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**Eva Rosenberg** • Feb. 27, 2014

Someone recently asked me if there is a way to get her father's earnings information from back in 1977-78. She needs it because his income in those years is not on his Social Security record.

It turns out that he is an Indian national and worked in the U.S. for about 11-12 years in the '70s and '80s, then went home.

I gave her some suggestions, since the IRS probably doesn't have records that old. But...this brings up an issue we should be discussing with our clients. All of them – but especially those here temporarily – and very specifically with those folks that we know are planning to return to their native countries.

Tell your clients to get into the habit of looking up their Social Security records. (In fact, we should, too.) Check it at least every couple of years to ensure that all the wages and/or self-employment income has been recorded in the system.

These days, you can do it online. In fact, I just had Lulu, my office manager, try it. It took her about 5-10 minutes. Just go to – <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount/>

The system asks you a series of questions that only you (or someone who knows you really, really well) can answer – about where you've lived in the past (cities, or street names) and other such things. The system also asks for specific information that can only be found on a W-2 (employer's tax ID number) or tax return that the individual has filed some time within the last 5 years. So advise your client to have a couple of years' worth of tax files handy when they log in.

Looking up the information every year or two gives the client time to catch errors

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Looking into this about a decade before retirement will give them time to beef up their Social Security contributions – or to set aside more money privately, so they can afford to retire when they are ready.

This is yet another situation that confirms my contention – NEVER throw out a tax return. The minute you throw out an old tax return – you'll need the information on it.

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