

## **Episode 81: Monica discovered the family secret**

Have you ever tried one of those DNA testing kits? This is where you send in some saliva in their sealed tube, and they analyze it and tell you from your DNA where your ancestors came from. And they'll also give you some names of people who share some of your DNA, and those people are your relatives. And many of them are people you've probably never met.

I recently did this with one of the DNA kit companies called 23andme. I got the results back, and they gave me a list of 1500 people who were all "somewhere" in my family tree. And I've even gotten in touch with some of them.

Check this out. When I was a kid, we lived in Ohio but we had a lot of family in Virginia because that's where my dad was from. I had a great uncle who lived in Virginia, and he was in the market for a dog. Well, it turns out our dog had just had a litter of puppies and we had a dog available. This puppy was a mixed breed but probably mostly black lab, and he was all black except for a little bit of white right on the tip of his tail. So we named him Tippy. I'm a real animal lover and I loved Tippy. This was when I was probably about 9 or 10 years old.

We drove to Virginia and brought him with us, because he was of course going to live with my uncle. I remember the day we were leaving, and the last time I saw Tippy. I was really sad.

Okay, now fast forward to a few weeks ago, when I got the results back from the DNA test. I got in touch with a young lady who was actually the granddaughter of my uncle in Virginia. I mentioned to her the story about Tippy (mainly because it's one of the stories that stands out from my childhood). Later that day, she emailed me a picture of my uncle – and there was Tippy, in that picture. She said she remembered my uncle, her grandfather, having that dog and what great companions they were. So I thought that was pretty cool.

But that's nothing compared to the story you're about to hear from today's guest, Monica. She's 40 years old, lives in the Midwest, and she has gone through her whole life, in a lot of ways, just like lots of other people. She grew up in a typical family environment, with her mom and her dad, so of course she knew who her family was. They celebrated Father's Day every year, just like many people will this coming Sunday.

But then she discovered that what she *thought* was true for 40 years, wasn't actually the truth at all.

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### **Scott**

When you were growing up did your parents ever talk about family or genealogy or anything?

### **Monica**

Only from the standpoint that I knew my dad's parents were Armenian and Italian, one of each; and that my mom is Southern from Alabama. Of course they always swore that they were Native American of some flavor and just a mix of different things. We never really nailed down what exactly, just kind of like a Heinz 57, so I knew I had quite a few little things in me. I knew my dad was Armenian and Italian and I knew my mom was Southern and probably Indian. That's about it.

### **Scott**

Really you had no reason to question any of that.

**Monica**

No, no my parents were married for a long time and I was always at family functions and people would say that I resembled my dad's mother, my grandmother. Or that I looked just like my aunt Amy, or resembled my mother, those kinds of things. I would never imagine to question it.

**Scott**

I understand sometimes people would think that you were Irish?

**Monica**

(laughs) Yes, so even though I kind of resembled my grandmother and kind of resembled my aunt I was definitely the odd ball. I have the fairest skin imaginable. I'm covered with freckles. I have big bright green eyes and reddish brown hair that's super curly. No one in my immediate family is like that at all. My mother had darker skin, jet black hair, dark brown eyes. My dad had very light blonde hair, almost like a sandy dishwater blonde, and big blue eyes. Even my brother and I didn't look alike. My brother is dark complected with dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. He's really tall and slender and I could barely reach the counter tops. I still can't reach the counter tops to be honest with you (laughs).

**Scott**

So you figured somewhere back in the family line there was somebody who was fair skinned?

**Monica**

Yeah absolutely. There had to be somebody who kind of resembled me.

**Scott**

So you grew up with your mom and dad. Before we get into the story of what really happened and what we're going to talk about, what happened when you were 22 years old?

**Monica**

My mother for a long long time owned a restaurant. She had gotten tired of it and wanted to be out of the restaurant industry, but she was a workaholic, she loved to work. She just wanted to get a job where she would go to work, work and then come home. She found this little factory job over across the border in Illinois. She worked for a company that made fire safety equipment and that really intrigued her and she enjoyed that. It was a late night shift so she would get home pretty late, probably around 1ish in the morning. December 19, 2003 right before Christmas she was heading home from work. She knew it was before Christmas so she wanted to stop and cash her payroll check so she could get up bright and early and finish her last bit of Christmas shopping. She stopped at a check cashing spot right near her house, cashed her check and put her money away and started heading home.

