

Woman's quest to uncover family history using DNA tests upturns her life

In 2008 the story's protagonist, 56-year-old Cheryl Whittle from rural Virginia, heard about DNA testing on *Oprah*. Just for kicks she bought a kit for herself, her husband, and two of her siblings. When the results came back in her email inbox, she discovered that the man who raised her, the man she had thought was her father, wasn't. He had died in 1989, several years after Cheryl's mom, and few people were still alive who had known them at the time of Cheryl's conception. Thus Cheryl began a long, circuitous, frustrating, emotional quest in genetic genealogy to find out who her father really was.

When my story ended (spoiler alert), Cheryl had been through one emotional roller coaster after another. Her search had angered some of her immediate family members, and greatly disappointed a woman who longed to be Cheryl's biological sister but turned out to be a distant cousin. As of August 2013, when my reporting wound down, Cheryl had made contact with another possible sister who refused to get a DNA test because she was worried about tarnishing the memory of her late father.

After my story was published, Cheryl and I kept in touch on Facebook. She often Liked my articles, and I commented on photos of her new great-grandchild. She patched things up with her immediate family, and seemed to be healing from some of the bruises of genetic genealogy. But despite everything she had been through, she didn't give up the search for her father.

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