

Found!

Courtesy of Ancestry DNA and electronic breadcrumbs, my immediate family tree suddenly has a new leaf: Herman Walter Robertson, III, 55 years old. He is my older sister Sandra's long-lost, first-born son. When Sandra was a 20-year-old student at Howard University, in Washington, DC, her unplanned pregnancy produced a baby boy who she placed for adoption. Sandra returned to our mother's home in South Carolina for a brief period, then set off for a new life in Brooklyn, NY. Our family never again spoke of that little boy; but, I always thought about him, as I'm sure my sister also did.

I married late, and never had children, so I was grateful that each of my older siblings produced several children for me to love. My first niece, Lisa, was born when I was 15 - the same year that Herman was born. I loved Lisa as if she were mine, and she loved me back. Her sudden death at age 40 led me as close to the brink of depression as I've ever been; but slowly, I healed.

As my nieces and nephews grew older, and went off to college, our contact became sporadic. Then, my sister Sandra died after years of suffering with Crohn's disease. I joined FaceBook in order to maintain ties with her three children, and their children because I'd promised Sandra, when she was on her deathbed, that I would look-out for her kids.

On FaceBook, I was repeatedly drawn to heart wrenching stories about adoptees and their search for their birth families. I often wondered if Sandra's son also was looking for his birth family. I sometimes searched for him on the internet, but had few facts, other than his birth year, city, and the home where Sandra stayed before she gave birth to him. So, I finally gave up searching.

Then, my husband had his Ancestry DNA done, and encouraged me to get mine done too. I ordered the kit, spit in the tube, and mailed it off - expecting to wait six to eight weeks for the promised results. Three weeks later, on Thanksgiving morning, I received a notice that my Ancestry DNA analysis was complete and waiting for me on the Ancestry web site. I was so excited! Had my results arrived so quickly because their discoveries were momentous? Unfortunately, nothing in the geographical analysis surprised me: 79% Africa and 21% European. As I usually do when new and interesting things happen in my life, I wrote a brief essay about my search for my history, and what it revealed. I published it to my website and thought that was the end of my DNA story; but it wasn't.

Several days later, I began getting emails from Ancestry notifying me of people who shared my DNA. Nobody had told me that the Ancestry DNA analysis also links you to living people who share your DNA. One by one, I perused the cryptic list of names of people who shared my DNA. None sounded familiar. And then, I discovered just how prescient my gut feeling about the momentous nature of my test results had been. One name, Herman Robertson, was followed by this notation:

Predicted relationship: close family
Possible Range: close family – 1st cousin
Confidence: extremely high

I'm intrigued, since I think I know all of my first cousins, and none of them are named Robertson. I click on Herman Robertson's name and am taken to his page on Ancestry.com. His descriptive information reads:

Gender: male
Age group: 50 – 59
Education: Bachelor's degree
Employment: full time
Occupation: sales

I click on the only message Herman Robertson has posted: Adoptee. Searching for birth mother, Born February 16, 1961 in Washington, DC, college graduate.

It has to be Sandra's son! I'm discouraged about making an immediate connection when I notice that Herman last logged onto his Ancestry page in 2014. What if he's no longer active on the Ancestry site, and doesn't get my message? Trying to stay hopeful, I click on the contact box, write the following note, and hit send.

Dec. 1, 2016

Dear Herman,

Are you an adoptee? Were you born at Washington Hospital Center? Did the Florence Crittendon Home have anything to do with your birth records? If so, you are my older sister Sandra's child who she placed for adoption while she was a student at Howard University. Please email me. I have been looking for you. One of the reasons I did my DNA test, was that I hoped you were also looking for your blood line. Sarah Bracey White.

