

## AUTHOR ARTICLE FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

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# THE LINES OF SHEILA

**Sheila Mughal, author of *THE LINES OF TAMAR* explains how and why she came to write the novel.**

**Along the way she discusses her passion for genealogy and expresses her hope that her book will encourage others to research their own family histories....**

Back in 1983 at the youthful age of 24, I decided to explore my genealogical heritage.

My father died when I was a baby and I knew little to nothing about his side of the family. As I grew older and had a family of my own, I had a longing to locate my paternal roots. Aside from that, my own mother's father migrated to America during the depression of the 1920's and she desperately wanted to locate any possible transatlantic siblings. The dual purpose of finding long lost family for both myself and my mother, had planted a seed which was to germinate into a compulsive hobby.

The mid 1980's were of course back in the dark days pre-internet, when genealogical investigations involved long hours spent in a library, as well as days consumed reviewing parish records, and the unenviable task of patrolling graveyards looking for clues on sullied headstones. As hobbies go, this was far from glamorous, and on top of that, served as a constant reminder of one's own limited lifespan. I was often prompted (by way of a guilt trip and a poke in the ribs), that I should have been spending more time, with those relatives still in possession of a pulse. However, with magnifying glass and umbrella in hand, I continued with the pursuit of my lineage.

Back then, the ultimate joy, for me as an amateur genealogist, was recovering a new surname to add to the portfolio. It was a pastime that was insular, introverted and excluded the outside world of the living, but none the less, a compelling hobby, which I found fascinating.

## The internet revolution

The big break came with the introduction of the Internet. Suddenly on-line searchable databases replaced the dusty parish records and rain soaked days, walking through overgrown nettle-infested cemeteries. With new sites offering social media networking to connect distant cousins, genealogy grew in popularity, and in depth of research capability. Regrettably it became less of an active occupation, and now involved time sat in front of a screen. However the unknown relatives that the illuminated screen revealed, was worth the associated increase in cellulite.

Every genealogist needs that one big break. The one ancestor, who can open the door to thousands more, and if that ancestor was a wealthy Norman invader, who had left an indisputable paper trail, so much the better. My 31<sup>st</sup> Grandfather (several times over via several differing lines) was William the Conqueror. Via King William, plus other notable knights of the realm and affluent barons, it seemed that I was a direct descendent of many of the great Kings and Queens of Europe, and beyond.

I was enthralled and elated, by the names thrown back at me from the genealogy software. Naturally I wanted to know more about this odd collection of strangers, who had contributed to my DNA.



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## Richard the Lionheart and Lady Godiva

Many of my more recent family members were poor, lived hard lives as coal miners or mill workers, and died young. I was proud of how they had struggled to survive, and had worked tirelessly towards giving their children a better existence than their own. However in stark contrast to the obvious deprivation and poverty from my maternal line, came the grandiose and ostentatious dynasties from my paternal line.

My father's Norman line were the wealthy landed gentry, and some simply possessed the most marvellous of titles. I have too many to list, but have picked out some names at random, by way of a few examples:-

- Lady Godiva – my 32<sup>nd</sup> Great Grandmother
- Count Baldwin – my 32<sup>nd</sup> Great Grandfather
- Dodo the Saxon – my 44<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather
- Eithne Queen of Ireland – my 42<sup>nd</sup> Great Grandmother
- Eneid Capuir ap Cerwyd Druid King of the Britons- 72<sup>nd</sup> Great Grandfather
- Holy Roman Emperor Prince Louis Le D Pius – 40<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather
- King Ceawlin of Wessex – my 47<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather
- King of Scotland Alpin MacEochaid Dalraida – 41<sup>st</sup> Great Grandfather
- King Richard 1<sup>st</sup> Lionheart – 27<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather
- Princess Ligarde of France – 35<sup>th</sup> Great Grandmother



From King Canute, to Bluetooth the Viking and Wig the tribal leader – the many historical figures who had shaped my genetic footprint, was to me, personally enthralling.

I expected my friends, brothers, children and husband to be as equally impressed by my colourful lineage, but I was wrong. As they struggled to stifle a yawn, I became aware that I was the only person who found my ancestors remotely fascinating. I was highly tempted to compose a book about my unusual family tree, and even began the process, but then came the sharp realisation that these long dead family members were personal to me and nobody else actually cared. I felt deflated and disappointed.

