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Meredith Pratt Ancestry Project

Meredith M. Pratt

Genetics and Genealogy Narrative: Meredith Pratt Ancestry Project

Meredith Pratt

Nova Southeastern University

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to discover my genetic composition and ancestry. This was done by talking with family members, looking at old photographs and notes, and using online databases, to find out information about my ancestors. Also, using 23andMe, a genetic composition company, my genetic composition was determined. It was found that I was 72.3% Northwestern European (32.0% French and German, 20.6% British and Irish, 6.0% Scandinavian, and 13.6% Broadly Northwestern European), 21.5% Eastern European, 0.8% Southern European (0.7% Greek and Balkan and 0.1% Broadly Southern European), 1.5% Western Asian and North African (1.2% Northern West Asian including 0.5% Cypriot and 0.7% Broadly Northern West Asian, and 0.3% Broadly Western Asian and North African), 0.3% Trace Ancestry of Manchurian and Mongolian, and 0.3% unassigned. It was also determined that my maternal haplogroup is W6. The genetic composition from 23andMe helped solidify any ancestors that I discovered via online databases or family members.

Before this project, I did not know a lot of information about my genealogy or genetic composition—leading me to this honors seminar based on these two ancestral reports. I had a brief understanding of both sides of my family up to my great grandparents. However, I did not know much about them, where they came from, or what they did, except for their names. With this, I didn't really know what my genetic composition would be either. I knew that on my mom's side that her grandparents, my great grandparents, came from Czechoslovakia. But the question always in my mind was where in Czechoslovakia since the nation broke into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Also, on my mom's side, I knew that my grandfather was born in Kentucky and that they had been there for quite some time. In addition, I knew that he was related to the Truman family, including Harry S. Truman, but I was not sure what the relation exactly was. On my dad's side, I knew that my grandfather and grandmother have grown up in Indiana and Chicago, Illinois, but I didn't know much more than that other than we were Swedish and would have Swedish Christmas Eve every year that my mom hosted. Throughout this project, I found ancestors that I did not know that had existed and where they came from and my genetic composition from 23andMe helped solidify some of the answers that I was looking for.

Mother's Side: Hadt Family

During this project, I found the least information on my mother's side of the family. Both of my mother's parents are no longer living so I only had my mom and aunt as a resource. Both of them knew about the same amount of information and had some scraps of notes written with family ancestors and where they may have come from. My grandma, Marlene Violet Hadt, was the last born in her large family. Her older sister ended up taking care of her and raising her

because her mother was older and tired at this point in her life from having many children. Because of this, we don't have a lot of information on my great grandparents since my grandma was raised by her sister. We do know that they came from Czechoslovakia but do not know when. I tried finding ship records for both my great grandparents names, Suzanne Marocek and Andrew Hadt, but could not find any records. My initial question was where did my great grandparents actually live in Czechoslovakia. One day, while looking through photo albums and notes I found written in messy cursive, Orava, Czechoslovakia. With a quick google search, I found a little town on the border of Slovakia and Poland. They were from Slovakia. This was one of the first successes of my research—finding directly where my great grandparents came from. My aunt later told me that my grandma used to say that one of the few memories she had was her mother singing Slovak songs, so this was another piece of evidence for their initial residence in what is now Slovakia.

After finding this information, I was expecting my 23andMe results to clearly show Czech or Slovak genetic composition. My results were 21.5% Eastern European, however, it said a possible match for this ancestry could come from Hungary which I found interesting. These results still solidify my Eastern European ancestry from my great grandparents who migrated to the United States especially after comparing my results to my aunt on my father's side who had zero Eastern European ancestry in her 23andMe results.

