in control, there's no hurdle we can't jump.

The first move? Start with the following exercises:

- 1. Strategic Moves.** Set an objective, note what you already know, make some guesses, seek out key sources, and locate appropriate records. Invest in folders, binders, and a good software program and label everything.
- 2. Web Workouts.** Many online sites have automated notification features that alert you when search data is added or updated. RootsWeb <[www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com)> can notify you of new surname or location message board postings; eBay <[www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com)> lets you store favorite searches—maybe “high school yearbooks PA”—in My eBay.
- 3. Mind Openers.** Just because your aunt said that your surname has always been spelled a certain way, that doesn't make it so. Be open to other possibilities for *any* information you uncover. Family history plot lines can be filled with unexpected twists and turns. Learn how to embrace them.
- 4. Unlikely Look-Sees.** While it's tempting to stick with your tried-

and-true methods of research, try a

detour through alternative sources like yearbooks and school, funeral home, and fraternal organization records—you may find valuable details about an ancestor's life that you didn't know before.

**5. Brain Extenders.** Stay informed. Read family history publications, blogs, mailing lists, and weekly newsletters. Brush up on social history through community education courses or online workshops. There is always a new how-to book, database, software program, or technique that can make exploring your family history much easier.

**6. Connecting Dots.** Try connection services like the one available at Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com/cb](http://www.ancestry.com/cb)> or utilize message boards. Join local genealogical groups, historical societies, and ethnicity-specific organizations.

**7. Risk Lifters.** No pain, no gain works for family history, too. Put forth an effort and get results. Make inquiries, contact people with similar interests, follow your intuition, and interview that relative before it's too late. The more you go out on a limb for your family history, the more branches of your family tree you're likely to touch. And the stronger your grasp will be. ♪

*Lisa A. Alzo is the author of a number of books including Three Slovak Women and Finding Your Slovak Ancestors (Heritage Productions). She can be reached at <[www.lisaalzo.com](http://www.lisaalzo.com)>.*

## Tools for Building Family History Muscle

### Database and Website Alerts

Ancestry <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> (select My Ancestry tab)  
eBay <[www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com)> (select My eBay)  
Google Alerts <[www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)>

### Finding Aids

GenSmarts Software <[www.gensmarts.com](http://www.gensmarts.com)>

### Mailing Lists and Message Boards

RootsWeb <<http://lists.rootsweb.com>>

### Networking Tools

Ancestry Connection Service <[www.ancestry.com/cb](http://www.ancestry.com/cb)>

### Genealogy Blogs

<<http://blogs.ancestry.com/circle>>  
<[www.genealogy.com](http://www.genealogy.com)>  
<<http://blog.eogn.com>>

### Genealogy Groups and Societies

<[www.cyndislist.com/society.htm](http://www.cyndislist.com/society.htm)>

### Podcasts

The Genealogy Guys <[www.genealogyguys.com](http://www.genealogyguys.com)>



Essentials

