

## Family Secrets, Luck and DNA

### In the Beginning... bad luck

It was just before bed on Friday evening; July 19, 1985 the phone rang with our emergency signal. I answered and my mother said “You must say Kaddish”. My beloved father had died. Although it was Shabbat, the next day, my husband and I made arrangements for his parents to watch the children while we flew from Des Moines to Los Angeles for dad’s funeral. My sister and her husband met us there, having flown in from Baltimore. My father had had heart surgery for a prolapsed valve several days before and the stitches had not held. The funeral was Monday morning and quite well attended; my grandfather was there, looking sharp as he shoveled earth on his son’s grave. But grandpa was 90 and not in the best of health. His eyesight was failing and my parents had been concerned that he was too old to live alone anymore. For the time that my father was in the hospital, they had temporarily put him in a retirement home (where he did not want to be). Monday night he slept at my parent’s house, and Tuesday morning, Mom showed me the glass that he left on the counter after he had taken his pills, with a pill still stuck to it. She said that this was why he should not live alone any more. We had plans to bring him back to Des Moines with us. Also on Tuesday, my husband and my brother-in-law flew home. Mom and my sister could not sit and do nothing, and they decided that they wanted to clean grandpa’s apartment. I on the other hand, felt that cleaning grandpa’s apartment was not sitting Shiva, and elected to stay at mom’s house. While at grandpa’s apartment, they found many items that they thought would be of interest to me as the family genealogist and put them in .... a garbage bag. Tuesday evening, grandpa asked to be able to spend one last night at home. He saw the garbage bag and knowing that Wednesday was garbage day, took it down a flight of stairs to the garbage. Wednesday early morning, he called my mother saying he was not well. She went and took him to the hospital, where he died that evening. (He had not wanted to live any longer). My husband again called his parents to care for our children and flew back out. Friday morning we had the second funeral, this time it was graveside, with only the four of us and a different Rabbi. In the meantime, many articles that would have solved my brick walls were gone, and I had never even seen them. What I lost was I thought never to be revealed to me during my lifetime. And with that, my hopes of learning more about my paternal grandfather’s side of the family were dashed.



(L to R: Henry, Fishel, HC, Esther, Rebecca and Dora)

Better Luck ... The DNA story  
 My paternal great grandparents: Meyer (Perchik) and Hite Families  
 (Is there a milkman in the family)?

In April 2011 I ordered the Family Finder DNA test for myself to see if I matched others. This DNA test compares the DNA in the 22 autosomal (non- sex) chromosomes with all the people in Family Tree DNA's database. Within a couple of months I had my first set of matches (and there were over 600 of them), I was blown away. It did not take me long to realize that in order to figure out how I was related to all these people, I was going to have to test cousins. I also wanted to learn my father's Y haplotype (direct paternal lineage type). Since I did not have a brother, and my father was effectively an only child, I looked to my second cousins. My grandfather was the youngest of five children of Fishel and Rebecca Hite Meyer: Esther, Aaron Jacob "Jack", Henry, Dora and Herman Charles "H.C." All of the five siblings had sons, but only Jack and Henry's sons had sons.

The original family tree was provided by one of Esther's daughters. It had Fishel and Rebecca marrying in Russia in 1881, Esther born in Russia in 1885 and the others born in Albany, New York with Jack's birth in 1888. I had documents showing Fishel arrived in the US on the Hamburg line on 25 May 1884 using the name Fishel Meyer. It was well-known that he had purchased the name Meyer in order to avoid Czarist conscription and that the original family name was Perchik.

Then Rebecca came over as Chaya Meyer to the US with Esther, arriving from Hamburg on 12 Dec 1887; however Esther was listed as two months old, with Fishel as the person that she was going to join. I thought it strange that the ages of a two month old and two year old would be confused. My great grandparents never became US citizens. Jack's World War I draft registration card showed his date of birth as 24 Oct 1888.

Rebecca Hite and Fishel Meyer				
Esther	Jack	Henry	Dora	H.C.
Sarah	Joe	Norman	Fred	Fred
"N."	"A."	"K."		Sarah

All of the great-grandchildren of Fishel and Rebecca considered that we were second cousins to the great grandchildren of the other three siblings. (Dora's son was an only child who died young.) One of my cousins, A. Jack's grandson, was also interested in genealogy so I called him, to ask if he would like to do a DNA test. He (fortunately) was not home, so I left a message (since there was a 24 hour sale on). When he did not call back within the hour, I called a K., Henry's grandson. I also left a message there. His wife called back and said yes.

When we got K.'s Y DNA results back, I was shocked because the question came back – were we Kohanim, since K.'s haplotype is J2, with DYS 455=8, one of the two Kohen haplotypes? The paper trail that I have, has my mother's father has a Kohen and my father as an Israel. No one in the family had any idea that my father, grandpa or Fishel were Kohanim. My daughter asked me, if this meant that Zeidi was a Kohen and I said, "No".

