

 <p>Cheer and Dance 2009 Summer Camp Cheerleading • Stunts • Tumbling Click here for more information</p>	<p>Each week our camp will offer both: Cheerleading & Stunts Camp Tumbling Camp</p>	<p>Carolina Legacy 1823 NW Maynard Road, Cary, NC 27513 Rachel: 919-609-9628 Gym: 919-280-2152 Fax: 919-280-2153 Email: rachel.cla@att.net</p>
---	---	---

[Subscribe](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [e-edition](#) | [Subscriber Rewards](#)

Thursday, June 25, 2009
Raleigh Durham Cary Chapel Hill

Health & Science

Home / Local & State / Health & Science

Counties: Wake | Durham | Orange | Johnston | Chatham Topics: Crime & Safety | Health & Science | Education | Growth | Q | Corrections

Columnists: John Drescher | Barry Saunders | Ruth Sheehan | Road Worrier | Triangle Troubleshooter

[Comments \(0\)](#) |

DNA reveals story of dad's disappearance

Genes are genealogy's new frontier

BY RUTH SHEEHAN - STAFF WRITER
Published: Mon, Mar. 23, 2009 06:42AM Modified Thu, Mar. 26, 2009 08:44AM

An earlier version of this story incorrectly spelled the name of Terry Smithers Treadway.

***** John Smithers of Raleigh had spent more than six decades looking for clues about the father who abandoned him, his sister and their mother when he was just a baby. The barrel-chested, brash-talking Smithers had something he wanted to give his old man: a fist in the nose.

Genealogy seminars

The National Genealogical Society's 2009 Family History Convention is scheduled May 13-16 at the Raleigh Convention Center.

More than 200 seminars will be offered, including several on the role of DNA testing.

Registration for society members is \$175; for nonmembers, \$210.

There also are free events, including an all-day forum on African-American genealogy May 12 (registration required) and evening lectures May 13. These include Genealogy 2.0: Using Digital Tools to Trace Your North Carolina Roots.

For more information visit www.ngsgenealogy.org.

For another source for information about DNA in genealogical research, visit www.familytreeDNA.com.

More Health & Science

- [N.C. children sick from cookie dough](#)
- [More summer nutrition programs urged](#)
- [Pandemic flu kills N.C. heart patient](#)
- [Flu fears force MD camps to close](#)
- [No signs of H1N1 flu in babies at NC hospital](#)
- [Many patients in dark on tests](#)



June 26th - June 28th
M/I HOMES INDEPENDENCE DAYS
9% OFF
any M/I home in Raleigh-Durham
[Learn more >>](#)

At 82, he had about given up on ever learning what happened to James William Smithers. He had long suspected his father got in trouble with the law and fled abroad. Decades ago, it was easy enough to disappear, and Smithers' father had seemingly vanished into thin air.

On the other side of the world, Lucinda Gray had always wondered what her father's life was like before he moved mysteriously from the United States to Australia. She had spent years just trying to find out his real name.

In mid-December, Smithers and Gray learned their elusive fathers were one and the same.

After years of poring over records online and in person, across continents and oceans, it took only a DNA sample from a simple cheek scrape to bring the two branches of the family together.

"I was skeptical at first," said Smithers, a retired insurance company investigator. "But when I talked to my sister, I knew this is what I'd been hoping for my whole life."

The case shows what a "new frontier" DNA has become in genealogical research, said Debbi Blake, a North Carolina state archivist.

DNA has been in genealogical use since 2000, according to Thomas Shawker, a radiologist with the National Institutes of Health who has become a nationally renowned expert on the use of the latest science in genealogy. Its use since then among professional genealogists and family historians has mushroomed.

"Everywhere I go, I am asked to lecture on DNA," he said, "and everywhere I go, the lectures are packed."

But the impact of DNA hasn't been as significant as the Internet, which transformed genealogical research by making records from distant places available at the click of a mouse. Some of the genealogy search sites charge a fee, though many of the raw birth, death, marriage and property records are available free online.

