

Newsletter

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From the Director - The Hamster Wheel of Generation Length

Besides [mutation rate philosophies](#), there's not much else that can make you go round and round like a hamster on a wheel to nowhere other than debating average generation length. Many people think the average generation length is 25 years while others put the number at 30 or even 35 years. The topic often surfaces on genealogical mailing lists and forums and even more so in the genetic genealogy community since generation length is applicable to mutation rates.

Really now, what does it matter? Unless you're a geneticist it doesn't matter what the average number is. What does matter for you is what the average number is for **your family**.

In my family, we have a long generational length on my direct paternal line back to 1710. All of the males in my line were born when their fathers were in their 30's and 40's. My paternal grandfather was born in 1894 and I was born when my father was 43 and this ended up putting quite a damper on the length of time I had with my grandfather. (He died when I was four). Albeit, long generation length is great from a DNA perspective. In theory, because the less generations you have from the common ancestor, the less likelihood for mutations to randomly occur. Since I mentioned my direct paternal line, that may be associated with Y-chromosome DNA testing, but my families' long generational length has also been advantageous with autosomal DNA testing as well. My father has a living first cousin born in 1920 who matches [Bill Hurst](#). Bill and I have known for years that we share a common BARKSDALE ancestor who was born btw. 1664-1670 and with the onset of autosomal DNA testing, matching DNA is visible between Bill and my first cousin, once removed. However, with myself being born one generation later, the matching DNA segment is not visible between myself and Bill at the matching thresholds set by the DNA companies.

Determining an average number for generation length is not going to be "one-size-fits-all" for everyone. Baroness Elliot of Harwood had a generation length of 58.5 years while Augusta Bunge's family has a generation length of 18.2 years.¹ To reiterate, the only number for generation length that matters is your own number which can be determined [here](#). The average generation length for my paternal line is 43 years.

So the next time you see the generation length debate raging on a mailing list or forum, save yourself some time by skipping that hamster wheel to nowhere.

-Katherine Borges
ISOGG Director

Sources:

¹ <http://www.genetic-genealogy.co.uk/supp/examples.html>

Pioneer Profiles



"Pioneer Profiles" is a new feature in the ISOGG newsletter profiling Genetic Genealogy Pioneers. Our first interview is with William "Bill" R. Hurst

How did you become involved in genetic genealogy?

I had only been doing genealogy for a few years when a cousin in 2002 on the Hurst Rootsweb list mentioned the Hurst DNA Project and the Rootsweb DNA-Genealogy list. I took the basic 12-marker Y-DNA test and found that I matched the other two Project members. In fact, the first four of us match

out to 67-markers with only one mutation between us. Later, I became the co-administrator of the Hurst Project so I could attend the first FTDNA Conference in 2004. I have been to every Conference since then.

Then one day Ann Turner, the founder and moderator of the DNA list mentioned a good use for mtDNA testing. I realized I had the perfect example of such use: two women, including my gg grandmother, were probably sisters. I found and tested direct maternal descendants of each and they matched! I called that the "Kelly sisters project." Later I moved back another generation by finding and testing a descendant of an aunt of the first sisters. Oddly, I only know my new 4th great grandmother as Mrs. Joseph Cummins.

While waiting on my cousins' mtDNA results, I figured I might as well take the same test myself. I turned out to be in haplogroup K. After producing a few reports on K out of Mitosearch, I started the K Project in 2006 when FTDNA began allowing haplogroup and geographical projects. Three years ago, I founded the haplogroup U8 Project after realizing the boundary between K and its "mother" U8 was very fuzzy. Besides running these two projects, my main activities in the past few years have been working to expand the U8-K tree and to understand mtDNA mutations.

Please share the significant milestones regarding Absalom Hurst and Triangulation.

