

12-1-2016

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### Recommended Citation

Arnold, Lee (2016) "Confessions of a Genealogy DNA Test Addict," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 36 : No. 4 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol36/iss4/8>

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# Confessions of a Genealogy DNA Test Addict

## How come I change my origins so often?

BY LEE ARNOLD

My father was a habitual liar. I know that sounds cruel, but it is the truth. He told us kids we were Irish – not true. He told us we were part Native American – also not true. He told us we were related to country & western singer Eddy Arnold – really, Eddy Arnold? He told us we were related to Jefferson Davis – my goodness, such nonsense. I dismissed Eddie Arnold right away. I was gullible, but not *that* gullible. In my early years of genealogical searching I did check out the Jefferson Davis claim and saw that that too was a lark. The Irish thing though, that was a bit harder to crack. I was intrigued.

I wondered, if we were Irish, why were we all born Baptists and then raised Methodists; why were we not Catholic? This question was not readily answered in our house. By the time I hit high school, I decided I would attend a Catholic college. It was in college that I did the first of, in retrospect, a string of impulsive acts that all would have been neatly avoided by actually doing my genealogy first. In this instance, I converted to Catholicism to get closer to my Irish roots. Oh yes, I went there. It was only a few years later, when I found a long-lost relative in Marion Co., Illinois, that I realized we were not Irish at all, but rather Scotch-Irish (that explained so much, like why I could never tan – only burn). So there I was, a Scotch-Irish Catholic – now that's a small club. Eventually I left Catholicism, returning to my Protestant roots, and eventually became a secular Jew (don't ask). But before that, I decided, against all good judgment, that my father, even though he was so wrong about the Irish thing, was right about the Native American ancestor.

I was obsessed with the notion of being American Indian. I decided, since Daddy's people were from Tennessee, that I must be Cherokee. So I became a charter member of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. And I started learning the Cherokee alphabet and took



an Indian name. I dove in, big time. It was just around then that genealogical DNA testing was hitting the news.

I ordered a kit from DNA Print Genomics and received my results on May 23, 2006. I was so excited. I read them out loud: “95% European, that makes sense, and 5% Che..., huh,” stopping mid-word. My spouse asked what's wrong. I said: “I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that I'm not Cherokee. The good news is that I'm Black.”

Yes, the remaining 5% was listed as Sub-Saharan African. Daddy never told us about that. I, of course, was elated again. And I promptly took out a charter membership with the Smithsonian's fledgling National Museum of African American History and Culture (do you see a trend about me needing to self-identify?).

I wanted to find out more about my Black heritage and took another test three months later, this time using Trace Genetics. And I came back 100% European/Middle Eastern – what? That was too vague for me. I needed details. Unfortunately for me these tests all cost around \$200.

So I waited a few years and finally in 2009 found DNA Tribes (sounded perfect to me) and waited for the results. And when they came back I was a mixture of about 20 ethnic groups, the largest being Tuscan (yes, as in Italy) at 9%. And there was not an African or Native American in any of



*Jefferson Davis, Confederate president.*

the rest. I was, just to name a few, part Turkish (7%), Portuguese (5%), Romanian (5%), French (5%), Greek Cypriot (5%), Belgian (4%), Serbian (4%), Basque (4%), Slovenian (4%), etc. I called the company and asked about all of the Southern European/Mediterranean results; I believe I said: “You realize that I'm paler than a Presbyterian?” They didn't care. Their results were what they were.

I waited two more years before I ventured back into the gene [testing] pool. On December 5, 2011, myDNAmix had me at a boring 100% European. On July 15, 2014, myOrigins had me also 100% European but hinted at British Isles and Scandinavia.

Scandinavia, that sounded interesting. Perhaps I was a Viking. I waited two more years before being tested again. What prompted me was seeing the victorious Icelandic national soccer team do a traditional Viking war cheer. Something stirred within my spine. I knew I had to find out if perhaps I could really be a rugged Nordic type (I just needed to grow my beard out and start to eating herring). Perhaps this was the heritage that had thus far eluded me.

On July 5, 2016, I received confirmation of my hunch. Genographic (by National Geographic) found I was 46% Scandinavian, 37% British and Irish, 10% Southern

European, 4% Finnish and Serbian, and 2% Eastern European. Even though my mother's parents both came from Germany, and German was the language of the home and church, I had no German blood in me, *nichts*. I did some research and found that the part of Pomerania where my grandfather came from was at one time called Swedish Pomerania (since it was ruled by Sweden). That was it; I was home. I had finally found my people and (surprise!) promptly joined the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia.

