

Finding Your Family with DNA Testing

by Richard Hill

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In most U.S. states, adult adoptees are still denied a basic human right that everyone else takes for granted. They are not allowed to see their original birth certificates. Genetic genealogy has provided an effective workaround for thousands of adoptees. And every day it uncovers a lot of other secrets that would never have come to light otherwise.

RICHARD'S PERSONAL SEARCH

Richard Hill was the first adoptee to identify his birth family through genetic genealogy DNA tests. His pioneering success, featured in *The Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere, opened the door for adoptees to get around sealed adoption records and decades-old family secrets.

In this presentation he shares some highlights and photos from his decades-long search for birth family, including:

- Accidentally learning of his adoption
- Identifying his birth mother through conventional research
- Meeting his maternal half-brother
- Eliminating the man named as his father through a DNA paternity test
- Creatively using a Y-DNA test to discover his biological father's surname
- Being misled by a "sibling" test that pointed to one of five brothers as his father
- Using autosomal DNA testing to finally identify the correct father

For the past sixteen years, Richard has been educating adoptees, genealogists, and others about the power of genetic genealogy to discover lost relatives and reunite families.

DATABASE GROWTH AND TODAY'S ADOPTEE SUCCESS RATES

As a result of massive growth in autosomal DNA databases, all of us are now getting more and closer matches. Blaine Bettinger has surveyed adoptee success. Here's what he found in 2019:

When adoptees logged into their DNA account(s):

- 71% of them saw a half first cousin or closer
- 92% saw a half second cousin or closer

As a result of DNA testing:

- 64% identified a parent
- 31% found a sibling

With databases this big, many unexpected matches are also showing up. Most result from what we call an NPE. Originally that stood for Non-Paternal Event. But people understand it more quickly when we say Not the Parent Expected.

EXAMPLES OF SURPRISE DISCOVERIES

Until recently, fertility clinics assumed donating sperm was completely anonymous. Yet donor-conceived individuals have been following the example of adoptees to identify biological fathers while discovering a remarkable number of half-siblings.

Thousands more people have learned or suspect that the man who raised them was not their biological father. They too are turning to genetic genealogy. And many more testers are accidentally discovering their own NPE status.

For some real-life NPE revelations, Richard shares examples of previously unknown relatives he has discovered through his own DNA accounts.

He explains how the amount of DNA shared by two people is measured in a unit called centiMorgans (cM). To identify possible relationships based on that amount, he introduces Blaine Bettinger's Shared cM Project.

Other Relationships	Half GG-Aunt / Uncle 187 12 – 383	Great-Grandparent 881 464 – 1486						Great-Great-Aunt / Uncle 427 191 – 885		
	Half Great-Aunt / Uncle 432 125 – 765	Grandparent 1766 1156 – 2311				Great-Aunt / Uncle 914 251 – 2108				
		Half Aunt / Uncle 891 500 – 1446	Parent 3487 3330 – 3720			Aunt / Uncle 1750 1349 – 2175				
Half 3C 61 0 – 178	Half 2C 117 9 – 397	Half 1C 457 137 – 856	Half Sibling 1783 1317 – 2312	Sibling 2629 2209 – 3384	SELF	1C 874 553 – 1225	2C 233 46 – 515	3C 74 0 – 217	4C 35 0 – 127	5C 25 0 – 94
Half 3C1R 42 0 – 165	Half 2C1R 73 0 – 341	Half 1C1R 226 57 – 530	Half Niece / Nephew 891 500 – 1446	Niece / Nephew 1750 1349 – 2175	Child 3487 3330 – 3720	1C1R 439 141 – 851	2C1R 123 0 – 316	3C1R 48 0 – 173	4C1R 28 0 – 117	5C1R 21 0 – 79
Half 3C2R 34 0 – 96	Half 2C2R 61 0 – 353	Half 1C2R 145 37 – 360	Half Great-Niece / Nephew 432 125 – 765	Great-Niece / Nephew 910 251 – 2108	Grandchild 1766 1156 – 2311	1C2R 229 43 – 531	2C2R 74 0 – 261	3C2R 35 0 – 116	4C2R 22 0 – 109	5C2R 17 0 – 43
Half 3C3R	Half 2C3R	Half 1C3R 87 0 – 191	Half GG-Niece / Nephew 187 12 – 383	Great-Great-Niece / Nephew 427 191 – 885	Great-Grandchild 881 464 – 1486	1C3R 123 0 – 283	2C3R 57 0 – 139	3C3R 22 0 – 69	4C3R 29 0 – 82	5C3R 11 0 – 44

