

# Five Hundred Years and One Life

*What a family's long pattern of displacement and stability taught me about my own*

I didn't set out to write a family history. I set out to understand why my own life kept following the same shape: build something, watch it work, feel the ground shift, and move. It took a genealogical deep dive in 2019, and a much deeper one in late 2025 and early 2026, to see that shape wasn't only mine. It runs back five hundred years.

What follows is the compressed version of that discovery – my ancestors' story, my own, and the mechanism connecting them. I've cut the parts that only mattered to me and kept the parts I think might matter to you.

## Part One: The Line Behind Me

**A river, a war, a name.** Somewhere around 1530, in Bavaria, a man named Fritz Ragor lived through the German Peasants' War – farmers and townspeople in open revolt against princely and church authority, armies moving through the countryside, the old rules about who belonged where being violently renegotiated. We have no diary from him, only parish and legal records, but at some point his name shows up on the far side of the Main River from where it started. No explanation survives. The historical context is explanation enough: when an environment stops being survivable, you cross whatever boundary you have to.

Over the next two centuries, the name settles into a stable spelling – Rachor – and the family does something quieter and just as important: it endures. Generation after generation of farmers, jurors, and churchmen in the village of Zellhausen live through the Thirty Years' War, plague, and famine, and simply don't disappear. There's no spectacle in the record, no rise to nobility, just births, marriages, and deaths logged year after year. That, too, is a kind of genius most family histories skip past: survival isn't always about winning. Sometimes it's just about not vanishing.

**An ocean, then a disinheritance.** In 1821, Philip Rachor is born in Bavaria; by the mid-19th century he's crossed the Atlantic and

settled in Brooklyn – the familiar immigrant story, but also, in the family's terms, the same old move repeated at greater distance: when the old ground runs out, you gamble on new ground.

In Brooklyn, the Rachors collide with the Timmes family – prosperous, socially prominent German Catholics with a much harder edge. When Anton Timmes writes his will in 1879, his sons inherit real estate, a business, and cash. His daughter Eva inherits five dollars. The disinheritance is deliberate and formal – a family exiling one of its own while keeping up appearances everywhere else.

Eva married Philip's son William Rachor anyway. It did not go well for the family financially, and then it went much worse. In under two years – 1890 to 1891 – William's father dies, then his mother, then William himself, at 36, after years of drinking. He was buried at Most Holy Trinity Cemetery on December 24, 1891 – Christmas Eve – leaving Eva a widow with four children under six and no inheritance to fall back on. It's worth sitting with that image for a moment: a young widow standing over an open grave on the one afternoon of the year built around family and warmth, while the wealthier branch of her own family prepared for Christmas a few miles away.

**A rescue, and a second beginning.** Eighteen months of grief and precarity later, on July 3, 1893, Eva married Henry Linck – a man with no biological claim on her children who became, in every functional sense, their rescue. He provided steady income and a stable household, and he gave five-year-old William – who would grow up to become "Papa," my grandfather – the one thing the family's own history hadn't yet supplied: a template for dependable, sober manhood. Stepfathers get a bad reputation in most family stories. In this one, Henry is infrastructure. Without him, there's a real chance the four Rachor children end up scattered into institutional care.

**Marriage of two survival strategies.** Papa grew up, served in the Navy, and by the early 1920s married Johannah Kammerer – whose family had built a butcher shop and modest property holdings in Brooklyn on a simple doctrine: watch the neighborhood, marry for stability, invest in real estate when you can, and always think several moves ahead. Where the Rachor line contributed depth, loyalty, and hard-won emotional intensity, the Kammerer line contributed strategy and

patience. Their marriage is the first real integration in the family story – instinct paired with method.

Following the Kammerer doctrine exactly, Papa and Johannah move the family in careful stages: out of the older, denser parts of Brooklyn, into Queens, and finally – renting first to test the schools, buying once they're sure – into Scarsdale, New York, in 1940. It's one of the most resourced public school districts in the country, and it's where their daughter Helen, my mother, comes of age.

That's the arc in outline, and it's a recognizable shape even without any of the specific names: instability met by movement; movement followed, once safety is reachable, by the deliberate construction of stability; the whole cycle repeated across generations until a family arrives, materially, somewhere secure. Two forces alternate the entire way through. I've come to call them **Rachor** – move, adapt, begin again – and **Kammerer** – build, structure, hold.

## **Part Two: My Own Turn at It**

Helen married Albert Wood, a World War II veteran and engineer whose GI Bill education and defense-industry career gave the couple everything the Rachor-Kammerer arc had been building toward: money, mobility, a house in an excellent Connecticut school district. From the outside, by the time I entered the picture, the family had fully arrived.