Unbeknownst to her, there was a car sitting there watching. They saw my mom and she wasn't a very big lady, maybe 5'1 or 5'2 and 100 pounds, 120 pounds soaking wet. They followed her all the way home to her driveway where they got out of their car and approached her and demanded her purse. What they didn't realize is that my mother is Southern, and there you don't take anything that doesn't belong to you. My mother, even though she was only 5'1, she was incredibly feisty and she wasn't going to have any of it. She fought back and these 2 men that attacked her were big boys, they were very big. They subdued her, she struggled and got a

little loud, so they took it upon themselves to take her life. They shot her. She died in her driveway, right before Christmas that year.

That was the absolute hardest day of my life. Waking up to the sheriff's department knocking on my door, telling me they had something really important to tell me and that I needed to sit down. I'm in the medical profession, I read the autopsy report, so I know that medically she had a quick death. She was shot in the neck and it severed her carotid artery and punctured her spinal cord, so her death was pretty swift. It just still hurts to think that she was still there by herself in the snow until somebody got there. I hate thinking about it but sometimes I can't help thinking about it.

**Scott**

It just strikes me as just being so senseless.

**Monica**

It really was. So senseless, to the point where these 2 men were caught several months later and it was a mess. There wasn't a whole lot of evidence to go on in my mother's case. Unfortunately, but also semi-fortunately, they committed another crime afterwards where they robbed a gas station and took the gas station attendant's life as well. Because of that they were able to link both of the cases together and compile a lot more evidence for my mother's case and a stronger case for the gas station murder as well. They are both serving 2 consecutive sentences back to back, which is nice. I guess that's as good as justice as our family's are going to get. They are serving their time.

They stole my mom's purse, and what they failed to realize was that she never kept money in her purse. When my brother and I were little we would ask her for lunch money for school and say, "Hey ma, could we have like 5 dollars or 10 dollars for lunch this week." She would be like, "Oh yeah, it's in my purse." Of course we didn't ever just take 5 or 10 dollars, we would take the 20 that was there instead and buy junk all week long and live on the high horse eating pop tarts at school. So she stopped putting money in her purse forever, she never put money in her purse. So after she cashed her check she stuck 500 dollars in her pants pocket. So the criminals got a really crummy Walmart purse and no money. There was nothing in her purse besides a hair brush and some old gum, there was no money. They went to jail for most of their lives for stealing a 10 dollar purse. To me that feels more like justice than anything else. Jokes on you goofballs.

**Scott**

Have you ever contacted either one of them?

**Monica**

I've wanted to a lot, but I didn't think that it would serve any good purpose for me and for my soul. My daughter did, my daughter is 22 and she was 4 at the time of my mother's death. They were very close, like 2 peas in a pod. My mother and her, there was nobody closer to her. She was the best grandmother in the whole world. My daughter just recently reached out to both of them, against my will I might add. She was immediately blocked by the accomplice, he didn't even give her the time of day.

**Scott**

They were contacting by email, right?

**Monica**

Yeah thru email. There's like a prison email or something that they can do that's like Facebook but not quite.

**Scott**

Right, right.

**Monica**

Yeah it's interesting. So she used that and that's how she knew that the accomplice had blocked her because she wasn't able to send anymore messages. The shooter, he did answer her. I cringed when she told me because I couldn't imagine that he would say anything worthwhile. To my surprise he was incredibly thoughtful with his words. Very apologetic but understanding of the fact that to us his apology would mean nothing, because of the life that he took. He was very kind in his words and very apologetic. He's been in prison now for 17 years, that's a really long time. He was just a kid himself when he went in, he was only 18 or 19. So he's been in prison for almost as long as he walked the earth prior.

**Scott**

And he's still got a long time to go.

**Monica**

He does. For just my mother's sentence he has 60 years to serve. Then he'll serve another 60 for the gas station attendant as well, so he'll be in for a very long time.

**Scott**

Unbelievable. Well, the reason I wanted to get that story out there is because it's going to become relevant later on in what you're talking about.

**Monica**

Yes.

