

Tree Climbers
by Carol Coley Taylor

The Oxford English Dictionary defines genealogy as an account of one's descent from an ancestor or ancestors. Those who practice the art are genealogists, or "tree climbers" as some would say. Easy to spot, genealogists are those glassy-eyed individuals, who spend their lives in the dark realms of county courthouse basements looking at dry, brittle ledgers and old, musty probate packets. Others can be seen emerging from a library after spending the day reading dim microfilms with almost illegible handwriting and swaying as if getting their sea legs following a long ocean voyage. Then there are those robust souls who spend days, scouring country cemeteries, oblivious to the ticks, chiggers and oppressive heat. And then there are the die-hard computer addicts searching each new web-site for that illusive fifth great-grandfather buried in the backwoods somewhere in New England.

Sound familiar? Then welcome to my world, the World of Genealogy, the second fastest growing hobby in the world. Recently, the major newsmagazines devoted cover stories to the phenomenon. New web sites on the Internet spring up daily.

Why such an interest in our forebears? The answers are probably as numerous and varied as the genealogists. Genealogy is no longer the realm of bluebloods trying to connect with those arriving on the Mayflower or to a Magna Carta signer, genealogists today a mixed-breed. Some merely collect names of persons related to them, no matter how distantly. Others want their children and grandchildren to remember family members. Many are searching for a parent or grandparent who died when the individual was young. Adoptees want to know more about their birthparents. For many, proving

relationship to a famous or infamous ancestor is a matter of pride, while others marvel at the hardships their ancestors faced.

With the increased interest in genetic medicine, many people are finding certain diseases run in families. In this case, knowledge is essential. The latest *NGS Newsletter* of the National Genealogical Society ran an interesting notice on a Family Alcoholism Study being conducted by the University of California, San Francisco. Persons with a family history of alcoholism were invited to participate in the study aimed at locating the genes that may contribute to the development of alcoholism.

Genealogists are those people who work the crossword puzzle with their first cup of coffee in the morning, love jigsaw puzzles and mystery novels, and readily admit their addiction to seeking those long lost relatives. At least, our addictions are not immoral, illegal or fattening.