

DNA connects long-lost family members

Charles Dunlap/Lead reporter

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For his entire life Bob Bennett, of Mesa, Ariz., knew he was adopted. There were no doubts in his mind. In fact, he has memories of his short time at an orphanage in Kansas City. Throughout their lives, his adoptive parents never admitted they had adopted him. He has searched for his biological family basically his entire adult life. And now, at 72, he has found them.

He was born James Gordon Pingree to Beulah June Linder and Gordon Phillip Pingree Jan. 27, 1944, in Carthage. He was adopted when he was approximately 2 1/2 to 3 years old. Not only was his name changed to Robert Thomas Bennett, but also his birthdate to Feb. 23, 1944, in Warrensburg.

"There's two me's," he said.

Some time ago, one of his twin daughters, Bridie Palitz, started an interest in her family's genealogy and joined Ancestry.com. Bennett was also a member and she requested their accounts be linked so documents could be shared across the accounts. Bennett had also taken the Ancestry DNA test, which gives you a readout of your genetic makeup, but also potential relations if they have also taken an Ancestry DNA test.

Christmas 2015 was the start of a chain of events that would change everything for Bennett. Susan (Linder) Schelp, of Emma, had requested one of the Ancestry DNA tests as a gift. She conducted the test and her results listed Bennett's name as a relation. She could not see any reason why they were related, and so thought nothing of it.

"I didn't have the skill set to dig into (Ancestry.com). Doing the DNA test was very key," said Bennett. "(Bridie) started digging deeper and deeper. ... She took to it like a duck takes to water because she considers it like a puzzle."

The searching done by Bridie led to a woman named Heather Lake, whose great-great-great-grandfather was a Linder, which was a link. After connecting with Lake, Bridie and her sister Buffy were now all working together to find more information about their father's potential birth family.



After knowing he was adopted and basically searching his entire life, Bob Bennett (center) has found his biological family. Born in 1944, he was put up for adoption when he was about 3 years old. Through the help of Ancestry.com and its DNA testing service he was able to find his family from the Concordia and Emma areas. He and his wife, Diane (right), got to not only meet his long-lost cousin Susan (Linder) Schelp (left), but his entire newly found extended family. (Photo: Charles Dunlap/The Concordian)

Approximately at the end of August to the start of September, Schelp checked an email account she rarely views, as it is typically used to hide surprises from her husband for her online purchases of his Christmas gifts.



Bob Bennett knew in his heart he was adopted. He could remember the orphanage. However, his adoptive parents never admitted they had adopted him when he was approximately three years old. He is now 72 and through the help of Ancestry.com and its DNA testing service, has found his biological family.

(Photo via
bobbennett.net)

"What I was really thinking was (Bob) was related to the other side of the family and was one of the Parkers," she said, and not one of her cousins, as she would later learn. "I don't even know what made me check the (email) account. ... I just thought I ought to check it and see if anything is there. His daughter (Bridie) had been trying to contact me since April."

In a family album, she explained, was a picture of a little boy who Schelp was always curious about when she was much younger.

"My mother said 'that's Beulah's boy Jimmy,'" she said. "And I asked, 'well, what happened to Jimmy?'"

Her mother was not able to explain why he was put up for adoption. What finally made the official connection and made the puzzle into its final image was a genealogy prepared by one of Schelp's cousins, Gene Jeffers, in 2010. In it, it listed Beulah's only child, which was Bennett.

"If he hadn't done this, we would not know," said Schelp, holding the genealogy.

"It is just a series of miracles," said Bennett. "It set off a flurry of emails."

Pictures of Bennett as a child also matched features of the few photos Schelp had in her possession of the young boy Beulah put up for adoption. Beulah was 19 when she had Bennett. According to Schelp, she was a beautiful woman. Bennett was the only child Beulah would ever have.

With the connection and knowledge of his birth parents, Bennett was able to learn the history of not only Beulah, but also of his biological father, Gordon. His biggest worry, Bennett said with tears in his eyes, was if he had the chance to have met Beulah when he was an adult, she

would reject him. Schelp assured Bennett Beulah would have done no such thing.

"She would have loved you," she said.

On Saturday, Oct. 15, all the branches of the Linder family tree came together to celebrate the tree's new growth with a luncheon, a slideshow of photographs and general feelings of welcome and camaraderie.

To learn more about Bennett and his family, as well as some information about his search, visit www.bobbennett.net.