

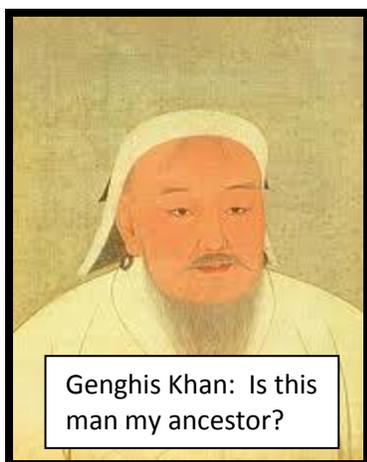
I Am A Mongolian-American

Several years ago I was contacted by a gentleman from Connecticut who was convinced, based on his family lore, that my great uncle was the father of his father. You kinda have to figure that one out, but basically his father had been born out of wedlock to a widowed mother, and the rumors had swirled for years that the Rawlings family has some connection to the situation. We couldn't solve the problem by talking about it, so I suggested we have DNA testing done. He agreed and we discovered there is no family relation at all. (Turns out a farmer who lived down the road was the likely culprit, but that's another story.)

The unexpected result of this was that my DNA profile got posted on the internet via a site that specializes in doing DNA genealogy. I have no real problem with that. I don't plan to commit any grand crimes for which my genetic material would give me away. To my great surprise, however, I began receiving occasional emails revealing that I had been "matched" with other members of my extended family across the country. Some are named "Rawlings" and others "Rollins," but I feel certain we are indeed somehow connected, even if the exact blood line is not clear.

The first shock I received was the finding that I have a Mongolian heritage. I am not joking. Personally, I could not care less about who my ancestors were—that fact never puts meat on the table. But others in my family who do have traced the Rawlings line back to 13th or 14th Century England, and my mother's Newsom line back some 1,300 years to the era of Charlemagne in France. The idea that I was part Asian sort of took me aback. (As the fellow from Connecticut who originally thought we were related said, "Gee, you look Anglo to me." Honest.)

My brother, Tom, got interested in this and sent his DNA off to be tested under the *National Geographic's* Genographic Project, an effort to document human migration patterns throughout history. Turns out he has Mongolian blood, too, and that his (and presumably my) ultimate ancestral home is not France or England, but rather the Caucasian region that now includes the country of Georgia. That might explain the Mongol genes.



Beginning in the 13th Century AD, the Mongol Empire spread rapidly westward, and at its peak in the mid-15th Century included not only the Middle East (excepting the Arabian Peninsula) but much of Eastern Europe. While I may have had ancestors in France and England, there was plenty of chance to pick up some Chinese DNA in there. One of more of my forebears seems to have been an ethnic chimera.

The second big shock came last week when I received an email informing me that another relative had been found, this time in the Middle East. It seems that—according to my Y-chromosome markers, I have a 83.53% chance of sharing a common ancestor with this person in the last 20 generations, rising to a 95.25% chance in the last 28 generations. To put that in common language (and assuming a "generation" is 20 to 25 years) sometime in the last 400 to 700 years, I had an ancestor who was spreading his DNA in that part of the world.

The good thing about the DNA match was that it came with an email address for my new-found relative. I fired off an inquiry, and was answered promptly by a professional living in Dubai—I won't give the details, but suffice it to say he said at the outset he was of "Muslim Arab" origin, his words. Never in all my wildest dreams did I imagine that outcome. I've written him back—we should have lots to explore.

The bottom line here is that while you never know where life will take you, you also never really know where how you got here in the first place. The positive outcome of all this is that I can truthfully check the "Other" box on the various government documents that inquire about my ethnicity. That's good—or is it?