

Proposal

**THE JACKSON 5000:**

**Searching for Historical Accuracy, a Circus Tent,  
Thousands of Unknown Relatives, and Perhaps a New Racial Identity  
Through a Series of Cold Calls, Old Bibles,  
Strange Conversations, and a DNA Test.**

BY

**BUZZY JACKSON**

[Sales Handle]

## **THE JACKSON 5000...**

... is one part family memoir, one part investigation into the remarkable new world of DNA research, and one part How-To manual for reconstructing a family tree.

Author Buzzy Jackson invites the reader to share in her journey as she makes contact with long-lost relatives, fact-checks longstanding family legends, and gets cozy with the American subculture of amateur genealogy.

## THE JACKSON FIVE THOUSAND

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## THE JACKSON 5000

### AN OVERVIEW

A family memoir, an exploration of the curious and rapidly expanding world of genealogy enthusiasts, as well as a user's guide to building a family tree, THE JACKSON 5000 will be all of these things - but most of all - it will be an entertaining journey of discovery for both the author and reader.

I didn't really get interested in genealogy until it got personal; that is to say, I had a baby. Lots of parents have this experience, and it often starts with that first visit to the doctor, when she brings up the three most potentially terrifying words in the field of Obstetrics: *Family Medical History*. Some of us come prepared with a clear, linear narrative, but for most of us, it's kind of like completing the Saturday *New York Times* crossword puzzle: it looks approachable at first, but as soon as you get a few boxes filled in, the white space looms larger and larger.

Doctor: OK, both parents are living. How about your grandfather?

Me: "Let's see... my mom's father? Yes, he died."

Doctor: "Mm-hm. Of what?"

Me: "Oh, of a heart attack."

My Husband: "Wasn't it a stroke?"

Doctor: (looking up from her chart in apparent alarm)

Me: "Oops! Right. It was a stroke."

Doctor: “OK, a stroke.” (She frowns.)

Me: “Is that worse? I mean, aren’t they similar?”

Doctor: “Not really.”

Me: “Then maybe it was a heart attack.”

(Doctor looks at my husband, who just shrugs. Doctor sighs.)

It’s silly, but the impulse to game the medical system is hard to shake, since everyone would like to present their doctor with a perfectly clean record (whatever that means, when you consider that none of us get out alive). Somehow it just seems unfair to one’s children to start out with a list of potential diseases....brought to you by Grandma and Grandpa!

Even though lying to your doctor won’t actually *change* your Family Medical History, it’s tempting. And that’s assuming you know something about it. In my case, obviously, there was a lot I didn’t know. This meant that I had to start asking my parents questions about the family, a process that revealed to me, in a frankly embarrassing way, how much I simply did not know about them – about us. Some might say this lack of knowledge was their own fault for not telling me more family stories, but given my longstanding belief that I could only avoid psychotherapy as long as I refused to blame my parents for my own problems, that option was out. I decided to start with my dad.

Thus I began my search for *Jacksoniana*: the truth about my little branch of the Jackson diaspora. I was already sitting in front of the computer, so I started there. Actually, I procrastinated, and checked my email. And there it was, right on top: *Beginning Internet Genealogy*. Along with a notice that I was in possession of three

overdue books, my local library helpfully informed me that at ten o'clock that morning, the Beginning Internet Genealogy workshop would be held in the River View Room. Before I got up, I took a few minutes to check out what else I could find online that might help me in my genealogical quest. "Surname Jackson," I typed.

This is how it starts for most of the hundreds of thousands of people who've gotten hooked on genealogy in the past decade. They're at the computer, and they start typing. THE JACKSON 5000 is about that process – becoming interested in family history and discovering how to find the answers you're looking for. It's a lighthearted yet seriously-intentioned exploration of the meaning of family and genetic inheritance. In tracking the history of the Jacksons, I follow a path that anyone else can do with their own family history, and I take it step by step, as a beginner just like them. Readers will gain insight into the highly accessible new world of genealogy, including a reader-friendly discussion of the most recent advances in DNA testing and its genealogical applications.

