

Journey To Discovery – Where To Go From Here

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February 10, 2020

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After about a year, I've had much time to ruminate over the results from my Ancestry DNA results. I've even had an update to my ancestral breakdown, but not much has changed. For

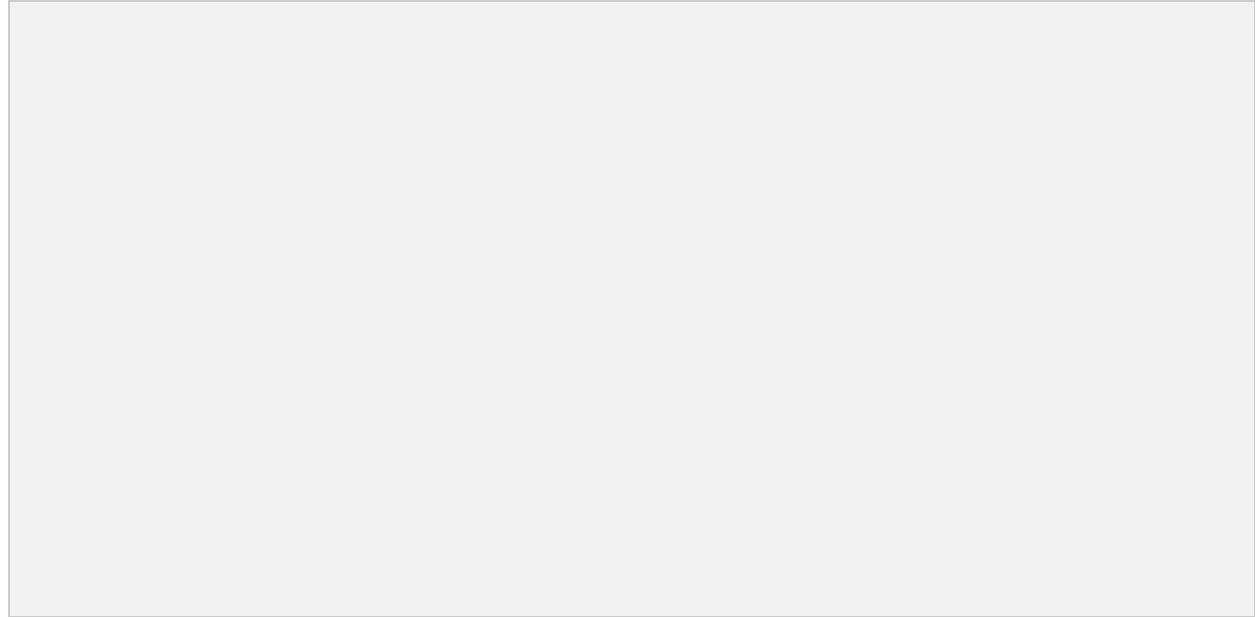
most of my life, I have wondered, daydreamed, and even hazarded a few guesses about my family history. Being adopted has left me feeling adrift most days when trying to feel a sense of belonging. So, one would think, knowing would give me a sense of self and satisfaction if nothing else.

Well, the results have had mixed results for me. First, Ancestry was originally a site where you could trace your family history. The process would have you fill in your family tree as you learn more. The ads show satisfied customers receiving a “leaf” or a hint to something new about a member of your family tree. Ancestry, however, isn’t that helpful to those who have zero clues about their birth parents. My adoptive mom had an inkling of their identities but wasn’t too sure of their exact names. Taking that info and having a vague sense of where they came from (I can only assume they were from Oklahoma as that’s where I was born), I have little solid information to work with.

Now, I will say, since taking the test, I’ve seen many DNA matches. However, none of these matches have given me anything substantial to research with. I either get no response from these matches or the ones willing to help have little to go on. The virtual brick wall is as solid as ever. Let me state, however, my husband took the DNA test. He has had great results finding family he didn’t know even survived WWII. As far as he knew, most of his family had died during the war. From his perspective, Ancestry is a great tool for those who have some background, or at least their birth parents’ details. As an adoptee, the family tree feature has been less than stellar.

My family taught me that we’re all the same tribe...

Despite still having major obstacles with learning more of my family tree, the test has given me a fascinating amount of my ethnicity breakdown. Ancestry presents your **Ethnicity Estimate** first. Here, the website displays a map with your ethnicities highlighted in different colors. Also, on this graphic, they break down the percentages of each country where your DNA has been found. As a US citizen, I also get to see patterns of how my ancestors migrated to the USA. This information has given me much to ponder and triggered even more questions. But it has also answered some of my oldest questions.



Screenshot by Lisa Mildon

While I love knowing my ethnicity, knowing has also become uncomfortable. For years, I would look in the mirror and imagine where the dark hair came from or the pale skin or my proclivity to foreign languages. I'd also think about where I came from while knowing of the large population of Italians and Native Americans at my birthplace and childhood home. The dark hair had to come from either group. I've spent my life assimilating into so many cultures, learning 6+ languages, obsessing with traveling the world, and studying world history, and knowing has taken some mystery and mystique out of my persona.

That feeling of losing some of the magical wonder of my ancestry came as a huge surprise. I hadn't realized part of my essence, my own persona, was not knowing. It had become part of my psyche. I felt like my soul was all ethnicities as I saw (and still do) all of humanity as the same, just steeped in different stories. So, part of me feels a bit hollow, like I lost part of myself. The irony of learning my background has taken away part of me. Honestly, I hadn't expected this at all.

...why can't we all embrace each other and just love our species?

The other unanticipated result is feeling like a poser. What I mean by this is I no longer feel okay about loving Latin music, soul food, and Native American stomp dances. I loved them, partly as I thought they were all part of my heritage. I was an "all ethnicities" soul. I loved and appreciated so many aspects of other cultures that I now feel as if I am misappropriating them. I feel disingenuous in my passion for different cultures and ethnicities. As my ethnicity is about as white bread as you can get, I now feel the weight of my "white privilege" for the first time.

Where to go from here? Knowing my ancestral ethnicity has given me a much weightier responsibility. I feel such a deep need to be the voice of all those minorities, to somehow stitch

together and help heal ethnic relations. I am very fortunate that my adoptive family taught me that there are no differences in skin color, culture, history, and beliefs. My family taught me that we're all the same tribe... human. So, my path now lies with how to impart this to anyone that will listen. Let's all become "all ethnicities" souls. If we see each other as merely humans with different stories, why can't we all embrace each other and just love our species?

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