One day I was thinking about the implications of the fact that my 4th cousin, twice removed, and I had exactly matching Y-DNA. Our common ancestor was Absalom Hurst, so I realized that I knew what Absalom's Y-DNA was. I even wrote an article for the Mt. Vernon (VA) Genealogical Society's newsletter entitled "How to Find Your Ancestors' Y-DNA Without Digging Them Up." It works the same way with mtDNA, so I wrote another article with "Y-DNA" replaced by "mtDNA." I remembered that the word "triangulation" was used to describe the process of determining the location of a distant object by measuring the distances between two near-by objects and the angles involved. So I suggested that the term be used in genetic genealogy to describe the method used to determine the DNA of ancestors. Now I see the term widely used, as if it had always been so. But Absalom Hurst was the first person whose DNA was described as being triangulated.

What discoveries have you made through the Haplogroup K Project?

As I said, one of my main activities has been updating the K and U8 trees. It's very difficult to get credit for discovering and naming subclades. I managed to do so for two new subclades by publishing an article on the position 524 (now 523) insertions in the [Journal of Genetic Genealogy](#). I stuck in a little tree of the subclades under K1a, including what I proposed as K1a10 and K1a11. Discovering them was not that difficult; like America, they were always there. But somebody had to notice them. It helps if you look everyday! Naming them was a matter of determining the next two numbers after "9."

Until last October, every K had been easily placed in either of the major K1 or K2 subclades. Then, after finding a Georgian sequence in June that didn't fit in either of those subclades, I found a Chinese sequence which also didn't fit either one, but did have eleven extra mutations in common with the one from Georgia. The scientists who published both these sequences did not make the connection between them to determine they represented a new high-level subclade. This time I decided to forgo the possibility of official credit, which would have required writing an article and waiting months for publication. I simply announced the finding of a new K3 subclade on every list and forum I could find. My contention now is that K originated in the Caucasus, with most of us moving to Europe; but the K3 subclade headed eastward along the Silk Road as far as China.

Perhaps more important than finding and naming subclades is determining their origins. We have subclades in K that are obviously from Finland and Spain, for example. The K1a10 subclade is found in both the British Isles and the Scandinavian Peninsula. Where was the origin? My guess is the former, since there are not only more examples in the British Isles, but they are more diversified there. I believe that the subclade was taken back to Norway by the Vikings. K1a11 presents a problem. At FTDNA, all examples are from Germany and to the north. But HVR-only examples – it

has four particular HVR mutations including the rare 16T – have been found in the ethnic-Afghani part of Uzbekistan and in Pakistan next to the Afghanistan border. The author of the paper with the latter example even designates it as K1a11.

Do you have any advice for those just beginning their journey in genetic genealogy?

It probably helps to have some experience in genealogy. Then take the highest level test in each category that you can afford – Y-DNA, mtDNA and autosomal. Even if you are just taking one basic test, do it with a company that allows you to later upgrade if you wish. I've seen too many people test with one company, then find out their results are not complete, and then have to start over with another company such as Family Tree DNA. Then join appropriate projects for your surname, Y-DNA and mtDNA haplogroups, and relevant geographical areas. Further information may be found on the DNA-Newbie and other RootsWeb lists, DNA-Forums and the FTDNA Forums.



Time Again for "Who Do You Think You Are?"!

The third season of the U.S. version of the popular U.K. television series, "Who Do You Think You Are?" debuted on Feb 3 at [8-7 p.m. CT on NBC](#). In season one, NFL football star [Emmitt Smith underwent DNA testing](#) to learn more about his heritage and while genetic genealogy was unfortunately not included in season two, it returns in season three with the highly anticipated [episode featuring actor, Blair Underwood](#). Sharp-eyed genetic genealogists caught a glimpse of Blair's DNA results in the show's preview (shown below).