As a professional historian, I do have a few skills that come in handy. I know, for instance, that sometimes the most boring, bureaucratic archives contain the juiciest details (you also have to be nice to the Head Librarian). I've done enough interviews with intimidating strangers to know the value of a good oral history. And I know that, no matter how fabulous a historical detail may be, if there's no way to prove it's true, it probably isn't. My own professional training in(?) American history can also help place a personal narrative within the larger historical context.

The plan for the book is simple and straightforward. In an attempt to understand the history of my personal branch of the Jacksons in America, I will travel to ten states in order to interview my father and his six siblings, along with a select group of extended Jackson relatives. Between conversations, I will conduct genealogical research as I get familiar with the many genealogical archives located online (FamilySearch, Ancestry.com, RootsWeb, virtual cemeteries, etc.) as well as in local county courthouses and even on the dreaded library microfilm (another of my professional skills, though one I almost wish I'd never learned). In order to learn more about the subculture of genealogy hobbyists, I'll attend their conferences and join local genealogy groups, as well as taking part in online chat groups as my search develops.

I'll also submit the DNA of myself and my father to the leading genetic genealogy company, Family Tree DNA, in order to compare genetic information from both the male and female lineages. Family Tree DNA will then compare our genetic information with their ongoing Jackson Surname Project (to find linkages with other Jacksons) and will also decode the geographical origins of our ancestors. This process will lead to an ongoing exploration of the expanding world of genetic science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Through this process, I hope to either verify or debunk a long list of family myths, some just plain silly (Did my grandparents really house their kids in a circus tent?), and some profound (Do we as a family possess any African heritage?). On a personal level, I hope that the process of researching this book will help me to better understand myself and my own family, while inspiring others to take on genealogical journeys of their own.

We're living in amazing times. Not since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, two hundred years ago, has the pace and proliferation of technology so

influenced human life. Information has never been so easily available, and time has never been dearer. Yet it's an era of paradox. As we speed away from our past, we are better connected to history than ever before, with vast resources of data just a few keyboard strokes away. In this forward-leaning environment, people are increasingly spending their free time in patently "retro" pursuits, from book clubs, to scrapbooking, to reconstructing our family trees. We've never been further from our human origins, nor have we ever known so much about them.

Perhaps, in a few years, when the doctor asks about the Family Medical History, we'll simply provide her with DNA samples and be done with it. In the meantime, speaking for myself, THE JACKSON 5000 will keep me honest.



## THE JACKSON 5000

### MARKET POTENTIAL

#### IN THE BOOKSTORE

THE JACKSON 5000 will appeal to readers interested in the established and popular field of family memoir, but another overlapping audience for the book will be the world of genealogy hobbyists – a subculture exploding in popularity, thanks in part to the vast new reserves of data made possible by the World Wide Web and DNA testing (not to mention the “Oprah Factor,” as in the PBS special and spin-off book, *Finding Oprah’s Roots*).

Bestselling books in the family-tree genre include Edward Ball’s *Slaves in the Family* (1998), Tony Horwitz’s *Confederates in the Attic* (1999), and *The Liar’s Club* (1995), by Mary Karr. The world of genetics has also produced a number of popular books, such as Richard Dawkins’s *The Ancestor’s Tale* (2005) and Spencer Wells’s *The Journey of Man* (2006), which was the basis for the eponymous PBS documentary. Brian Sykes, founder of Oxford Ancestors, Europe’s best-known genealogical testing service, is also the author of several bestselling books on the subject of DNA, including *The Seven Daughters of Eve* (2001) and *Saxons, Vikings, and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland* (2005).