Mother's Side: Wright Family

I knew a little more information about my mom's father, my grandfather, side of the family. My grandfather, William Lemuel Wright, grew up in Kentucky and was truly a country boy before moving to Lansing, Illinois where he met my grandmother at a soda shop. He was the

president of the American School in Illinois which was the first homeschooling program that began in 1897. My grandfather's mother, my great grandmother, was named Edna Mae Truman. She also grew up in Kentucky and was related to the Truman family of President Harry S. Truman. Growing up, I was always told that I was related to Harry S. Truman, the only "celebrity" I know that I am related to, however, I like to tell people that I am related to actor, Chris Pratt. In my home, we had an old, antique bed set. It was a dark wood and as a child, it always gave me a creepy feeling. However, this bed set was from the Truman family. We have papers to confirm that this bed set was indeed in the Truman family lineage and my aunt now has it.

Through further digging and by using a document sent out to Truman descendants by a historical documenter that my mom had, I found that my great grandmother, Edna Mae Truman, was Harry S. Truman's second cousin twice removed. Edna Mae's great grandfather, William Truman, had many children but two included her grandfather, Milford Madison Truman, and another named, Anderson Shippe Truman, Edna Mae's great uncle. Anderson Shippe Truman was Harry S. Truman's grandfather. Because of Anderson Shippe being Edna Mae's great uncle, Harry S. Truman is her second cousin twice removed. Finally finding how my mom, grandfather, and I are related to the Truman family was another success and question that I had answered while doing this project.

Father's Side: Sponsel Family

On my dad's side of the family, my grandmother is Betty Lou Sponsel. She was born in Chicago Heights, Illinois and grew up there until she went to Indiana University for college. Her mother, my great grandmother, was Irene Mae Nelson and her father, my great grandfather, was

Carl Sponsel. Carl was adopted by John Max Sponsel, my great-great-grandfather, from Germany and by Lillian Swenson, my great-great-grandmother from Sweden. Because of the adoption, one of my questions was more about the genetics side of my grandmother's father. From my grandma's own DNA test results, it was found that she is 50% Scandinavian, 23% British, and 27% from other regions including Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. I wasn't able to find any information about Carl Sponsel's birth parents, but they most likely have similar ancestry to his adoptive parents. Also, Irene Mae Nelson's mother, my great great grandmother, was from Sweden where this can be seen in my grandma's DNA results as well as mine because I have 6.0% Scandinavian in my genealogy.

Back to Carl Sponsel, some interesting information that I found about him was that he voted as the first president (mayor) of "village" or the local town government where he lived. The town he was president/mayor of was called Dilworth which is in Minnesota. I found out this information from various newspaper clipping articles in a photo album about him winning his nominations and presidency as well as a letter from the city of Dilworth in 1995. In the letter addressed to my grandmother about her grandfather, the city of Dilworth thanks my grandmother for sending information about her grandfather, John Max Sponsel, because the city was compiling a whole database on the origin of their city and all past elected officials. I had never heard about this story before how my great great grandfather was the first mayor of a town in Minnesota, so this was a cool fact to find.

Father's Side: Pratt Family

On my dad's side of the family, my grandfather, my dad's dad, was Donald Eugene Pratt. His parents or my great grandparents were John Pratt and Mildred Elizabeth Pendergast. And my

great-great-grandparents were Elijah Pratt and Laura Barbara Schultz. Elijah Pratt and Laura Barbara Schultz lived in a town called Prattsburg, Indiana. When trying to research this area, I found that is an unincorporated community in Ripley County in Indiana (Wikipedia, n.d.). The first post office here was established in 1849 and then closed in 1857. Apparently, the postmaster running the office was a member of the local Pratt family which gave the community its name. This is all of the information that I could find on Prattsburg and I wish I could find exactly who the postmaster was—it possibly being one of my direct ancestors. However, just south of Prattsburg is Versailles, Indiana where my great grandfather John Pratt and his wife Mildred lived. His father must have moved to Versailles after some time where my great grandfather then grew up.