He then demonstrates a tool at DNA Painter.com based on data from that project and shows how it helped him determine his relationship to these surprise DNA matches.

For a case with no other information, he also demonstrates another DNA Painter tool called WATO for What Are the Odds?

STRATEGIES, TOOLS, AND RESOURCES

Richard explains his basic DNA testing strategy. Whether you're a genealogist or an adoptee, you should get into all five of the autosomal DNA databases that provide matches:

- AncestryDNA*
 - 23andMe*
 - Family Finder
 - MyHeritage
 - Living DNA
- *Test does NOT accept uploads of raw data from other tests.

You can save money by testing with the first two and getting into the others through free uploads. If you're a male, also consider the Y-DNA test for tracing your direct paternal line. While mitochondrial DNA testing does have some very specific genealogical applications, it is rarely helpful for identifying birth mothers.

Educational Resources on Genealogy and Genetic Genealogy

- Legacy Family Tree Webinars
- The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy
- The Adoptee's Guide to DNA Testing
- International Society of Genetic Genealogy
- Family Search Wiki
- MyHeritage Wiki

Genealogical Database Subscriptions

- Ancestry.com
- MyHeritage
- Newspapers.com

Some Third-Party DNA Tools

- Gedmatch.com
- DNA Painter
- Genetic Affairs
- DNAadoption.com
- DNAGedcom.com

Facebook Groups & Pages for Everyone

- DNA Newbie
- Genetic Genealogy Tips and Techniques
- International Society of Genetic Genealogy
- Richard's [DNA Favorites Facebook Page](#)

Facebook Groups for Adoptees +

- DNA Detectives
- Unknown Fathers DNA
- AmerAsian DNA: A Search for Fathers
- DNA for the Donor-Conceived

If you find yourself struggling with the emotional impact of a DNA testing surprise, there are genetic counselors who specialize in this area. Richard recommends Brianne Kilpatrick at WatershedDNA.

The books, tools, Facebook pages, and other resources listed in this presentation are just a small sample of ways to make your DNA testing experience easier and more productive. Richard's website DNAFavorites.com includes more than 150 links to these and many, many more of the best DNA testing resources.

DNA Favorites

The Best DNA Testing Resources

- About Richard Hill
- Finding Family Book
- DNA Testing Types
- Testing Companies
- DNA Testing Tools
- DNA Education
- DNA Presentations
- DNA Books
- Facebook Groups
- DNA Bloggers
- Ethnicity Testing
- Paternity Testing
- Finding Lost Family
- Adoptee Resources

Home



Link Directly to the Most Useful
DNA Testing Resources

The content is organized into the categories shown here. The last two sections are specifically for adoptees and others looking for lost family. Reading through these sections from top to bottom also provides an easy-to-understand overview of genetic genealogy.

If you would like to read the full story of Richard's decades-long search, his award-winning book is called "[Finding Family: My Search for Roots and the Secrets in My DNA](#)." It's available in print, eBook, and audiobook formats at Amazon and Audible.

"Impressively informative, exceptionally well written, an inherently fascinating and compelling read from beginning to end, *Finding Family: My Search for Roots and the Secrets in My DNA* is an extraordinary account."

—**Midwest Book Review**

Customer reviews

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

862 global ratings