While THE JACKSON 5000 shares themes and subject matter with these books, it is unique in its combination of a personal family story with archival and scientific research. Author Buzzy Jackson is not a scientist attempting to translate her findings, but

instead a “normal” person with an interest in genealogy who narrates her familial quest in the same friendly spirit as Bill Bryson narrating his hike along the Appalachian Trail in *A Walk the Woods* (1998). *THE JACKSON 5000* will appeal to readers interested in the field of memoir, as well as those looking for inspiration and guidance as they contemplate their own genealogical research.

#### **THE GROWING WORLD OF GENEALOGY**

The concept of the Family Tree has been around for a long time, and everyone can usually point to someone in their extended family as “the one who’s interested in the family history,” but the growth of the internet expanded the scope of this field enormously. It’s no longer necessary to travel to a distant county courthouse to find meaningful data about one’s ancestors; now billions of pages of census data, birth and death certificates, and even virtual graveyards can be accessed online. Genealogy hobbyists now constitute their own niche within the tourism industry, which offers Genealogy Cruises (featuring authors and researchers on genealogical topics), International Genealogy Tours, and even home exchange programs for international travelers in search of lost ancestors. Genealogy conferences, “meetups,” and clubs are also increasingly popular.

## GENEALOGY STATISTICS

The Church of Latter Day Saints (a.k.a. the Mormons) is the acknowledged leader in the genealogy field, having begun its archive over 100 years ago. In 1999, the church launched [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org), the web version of the LDS archive.

According to FamilySearch:

- Over 150 million people have visited the FamilySearch website;
- FamilySearch has one million registered users;
- More than 50,000 people access the site every day.

The Mormons used to be the only game in town, but not anymore. Many other “family-focused interactive properties,” as these genealogical web sites are called, are flourishing these days. The Generations Network owns a collection of such sites, including Ancestry.com, RootsWeb, MyFamily.com, and Genealogy.com, and together

The Generations Network boasts:

- 8.5 million unique visitors worldwide;
- 400 million page views per month.

Given the popularity of PBS’s genealogy series, including *Ancestors* and Henry Louis Gates’s *African Roots*, new programming is in the works. Genealogy now has its own web-based television channel, RootsTelevision.com, which will offer original content online. In its bid for online advertisers, RootsTelevision provides some interesting demographic data about the genealogy audience.

RootsTelevision provides the following demographic and sales information about the genealogy audience:

(courtesy of RootsTelevision.com)

- Cuts across all age groups from scrapbooking moms to the elderly, but is most heavily concentrated – not at the upper range, as many assume – but in the middle age segment
- Is affluent and becoming more so (baby boomers, in particular, are now on the receiving end of the largest transfer of wealth ever in the form of inheritances and have significant disposable income)
- Includes both men and women, but skews female – not a bad thing, since women tend to have 15-18 more years to be your customer than their spouses. And as Tom Peters and Martha Barletta point out, women are the “instigators-in-chief for most household buying, accounting for a mammoth *80 percent* of all spending by U.S. households.”
- Already lives on the Internet. Genealogists are known for crashing sites with traffic and are among the stickiest surfers online.

Our audience has a pronounced need for products including, but not limited to:

- travel (nothing like a family reunion or trip to the homeland!)
- computers, peripherals, and supplies
- online access and search services of all types (how else do we find those 3rd cousins once removed?)
- any kind of image-capture product (cameras, camcorders, scanners, etc.)
- copying and shipping services
- **books, books, books – genealogists are avid readers!**
- and not so incidentally, financial planning, insurance, cosmetics, cars and other useful products and services

Genealogy is also growth area for Web 2.0. Google invested \$3.9 million in the new company, [23andMe](#), a “personal genome service,” and Geni.com is a new family tree-building site that positions itself as the Facebook of genealogical networking. According to Nielsen/NetRatings, while these new web services are often discovered by the younger

generation, they subsequently inform their elders – who themselves become registered users.