In the meantime, A. called back and wanted to test as well. I said, probably next year, as I had others that I needed to do, to sort out my matches. About 6 months later I had the opportunity to test A. And, fortunately, I did both the Y DNA and the FT DNA. When we got the results; - a family secret was revealed. His Y haplotype was G not J2!!

Whoa, how can this be possible?? At first, there was an error in the Family Finder matches, and we were not matched. But fortunately Gedmatch.com showed that he and I had a significant amount of shared DNA. In the meantime, I emailed Family Tree DNA and talked to the president and founder of the company, Bennett, on the phone. The Family Finder results were re-run and A. and I did match. The Y DNA test was re-run and the results did not change. The Family Finder test reports results in centiMorgans (cMs), which is used to imply distance (length along a chromosome) of a segment of shared DNA. The total is the sum of all the cMs across all 22 autosomal chromosomes, while the Longest Block is the single longest segment. These were the results:

Person 1	Person 2	Total CM	Longest Block
Sarah	K.	444.01	75.76
Sarah	A.	236.00	42.6
K.	A.	200.68	17.14

Bennett pointed out that I shared half as much DNA with A. as I did with K. And looking at the table, it is clear that K. also shared half as much DNA with A. as he did with me. So it appears that we are half second cousins. A.'s mother was Hungarian and his paternal grandmother was Romanian, and to the best of my knowledge, I do not have Hungarian or Romanian ancestry, it looked like the woman with two men had to be Rebecca.

Then I asked N. a grand-daughter of Esther to test as well, to "solve a problem". Since Esther was female, I was only going to do the Family Finder test. If that test revealed that K. and N. are half second cousins and that N. and A. are full second cousins, then we could confirm that it was Rebecca who had relations with the two men.

Person 1	Person 2	Total CM	Longest Block	Relationship
Sarah	K.	444.01	75.76	2 <sup>nd</sup> cousin
Sarah	A.	236.00	42.6	half 2 <sup>nd</sup> cousin
Sarah	N.	119.74	30	half 2 <sup>nd</sup> cousin
K.	A.	200.68	17.14	half 2 <sup>nd</sup> cousin
K.	N.	217.64	68.27	half 2 <sup>nd</sup> cousin
A.	N.	350.5	53.41	2 <sup>nd</sup> cousin

Jack's birthdate made sense when we thought that Jack was Fishel's biological son, but now it does not fit, however, it would have been easy enough to delay reporting a birth by a couple of months. When and where did Rebecca marry Fishel? And who were Fishel's children?

Either Fishel fathered Esther and Jack or he fathered Henry, Dora and HC. Since he was living with Rebecca here as her husband, he had to be the father of Henry, Dora and HC. So someone else, "Mr. G" fathered Esther and Jack. Mr. G had to be Rebecca's husband (lover?) in Russia. Therefore Fishel was Rebecca's second husband. Her first

husband died or divorced her. With one child and pregnant she needed to get married again immediately. Her family, the Hite family, had already married into the Perchik family, and she came to join Fishel as his wife. We don't know anything at all Mr. G except his haplotype. But since Jack was his son, and if he had died in Russia, perhaps Jack was named for him.

Now that we have the results from the DNA the simplified family chart looks like this:

Rebecca Hite and "Mr. G"		Rebecca Hite and Fishel Perchik Meyer		
Esther	Jack	Henry	Dora	H.C.
Sarah	Joe	Norman	Fred	Fred
"N."	"A."	"K."		Sarah

Could she have married Fishel in Russia? He was here when her children were conceived there. We do not know exactly when she married Fishel, but it certainly would not have included a civil marriage in the US, although it might have included a religious marriage not reported to the US authorities. Could it have been by proxy while she was in Russia? Did Jews even do such marriages? It would not have been safe for him to return to Russia to marry her due to the false papers, not to mention the cost. It may have included a very quiet religious marriage in New York City, with a fast move to Albany, in time for Jack to have been born there as Fishel's son. Or the marriage with Fishel may have been "common law". But without a minimum of a proxy marriage, Esther's papers would have been false in indicating that she was Fishel's wife in addition to the falsity of surname Meyer.

And why was she sent to him? My guess is that it was because he was still single and the families knew each other in Russia. But it is clear that they would not want to do anything to indicate that she came on false papers (in two ways, the surname Meyer and her status as a wife). They may have had an unregistered religious marriage (that would have been consistent with my understanding of her personality). Not wanting any questions about the parenthood of her children, they delayed reporting of Jack's birth so it looked like he was conceived here. They did not naturalize because they did not want anyone to know just how false her immigration was.

All of the children were brought up with Fishel as the only father that they ever knew (after all Esther was a baby when she Fishel married Rebecca). Since Fishel knew he was not Jack's father and that Jack's father was neither a Kohen nor a Levite, it was best to just use the religious status of Israel for the whole family, rather than to advertise that his sons had different birth fathers.