Also in February on the side of the Atlantic where it all started, the *Who Do You Think You Are? - LIVE!* conference will be hosted in Olympia, London on 24-26 Feb. Not only is this conference the largest family history conference in the world (over 11,000 attendees last year) but it also boasts [the largest DNA workshop](#) anywhere sponsored by Family Tree DNA in its fourth year. If you are attending the conference, stop by Family Tree DNA's stand (#428) and check out the special show prices and free DNA talks. The DNA talks are held all three days and there's an additional [DNA talk](#)

[sponsored by The Society of Genealogists](#) on Friday at 12:30 pm with Dr. Turi King presenting "Surnames, DNA and Family History".



ISOGG will also have a stand (#433) at the conference thanks to the efforts of Brian Picton Swann and Debbie Kennett. Along with Brian and Debbie, there will be several knowledgeable ISOGG members staffing the stall to answer any DNA questions you'd like to ask.



DNA Success Stories

Pitts DNA Project Success Story

By David Pitts

We had heard family stories about William Pleasant Pitts (b. May 27, 1849 Mississippi) where he took the family's harvested cotton to town to sell and was never heard from again. With a lot of research I finally found him (unmarried) living in Fort Smith Arkansas in 1870. Later census records showed he married a Columbia Jane Unknown about 1875, and went to Texas and finally to Colorado where he died after having several children.

I posted these data on the web, and one day I received an e-mail from Coy who said he is a descendant of William Pleasant. Coy had some other parts of the story of William Pleasant Pitts. It turns out that William Pleasant Pitts married Georgia Ann Colvard (Nov. 10, 1870) and had two daughters: Charity and Ida Emma. Coy is a descendant of Charity. But then about 1875 William Pleasant Pitts evidently ran off to Texas with Georgia's sister, Columbia Jane Colvard. By 1900 they are living in Colorado. William Pleasant Pitts and Columbia Jane Colvard Pitts are buried in Cedar Cemetery Montrose County Colorado. They had 6 children, many of whom are also buried in central to western Colorado.

Family Finder provided a way to verify this story and it successfully predicted that Sue was a 3rd cousin (actually 3rd cousin once removed), Celestine was a 3rd cousin (actually 2nd cousin once removed), that I (David) was a 3rd cousin (correct), Nancy was a third cousin (actually a 4th cousin), and that Imogene (David's sister) was a 5th to remote cousin (actually a 3rd cousin).

For more DNA success stories or to submit yours, visit:

What's *NEW* in ISOGG



DNA in the News

[DNA Turning Human Story Into a Tell-All](#) - NY Times - 30 Jan 2012

[Bret Hart Submits DNA for Project](#) - TWNP News - 29 Jan 2012

[Of Culture and Cows: What We Teach Our Genes](#) - Wall Street Journal - 28 Jan 2012

[The scientists behind Mitochondrial Eve tell us about the "lucky mother" who changed human evolution forever](#) - io9 - 27 Jan 2012

[With DNA Testing, Suddenly They Are Family](#) - NY Times - 23 Jan 2012

For more articles:

<http://www.isogg.org/newsarchives.htm>

NEW video added to ISOGG page - DNA Videos

[National Geographic Live!: Spencer Wells: The Human Journey](#)

NEW links and sections added to ISOGG Research page

[Russian Journal of Genetic Genealogy](#)

Wiki

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Blogs

Genealem's Genetic Genealogy

Your Genetic Genealogist

On-line Journal of Genetics and Genealogy

The Genetic Genealogist

ISOGG welcomes NEW Co-regional Coordinator for Brasil:

Aaron Salles Torres

New to the ISOGG Speakers List:

Charles Acree

Region: West Texas

Midland and Odessa

Terms: [Contact](#)

CeCe Moore

**Region: Orange County and
San Diego County**

Terms: [Contact](#)

The ISOGG newsletter is a membership benefit of the world's first society founded for the promotion and education of genetic genealogy, ISOGG - The International Society of Genetic Genealogy. Membership is FREE! Members automatically receive the newsletter to share the latest news and happenings in the world of genetic genealogy.

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