The Pratt family name I was able to trace back to 1530 with the help of one of my aunts on my dad's side. The Pratt name is Anglo-Saxon in origin and means a “trick” (Coadb.com, n.d.). The name most likely came from someone who performed tricks like a magician or a conjuror. Through further research, I found that Phineas Pratt was the first person to have the surname of Pratt in the Americas and I am a direct ancestor of him (Pilgrim Hall Museum, n.d.). Phineas Pratt was born in 1593 and arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1622. His father, Henry Pratt, was a Puritan Reverend in England so it makes sense why Phineas came to the Americas for religious freedom and new opportunities. He arrived on the second ship after the Mayflower which was called the Sparrow (Pilgrim Hall Museum, n.d.). Once arriving to the New World, he and some others tried to settle an area called Wessagusset but it didn't work out due to not having enough supplies, the conditions, and Native Americans. I also found about Phineas Pratt that he wrote a narrative to the general court of Massachusetts called “A declaration of the affairs of the English people that first inhabited New England” to support his request for

financial aid (Pilgrim Hall Museum, n.d.). The narrative that he wrote talks about his own journey from England to America and how he and others tried to colonize Wessagussett and why it didn't work. With the narrative, I also found a will for Phineas Pratt which was interesting to see as well. I never thought that I would be able to trace some of my ancestry this far back. But my 23andMe results also indicate that I have 20.6% British or Irish ancestry so this corresponds with what I have found as well. I also never thought that I would have a direct ancestry to a Pilgrim from England so that was something very cool to learn about as well.

Today: Pratt Family

Today, my family consists of myself, my mother named Lee Anne Wright, and my dad Dale Allen Pratt. I am an only child and grew up in Sarasota, Florida. I went to a private school from pre-k to 12th grade so I was always surrounded by the same people in a small class and then decided to attend Nova Southeastern University for my undergraduate career to pursue my love for marine biology. My mom grew up in Lansing, Illinois and has one older sister named Rae Jean. My mom never went to college and she was a dental receptionist and hygienist in downtown Chicago.

My dad grew up in Park Forest, Illinois and has two older sisters named Donna and Debby. My dad was always an outgoing person where my mom was quiet and introverted. My dad had lots of friends and wasn't very fond of school and tried community college but decided to continue working as he that is what he had been doing since he was an early teenager. My dad had always worked hard in retail and department stores at a young age and different companies wanted him, so he eventually became vice president for a mattress company. He eventually

opened up his own business called The Box Shoppe which was a pack and ship store and my mom ran the business with him as well when they eventually got married.

The whole family, both my mom and dad's side, moved down to Florida to follow their own parents to retirement so everyone is down in Florida now except one of my aunts, Debby, from my dad's side. After about ten years of marriage, my parents decided to have me. Initially, my parents were not going to have children but once my mom's father became ill from stomach cancer they decided to. My grandfather on my mom's side died from his cancer and only about a month later my mom found out she was pregnant with me. My grandfather never thought his daughter was going to have children and never knew that my mom was pregnant or that I would even have existed. Her pregnancy with me, helped ease the loss of her father and in a way, life was lost but another, mine, was created.

Conclusion

After this project, I have found so many interesting and new finds about my family by talking to relatives, looking at old notes and photographs, finding information online, and by using my 23andMe results. In addition, to the genetic composition results from 23andMe, I found that my maternal haplogroup is W6. After some further research, this W haplogroup is common in Eastern Europe, North Caucasus, Central Asia, Iran, and North West India (Hay, 2015). This specific haplogroup descended from the haplogroup N2 into W1 and then into further divisions such as W6 (Hay, 2015). This W haplogroup came about during the late glacial period near the Caspian Sea between 16,000 to 20,000 years ago as well and the W group overall was found in the original Indo-Europeans (Hay, 2015). My haplogroup, W6, was first found in Germany and I found this interesting since I do have a large percentage of German in my genetic

composition. With what I have found through family or online does correlate with my genetic composition which helps solidify things that I was told or shown by family members. This discovery of my ancestors will forever be ongoing because I am sure there are plenty of ancestors or stories that I have not come across yet.

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