#### **MARKETING SUMMARY**

THE JACKSON 5000 will touch upon several popular interest areas: the family memoir; genealogy; and new breakthroughs in DNA testing, conveyed in a friendly, intelligent, and humorous style. While other books and TV shows have dealt with specific aspects of these topics, no one has combined these subjects in such an entertaining and personal way.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

**BUZZY JACKSON**

Born to a secular Jewish mother and a nominally Baptist father, Sarah Jackson was born six weeks late in Traverse City, Michigan, where she lived for twelve days – just long enough to earn the lifelong nickname “Buzzy” from her Russian grandmother – before being whisked off to Montana where her exhausted mother finally rejoined her father, a graduate student who’d been assured that his child would be born in time for the start of the semester at the University of Montana. That didn’t happen.

Since then, Buzzy has continued to travel, dividing her childhood between Montana and Northern California. As an adult she somehow ended up living in many of the Top Ten Most Expensive American Cities, including Los Angeles (going to college at UCLA); New York City (working in the publishing industry); San Francisco and Berkeley (getting a Ph.D. in History at UC Berkeley); and Boulder, Colorado (currently a faculty member of The Center of the American West at CU Boulder).

In addition to her work as a historical researcher, Buzzy also writes about popular culture. Her first book, *A BAD WOMAN FEELING GOOD: BLUES AND THE WOMEN WHO SING THEM* (W.W. Norton: 2005), described by *Publisher’s Weekly* as “thoughtful [and] fluent...a refreshing new perspective,” focused on music, a subject also covered in her work as a Columnist for the *Arts & Culture* blog at KQED.org (2006-

2008). She's also contributed essays on books and travel to Salon.com and the anthology, *THE RISKS OF SUNBATHING TOPLESS* (Seal Press: 2005).

Recently Buzzy has focused on writing focused on science and the environment, as lead researcher and writer for the documentary film, *RED, WHITE, AND GREEN: LIVING WITH ENERGY IN THE AMERICAN WEST* (The Center of the American West / Nebraska Public Broadcasting; in production), and co-editor with Patricia Nelson Limerick of *THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE: RACIAL EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING* (Univ. of Washington Press: 2009), an anthology of writing on environmental justice.

An accomplished public speaker, Buzzy toured seven cities on her last book tour, during which she conducted numerous local and national radio, TV, and magazine interviews. Buzzy has taught at UC Berkeley and the University of Colorado and speaks frequently on topics of American culture and history to college and community audiences.

She currently lives near Boulder, Colorado, with her husband and young son, Jackson, who was born only two weeks after his due date.

**THE JACKSON 5000:  
MARKETING & PROMOTIONAL TIE-INS**

**THE VALUE OF PROMOTION**

As someone with experience in the publishing industry - having worked at a literary agency and as a bookseller at an independent bookstore – I appreciate the importance of the author’s role in promoting her own work. Friends and former colleagues in the bookselling and media industries would be eager to help me publicize this book; in the past, I have appeared on the WGBH-Boston morning interview show, “On Point,” as well as similar shows on Minnesota, Texas, Berkeley, and New York City’s public radio stations, and I have a standing invitation to appear on KQED’s “Writer’s Block,” their weekly reading series. As an author, I’m always looking for new audiences for my work and I am an enthusiastic and entertaining speaker.

**SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

One of the obvious markets for THE JACKSON 5000 is the world of genealogists, and luckily this is a well-organized group of people who are always looking for speakers at their many club meetings and conferences (and even at some of the larger family reunions!). In addition to speaking opportunities, genealogists spend a lot of time online in chat groups and other forums where books are reviewed and recommended.

While THE JACKSON 5000 is not aimed at the academic audience, I nevertheless have an extensive network of colleagues in universities and local historical



groups around the country who would welcome a lecture on the application of historical research.

My recent writing on science and environmental issues has led to invitations to speak on these topics at events like the annual Bioneers Conference and university panels. One focus of THE JACKSON 5000 will be the evolving field of genetic testing, which would lend itself to audiences and media outlets interested in accessible presentations of the latest scientific breakthrough.

#### PERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Every book needs its blurbs; here's a list of some friends who could be contacted in the event:

- Tracy Kidder (personal friend): Author, *Mountains Beyond Mountains; Home Town; Among Schoolchildren*, among numerous other books.
- Ralph Steadman (friend and former client): Illustrator and Author, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, The Grapes of Ralph*, among many other books.
- James Ellroy (former client): Author, *L.A. Confidential, The Black Dahlia*, among many other novels.
- Patricia Nelson Limerick (current employer): Chair of the Board, The Center of the American West; Professor of History at CU Boulder; MacArthur "Genius" Grant Recipient.
- Peter Guralnick (former employer): Author, *Dream Boogie: The Triumph of Sam Cooke; Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley; Sweet Soul Music*; among many other books on music.

- William Kittredge (personal friend): Author, *A Hole in the Sky*; *Owning it All*, *The Last Best Place*, among other novels and essays.
- Leon F. Litwack (friend and former academic advisor): Author of the Pulitzer Prize- and National Book Award-winning *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, among other historical works.

## **THE JACKSON 5000:**

### **FOR WHOM AND HOW: TARGET AUDIENCE**

Readers interested in books about family will seek out THE JACKSON 5000, not because it is a scandalous indictment of someone's childhood, but because it's concerned with normal, nutty American families just like their own. People with an interest in exploring their own family history will look to THE JACKSON 5000 for help in starting that process, and experienced genealogists will find in it echoes of their own experiences.

Potential buyers of THE JACKSON 5000 may have already enjoyed books by other non-fiction authors who write about personal journeys in a similarly engaging and approachable style, such as Bill Bryson, Elizabeth Gilbert, and Sarah Vowell.

### **FORMAT**

Although most of the book will be arranged in a straightforward manner, some graphs and charts will also be featured as illustrations of genealogical information (such as family trees and DNA structures). Some family photos (b/w) will also be included.

The book would also feature a sample genealogy worksheet (located at the back of the book) that the reader could fill in to begin her own genealogical research.

### **LENGTH**

The proposed length of the book is approximately 300 pages, including illustrations.

## THE JACKSON 5000: COMPETITION

While other books cover issues of family and genealogy, none exactly mirror the approach or content of THE JACKSON 5000.

Recent popular memoirs similar in theme and style to THE JACKSON 5000 include:

- Mildred Armstrong Kalish, *Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression* (2004)
- Bill Bryson, *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir* (2006)
- Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (1998)
- Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic* (1999)

Books explaining science in a similarly accessible way include:

- Brian Sykes, *Saxons, Vikings, and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland* (2005).
- Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (2003)
- Neil Shubin, *Your Inner Fish: A Journey Into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body* (2004)
- Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1998)
- Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (1993)

While the separate genres of memoir and science writing are popular, few books combine them in an accessible, engaging manner. The aim of THE JACKSON 5000 is straightforward: it's a voyage into the unknown, in which the author finds her way among the fields of genealogy, genetics, and history, to discover and understand her own family. Along the way she will investigate interesting American subcultures, useful genealogical techniques, and emerging scientific technologies, and the reader will share in these encounters.

**THE JACKSON 5000:  
AN ANNOTATED TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

THE JACKSON 5000 will alternate between visits with the eight Jackson children in my father's generation and forays into the similarly strange spheres of genealogists and DNA research. These themes and issues will not be strictly divided, though, since everything here is, well, related. This proposed structure (below) is a general guideline, since I have to leave open the possibility for new directions and travels, depending on the information and experiences I encounter as I conduct my research. This research will include:

- **Genealogical research** – Paper trails (my family tree, family bibles, etc.), and online information;
- **DNA research** – Genetic testing of my own DNA as well as my father's (to capture both the male and female chromosomal information in our lineage), as well as interviews with geneticists about what DNA can reveal;
- **Family interviews** – Meeting (in many cases, for the first time) my far-flung aunts, uncles, and cousins from Vermont to Mexico to find out the truth, if any, behind many Jackson family myths;
- **Historical research** – Understanding the historical context of my family's past; using original historical sources (newspapers, photographs, autobiographies) and secondary works of history.