**Scott**

So this whole thing- this is one of the funny things about this story- is that it was triggered by such a random gift to you.

**Monica**

Yes, yes.

**Scott**

How did this start?

**Monica**

So my boyfriend, he is Mexican-American Indian. He was showing me on his ancestry app that he has, all about where the indigenous people from his heritage came from, and the years from which they migrated and how they moved from the Yucatan area up through Mexico and dispersed through the United States. I was just so fascinated by it, I thought, "This is so amazing that they can do this! It's crazy and so cool!" He said, "Well your family is from Italy and Armenia. That had to have migrated at some time." I said, "Well yes of course." He said, "Well if you did this it would show your family's migration and where they came from before that and where they settled." I thought, "Wow, that's really neat." His sweet self, he asked, "Well do you

want one?" I said, "Yeah of course!" So right then and there he went in there and purchased a DNA kit for me. A couple days later it was at my doorstep. It was so sweet and thoughtful and I was so excited to see where exactly my family lived. I knew what they were, but where they were. Also more importantly too, I wanted to prove my mother wrong from beyond the grave. I wanted to show her that there's no way that we're Native American. So that was my 'haha' to her because that definitely came back as a big no (laughs).

**Scott**

The kit that you got this time- I know there's a few different companies that make these kits- and this one was called AncestryDNA.

**Monica**

Yes. AncestryDNA was the first one that I did.

**Scott**

What's involved with having this research done? What do you have to send them?

**Monica**

They send you a kit with very clear instructions. You don't eat or drink or brush your teeth prior to performing the test. There's a little vial that you have to fill with saliva. In retrospect it's not a lot of saliva, I think it's only a quarter of a teaspoon, but when you're sitting there trying to fill that thing up you're like, "Gosh dang, how much more spit does this thing need?" It feels like you're sitting there spitting forever. Your mouth is so dry because you just want a drink of water and you're filling this thing up for all of eternity. It was pretty simple though. Once it is filled to the line you close up the lid and it mixes a stabilizing solution with it. You shake that up and put it back in the little bag and send it right back off to the lab. Within a few days you get it.

The app is really cool, it's really user friendly. They'll show you the progress of everything along the way. They let you know when they get the kit and when it starts processing in their lab. Then when they are geno-typing it and reviewing your DNA and then when your results are ready. I wanna say it was around 3 weeks or so from start to finish. I swear to you it felt like the longest 3 weeks of my life when I was waiting for all of this. It felt like forever.

**Scott**

For some people that are doing it for a specific reason, because they want to find out something about their family, I love the idea that they have this app keeping you updated on the progress. Otherwise they'd be getting phone calls everyday saying, "Is it done yet? Is it ready yet?"

**Monica**

Yeah, right! "Where's my stuff? Have you looked at it? Is it just sitting there?"

**Scott**

Yeah

**Monica**

One thing I forgot to mention to you in our previous talks was that I had the opportunity to do this test just 2 years prior to me doing it for real. My oldest daughter bought me a DNA kit, she wanted to find out a little more about her DNA and heritage. She knew what I was so that wasn't a mystery, but her dad was a little unsure of his genealogy, so she wanted some clarification.

One Mother's Day she went ahead and bought us both kits, and we opened them and it was so exciting. We filled them up together and cleared them up and sent them off. Her results came back relatively quickly and mine were still pending. My daughter said, "Mom, let's just give it a couple days. Just because we mailed it off together doesn't mean they got processed together." So we gave it about an extra week and there was still nothing. Mine said it was still sitting in the laboratory. So she ended up reaching out to the customer service for AncestryDNA. They said, "Oh gosh. So about that test, it got lost in the lab." We were like, "It got lost in the lab?! How in the world did that happen?" They said, "Well we can send you another one or we can refund your money." A couple of years ago she was much younger so I said, "Just take your money back. It's totally fine, just take your money, it's not a big deal."

So that was the end of it and even when her results came back in I was like, "Hmph. That's interesting. It shows that you're Eastern European but it doesn't specifically say Armenia or Italy, which I thought it would." AncestryDNA is really really big and they test DNA specifically through different areas and countries. There are hundreds of thousands that will pop up. I just thought, "Meh, it probably makes sense. There probably isn't a whole lot in my daughter since there's maybe only half in me so there's less than a quarter in her. Maybe that's why it is just broadly grouped as Eastern European, that's probably why." I didn't think anything else of it, nothing. I moved on and moved forward. So when my results came back that's when it really got interesting.

