

How to Find Living Descendants of Our Ancestors

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DNA SIG handout - - September 6, 2022

Introduction - - The process involves finding living descendants of the siblings of our ancestors, in order to identify DNA matches among those living descendants and assign them to the appropriate shared DNA match groups. Tracing living persons, however, cannot generally be accomplished by “one-stop shopping.” Rather, it is a process of amalgamating many small clues from a variety of sources.

Initial steps - - The process requires working in the opposite direction to that we are used to doing; instead of working from our most recent relatives back to earlier generations, in this process we are working forward from a set of ancestral siblings (collateral relatives) and researching down into the present day where we need to find living persons, among whom will be some of our DNA matches. This involves using traditional genealogical document research to trace the already-deceased children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc., of the brothers and sisters of our ancestor until reaching the generation(s) of living descendants.

Choose an ancestor for whom you want to find DNA matches. If you have not already determined the siblings for that ancestor, use traditional genealogical methods to research that ancestor and his/her parents to determine who are the siblings or suspected siblings for that ancestor. When you find siblings, enter them on your working tree so you will receive document clues and ThruLines clues or Theories of Family Relativity hints for those collaterals. Be sure to note middle names or initials, nicknames, and multiple spouses. You may have to undertake considerable document research in order to confirm siblings of your ancestor, including a review of probate and land records. Once you have determined the siblings of your ancestor, begin tracing the children of each sibling.

Next steps - - Continue using traditional genealogical methods to research the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of each sibling of your ancestor, again noting middle names/initials, nicknames, and keeping track of all the spouses. Many times, our ancestors and their siblings had children by more than one spouse. This is relatively straight-forward research into deceased individuals, and involves researching all the children of a couple at every generation forward.

You have likely already done searches for DNA matches who carry the surname of the ancestor you are researching. As you research each generation forward from each sibling of your ancestor, continue to search for DNA matches who carry the surnames of the married daughters, granddaughters, etc., of your ancestor's siblings. Also periodically run searches for those new surnames in the trees of your DNA matches. Search in all the databases where you have your DNA data. Be methodical and consistent - - and be patient! It will take some time to identify the deceased descendants of your ancestor's siblings.

Once you have identified deceased descendants of your collateral ancestral relatives down into living generations, you can go after the low-hanging fruit by looking at your ThruLines clues at AncestryDNA and Theories of Family Relativity hints at MyHeritage. Remember, those are clues, not facts. Look for those clues linking to the generation of your MRCA ("Most Recent Common Ancestor"); i.e., the parents of your target ancestor and his/her siblings. And then, research the individuals included in the ThruLines clues and Theories of Family Relativity hints to confirm that these persons in the generations between the MRCA and your DNA match legitimately descend from your targeted ancestral couple.

Even without the finding aids found at Ancestry and MyHeritage, you can find DNA matches by name at FT-DNA, 23 and Me*, Living DNA and Geneanet. Look at the linked trees of your matches to confirm that they are connected to the line you are researching. Tag each match as a "DNA match." Go back up the family line, generation by generation, tagging the relevant parent, grandparent, etc., as part of the "DNA line." This will help you to remember which siblings, nieces/nephews, etc., of your ancestor lead down to identified DNA matches. *Reminder - - there are no trees at 23 and Me, although some testers there do include lists of surnames.

Enter any DNA matches who trace down from the siblings of your ancestor into your tree. You may get document hints, even for living people. Note in which DNA database(s) that DNA match was found (Ancestry, MyHeritage, etc.). Be sure to designate them as "living" persons so that their information will not be visible to others who visit your public tree. Add a note to each of those identified DNA matches on the DNA match's profile page, so you can easily remember how each match connects to you.

For each identified DNA match, use the shared matches tool or the in-common-with tool in order to identify other living persons who are in that same DNA match group, and who, therefore, are also presumably affiliated in some way with your MRCA's ancestral line. Using Ancestry's or MyHeritage's colored dot tool, tag each identified match as a member of that respective group.

Playing detective - - Now the fun (and sometimes, the frustration) begins! Start by looking at all the document clues (green leaf hints at Ancestry and record matches at MyHeritage, or clues from the attached records in linked trees at other sites) for the most recent deceased descendants of your ancestor's sibling. Those document clues clustered under a deceased descendant sometimes refer to children of the decedent by way of a birth index or marriage information; Social Security applications for a child; or an obituary naming survivors. Find A Grave memorials for the deceased descendant might show a transcript of the obituary for the decedent. The obituary may name living survivors of the deceased person.