## **INTRODUCTION**

How and why I started this journey, from a surprising letter from Bill Cosby to a long tradition of Family Bombs. (See attached Introduction for the full story).

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **JON A. JACKSON, THE BROTHER WHO NEEDED HIS SPACE**

This chapter will not only focus on my father, Jon, but also on my own immediate family (my mother and two half brothers), a sort of mini-autobiography that will set the stage for the rest of the book.

My dad is now a novelist, but coming from a relatively uneducated background, he didn't take his writing seriously until he started a conversation one day with a fellow carpenter in Michigan named Jim Harrison. A young poet at the time, Jim encouraged my dad to keep writing, and he did. Still friends to this day, it was that early friendship that gave my dad the courage to pursue a writing life.

My father's work, in turn, inspired me. In this chapter the reader will get a sense of where I'm coming from and my own motivations, as well as getting to know my dad, a decidedly unsentimental character with extreme opinions about almost everything, including his family.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GENEALOGY FOR BEGINNERS

Here we'll take it step by step, as I learn the fundamentals of how to “do” genealogy in the first place. I'll interview my local genealogical society staffers and begin the DNA testing journey. Questions of ethnicity in the Jackson family narrative will lead to the exploration of changes in DNA technology and how genetic testing has become *de rigueur* for today's genealogists.

We'll also get a first look at genealogy hobbyists – the people who spend the first Monday of every month at the local genealogy club meeting and the folks who actually go on the genealogy cruises. What got them into this – are their families a lot more interesting than the rest of ours, or what?

## CHAPTER THREE

### (MEARL) JOANN JACKSON VICKERY & MARY JACKSON: THE GOOD GIRLS

Well, if your parents named you Mearl, you'd go by JoAnn, too. In this section I'll examine the Southern roots of my grandparents, investigating the origins of the mysterious Alabama homestead, Windswept, as well as the earliest signs of Grandpa Jackson's “chosen” status: his personal visits from Jesus Christ, who appeared to him in a – yes – manger (in Alabama) and told him: “Jabe, you will never die.” Okay, so that one didn't technically pan out (at least as far as I have been made aware). Still, his path as a Holy Man was set, as were his plans to move north and start a family.

My Aunts JoAnn (a.k.a. Mearl) and Mary are the oldest siblings and are thus privy to the oldest family stories. Mary is also the one responsible for claiming a



“Jewish” identity for my Baptist grandfather, and may know something about his mysterious black “brother.”

I’ll go to Los Alamos, New Mexico, where Aunt JoAnn lives. She swears she has nothing to do with the nuclear research going on there... but I’ve never heard a good explanation for how she got there.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

##### **THE JACKSON SURNAME PROJECT**

Having sent in my DNA sample, I’ll enroll in the company’s “Jackson Surname Project,” in which every Jackson who’s used the testing service can volunteer his own genetic and/or family background information – thus opening the door to finding lost relatives and at the very least learning more about where this branch of the Jacksons came from. Of course, another kind of door-opening could also happen: the kind where a knock on the door announces someone claiming to be your cousin, waiting for you on the front stoop, eager to reconnect and, you know, maybe stay awhile. Hmm.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE**

##### **NANCY JACKSON SCHWARZ & FAMILY: WHAT GENES CAN MEAN**

Aunt Nancy has dirt on everyone and is the mother of my cousins Tim and Flipper (though she goes by Amy these days). Flipper was extremely close to our Grandpa Jackson and was really the only one in my generation to have any relationship with him. “Mom and Dad really loved their own kids,” Nancy told me, “but with their grandkids, they were... indifferent.” Tell me about it. Somehow Flipper broke through that wall. She’s now a Supermom in Portland, Oregon, pregnant with her fourth child.

