Using DNA and Family History Research to Solve Adoption Mysteries (or any brick wall)

Lisa Van Gemert, M.Ed.   lisa@vangemerts.com

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A. Steps for Finding Parents When No Parent Is Known

1. Take an autosomal DNA test at Ancestry, FamilyTreeDNA, and 23andme.
   a. If you are male, seriously consider taking a yDNA test at FamilyTreeDNA.
   b. Upload the file to GEDmatch.com to connect with others who are serious. Use the One-to many matches tool (there is a video tutorial). You may also like to try the DNAGedcom tool.
2. Create a private, non-searchable tree at Ancestry for your closest match.
   a. Do this even if the match is from a different company
   b. Tree naming suggestion: Q&D: First Name cM
3. Identify the shared matches with the match from Step 2.
   a. If you have a lot of matches, start with those who have trees. Remember that you can look at unlinked trees.
   b. People often use the same username on different platforms.
4. Build quick trees for those shared matches until you get to a common ancestor they share.
5. Build a quick descendancy tree for the common ancestor. The key: Go BACKWARDS until you get to a common ancestor your matches have in common, and then go FORWARDS, filling in as many of their descendants as possible.
6. Go on a hunt for shared matches, and add them into the tree.
   a. Indicate in notes (or somewhere) the cMs shared.
   b. Remember that in Ancestry, notes are private and comments are public.
   c. Develop scenarios and run them through the What are the Odds tool at dnapainter.com/tools/probability.

B. Steps for Finding Parents When One Parent Is Known

1. Build your tree back as far as reasonably possible (1700s, please) on your known lines. Remember: a leafy tree is your best weapon.
2. Identify the matches you have on the known branches using the shared matches tools at the different testing companies.
3. Label those matches using the Rule of 16 method (see below). Then ignore those matches.
4. Identify the matches you have on unknown branches.
5. Starting with the closest unknown match, build a quick tree for that person on Ancestry.
6. Identify matches shared with this unknown match.

7. Build out trees for those shared matches until you reach a common ancestor.
    a. Remember to look for connections and lack of connection.
    b. That common ancestor is your ancestor as well.
8. Build a tree down from that common ancestor. The unknown parent is in that tree.

Rule of 16
[from Diann Southard at yourdnaguide.com]

Idea:
We all have sixteen great-grandparents. They can be grouped into eight groups of couples.

Plan:
Assign each of those couples a name (last name/last name) and a color.
In Ancestry, create a label with that name and color.
Label all of your matches with the correct color where you can.

Tips:

- If you're going to ask someone to share their tree with you, do so gently and respectfully. Avoid oversharing at this point. A simple, "Hi! I noticed that we're a DNA match, and it looks like you have a tree. I'd love to see your tree to compare notes. Would you be willing to please share your tree with me? The link to my tree is >>>>>, if you would like to see it. Thank you, Your Name" is great. Don't say you're sure they're your sister.
- Use the shared cm tool at https://dnapainter.com/tools/sharedcmv4

Resources for adoptees and adoption research:

⇒ https://www.dna-testing-adviser.com/DNA-Adoption.html
⇒ International Society of Genealogy wiki page on genetic genealogy https://isogg.org/wiki/Utilizing_DNA_testing_to_break_through_adoption_roadblocks

Want to get really good at family history in just 15 minutes a week?

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