

'Bob and I had different fathers.'

(Editor's Note: A familiar face in Yountville since making this community his home in 1993, Chris Burditt, the semi-retired Napa Valley College Mathematics professor, cyclist, tennis and Scrabble player has counted genealogy among his many interests for years, but about around the turn of the millennium, as web resources became more plentiful, he found himself getting into a much deeper exploration of his roots. Burditt was clearly hooked, but what he hooked into this summer was far more absorbing and revealing than he had anticipated. During the last two months he has worked non-stop, piecing together the remarkable story which he has penned below.)

By Chris Burditt

When my DNA results came back this spring I was surprised by the strong connection to Ireland. I knew about an Irish connection through my grandmother, Maggie McCristal. In fact, I obtained Irish citizenship because of her. But the result from FamilyTreeDNA was based on the Y-chromosome, which is inherited only through the male line. The Burditt line, as documented by the genealogy website OurNothernRoots, didn't show any Irish connection. Then the young webmaster for OurNothernRoots informed me that his DNA didn't match mine. So one of us wasn't a Burditt. My brother Bob's DNA resolved the confusion: his DNA matched the webmaster. Bob and I had different fathers!

While still legally married in 1944, my mother, Margaret, hadn't lived with her husband for at least a year. When she was three months pregnant, Margaret moved from Michigan to New York with her eldest son Byron.

Bob's father, William Burditt, must have known he wasn't my father, but he never admitted it, even when we met 30 years later. He died in 1983.

So my mother left us this puzzle to solve 13 years after he death. Fortunately, I got a very lucky break: The name of McGee was among the participants whose DNA matched mine. This awakened a memory in Bob of a 1944 fishing trip, when he was 13 years of age. A man named McGee took him fishing to Prudenville, Mich., where he met the man's children

and ex-wife. Bob recalled the man's build, hairstyle and work status. Oh, and he was also dating our mother!

I used internet resources, including Ancestry and U.S. Census records. Brother Bob and my nephew Byron were very helpful with research in old city directories for Saginaw and Midland, Mich.

I even found a book on-line which listed all employees of a Saginaw machine gun factory, where my mother worked from



Chris Burditt, right, with, from left, Ted McKee, Bob Price and Harold McKee, Jr., in Prudenville, Mich., earlier this summer.

1942 to 1944. After a month, these efforts yielded a draftsman who loved to golf, but never fished, according to his 85-year-old son.

But all that effort wasn't wasted. It formed the basis for the next search. This time I focused on a similar name among my DNA match participants: McKee.

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Different Fathers . . .

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In the Social Security Death Index I found Irene McKee, who died in Prudenville, Mich. Telephone records indicated McKees still lived in the area.

I used the 1920 and 1930 U.S. Census to find her husband's name. It was Harold M. McKee. His 1917 WWI draft card showed his profession was pipefitter.

The 1917 Detroit city directory shows his profession as plumber. The McKees had six children, the last one being

born in 1936.

In the 1943 Midland City directory, Bob found Harold living in a boarding house. He was living alone. The boarding house was one block away from my mother's apartment!

And, as if that weren't close enough, Bob recalled his family of five lived in that same boarding house for two weeks in 1942! This must have been where Margaret and Harold met – passing the butter.

But still, like most genealogical work, the connection was based on circumstantial evidence. There were no letters, no eyewitnesses, and my parents didn't marry.

In fact, Harold probably never knew he had a seventh child.

At this point I decided the most delicate way to contact the living McKees in Prudenville would be through their county genealogical society. By chance, Harold's son-in-law was one of its officers and an avid genealogist.

I traveled to Michigan in June and met Harold's surviving sons Ted and Harold, Jr. The McKees shared their heirloom family photos, and Harold, Jr., agreed to submit his DNA sample to FamilyTreeDNA as I had done. After five weeks, Harold's DNA results came back: We're brothers!

So now I have a biological father, born February 9, 1896. By a fitting coincidence, that's also my birthday, only 49 years earlier.

(Postscript: Tuesday afternoon Burditt had lunch in Middletown with a niece he had never met from the McKee side of his family. The family owns a restaurant in that community, and Burditt helped his niece's son with Geometry problem. And since discovering his new biological roots and learning of a family history of abdominal aortic aneurysms Burditt underwent an ultrasound test and learned he does not have the condition that claimed the lives of four of his siblings on the McKee side.)



Harold McKee during WWI.



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