I remember stopping in high school with my family at a gift shop in a German community in the Midwest. I had begun teaching myself German, and I spotted a beer stein with a saying, which I struggled to translate. It said “We grow too soon old and too late smart.” It has been many years since I was in high school, and I have had many opportunities to remember that saying. Some of those opportunities have been in genealogy.

I often say that I am not the typical genealogical lecturer and writer because instead of trying to impress you with how smart I am, I am more likely to share with you how un-smart I am. So, here is my list—a very small portion of it.

**PREPAREDNESS**

I know that at the beginning of every research problem I need to do a systematic resource survey and compile a list. I even give a lecture on the topic. Do I do it? Not often enough and not thoroughly enough.

It isn’t for lack of a system. I have one. A good one. It’s just that I really like to research and at some point I can’t stand it and rush off to the library or launch my Internet browser. (I’ll bet there are some heads nodding in agreement on this point.)

**BEING THOROUGH**

In the Family History Library Catalog (FHLC), when you do a Place Search and select the place, you see a long list of topics. I know which ones are important—Cemeteries, Church Records, Land and Property, Taxation, Vital Records—and go for them first. The problem is that I don’t go back and work my way through the “lesser” topics. One of them might have alerted me to a source that would have contained the problem solution.

This didn’t happen as often in the old fiche catalog, because I automatically scanned the entire county. I haven’t systematically adapted to the online format, probably because of my dislike of mice (pun intended).

**DRILLING DOWN**

In any web-page-styled screen there are likely to be many buttons and links to select from. When I am searching the FHLC for American localities, I begin with the county, at which point I see that long list of topics mentioned in my previous bad habit. On the same screen, in the upper right-hand corner, is a button that says “View Related Places.”

Not only am I not thorough in clicking on every topic, I almost always ignore that button. I shouldn’t. Many records—such important things as church records and cemetery records—are catalogued at the lowest political subdivision. Once again, I haven’t adequately adapted my search techniques to online formats.

**ABSTRACTS**

Published abstracts almost always come with every-name indexes—or at least with every-surname indexes. If I don’t look for a published abstract, I can easily miss a key piece of information that is in a document focused on another surname.

**DOUBLE-CHECKING**

Some of my problem with haphazardness would be resolved if I forced myself to double-check everything before leaving the library. I blame this failure on a combination of the increased parking rates at my local library—and hunger—but the truth is, when it requires a follow-up trip, my rush was indeed penny wise and pound foolish (pun intended).

**COMPILATION AND CLOSURE**

This week I had to provide some factual information about our family history so that my niece could write a three-page report for school. That certainly should be easy for me, right? Right. That certainly should be easy for me. I had no trouble making a list of the items I wanted to send her. I assured my sister it would be an easy matter of creating a three-page report for school. That certainly should be easy for me, right? Right. That certainly should be easy for me. I had no trouble making a list of the items I wanted to send her. I assured my sister it would be an easy matter of creating a three-page report for school.
ing a focused document for her by copying and pasting from files on my hard drive, with a bit of editing to make it more appropriate for her to understand. Ha!

What I discovered was that although I had thoroughly researched the various elements, I had not compiled everything into family sketches. I thought I had. I assumed I had. But I had not. I spent the entire afternoon going through file folders making sure that I was correct in my narrative.

Like the beer stein said . . .

I GROW TOO SOON OLD AND TOO LATE SMART