

No, seriously, get out of your head, Whenever you hit a brick wall, a Jeffrey, a Jeffreytina, one of Ancestry's infamous hang-ups, someone who's a 125cM match on AncestryDNA but who won't build a tree (but asks YOU to do it for him/her), or the documents start swimming before your eyes, it's time to STEP AWAY FROM THE COMPUTER and get out of your head and into your body. Or, at least, get into a different part of your head. This episode discusses some of the ways that I step back in order to get straight, and the rules I've set for myself in order to stay sane on a day-to-day basis while trying to get healthy, record a podcast, run a bunch of Facebook groups, manage my Twitter, manage a new newsletter, Patreon, my Facebook page and, of course, my Ancestry and AncestryDNA while starting The Reparational Genealogy Project. You may not need the rules that I need, but it's good to talk about solutions when we spend so much time talking about the problems of burnout, 18-hour rabbit holes, too much coffee and jet lag from conference travel. Listen, and see if any of the solutions I suggest make sense for you.



Hello, and welcome to episode 206 of From Paper to People, Ancestors Alive!'s podcast with an energy blast. I'm back with something fresh, but first, The Genie News:

There is an urgent Crowdrise campaign on to save Weeksville. [Weeksville is a unique historic house museum located in Crown Heights, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York.](#) Their work preserves the history of one of the largest free black communities in pre-Civil War America. For 50 years, they've used arts, culture, education, and historic preservation to teach, making history relevant and resonant for contemporary audiences. Now, they are in threat of closing if they don't maintain operating costs. They need \$200,000 by June 30, 2019 or they will close their doors to student programs and adult visitors. They will lose the ability to carry the history of a free black abolitionist community forward. Enough remarkable African-American history has been lost. Please give even \$5 to the Weeksville Crowdrise campaign at [bit.ly/2PPuOTH](https://bit.ly/2PPuOTH).

And the fight continues toward a win in New York State. Senate Bill S3419, also known as Assembly Bill A5494, or the Weprin-Montgomery Bill – the clean bill to make original birth certificates with ALL identifying information available to adoptees and fosters, is gaining sponsors in both houses in New York State. Why is this important? New York State, one of the most populous in the nation, is also one of the most secretive with public records. Adoptees and fosters can NEVER access their parents' full names, even for health purposes. Any adopted person who died 100 years ago? That identifying birth certificate is also permanently sealed. If you believe in an adoptee's right to identify parents and family, to perform genealogical research, and to get health information, keep an eye on @nyadopterights and @nyadoptequality on Twitter. If there are actions to take, you can learn of them there. If this bill becomes law, it doesn't benefit New York alone. It sets precedent for Florida and other entrenched states in the US, and hammers yet another nail in the coffin of denying adoptees their full civil rights.

A few Spring changes: *I have reopened the Facebook group to application by anyone who'd like to join!* Just go to [facebook.com/groups/frompapertopeople](https://facebook.com/groups/frompapertopeople) (all one word) and answer the three screening questions so I know you're a real human. We'll be so glad to see you there! And if you're already a member, feel free to invite friends in the genie community.

I've started a newsletter that aggregates genie and family history news from printed sources, YouTube, and Twitter. It's called The Ancestors Alive! Daily, and you can subscribe for delivery to your email box at [paper.li/AncestorsAlive/1557599531](https://paper.li/AncestorsAlive/1557599531). It will also publish to my FB page and to Twitter.

One last thing: I'm running a Special Offer over at Patreon: become a patron for \$7.50 a month or more between May 15 at noon Eastern Time and June 30 at 11:00pm Eastern Time, and in August you will receive a deck of playing cards, designed by me, with a groovy vintage motif – I'm making more designs all the time – including ad art from the 20th century, the 1790 Census, WWII cartoons, and more. Everyone supporting at that level or higher will get a deck. Come, be a Vine and grab some swag!

Now, this episode may be a little woo-woo for some, but finding ways to step back, hit refresh and then return to the work with a different set of eyes after you've been challenged by a Jeffrey or a challenge in the data is probably the most important skill you can have in genealogy. Burnout is a researcher's ultimate enemy. Breaking through brick walls or defending yourself from anger, frustration and fatigue is key to success. I trust other podcasts to talk about specific documents and techniques for doing this in the world of genealogical resources, so I'm here for you today to talk about self-care resources.

Team Red on BYU-TV's Relative Race said something a few episodes back: "If you change the way you look at things, things change." That kind of optimism used to make me want to swing a longsword in a crowded bus station, but now, I get it!