Was I done? Not at all. Like anyone in an established 12-Step Program, I was powerless over the seductive call of the DNA test. I thought: just one more, just to make sure. On November 2, 2016, I got my results from the AncestryDNA test. I was 71% Western European, 11% Irish, 10% Scandinavian, 3% British, 2% Finnish/Russian, 1% Eastern European, 1% Iberian, and 1% Italian/Greek. I was devastated. How could I drop from 46% Scandinavian in July to 10% in November? Is it even possible? I want to be a Viking, damn it! [See, I even curse like one.]

I am done. I swear this time. No more scraping my inner-cheeks or spitting into tubes. No more converting religion, no more joining ethnic museums, no more DNA testing. I curse; I curse all of those Ancestry.com commercials. But it's not just Ancestry; all of these testing sites have the same reliability, in my mind, as a smooth-talking Herbalife salesman. No more for me, thank you.

But then I was on the phone with the American Swedish Historical Museum, confirming my reservation for their annual Lucia Festival (of course). I asked her about the discrepancies in my last two tests. She didn't have an answer, but said: "Have you tried 23andMe? I hear they are really good." Oh no. She shouldn't have done that. It was like swinging a fresh loaf of sourdough bread in front of Oprah or a catnip toy to a tabby. I started saying the Serenity Prayer but then stopped mid-plea. What would my common Cherokee-African-Swedish-Italian-Basque-Romanian ancestor say? Maybe just one more test.



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## What is a “*männing*”?

*Männing* is a Swedish word that has at least two meanings:

1) it is a word that explains a relationship. If you have a *cousin* you are two generations from the common ancestor; yourself, your parent, and your grandparent. Instead of cousin you say that you and your cousin are *tvåmänningar* (two=två).

Next you have *sysslingar* (2<sup>nd</sup> cousins) or *tremänningar* (three generations back to the common ancestor).

And then comes *bryllingar* or *fyrmänningar* (four generations back to the common ancestor. *Brylling* is not a very common word in daily use.

With this *männing-system* you can easily go back many generations, and if you hear somebody mention that so-and-so is a *niomänning*, then you have met another genealogist.

Years ago I found out that my husband and I are ½ *elvenmänningar*, as we are both descended from a lady in Falun, Gunborg Olofsdotter, who was married twice, and he comes from her first marriage, and I from the second. This is early 1600s.

2) It is a word that has to do with the Swedish army during the time of the *Great Nordic War* (1700–1720), when Sweden was fighting against Denmark, Poland, and Russia during the reign of Karl XII (1682–1718).

The war started with various victories, but in 1709 the Swedish army was on the march towards Moscow, but lost the battle of Poltava in modern Ukraine. The whole Swedish army was taken prisoner and had to spend the time in Siberia until the Peace of Nystad in 1721. After the peace, the survivors were allowed to go home again.

After the losses in 1709 Sweden needed to set up a new army, and this was done according to the allotment system (*indelningverket*) according to which each county was divided into many *rotar*, and each *rote* consisted of a number of farms, maybe 4-6, that were responsible for hiring a soldier and furnishing him with the necessary equipment.

In difficult times two *rotar* could combine their resources and together hire one soldier, who was then listed as a *tvåmänningsoldat*.

The war went on, and in 1710 the Swedish army won the battle of Helsingborg in Skåne, and then went to northern Germany to try to end the war with a victory over Danish, Saxonian, and Russian forces, but had to surrender in 1713 at the fortress of Tönning in Holstein-Gottorp and the Swedish soldiers were taken prisoners.

So a new army was recruited, and this time the authorities had to resort to soldiers hired by not only two *rotar*, but by three, four, or five *rotar*: *Tvåmänningsoldater*, *tremänningsoldater*, *fyrmänningssoldater*, and *femmänningsoldater*. The same happened to the cavalry regiments, where they also had to find horses.

King Karl was killed in 1718 in Norway, succeeded by his sister Ulrika Eleonora.

In the final Peace of Nystad in 1721 with the Russians, Sweden lost Estonia, Ingria, Livonia, and parts of Finland, resulting in a border between Sweden and Russia that is similar to the present border between Finland and Russia.