Her brother, Tim, lives with his family in Nashville. His youngest son, Caz, was born two years ago with an extremely rare genetic disorder called CD45 Deficient SCID – a disorder resulting in a non-functioning immune system. He was not expected to live past age one. Caz is only the third person in the world ever diagnosed with this specific disorder, which happens to be genetically based, meaning my cousin Tim and his wife Julie both carry the recessive gene (and maybe I do, too).

In this chapter I'll interview Tim and Julie about their life with little Caz, as well as the impact of genetic science on their lives (most of what is known about CD45 Deficient SCID is a result of very recent breakthroughs in the Human Genome Project). All expectant parents harbor some degree of fear about birth defects. What happens when your greatest fears are realized? I want to talk to Tim and Julie about this and other issues, such as the day-to-day reality of caring for Caz and big sister Ava, and their surprising decision to have a third child – who's due in November 2008.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **OTHER GENEALOGISTS, OTHER JACKSON**

With DNA results in hand, I'll go forth to meet my fellow family tree-huggers and other Jacksons as well. This could take the form of attending a family reunion, a genealogy conference or cruise, or all of the above. According to the 2000 Census, there are around 800,000 Jacksons currently at large in the United States. Are they as interested in me as I am in them? Statistically speaking, at least some of them must be. All together now, "We – are – family – all 800,000 and me!"

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

**LARRY JACKSON & JABE COOK JR. JACKSON [SIC]: BROTHER, WHO ART THOU?**

One's a former Sheriff, the other has been arrested a dozen times for a smattering of Boomer lifestyle choices. One's in Montana, the other's in Michigan.

Both are bald.

Larry is now retired. He collects guns, paints watercolors, and transports violent felons on cross-country airplane trips in his spare time. He's remarried to a woman who makes a mean Bundt cake. Jabe is a sculptor. His most recent work in metal is a giant "NO" affixed to the grill of his pickup truck. He recently divorced a South African woman he met on the Web. Turns out she just didn't "get" him.

They've both gotten crankier with age.

Larry and Jabe are my father's only surviving brothers, and through interviewing them I hope to get a peek at the male Jackson psyche – at least, the male Jacksons born into this particular family – and of course by all this, I mean my dad.

I'm also interested in understanding my two uncles' respective views on family and its importance. Larry never had any children of his own, and that seems to have suited him fine. Jabe, on the other hand, is hands-down the most sentimental of all the siblings. His newfound grumpiness aside, his devotion to his children, Nick and Mooner, is extreme. His profession of love for me, personally, I always found touching and a little surprising, since I rarely saw him and only got to know him a bit in my early twenties. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that, due to inflexible academic scheduling and extremely poor medical prognostication circa 1970, it was Jabe who spent the last few weeks of my mother's pregnancy caring for her while my father headed off to graduate school in Montana; it was Jabe who took the wheel of a 1966 Volkswagen Beetle in order to drive my mother around the bumpy back roads of Michigan's Leelanau

Peninsula in a frantic attempt to induce her four-week-overdue labor; and it was Jabe, not my father, who was present at the hospital for my birth. This fact means a lot more to Jabe than it does to my dad, which gives you some idea of how different they are. The last time I left Jabe's house, he called out, "Remember, Buzz: You'll always have safe passage here." My father just rolled his eyes.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE MISSING LINK?**

Here's where I start applying the science to the stories: what, if anything, is true about the history of this family? Where did we come from? Who do I need to find out there who can verify the Jewish Question? The Black Question? The Banking Question – apparently some relative of mine started her own bank. Now that's something worth pursuing.

Aunt Nancy once again comes to the rescue. After my first visit to the genealogical society I emailed her, describing my plan to head down south to find the "Alabama Jacksons." Here is her reply: "About the Jacksons of Alabama - there aren't any."