I have seen so many Twitter and Facebook posts, genie memes, and even discussions in the podcast group that talk about the same problem: as genealogists and family historians, we're all addictive in our behavior, and we're all perfectionists. We frustrate easily at times, but we're dogged in our pursuit of the next document, the best piece of evidence...and this makes us all a bunch of crazies who forget how to succeed in the face of seeming failure. We forget how to proceed. We forget how to get out of our own heads.

Some very wise people a long time ago taught me that there are two kinds of fear: fear of losing what you have, and fear of not getting what you want. Every negative emotion, no matter what it looks like on the surface, can be shaved down to one fear or the other. To succeed and get over the hump of a brick wall or other frustration: instead of perseverating, break it down. Find the fear: are you afraid that you'll lose a hard-researched line because something doesn't bear out? That's fear of losing something you have. Are you afraid of hitting a dry spell and losing your rep in your family or community? That too is a fear of losing something you have.

Or, are you afraid that you'll never solve the issue before you? That's fear of not getting what you want. Are you afraid that a relative who's making demands on you to find a certain

person is going to be disappointed, and Thanksgiving is going to be miserable? That's also a fear of not getting what you want. And if you're afraid of a confrontation or of criticism from Jeffrey or his sister Jeffreytina, that's probably a combination of both fears.

Finding the fear is a great skill, because it makes the next step clear: action. Fighting through the emotion leads to the action, and action is the only solution to ending the frustration of a brick wall or other negative headspace.

There are a LOT of actions that we can all take in response to Jeffrey, Jeffreytina, or a stall in research.

First, know that you can't fail in a goal. You just can't. Everything you do is a learning experience, even if it results in ripping 5 generations or a month's work out of your tree and starting fresh. A few years ago, following a pre-Colonial Walker line from Kentucky to Massachusetts led me to think that I was a Tudor, as in King Henry VIII. But oops, wrong Walker family in the 18th-century British American Colonies - I should have gone with the Virginia family that my gut was leading me to - so I had to rip out HUNDREDS of people and weeks of work. The upshot was 1. I learned to follow my gut, which I did not do initially, 2. I am NOT a Tudor, and 3. I am descended of a crazy itinerant Scottish preacher from Wigton, a town where women accused of witchcraft were tied to poles driven into the beach at low tide, so that the staked women could watch as the water came in to drown them. Who needs kings when you have charismatic preachers and unbelievably cruel misogynists?

To feel some control over a session, though, you can build success into your work by starting on the right foot. Before you begin research, take a few minutes to start with some clean, slow, deep breathing, then meditate on the session's desired direction. Take a moment to think about and list what you seek, and how you might get there. List possible documents you will need to search in order to complete your task. This keeps you organized and focused, and breathing deliberately throughout will help you to concentrate your energies on the task at hand.

Now, we all know what's going to happen next. You're going to work for hours and forget to pee, or you're going to drink too much coffee and fry your brain, or, worst of all, you're going to hit a major snag, something impenetrable...dare I say A BRICK WALL? Then you're going to freak out at 2 in the morning and ask the immortal question: what do I do?

Crank back a moment. Even before clean breathing and being orderly before your session, don't let yourself be nutty in the first place. It's taken me a long time to learn this. I am not allowed, by order of me, to research after 8pm. I have to turn off my cell by 9 and put my laptop in another room. I am not allowed to drink a Coke, or even half of one to help me "stay awake," after 3pm. I am not allowed to come in from driving, all frazzled and unfed, and sit down immediately at the computer. I see this as extremely important and frankly, I never hear anyone discuss self-care in the genealogy community. I hear us all joke about long hours and bitter coffee, and I see us asking one another how to get through brick walls with research, but the piece that's missing is the obvious one: how can we get out of our heads long enough for our minds and spirits to rebound and reboot, so that we can come upon our own solutions through inspiration? These are some ways I do that.

The simplest thing you can do is to program an alarm. Walk away from your desk for 10 minutes every hour, so that you're on for 50, off for 10. During those 10 minutes, LEAVE YOUR OFFICE. Eat a snack - NEVER work while hungry. Low blood sugar leads to impatience and fury, which never fed the bulldog. Do whatever you like but DO NOT THINK ABOUT WORK - step outside, run up and down the stairs, water your plants, speak to a child. Do something completely different from your work. Learn how to compartmentalize your work from the rest of your life, so that you can start to back-burner the work while you engage a different part of your brain. Don't worry, while it's simmering back there, new ways of looking at the problem will arise. Maybe not today, but they will.

If that doesn't work, you always have another option: move to a different part of the tree and work a completely unrelated line, preferably with different tasks attached. This is when shrubbing can save you. There's ALWAYS more work to do, so you can always shift focus and

go someplace else. I like to switch to the mindless task of adding photo hints to my tree. I change the music, change physical position, grab some herbal iced tea and start adding. It's fun and I get to see all sorts of photos I've never seen before.