## The joy of writing

I have been writing books since being able to hold a pencil. I think I was about 6 when I first created a book about the little people living at the bottom of my imaginary garden. Up until 2015, I had not taken any of my former manuscripts to publication. I wrote for my personal pleasure as others may read for the same reason.

However as an adult, my profession was within sales and marketing, and I understood commercially, that it was a pointless exercise, to write something nobody else would ever want to read. As such, the likes of my 52<sup>nd</sup> Grandmother Yrsa Helasdottir born in Denmark in 565AD and her association with the King of the Goths and the Vandals, would be retired to the empty pages of an unwritten book.

At some point in life, even for one who writes for personal pleasure, there comes a moment when the ache to have at least one book transported to life in print, makes its overwhelming presence felt. Shortly after my 56<sup>th</sup> birthday, (seems old when I type it), that realisation hit me overnight. I had reached an age, whereby I had amassed an assortment of experiences, learned a multitude of agonising lessons and had reached countless conclusions. I had often considered, that if only I could put an old head on youthful shoulders, what a formidable combination that would be.

Once again, I opened up my laptop and started to create my words of pearly wisdom. However, as usual, my marketing brain understood that my children were as unlikely to read about my understanding of the world, as they were to digest the contents of an instruction manual.

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I felt defeated. I was anxious to share some of the amazing stories of my colourful family and also longed to impart my experiences and philosophical meanderings of life, but I knew the younger generation would shun my attempts.

### Genealogy and a novel idea

In the meantime, an idea for the book which was to become “The Lines of Tamar”, had started to evolve. As one would fathom, I am a person intrigued with the past; especially the notion of how the past can influence the present and even help shape the future.

I went in search of a strong powerful woman from the history books, and no book seemed to be more historical than the Old Testament. I was taken with the notion of making a bygone figure, live a modern day life. There was no shortage of material, even though females were traditionally given lesser attention in the bible. Yet incest, debauchery, betrayal and torture were in plentiful supply and if anything, seemed a touch too macabre for a modern day audience. I recognised that to make it digestible for a younger and more sensitive palate, I would need to lighten and modernise the story.

My plot, still in an evolutionary stage, involved twins, a sacred lineage and a hidden prophecy. However I was at a loss as to which historical figure to choose as a central character. I then took a cursory glance at my own family tree, and the answer to my quest was in front of my eyes. My 103<sup>rd</sup> Great Grandmother Tamar. By a stroke of luck she had given birth to twin boys and by way of additional providence, she was associated with a legend that saw her descendants head for the shores of Britain and Ireland. Add to the mix, some mysterious folklores, strange hieroglyphics and even the arc of the covenant, and it was soon apparent that my distant relative was an ideal choice.

At long last, I felt I could sell genealogy. Perhaps by putting some of my interesting forebears into a book which was a fictional novel, rather than list them in a factual mundane history book, I could sprinkle fairy dust on forgotten generations.

It was very important to me that this was a book my children would want to read and that as well as being entertaining to my peers, it would also appeal to a younger age group. Even though my children are now in their 30's and 20's, with my youngest being a teenager, (and by coincidence sharing the same unusual names as one of Tamar's twins), I would have hated to write anything they would label as stuffy and boring. Therefore, and quiet deliberately I created a book which I jokingly refer to as “The De Vinci Code meets the Kardashians”.

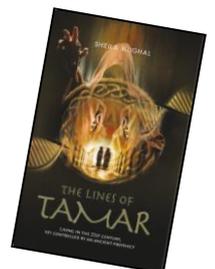
I am delighted with the end product. It contains the sentimentality, humour, music and celebrity that would entertain and delight a discerning fledgling audience. Yet this is also a serious tale, which questions the concept of good v evil and coincidence v destiny. By way of selfish pleasure, I even included a gothic mansion, a castle, a few secret tunnels and a Druid or two. I even manage to camouflage some of the pearly words of wisdom I was dying to share.

32 years of dedication to the fascinating hobby of genealogy, has made me realise there should be no such thing as writers block. For any aspiring novelist out there – just look to the past. There is far too much material for one author alone. After all - revitalising the ancestors for a new 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, is to give them immortality. If they could talk (and wouldn't that be a good book), I am sure they would find this more than acceptable.

[ENDS - WORD COUNT: 1,700]

### CREDIT:

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