I was born May 28, 1956, in Yonkers, to two unmarried teenagers from Keene, New Hampshire, and placed with Helen and Albert within six weeks. On July 3, 1956 – sixty-three years to the day after Eva married Henry Linck – I was formally adopted, and a seventy-year-old Papa held me in his arms for the first time. On paper, this was the family's whole five-hundred-year project paying off: a displaced infant landing in about as much security as postwar America had to offer. To an infant's nervous system, though, the first fact wasn't security. It was separation – taken from the people and place of origin and placed inside a family history that would stay invisible to me for the next sixty years.

**Early years, then a fracture.** Through about age six, physical affection in our house was abundant – my father especially was warm

and easy to be near, and my mother tucked me in every night, wrapped tight "like an envelope." That abundance left a good imprint: love feels like bodies close together, safety feels like being held. Inside that same period, though, a single moment in the bathtub – an ambiguous, frightening contact, met with sudden fear on both sides – taught my body a very different lesson: that my own developing sexuality was dangerous and had to be kept invisible. No one explained anything afterward. Nervous systems don't need explanations to draw conclusions.

Papa died in 1962. It cost my mother more than a grandfather; it reopened her own oldest wound, the one running back to Eva's exile and Henry's rescue. Her depression deepened, and physical affection in the house began quietly withdrawing – fewer hugs, no more nightly tuck-ins, until I was the one walking down the hall to find her instead of the other way around. I responded the way small children do: I kept wetting the bed well past the age when it should have stopped, because it reliably produced one thing I still needed – an invitation into my mother's bed. It worked at home. At summer camp, with no equivalent invitation available, the same strategy produced only shame. And one particular night, after I cried too long and too hard asking to be let into my parents' room, my father came in, told me to stop, and slammed a door that had always before been left open. No one ever came back to repair it. The lesson that landed, and stayed, was simple: my needs are too much, and asking for what I need gets punished, not met.

**A mind and a system that didn't match.** Elementary school suited how I actually think – relational, visual, pattern-based – and I was seen as bright, even gifted. Seventh grade switched the whole structure overnight: eight teachers instead of one, forty-two-minute periods, subjects taught in disconnected silos. My mind, built for synthesis, was suddenly required to do detail-tracking and linear recall all day. I developed workarounds – favoring classes graded by test instead of paper, leaning on charm and improvisation to cover gaps – but the story I told myself shifted from "I'm bright" to "I'm lazy, disorganized, not living up to it." I wouldn't have language for what was actually happening – an undiagnosed ADHD brain in an environment built for a different kind of mind – for another fifty years. Underneath all of it ran a second, unspoken displacement: growing up

gay in a Connecticut suburb in the 1960s and '70s, with no visible way to be that safely, at the exact same time the school system was telling me my mind itself didn't fit.

**Collapse, and the first do-over.** College reproduced the same mismatch at a higher cost, and I chose accounting largely because it sounded respectable and safe, not because it suited how I think. My first job out of college, at a Philadelphia bank, was detail-intensive, desk-bound work with almost no human contact – and within a year I was in over my head financially. I declared bankruptcy at 24. It looked, from the outside, like a personal failure with no excuse: good degree, supportive parents, no obvious structural barrier in the way. From the inside, it was an undiagnosed brain with no manual, no real financial education despite the accounting degree, and a deep-set belief that asking for help wasn't safe.

The next years brought a long, largely loveless relationship, a move into a Philadelphia neighborhood that put me in the middle of the era's urban decline and white flight – an unintended education in how displacement operates at the level of entire communities, not just one life – and, by my early thirties, a drinking habit that had started as a way to quiet an overloaded nervous system and had become a real problem. By September 1991 I'd left the relationship, left the state, and moved to Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, unemployed and drinking heavily, in a spiral that was heading somewhere specific: I was 35, approaching 36 – the exact age my great-great-grandfather William Rachor had died of the same disease, a hundred years earlier, almost to the year.

**The turn.** My mother set the condition that changed the trajectory: rehab, not a suggestion. The first attempt, at Spofford Hall that December, interrupted the spiral without ending it; I went back to Wolfeboro alone and slid again. The second attempt, in early 1992, took me to Beech Hill Hospital – just outside Keene, the town where I'd been born and had no conscious memory of. I didn't plan that particular symmetry; my insurance did. But there is something to returning, in your worst moment, to the actual ground you started from. My long-term sobriety date is February 18, 1993. I was 36. Where the family's earlier William had no one positioned to help him, I did – because three generations of people before me had spent

decades building exactly the kind of stability that makes an intervention like my mother's possible. That's not sentiment. It's mechanism: stability compounds, sometimes across a century, into someone else's rescue.

1993 also brought a meeting with my birth mother, Nancy – replacing an unanswerable question I'd carried my whole life with two real, complicated people – and it brought a new relationship, with a much younger man I effectively stabilized and supported the way no one had been positioned to do for me at his age. I didn't notice the pattern at the time: I had become the rescuing, stabilizing figure in a relationship that mirrored my own bankrupt 24-year-old self back at me. It's a pattern I'd repeat, in a different key, for another fifteen years, until I consciously let it end.