Or, I move to a different platform – I think another way. I go to Twitter and start a conversation, or jump into one that's already happening. As I said in my Twitter episode, you can make friends, ask and answer questions and learn a lot. But I DON'T ask about the brick wall or snag – I think about other things by reading other people's posts and articles. Another way to go is to hit Instagram. I look at the genie accounts there – the photos are fantastic, as are the conversations. I just enjoy and get out of my head.

If you're fed up because you can't find a record, it could be that it hasn't yet been indexed. There's only one solution to that – put some good energy into the universe and index some records on FamilySearch, index New York records at [newyorkfamilyhistory.org/volunteer](http://newyorkfamilyhistory.org/volunteer), or choose from dozens of projects at [zooniverse.org](http://zooniverse.org)

During the day in particular, I do something creative or physical to break the brain-lock – I think with my eyes, ears and body, away from the computer. This could mean taking a short walk while breathing deeply, cooking or baking, going somewhere to shoot some photos, or listening to music and dancing around. It doesn't need to be for long, just 5-10 minutes. When I dance, I make sure the music is completely unlike what I use in the background for work. Work music is SomaFM Drone Zone, on very low volume. Dance music is 80s New Wave, loud and I usually sing along. I change the energy in my mind, body, and spirit completely. A different rhythm and volume combination is the most important thing. And when I have been working in silence, I switch to Drone Zone, or vice-versa, if I'm staying at the computer.

According to the National Institutes of Health, cats reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Cat purring occurs within the range of 20-140 Hz, which is a frequency that has been proven to heal joints and bones in humans. Having a cat near you, let alone petting one, can

release chemicals in your brain that calm you. So, cats are like awesome furry drugs that heal your whole body. I have two, so I'm in luck! If you don't have one, visit one in the neighborhood for a few minutes - it'll get you outside and thinking about something else, then healing from good kitty vibes.

Dogs are excellent, too. I don't have them, but my neighbors walk them all the time. Harvard Medical School has found that dogs may improve human heart health. Blood pressure goes down when a human pets a dog. Dogs also calm humans, so that the human heart rate and blood pressure go up less and come down faster when stressed. But also, dogs are fuzzy, silly and awesome. They will fetch things for you and dance around when pleased. And here, too, if you don't have one, visit one nearby, as I do.

If you have access to neither of these wonderful creatures, that's OK. Any pet will do. Sing to a bunny. Hum to a lizard. I, myself, am partial to dancing with hamsters, and chatting with bumblebees in a Manchester accent. Having a visit with another non-human creature always puts a smile on my face and puts me in a different world for a few minutes, which is exactly what I need to jump the turnstile and travel elsewhere.

Another fantastic approach to being frustrated is slowing down and practicing Interbeing, or Tiep Hien Buddhism. Don't worry, it won't mess with your religion (or non-religion), it's a practice of mindfulness in every action in life. My best mindfulness practices are 10 Minutes of Dishes and Making Herbal Tea with Intention. I learned Interbeing from books by a Vietnamese monk named Thich Nhat Hanh. Right before starting to study for the bar exam, I went to the Maple Forest Monastery in Vermont to learn how to practice what I'd read. It was really hard, but it was worth it. Basically, mindfulness practice means doing a thing slowly, while breathing deeply and saying to yourself what you are doing as you are doing it. For instance, in 10 Minutes of Dishes, I say to myself "I am walking toward the sink" as I walk toward the sink, then "I am standing before the sink" once I've stopped, then "I am reaching for the hot water handle" as I do that, and so forth. It makes me mindful of the present moment, and there's no room for obsessing on a brick wall or somebody who irked me in a

Facebook group. By the time I'm done, I am always calmer than when I started. Throughout, I breathe, smile, and relax, and it's amazing how much better and nicer the world is.

Above all, remember that it is not possible to fail a goal. Period. Unless a publisher is breathing down your neck and you have to submit by a hard deadline, there is no such word as failure. Simply be honest with your editor about your needs, and always, be honest with yourself: find the fear, find the action that unwinds it for you, and then, act.

I hope that this helps you to get into your body and out of your head when you hit a bump in the road. Be sure to join the group to give feedback. Stop by the swag shop at [zazzle.com/fppppodcast](https://www.zazzle.com/fppppodcast) for shot glasses, hats, t-shirts, tote bags and more, and jump into that limited-time offer to become a Vine and get a free deck of vintage-designed playing cards for only \$7.50 a month at [patreon.com/join/ancestorsalive](https://www.patreon.com/join/ancestorsalive).

Until next time, do your research, be kind to yourself, don't be a Jeffrey, and Expect Surprises.



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