

Surprise! You Have a New Family Member

By Sylvia Nelson

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Today my husband and I have connected an unknown child to her surviving aunt. All of this came about through DNA testing. I have her approval to use her name, as well as Gary's and his cousin's.

Last May, I got an email from a woman in Arkansas named Lisa, who said she matched my husband Gary's mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) as a first or second cousin. She had taken the Family Tree DNA's mtDNA test after learning she was adopted. I also got the notice from Family Tree DNA that she and Gary share DNA with approximately 400 cMs in the Family Finder test.

I talked with Sue Hassenmiller about this, and she suggested I have Lisa contact the website DNA Adoption.

In her next email, Lisa told me she knew where she was born in 1969. Her birth mother was Native or half Native. She had not spoken to her adoptive father about this yet; the information was from her adoptive mother's sister. She had her adoptive father take a DNA test. It came back that they are not related, and the story unfolded.

She asked if Gary had any family in that area or who may have lived there in the '60s. She wrote:

"I'm praying my parents kept the adoption papers and my real parents are listed."

I then got this email:

"I received my adoption packet today and my father is not listed. My birth mother was [Withheld], and she was 18 years old in 1969; she gave birth to me in Arkansas, but I don't think she was from the area. I plan on doing some more research to find out if she came to Arkansas from another state or if she lived in the area. Since a father was not listed, I assume he probably never knew [she] was with child and she came to Arkansas to hide the pregnancy since she was unmarried and only 18.

"Since Gary and I are 1st-2nd cousins that means we would possibly share a great grandparent or even a grandparent. I'm just hoping to at least know my natural father's name and to know if I have brothers and sisters somewhere."

"All of this is so mind blowing to me, I feel as though I'm dreaming and none of this is real - even after reading the documents."

On January 2, I received this message:

"I have some news, I found my birth mother and we talked last night - David Langlois is my father. When he was told about the adoption, he said he would have kept me."

Lisa later told me that the European portion of her DNA was 70 percent French. She has sent pictures of herself and of her birth mother, who lives in California.

I was able to tell her that David Alan Langlois was Gary's cousin on his mother's side. She and Gary would be first cousins once removed. David was in the Navy during the Vietnam War - in fact, his burial information in a military cemetery indicates he joined the Navy in 1969. Where he was before and during that time, I don't know. The family lived in Southern California, but he could have been anywhere as a Navy recruit.

I shared the Langlois side of Gary's family tree with her. The Langlois family goes way back, into Nova Scotia from France.

Gary wrote to his surviving cousin (David's sister) in California. This week he got an email from her:

"Hi Gary

- got your very interesting letter. I am open to meeting this woman. Dave never said anything about her to me, and at that time I'm probably the only one he would have confided in. So what now?"

I introduced them via email on Jan. 17, and I just learned that they have spoken and Lisa will be going to California to meet her new family. Gary's surviving cousin has two sons, and Lisa has two daughters. Their families are grown and both are very pleased. Lisa's adoptive father is very happy for her. So are we! She said he would always be her true father. And of course, I have added her to Gary's tree.