**Scott**

What did that first test of yours show?

**Monica**

Much to my surprise it showed that I was Northwestern European, which makes sense. That's like the British area or English. Then it showed I was Eastern European/Russian. I thought Russia didn't make any sense so it must just mean Eastern European. Then it showed that I was very heavily Irish and Swiss. So I thought, "Ok, so where is the Italian and Armenian?" So I started looking it up and making sure that they are actually testing for these regions and sure enough they had those specific regions. Especially for Italy, they test between Northern and Southern Italy. I wasn't on either of those spectrums.

Then I started thinking, "Alright, well maybe my dad isn't really 50/50." It's happened before where people have thought they were German and it turns out they were actually Austrian. So I thought maybe it was that his family lived in Italy but maybe they weren't Italian, maybe they migrated there. I just found that all odd. I am very close to my father's sister, my aunt Amy. She was a huge part of my life and still is. She really helped raise me. My parents both worked all the time so I spent a lot of time with my aunt Amy. So I called her because I knew she had taken one of these DNA tests but I couldn't remember which one. She said that she hadn't taken the AncestryDNA, she had taken another one. We got to talking about it and she said, "Well that's kind of odd that it didn't show Italy or Armenia. It should very much be there. I am for sure Italian and Armenian. I did 23andme and mine broke it down very specifically, I'm almost 50/50 of each. There is very little of anything else. Maybe you should take that one and it will be more definitive and because we are both related it will link our DNA together so it will show what we have in common and where it overlaps." Which made sense because that's my dad's sister, my blood aunt.

**Scott**

Right with a known family member yeah that would-

**Monica**

Yeah! So I thought, "Yeah ok, well my dad probably wouldn't want to do a DNA test, that's not really his thing." If I asked him to do it he would probably say, "Ehh I don't want to do that. Nah that's ok I'll pass." But my aunt had already done one so that was perfect. So I had to go buy a 23andme kit because I really wanted to know what was going on. The other thing that was very weird was that on AncestryDNA it will show all your DNA relatives, or all the people that have taken this particular test on either side of your family. I recognized a lot of the people on my mom's side of the family, my mom has a lot of ancestors there. Some of the names really stuck out. Then I kind of, by logical deduction I guess, excluded certain names because of the Eastern European. I assumed that would be my father's side so I started looking at those names and none of them looked familiar at all, none of them. Even with my mother's side of the family there wasn't anybody closer related to me than a 3rd cousin. So it was very difficult to reach out to these people and be like, "Hey, who's your grandma and grandpa?" Not too many people know their 3rd cousins.

So I thought AncestryDNA was just a wash. It gave me the information I needed but now I was committed so I went ahead and bought the 23andme so I could get some clear answers. It also seemed very user friendly. So I ordered my kit and a few days later it came in the mail.

**Scott**

It's the same thing, you fill up the vial with saliva.

**Monica**

Same thing. You seal that back up and mail it off. The app was very user friendly and really great to see the tracking system on there. Every step of the way you see what is going on with your DNA and what progress it's making and what step it's at and their review. So I thought the first one took forever, the second one I was checking everyday like a psycho. I thought, "It's gotta be done. It says it won't be for 3 more weeks but I'm going to still check it anyway because maybe they finished it early." I felt like it was never going to be done. I was so excited and nervous to see what the results were. I got the results while I was at work. I was just about finished up and I got a little ding on my email that said, "23andme results are ready!"

I couldn't wait to get home so I could open that up and check it out. I rushed straight home and opened it up and it was so weird because it was almost the exact same as AncestryDNA as far as the percentages. Still not Italian and still not Armenian and definitely Russian. More specifically it was Czechoslovakia.

Then the sinking stomach feeling when I saw my aunt's email information, which I had added to it prior to the results coming in. When I clicked on her name it said something to the effect of "It's always nice to share your family history with friends to show where overlapping families could be from. Our results have determined that you and Amy are not related within the last 4 generations." I was just beside myself. Truly that moment my world went crashing down. I kept thinking, "What do you mean we're not related. That's my aunt. Surely we're related, what is going on?"

