

Cousin Relationships Explained

October Column

At a recent meeting at our library a question was asked about “cousins,” and how to determine the degree of relationship we share within our families. Needless to say at this particular time, we did not come to an agreement on whether the person in question was a “first” or “second” cousin of the relationship discussed.

Later driving home and thinking about this discussion, a song of long ago started playing in my head, “I’m my own Grandpa”. With a chuckle, I started to sing the words, but then I thought do we really understand our genealogical relationship of “Cousins” and how they relate to us.

The first generation relationships are fairly easy: mother, father, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, cousin. We know that our parent's parents are our grandparents. Beyond that generation they are great grandparents. After that, we add another “great” for every generation as we go back in time. However, it is much easier to say “my five times great” grandmother, rather than repeating “great” five times. This tells you that your “five times grandmother” is seven generations back from you (your parents are one generation, grandparents second generation, then one more generation for each “great” making it a total of seven generations).

Now, if someone walked up to you, and introduced themselves to you as your third cousin twice removed. How would you react, what would you think. We are familiar with our immediate family and our relationship to one another. But what about the stranger on the street who says he's your third cousin, how does he fit into your family.

Let's try to simplify this relationship. The term “removed” in genealogy means the number of generations away from yourself. As an example, my cousin's children are still my first cousins. But they are one generation younger than me, so they are once removed. My children and my cousin's children are second cousins. In reality though we often just refer to each other as cousins.

It is only in terms of genealogy that the true distinction really matters. As we trace back in time to a much earlier ancestor and their descendants, this is where we need to determine the exact relationship. If I take “my sixth great grandfather Benjamin” and his brother Stephen's family and place them on a chart.

Benjamin and Stephen's eighth great grandchildren (me) would be eighth cousins, and these eighth cousin's children, would be eighth cousins once removed.

By using this illustration my hope is to shed some light on relationships in this entertaining world of genealogy. This does not mean we have to change our thinking of what we call our cousins. What matters most is the type of relationship we have with each other that counts, as for the eighth times cousin moniker, we just drop the words “eighth times” and become cousins.

So if you are not your own grandpa, whose grandpa are you!!!!

To get a copy of a relationship chart go to: www.cyndislist.com/cousins/charts/ then click on: Ancestral Relationship Chart

PLEASE NOTE: The Medicine Hat Genealogy Society, at 971-13th Ave. SW across from the Main Entrance to the Hillside Cemetery, will be holding an “Open House” in our library on Sunday the 18th of October, from 1 – 4 pm Everyone is most “WELCOME” to attend.

I can be reached at timetraveller@gmail.com
Lloyd Robinson