

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

FACT CHECK FIRST

July 2020

The Situation:

I'm responsible for maintaining our family history database. Recently I got a call from a guy who said he was the son of a family elder. This information did not jive with information the family elder previously submitted, and if true, would mean the caller was either born prior to the elders marriage and subsequent noted children's births, or that he had a child out of wedlock. The young man wants to be added to the family tree along with his children. How do I include them without causing tension within the family?

The Fix:



Doug Harris

I have two reactions to this situation: One is "honesty is the best policy" and the other is "discretion is the better part of valor." By these I mean that the first step is to speak to the Elder—before speaking to anyone else in the family about the issue. He deserves to know what is being said and what may likely become public. Give him the opportunity to "come clean" before he is outed and encourage him to contact his daughter directly regarding her desire to be added to the family tree. This can be real sticky. Who knows the real story? What is her real motivation? Maybe she's been told he is her father, but he really isn't. Perhaps the Elder knows who the real father is, then again maybe not. It could be a sincere effort on the part of a well-intentioned woman honestly searching to connect with her biological father. This is an issue for the nuclear family, not the extended family.

The Fix:



Sylvia
Ford-George

The situation you raise is not unique within families. Family members not identifying children—especially those born outside of a marriage—happens more often than expected, and become a big part of the dreaded family secrets. Many times the secret dies with the family member (or is identified while on one's death bed). The first course of action should be to confirm that the claim is legitimate. (Haven't we all seen women on Maury Povich Show claim a man's paternity by saying, "he's the only man I've been with, there's nobody else, etc." only to hear Maury announce, "He is NOT the father".) Once the information is confirmed true, add them to the family tree.

Our family has done this at least four times since we've held reunions. 1- During the compilation of our family tree a family elder was listed twice. Once with his wife and two children, and a second time on another branch of the tree, as the father of a third child. 2- After our second reunion where a family elder introduced all in attendance to a grown daughter only he, his wife and son previously knew about. 3- After another family elder was told by a young man (who's mother had just passed) that he was his father. 4- When a family grandfather was contacted by his newly discovered grand-daughter, who was just given her adoption papers naming his daughter as her mother.

In the first instance the information was available on the family tree, and only those who really looked through the finished document made the connection. In the next two, the information was well received and the "new" family members were welcomed into the family with open arms. In the last all but the mother was excited. So please be very discreet and respectful when getting confirmation and/or placing information on the tree. Talk to as few people as possible, unless or until the Elder makes an announcement. And please do not use this as something to gossip about. With DNA testing as it is today, the Elder may be running out of time to tell the story on his own because DNA don't lie.
