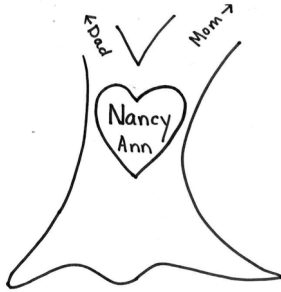


Family Tree



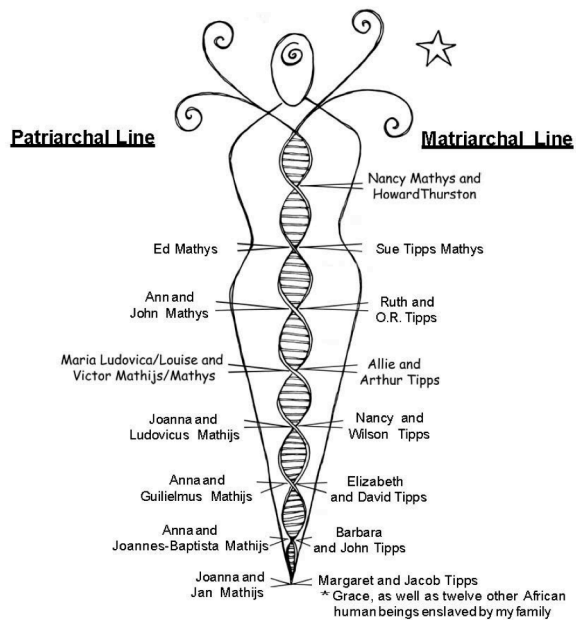
Most people diagram their extended family as a tree. You start with your name solidly "carved" on the trunk. The trunk then splits in two directions: your mother's family on the right and your father's family on the left. Branches divide again and again, including distant relatives reaching up into the sky.

One of the reasons I love a family tree is that I can picture all of our trees standing close together, forming a dense forest. Through marriage and partnership, my family branches touch and intertwine with the branches of other families. Soon enough, my tree will also touch your tree. Before too long, the generational connections between us will become obvious.

Though I love trees and the image of a grand forest, I was seeking a different image to map my family's genealogy. I wanted to have my ancestors root me down into the earth instead of reaching up toward the sky. I wanted the symbol of the actual molecule that contains the swirl of genes that connect me to all who have come before me and all who will follow me—DNA—to be front and center. Finally, since we are all born of women, I wanted the image that held my family to be feminine.

Khara Scott-Bey, illustrator of *Big Topics at Midnight*, listened to my thoughts and her own creative imagination

Nancy's Family Tree



and found the perfect image for the family that flows through me, Nancy Ann Mathys Thurston, up from my Tipps and Mathys ancestors.

The swirling DNA right in the middle of my re-imagined "family tree" reminds me that the present moment in my life is connected to generations yet unborn and ancestors long past. Past, present and future spiral together, giving me a big context for the small daily choices of my life.

Your "Family Tree"

Start to play with images that you enjoy or that capture your attention.

What are some images that are powerful to you?

Make a list or doodle some ideas.

Are they from nature? The stars? A person? Is there a shape that fascinates you?

**Do any of them have potential
to become your unique "family tree"?**

A mountain formed from layers of rock? A river with tributaries? A palace with many rooms? A rose with many peals? A spiral?

Look at your sketches from a distance, or upside down. Scan your list, noticing if one or two have possibilities you'd like to expand.

Get out your pencils or markers or paintbrush and give it a go!

Write in your ancestors' names as far back as you know them.

**Does anything shift in your perception
when individuals are included within the image?**

**What do you want to think/feel/remember
when you look at your "family tree"?**