

ADOPTION AND GENEALOGY AND DNA: SOME TIPS TO FOLLOW

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October 1, 2022

Many people who were adopted after adoption records were sealed at the state level have been looking for their birth parents, or for information on an ancestor that was adopted during that period. This memo contains information I have learned and suggested to those adopted people whom I have helped and many have successfully learned their birth story.

I. To Start:

- A. **GOALS: What is your goal?** To contact your birth family, meet members, learn medical history, or other family info.
- B. **Records at home:** What do you have at home from your adopted parents about your adoption? Leave no stone unturned. Ask your siblings what they heard. Every tidbit could be important in your search. Look at all papers on hand, check safety deposit boxes, etc. All prior information **MUST** be shared with anyone helping you.

II. Adoption Agency in the State where you were adopted

- A. Get your **non-identifying information** from the state adoption agency from the state where you were adopted. This information can be most helpful when sorting DNA results. Do not believe anyone who tells you they don't have a file on you, they do. In Georgia, the organization is the Georgia Adoption Reunion Registry at www.ga-adoptionreunion.com. In Georgia, you can also pay for a search and to have contact made with your birth parent, if alive.
- B. **Laws differ by state**, so where you were adopted matters. Some states have unsealed the records, some allow you to pay a fee to have your records searched (as does Georgia), but it's a state by state scenario. Also the date each state sealed their records is important: Georgia did not do so until 1941.
- C. **Register your search for your birth family.** There are many sites where people register that they are seeking their birth families, birth parents, or families might be seeking you. The state adoption agency in each state, if this service is offered, is the most secure one to register with.
- D. Remember that the birth family members, depending on how closely kin they are to you, **may not be aware** of your existence, or have any details for you without further

inquiry. Many will want to help, others may decline. Some may want to meet you, bond with you. If you learn about them via DNA, especially a very close match, take a screen save of their info and especially of any family tree they have posted, in case they go private and remove the information from view.

III. DNA

- A. **Take DNA tests at all available companies** if your goal is to find your birth family members. You may meet a cousin who can help you figure it out. Always be up front and post that you are adopted, the year, what state, and what you know about your birth story. Ancestry.com has the largest number of people tested, and is a must if you are seriously trying to locate your birth kin. Also test at FamilyTreeDNA.com, MyHeritage, and 23andMe to cover all the bases.
- B. **DNA testing advice:** if male, definitely take the Y-DNA test at Family Tree DNA in order to find info on your birth father's line. Always take the autosomal tests at each of the companies to increase your chances of a cousin match.
- C. The **Ethnicity or Origins information** at each DNA site may be useful in outlining your ethnic origins, since, as an adoptee, you don't know anything about such. Always take them with a grain of salt. They are also frequently updated.
- D. Once you get DNA results, **study your highest DNA matches** and always contact those that are the closest matches, noting the kinship suggested by the testing company, which could be slightly skewed. You will have many matches, but you need to be careful how you approach them. Document your journey or be sure your advisor/genealogist documents how they arrived at their conclusions. Be sure there is a written memo and that you keep it. You could seek help through one of the "adoption angels" who offer their services at several sites, including through WikiTree, see their HELP button.
- E. Study **the new book** *The Adoptee's Guide to DNA Testing: How to Use Genetic Genealogy to Discover Your Long-Lost Family* by Tamar Weinberg, published in 2018 by FamilyTreeMagazine.com. The book has some great advice and some good case studies that are well worth reading. Contains more than you will need to know.
- F. **Don't be in a hurry.** DNA can lead the way, and sometimes you may find your answers within a few months. For some, it may take years. Remember, your birth relatives have to have taken a DNA test to match you. Don't be pushy, be ethical. As one writer stated: "We all have a right to the knowledge of our biological identity, but the right to knowledge does not necessarily equate to the right to contact." (January 2018, www.family-tree.co.uk)