

How Tracing Our Genealogy Can Deepen Our Spiritual Lives

LORI ERICKSON EMBARKS ON QUEST TO FIND HER SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

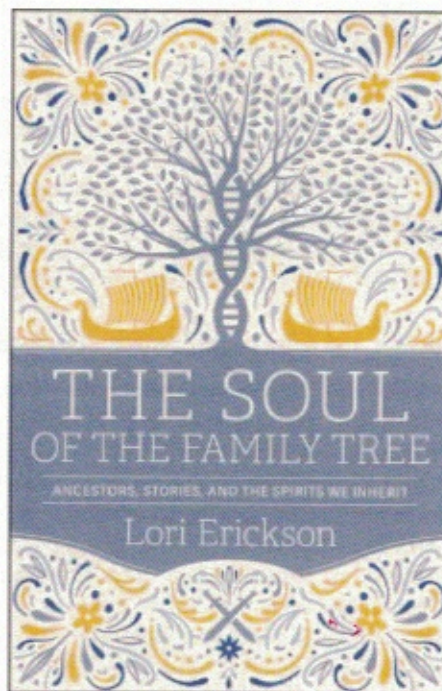
Courtesy of Lori Erickson and Westminster John Knox Press

Early one morning, travel writer Lori Erickson was collecting her spit. Like many Americans drawn to their pasts and genealogy, Erickson had decided to test her DNA to discover her heritage through a simple home-collected sample. This step soon launched her journey to walk the lands of her ancestors, from the stunning fjords of Norway and the bleak coast of Newfoundland to the small Norwegian-American Iowa town where she grew up and the farm of her great-great grandfather.

Erickson had her DNA results, but as a writer most interested in spiritual journeys, she wanted to dig deeper. What could she learn from her forbearers' spirituality? She realized that her story suddenly became much more than a quest to see how far back she could trace her ancestors. Instead, she began to see herself—and each of us—as parts of a long line of souls, adding our individual sparks to the flame of a much greater spirit.

Erickson (author of *Near the Exit* and *Holy Rover*) takes us along with her in her new book, *The Soul of the Family Tree: Ancestors, Spirits, and the Stories We Inherit*, as she seeks to show us how the spirits of our ancestors can guide us today. What can spiritual guides like Gudrid the Far Traveler, Leif Eriksson's sister-in-law, or the battle-hardened Viking-Saint Olaf teach her? And what would it be like to walk in the shoes of her hardscrabble immigrant ancestors, Hans and Sila, who settled in Decorah, Iowa, or to spend time with modern-day Norse pagans? The spiritual richness of Erickson's family tree taught her not only about her ancestors, but also just as much about herself.

The Soul of the Family Tree will appeal to readers of Erickson's previous books specializing in spiritual journeys, anyone interested in genealogy and Norse or Viking culture and history, and to those who have enjoyed similar books like *The Lost Family Tree* by Libby Copeland and *The Nordic Theory of Everything* by Anu Partanen. However, Erickson's exploration of the spirituality of our family trees sets this book apart from similar ventures. "Genealogy is one of America's top hobbies, but amateur researchers may never think to consider the spiritual dimensions of their explorations," says Jessica Miller Kelley, senior acquisitions editor at Westminster John Knox Press. "Erickson prompts readers to look not just backward but inward to consider the legacies left and journeys taken by our ancestors and to identify foremothers and forefathers who can inspire us today, whether we're biologically related or not."



The Soul of the Family Tree is available from many retailers for \$18. NAGC enjoyed working with Lori on her genealogy as she researched for her book.