BOOKMARK E-MAIL PRINT TEXT SIZE: [-] [+]

Advertisements



BIG TENT SAVINGS EVENT
Replay
Performance AUTOMALL
JUNE 19-30
OPEN SUNDAY 12-6

CLICK HERE
Enter to Win a \$25 Gift Card to
TRIANGLE TOWN CENTER & COMMONS

Most Popular

Stories

Emailed

Last 24 Hours

- [Hansbrough 'underdog' no more](#)
- [Jordan's son leaves Illinois program](#)
- [Sanford admits infidelity](#)
- [Duke loses guard Williams](#)
- [Some Oblinger e-mail is missing](#)

Last 7 Days

- [Nude photo found on hospital phone](#)
- [Barrel Monster's renown spreads](#)
- [Ex-chancellor Oblinger's e-mails missing](#)
- [S.C. governor admits straying](#)
- [State has money woes despite lottery](#)

Last 24 Hours

- [Hansbrough 'underdog' no more](#)
- [Duke loses guard Williams](#)
- [Nonprofits scrambling to meet demand](#)
- [Victim of rabid fox retains wit](#)
- [Lawmakers push tax credit for movies](#)

Last 7 Days

- [Salt to taste](#)
- [Barrel Monster's renown spreads](#)
- [Child, women attacked by foxes](#)
- [Texting at wheel illegal on Dec. 1](#)
- [Southern Baptists fight decline](#)

Print Ads

[View all ads from past 7 days >](#)

Ads from Today's THE NEWS & OBSERVER

- ALEXANDER'S SEWING CENTER
- AUCTION PROMOTIONS UNLIMITED
- AUCTION PROMOTIONS UNLIMITED
- AUCTION PROMOTIONS UNLIMITED
- BOJANGLE'S FAMOUS CHICKEN'N BISCUITS
- BREITLING USA
- BROADWAY SERIES SOUTH

Search...

SEARCH

DNA testing has a fairly hefty price tag -- from \$99 to well over \$700, depending on the type of DNA and the level of research. Until recently, its application has been limited, said Terry Moore, a professional genealogist in Raleigh. Typically, it's used to identify which branch of the family tree to climb -- or which region or nation to zero in on.

"Usually, DNA helps people who have gone through all the records and traced their ancestors back to the 1400s and are stuck," she said.

It is, Moore stressed, simply another tool in the genealogist's box. "This is not CSI," she said. "DNA will not do the work for you. But it can bridge gaps in history."

As more people who share a surname start their own registries, DNA's role is expanding into the modern age -- uniting living relatives. The Smithers-Gray case is a perfect example.

Real name unknown

Like her half-brother John Smithers, Lucinda Gray had been trying to investigate her father's veiled history for many years.

Her dad, John Henderson Gray, who died in 1970, had been a fine father to her and her four siblings, and a good husband to their mother. But even their mother didn't know his true identity.

He had moved from the United States to Australia in 1926; in 1944, at age 51, he had married their mother, Betty, then 22. It was well known that Gray had changed his name when he moved down under. "Our mother always assumed he'd changed his identity because of some strife," Lucinda Gray said.

ruth.sheehan@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4828

Get it all with convenient home delivery of The News & Observer.

[Next Page](#)

COMMENTS

[Refinance and Save \\$1,000's](#)
\$200K Mortgage for \$917/month. No Obligation. Refinance Requests Only.
pickAmortgage.com

[Online Degrees](#)
Get Your AA, BA, Masters or PhD at a Top Online School. Start Now.
Education.Nexttag.com

[Looking for a Mortgage Rate Quote?](#)
Search The Web For Mortgage Rate Quotes.
clikpath.net

Ads by Yahoo!

© Copyright 2009, The News & Observer Publishing Company
A subsidiary of The McClatchy Company

[Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Parental Consent](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [N&O Store](#) | [Advertising](#)


Hosted Solutions
Hosting Partners of
newsobserver.com

Top Jobs

[View All >](#)

Controller

Confidential Advertiser

Business Broker - Restaurant

Kimball and Company

CLINICAL ACCESS COORDINATOR

Hospice of Wake County

Quick Job Search

[Advanced Search >](#)

Keyword(s):



Featured Homes

[View All >](#)

Hot Deals

[View All >](#)



2008 Nissan Altima

\$16,250

Hiester Preowned Clearance Center



2007 Ford Five Hundred

\$13,980

Auto Park Chrysler/Jeep



2005 Infiniti FX35

\$22,980

Auto Park Chrysler/Jeep

Powered by 