Now that's the kind of need-to-know news I've been looking for. It turns out that all our Alabama relatives now reside elsewhere, and she's got some tips on where to find them.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **MOONER, NICK, & CHICKEN: ROAD TRIP!**

Time to meet two of my favorite cousins, Nick and Mooner (Marianne, actually – see a pattern developing among the girl cousins here? Flipper, Mooner, Buzzy...). Nick, a public school teacher in Oakland, and his Mexican wife Lucy, an administrative assistant, managed to live in the Bay Area for six years and simultaneously – incredibly – save \$80,000 toward their dream: a school in Mexico where they would teach English. That’s where they are today. Mooner, meanwhile, blew seventy grand on culinary school and is an indebted but happy chef in San Francisco, where she lives with her self-described “heterosexual life partner” Nicole, and their matching Boston Terriers, one of whom is named Chicken.

Mooner, Nicole, and the dogs (not to mention my three-year old son) would make great traveling companions for a trip to the American South where we’ll try to track down our lost Jackson ancestors and the family homestead of Windswept I (rumored to be located near the Tombigbee River in the now apparently Jackson-bereft region of northwest Alabama). With Nancy’s clues to guide us, we’ll search out our known living relatives, including Janet – no, not that Janet Jackson (though why not?) – the second cousin whom Nancy described as a “cattle baron,” and the one who, along with her husband, “got tired of waiting for loans and decided to build their own bank.” Good news, as I’ve gotten tired of negotiating car loans with bankers who aren’t related to me by blood.

Picture a minivan filled with three women, two dogs, and a toddler, tearing through the south with stops for barbecue and boiled peanuts. The truth is out there. With luck, a lot of potty breaks, and Aunt Nancy on speed dial, we’ll find it.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

## **CLAUDIA JACKSON APFEL & DON JACKSON: TENDER LAMB, BLACK SHEEP**

My Aunt Claudia and her husband, Bill, are Pentecostals with their own ministry in the Assembly of God church who were “called” by Jesus Christ to the avidly secular town of Barre, Vermont. According to the church’s own statistics, the Assembly of God adds 5,000 new members worldwide each day. I saw Claudia last year, for the second time in my life. I did not join her church, but I did enjoy her taco salad.

Of all my grandfather’s children, Claudia is the only one to have followed his path to Christian fundamentalism. She once encouraged him to try speaking in tongues, as she and so many members of her congregation do. Grandpa replied, “Oh, I speak in tongues all the time. I talk about Jesus all day to my children – and they don’t seem to understand a word I say.”

What qualified my late Uncle Don for his black sheep status, I cannot say. It probably has something to do with the fact that, as the oldest sibling, he blazed a trail into the twentieth century before his brothers and sisters: divorcing, marrying an Hispanic woman (that must have really pissed off my Grandpa), and perhaps most shocking of all, moving to California. Uncle Don’s house in Anaheim not only had a swimming pool and a desert tortoise that lived under the porch, but it was located only two miles from Disneyland, making him practically a saint in my five year-old imagination. Was there a darker side to Uncle Don and his cute little kumquat trees? I’ll find out.

## **CONCLUSION / EPILOGUE**

This chapter offers the opportunity to reflect upon the Jackson legacy – what binds us, what separates us – and upon the expanding notion of family made possible by DNA. What’s the meaning of “Mitochondrial Eve” and “Y-Chromosomal Adam?” What

have we learned about our genetic past that will help us move into the brave new genetic future? And what's the future of my genealogical history, so to speak?

Writing from the pre-journey perspective, I can only know what it is I hope to find. I'm making this trip not just for myself, but for my whole family. Like them (I assume), I've never been much of a "joiner." I'm not a loner, but neither am I big on group dynamics. Still, something in me – maybe something I got from my mother's side of the family, who knows? – wants to connect with these people, and more than that, I want them to connect with each other. I'm not sure this goal can be achieved. Maybe there's a deep-seated reason that Aunt JoAnn hasn't spoken to Uncle Larry in a decade or so. At the very least, I'd like to find out why.

And then there's Jackson. Not the surname, but the son: my son. I'd like to be able to pass on the Jackson stories just like my dad did, but this time with a few facts to back them up. I'd like him to know where to find his cousins, should he care to look for them. I'd like him to know what his name means, and what it means to me.