Next, look for obituaries of the most recent deceased people online at Find A Grave, Billion Graves, Legacy, and other obituary databases. Look for obituaries in newspaper databases such as Newspapers.com, Genealogy Bank, Chronicling America, etc. Sometimes, it is easiest to find online obituaries by googling the deceased person's name, together with the word "obituary," or "died" plus the year or state in which death occurred. Make note of all relatives named in any obituary for your most recent deceased person. Try wording your Google search in different ways - - use words like "obituary," or "died," or "death." Be sure to search newspaper databases for articles about living people.

Often, there is more than one obituary for a given person; look at all of them, as each may contain somewhat different information. If the obituary indicates that the deceased died in some dramatic way (car crash, industrial accident, house fire, homicide, suicide), look for news articles about that event in newspaper databases, as those news articles may include additional information about living survivors.

Once you have identified some of the living children and grandchildren of the most recent deceased person in the line you are researching, google each living person to see to whom he/she is related. This is where it is necessary to visit a number of "people-finder" websites in order to compile a portrait of that person and his/her relatives. This process can be somewhat painstaking.

Some of the people-finder websites I find most helpful are (in no particular order):

truepeoplesearch.com
searchpeoplefree.com
fastpeoplesearch.com
whitepages.com
clustrmaps.com
radaris.com
spokeo.com
checkpeople.com
nuwber.com
yellowbook.com
smartbackgroundchecks.com

There are other sites as well. It is easiest to google the individual's name you are trying to find, rather than bringing up the homepage of the people-finder site directly. When googling an individual, type that person's first and last name inside quotation marks. It is helpful to also add the name of the state if you know it. Example: "Craig McClane" Kansas.

You can also find information about living persons at facebook.com and linkedin.com. To use Facebook and LinkedIn, you must have your own account for those sites, and be logged into your account. If your DNA match has a photo in their profile at the DNA site, look for that same photo on Facebook or LinkedIn. It can help you narrow down same-named individuals at social media sites. If your DNA match uses a screen name, look for that same pseudonym at Facebook.

All the people-finder sites provide some information for free; to get the most information, a paid subscription is required. You can piece together a lot of information, however, by combining hints from all the free data available at the different sites. Sometimes, a search for one named individual will include links to relatives of that individual among the items in the hit list. Click on anyone you believe is connected to the person you are researching.

Information you can discover - - All the sites name the individual. Some may include a middle initial or middle name. Most of the sites list various "also known as" names. This is especially useful in determining the maiden name of the wife of your target individual, or the married names of daughters. Some sites actually identify which relative is the spouse of the target individual.

Some sites will provide only an age range for the subject of your search, while others state the person's age in years. Some sites, however, provide the month and year of birth, and a few sites will show the exact birthdate.

Tip: be sure to scroll all the way to the bottom of the entry for your target person as the most precise information about your subject may be found in a summary at the bottom of the page. And be sure to click on all the people listed in the "related to" section at each site, if possible (some sites do not allow access to the related persons without a subscription).

All sites provide the current address of the target person; most sites list previous addresses. The length of the list of previous addresses can be short, or can be quite extensive. Some sites also show on a map where the current address is located, and may show an aerial photo of the home. Some sites include a real estate description of the house associated with the address, and some even divulge how much the occupant paid for the home. Some sites also include information about voter registration and autos owned.

Tip: Note the previous addresses for your target person, then look at the people related to the subject of your search and note which of the related people lived at the same previous address(es). Those relatives may be spouses or children of your subject.

Many sites also provide a list of phone numbers associated with the target individual, and some indicate full or partial e-mail addresses. Some sites show other people associated with the same residential address and phone number. As discussed above, careful analysis of the current and past addresses and phone numbers for the target person may enable you to determine who among related people is a current or past member of the target person's household, which will assist you in determining how a related person might be connected to your target person.

All sites show a list of people related to the target individual; some lists of related persons are quite extensive. These lists do not indicate how the associated individuals are related, just that they are, in some way, related. Related persons might be spouses, former spouses, live-in partners or former partners, children, step-children, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters and their spouses, nieces and nephews, cousins, aunts and uncles, etc. Sometimes, it is not possible to

determine just how all the related individuals connect to the target person. By reviewing several people-finder sites for the same person, however, you can often figure out how at least some of the people are related to the target person.