**Career, caregiving, and a different kind of relationship.** The years that followed took me from a first real accounting job to increasingly senior financial and operating roles – first in Connecticut, then, after a cross-country move with a partner in 1996, in Santa Barbara, and eventually in Vermont at Orvis. The work suited me more and more as the roles moved from pure detail-tracking toward architecting systems: inventory flow, organizational structure, the kind of pattern-level thinking that had gotten me in trouble in seventh grade and was now, finally, the whole job. After leaving California and that long relationship in 2008, I spent eleven years caring for my father before he died at 96 – care that mattered to me partly because it broke an older pattern in the family: this time, a man died old, accompanied, and in no way abandoned.

At 65 I was formally diagnosed with ADHD, which reframed nearly everything before it – the seventh-grade collapse, the "disorganization," the drinking that had started as self-medication for overwhelm. Around the same time I discovered Human Design and Gene Keys, frameworks that didn't change who I was but gave me language for a lot of it: a mind built to withdraw, synthesize, and come back with something useful; a nervous system oriented toward building community wherever I land.

In 2011 I met Paul. I was 55; he was 34 – close to the age I'd been at my own lowest point. But this relationship broke the earlier

pattern instead of repeating it: for the first time, I wasn't primarily the rescuer, and he wasn't primarily in need of rescue. We married in 2013. I retired in 2016, and we live now in Arlington, Vermont, in a house I watched for eighteen months before buying – which is, itself, a very Kammerer way of choosing a place to land.

### **Part Three: The Mechanism**

Looking back at my career specifically, a second, more useful pattern showed up – one that isn't really about ancestry at all. It's about alignment.

In nearly every environment I've entered – a job, a neighborhood, a volunteer commitment – I've done the same thing without deciding to: introduced people to each other, created shared identity, hosted the gathering that turned a group of individuals into something more cohesive. I became, without setting out to, a center other people organized around. That's the Kammerer instinct, running on the inside now instead of showing up as a real estate decision – and importantly, it wasn't controlling. People grew inside the space it created, and often kept growing, into their own leadership, well after I'd moved on.

There was one ten-year stretch where this alignment was complete: career, housing, community, and a serious personal commitment all moving together at once. The signal that it had actually happened wasn't a title or a raise – it was that when I left, colleagues put together a yearbook of photos and notes, something that had never happened before or since. That's what full alignment produces: focus, energy, growth, a system running as designed.

The roles after that were productive but never fully recovered that alignment, and eventually – not through any single decision, more through a long accumulation of small ones – I retired. Looking back, that's the Racher instinct completing the cycle: build, stabilize, grow, and when the fit is gone, move and begin again. Not necessarily geography. Sometimes just a life phase ending because the reason for staying already had.

The same reframe applies to relationships. I used to account for the ones that ended in terms of success or failure, mine or the other

person's. It's more accurate, and a great deal less punishing, to say that people sometimes grow at different rates, and when growth diverges enough, the alignment that held two people together quietly gives out – without either person having failed at anything.

The clearest single insight in all of this came from a different source entirely – Human Design's language for what it calls a "not-self" signal – but it fit the older family pattern exactly:

**frustration is not failure, and it isn't conflict. It's information that something has drifted out of alignment.** Once I could read frustration that way instead of as a verdict on myself, a lot of decades made a great deal more sense.

Put together, the whole operating system looks like this: **build, stabilize, grow – and when the fit breaks down, move, adapt, and build again.** Not a flaw in me, and not a flaw in the people who came before me. A working method, five hundred years in construction, that I only recently found the words for.

## **What I'd Want a Reader to Take From This**

You don't need my ancestors, or my specific dates, to use any of this.

**Displacement is not automatically damage.** Sometimes leaving is the correct response to an environment that no longer fits – a job, a relationship, a belief you were handed rather than chose. The instinct to move on is not, by itself, evidence of instability. It can be inherited intelligence, or simply good information correctly read.

**Stability has to be built on purpose, and it compounds across more time than you'll live to see.** The people before you may have spent decades on decisions – where to live, what to prioritize, what to give up – whose payoff you're the one who happens to collect. And if you're ever in a position to intervene for someone else, at real cost to yourself, you may be standing on ground that took someone a long time to build.

**Frustration is data, not a verdict.** When something that used to work stops working, the more useful question usually isn't "what's wrong

with me." It's "what's out of alignment now, and what would it actually take to move."

**Patterns repeat until someone responds to them differently – and that response is rarely available on your own.** Nobody in my family had the resources to interrupt what happened in 1891. By 1991, more had been built, and I was willing to use it. That's the real inheritance: not a fate written into a family, but an accumulating set of resources, and the recurring choice, each generation, of whether to use them differently than the last one was able to.

I am not only what happened to me. I'm the point in a long pattern of leaving and rebuilding where someone finally had enough distance to notice the pattern itself – and to choose, on purpose, when to move and when to stay.

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