

A Queen or an Adoptee? It's All in the Relationships: DNA Testing and Me

by Beth O'Malley

How do you rate in the fantasy department? I'm about a 2 on a scale of 1 to 10. I'm a very practical sort of person. Which is surprising since I was adopted (am adopted?) and adopted people are supposed to have lots of daydreams. Rather than dwell on what might have been, it's easier for me to never indulge. Why want what I can't have?

Relatives for example, fall into the same category. Either I know someone and have a relationship with that person or I don't. It's the relationship that makes them family. It doesn't matter if they are Aunt Karen's cousin – by birth or adoption.

Genes have never been a big deal to me. Of course if they were my genes if might have helped. Growing up, my dear parents (adoptive) would make mention of great – great grandmother so and so being buried somewhere. I would think to myself, "She's not my great great grandmother". Naturally I was polite and didn't say anything out loud.

Irish is my family's nationality. My blue eyes, light complexion, and freckles furthered the cause as is having the name O'Malley. But I didn't have the urge to visit Ireland or figure out which county my relatives came from. Call me "casually Irish".

In my twenties I inadvertently discovered I was Polish and French Canadian by birth. It was a crazy kind of loss. I felt like I didn't belong anywhere. I wasn't really *anything*. At least I could travel under the radar and blend into my environment like a chameleon. Good thing I wasn't in danger of someone suddenly speaking Chinese to me as is the case with some Asian adoptees.

After I searched and found my birth family, I still didn't have a connection to any great great grandmother buried somewhere, even when the woman had 'my genes' because I didn't have a relationship with her. ***Why is this so complicated? Why can't I feel like other people?***

OK, fast forward a few decades. Life has settled down. I adopted a baby girl four years ago and hope that she will have an easier time than I did. I was thinking of her when I responded to an email telling me about the National Geographic Project (one of the people who reads my newsletter had forwarded it to me).

Based on DNA testing they are able to track your ethnic origins. It sounded very intriguing. You pay for a kit, swab the inside of the child/adult cheek and send it in. Several weeks later the results are available online. It doesn't tell you anything about your health or where specific birth relatives live. It is an anthropological study and designed to discover the "migratory routes your deep ancestors followed".

Pretty interesting indeed but not cheap. It cost \$100.00 to participate. I decided that my daughter deserves whatever information I can get my hands on in relation to her genes and emotional comfort. As an afterthought I gave myself an early birthday gift and signed up as well.

Initially I was disappointed that the information only applied to the maternal side. These birth fathers get to remain anonymous down to the very strand of DNA, despite contributing half the genetic material. But onward with the "deep ancestor" project.

Finally the results are in for me and I'm disappointed again – as I wanted more. More what? Maybe more specifics. Maybe a little map that traveled over the Atlantic and into the United States so I could follow the path of my ancestors?

If you are interested in what the typical results come back as, here is the link to the website: <https://www3.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/journey.html>. Just plug in code **FWXNKV594D** near the top of the page to see what I found. Go to the home page to learn more general details about the project.

I had the option of including my results in their database, which meant I popped in my email and identifying information on the chance someone else with similar DNA could connect with me.

Lo and behold I get an email. The DNA project informed me of ten possible low level matches. A low match is not a first cousin but someone you are connected with genetically many years ago, probably hundreds of years. This is weird. One “match” has a Hispanic last name. How does that work?

Then I get another email from a German woman who is a “match”. She is not adopted just very serious about this ancestry search. Her name is Gretchen. We exchange emails. I’m not much help since I have no real information about my birth father’s side of the family and limited great-great anything facts on the maternal side. She, however, has done her homework.

Gretchen (who is pregnant) in her excellent English, explains that many of the church records were destroyed during World War II. She has been researching and working hard to find her own roots.

I send her a picture of me at a play ground. She responds by saying I look “sympathetic and active”. She also tells me that many Germans have dark eyes and hair because there are connections to Syria. Her theory is that one of the early Spanish/Italian crusaders brought back a Syrian women. Hey remember that Hispanic last name? Amazing!

For about a week I am playing with the idea one of my early ancestors was kidnapped and brought to Europe. (Wow, an actual fantasy. Maybe I’m finally showing signs of being adopted). I share my fantasy with Gretchen who writes back, “My English is not so good— what I meant was that maybe a crusader had fallen in love with her and her with him. A soldier goes to make war and finds his big love”.

Wow. They were not kidnapped but instead it was a romantic interlude. Gretchen writes that this has happened two different times that she discovered on her father’s side. Both were Napoleon’s soldiers who left alone and returned with brides.

This very distant and ancient tiny little physical connection is surprisingly a source of comfort. I feel so human.

I celebrate this distant connection to the crusaders, lovers and travelers of the world and at last find a birth family connection that won't require therapy. This leads me to many dreamy days. I have fantasy after after fantasy. Maybe I was a queen! Or maybe I rate nine on the fantasy scale and can claim my "typical adoptee" identity?

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