Note that people-finder sites will not name persons under 18 years of age. Some other sites, such as newspaper databases, or websites that highlight athletic or academic achievement, will name young people, and in some cases, provide enough other information to identify them as connected to your target individual. Examples include high school honor rolls or team championships, with stats for star players who are named, and for whom the school year designation (sophomore, junior, etc.) is given, which allows you to estimate the birth year of the young person. Some newspapers in the 20th century regularly published birthday lists of children in the community.

Some sites also show lists of people who are “associated with” the target individual, as opposed to “related to” that target person. These might be neighbors, friends, or business associates. Occasionally, a relative might end up in the list of associated people.

No site includes all of the information described above, hence the need to visit multiple sites in order to build a profile of each living descendant. Enter each identified descendant on your working tree, marking each one as “living” to protect his/her privacy on your tree. Then use the search function on the DNA site to look for each living descendant by name. Use first name/last name searches, surname-only searches, nickname searches. For females, use both maiden surname and married surname searches.

Review the degree of cousin relationship by consulting the shared centimorgan tool at DNA Painter for that cousin relationship, and filter your DNA match list to a centimorgan range in order to narrow down your list of searchable matches to the appropriate level of cousin relationship, based on the number of generations between your DNA match and the suspected MRCA.

Working backward from DNA matches - - This same procedure can be used to research one’s DNA matches to try to determine to whom they are related - - you will just apply the method in reverse. First, look at both the DNA profile of your match and the personal profile of your match on the DNA site. Some of your DNA matches will use their first and last names. Some will use a screen name.

Some will only use their initials. Some personal profiles include age-range and/or geographical information about your DNA match. Some personal profiles include lists of surnames being researched by your DNA match. Be sure to check out the names of any trees belonging to your DNA match; that is, the title of your match's tree(s), not the names of the people in the tree. Example: Your DNA match, D.F., might have a "Fielding Family Tree" at Ancestry. This allows you to conclude that the surname of your DNA match might be Fielding. As you can see, this can be helpful in determining a match's surname if your match's DNA screen name uses only initials. Even private trees will show the name of the tree. Don't neglect the photo archive found on the personal profile page for your DNA match. You may find clues there. These are all beginning clues.

Review your match's tree if there is one. If your match has multiple trees, look at all the public trees for your DNA match. Look at unlinked trees for your match. Find a recent deceased person in your DNA match's tree and look for an obituary for that person to discover living survivors, among whom your match will likely be found. Then use people-finder sites to expand the list of additional potential DNA matches related to that match. Look for obituaries for both the deceased person and that person's spouse(s). It may be that the person who is not biologically related to your line will have the more informative obituary.

If your DNA match has no tree, then proceed immediately to google your match and look for him/her on various people-finder sites. Obviously, this method works best with people who do not have hopelessly common first and last names. Look for related people who are in their 90s or 100s age-wise. Those people may, in fact, be deceased, which means you might be able to locate an obituary. Some people-finder sites will indicate if a person is deceased, and the age at death and year of death. Once you find a deceased person related to your target DNA match, you are able to build out a mirror tree for that person, which may lead you to the MRCA.

Conclusion - - This method will not work for all your DNA matches. Some living people are very good at remaining below the radar of social media and people-finder sites. If you cannot find your person by googling first and last name, search again by first, last, and middle name. Search by first and middle initials and last name. Search by nickname. Use alternate spellings (many of which can be found in the aka section of people-finder sites). Use wildcards and Boolean searches. You will not find all the descendants of your ancestor's siblings, but you will find

at least some of the living descendants of those collateral relatives, and with luck, some of them will be your DNA matches!

Once you have confirmed how one of your DNA matches is connected to you, make thorough notes for that DNA match so you can easily recall their descent from your MRCA. Copy those notes to the same living person you've added to your tree. Run repeat searches periodically to see if new matches show up in the line you are researching.

DNA guru, Diahna Southard of "Your DNA Guide" advises us to make our family tree into a bush. That is, in addition to tracing our ancestry as far back as possible, fill in all the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren forward from the most recent five generations of our ancestors. This results in many branches, among which our DNA matches are concealed. Once we have identified some of these hidden DNA matches, we can run the "shared matches" and "in common with" tools to find other related matches. Happy hunting!