Now that I have a name, I turn to FaceBook where I discover three Herman Robertsons. Two have no profile photos or any site information, but one features a profile photo of a young man, in full emergency medical technician rescue gear, standing in front of a fire house. It's a private page with no background information or contact. If you know Herman, message him, reads the caption under his profile photo. There are two pictures on his page (both posted on Father's day 2014). They feature a middle-aged man in a suit, tie, hat and overcoat standing behind a little boy and a younger girl who are dressed as if for church. (The boy resembles photos of Sandra's younger son Hassan.) Several of Herman's friends have commented under the picture, expressing their admiration for Herman's father. One even says he was privileged to know Herman's father. I click on a few of his friends' profiles, and search for ways to reach them, and ask for their help in contacting Herman.

I make a friend request on Herman's page and repeat my message from Ancestry in a private Facebook message – hoping that this is the right Herman Robertson. When a day and a half pass without any response, I go online to the White Pages.com and put Herman Robertson's name in their search box, with Washington DC as his location. I get a listing for a Herman W. Robertson, age 55 who lives in Elkridge, MD. No phone number is listed. I decide to write a letter, and send it to the address. That evening, before writing the letter, I log on-line and go to my email page. I'm elated! Ancestry has forwarded a message from Herman. The message reads: So many questions. I am the person you are looking for. Please call me.

I call the number Herman has included. He answers. In a conversation that's as comfortable as talking to someone I've known for years, Herman and I exchange questions and answers for more than an hour. Since getting my email and answering it, Herman Googled my name, and searched my various websites. I'm saddened when he tells me that he's already discovered that his mother is dead. I'd wanted to be

the one to gently break the news of her death, 13 years ago. He expresses regret that he cannot thank Sandra for giving him life. "I'm one of the luckiest people in the world," he says several times. "I've had a wonderful life!" I learn that he grew up in Washington DC, graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park (the same college where I earned a graduate degree), that he's a sales manager for FedEx, that he's a long-time volunteer EMT in Howard County where he lives. That his wife is from the Bronx.

He enthusiastically tells me about his beloved sister, who also was adopted, and his adoptive parents who had migrated to Washington, DC from Mississippi. "They were wonderful," he says. "They offered to help me find my birth mother, if I wanted to, but I felt it would be disrespectful to them. I didn't start searching for my birth mother until after both my parents had died."

I tell him that he has two sisters and a brother, and I will call them to tell them about this discovery. "I don't want to disrupt anyone's life," he reiterates to me. "I'm sure your brother and sisters will be happy to know you," I tell him. Herman also reads to me from the social worker's report that his father shared with him before he died. It describes Herman's mother – my sister as: very attractive, college student, musically inclined, from educated family.

Once Herman accepts my friend request, his FaceBook page unfolds more of the story of his life: I see a picture of him, his father and his sister when he was presented the EMT Volunteer of the Year award; I see photos of his wife – he's in an interracial marriage, just as I am; I see from comments by his many friends that he is well-loved, and respected, both in his job, and his volunteer avocation.

When I call my older sisters to tell them that I've found Sandra's adopted child, they are incredulous! Connie, the oldest, corrects me when I say he was adopted from the Florence Crittenden Home. "Oh no," she says. "Sandra was in the Ionia Wiggins Home for Unwed Mothers in northeast DC. It was a black home." So that's why my search of the Florence Crittendon Home's adoption files never unearthed any information! When I call each of Sandra's three other children, and tell them about their brother, their reactions vary from surprise to shock; but they're all receptive to meeting the older brother they never knew they had. I now have all four of Sandra's children to look after.

Herman and I have spoken several times. I'm still surprised by the ease of our conversations, and the joy I get from answering his questions, and talking about Sandra's early life. I've searched through family photos so that I can scan and send to him ones that will help him gather memories of the beautiful young woman who gave him life.

Like me, Herman has no children of his own. On our family tree, both our branches end with us. That's why this connection is so important for Herman. Hopefully, he'll reach into the branches of our grand, family-tree, and get acquainted with the other members of this family who share his blood and remember his mother. I'm truly thankful to have found the man Sandra's baby has become.