**Scott**

You almost have to assume that the test made a mistake.

**Monica**

That's what I thought, that this couldn't be correct. How in the world could two separate DNA tests produce almost identical results. I remember the phone call I made to my aunt and she said, "Honey I know I already saw. What does this mean?" I was going through every possible scenario. Thinking, "Maybe my aunt and my dad have the same mother but maybe their father is different." Well no that wouldn't make sense genetically because that would still mean that she would be my half aunt, so that's not possible. Then I thought, "Maybe my dad was adopted?" Nope that's not possible either, my dad is the oldest of 6 siblings and they are carbon copies of each other. All 6 kids look alike and you can tell they are related, there's no guess. So nope that was for sure my aunt's brother. That's for sure not my father.

**Scott**

Did you ask him about it directly?

**Monica**

I didn't know how. I felt sad for him because I'm getting ready to turn 40 years old. For almost 40 years of my life this man has raised me as his own. I was a daddy's girl. He took me everywhere, we went everywhere together. My dad had a motorcycle and I was always on the back of that thing. There was a big layoff at the mills up here back in the early 80s and I remember being at the picket line with my dad because I wanted to hang out with him. So I was sitting at the picket line saying, "USS sucks" with my little sign, eating hot dogs. Just because I wanted to be with my dad. So to break that news to him I didn't even know how to. Did he know, did he not know?

I thought, "Ok, I've got to put my super sleuth hat on and do some major investigation before I present him with this information." There was just no way I could bomb him with this and ask, "Hey, who's my real dad?"

**Scott**

Obviously, as we mentioned earlier, you can't go to your mom for any answers.

**Monica**

No! I'm sure that woman was just rolling over in her grave having a good old laugh about this. She has to. I can't ask her. I can't go to her and be like, "Mom! What were you doing in 1980? Who's my biological father?" She couldn't tell me.

**Scott**

So what do you do? How do you figure this out?

**Monica**

Oh my gosh, Scott. If I ever decide to leave my job I think I'll send in an application to the CIA because I dug up so much information with basically nothing. The AncestryDNA didn't prove anything that was of any kind of relevance. There was nobody closely related that I could reach out to for information. I found on 23andme that I had a first cousin twice removed, which I found out is a 2nd cousin. That was the only close connection on my father's side that I had, so I reached out.

On the app there's this really cool messaging portion of it where you can talk to family members. So I sent her a message. Her name is Amber Hansen. She didn't have anything in her profile, like age or location. It just said, "Amber Hansen, Female" When I messaged her I didn't get

anything back. I thought it might take a while that she may not see it right away. Several weeks went by before I tried to contact her again because I was just getting desperate.

In the meantime I was doing all this research to try and piece things together. My mother was actually a really private person. She had a lot of friends, she knew a lot of people, she was well liked by everybody; my mom didn't ruffle anyone's feathers. I started contacting anybody that I knew from back then. Old employees that I still knew how to get a hold of because of the marvels of Facebook. I got a hold of my mom's cousin, her cousin's friend, her old boss. I just started calling people and saying, "Hey it's Monica, do you remember me?" Everyone was like, "Yeah of course I remember you!" I would say, "Ok, I've got to ask you, how well did you know my mom back in 1979-1980? Do you know anybody that she might have been dating around that time?" The answer was always, "No, your mom kept that kind of private. She didn't talk about who she was seeing or anything like that."

My mom's best friend, who I also call 'aunt' since I grew up close to her. I called her one night and she answered the phone and I said, "Who in the hell is my father?" She was like, "Come again? Um well I thought it was your dad Tom." I was like, "Nope, it is not. So who was mom seeing back then?" She said, "Honey I don't know who she was seeing back then. I had a baby too and even though we were still talking and great friends we were living separate lives a little bit. I was taking care of my baby and she was getting married and having a baby herself. We just didn't see a whole lot of each other."

Again I felt lost. I had no idea where I was going to go with this and where this was going to turn or if I would ever find out. I kind of prepared myself for everything. I prepared myself for just never finding out, that maybe it just wasn't meant to be. I also prepared myself to find out who my father was but that he wouldn't want anything to do with me. If he knew about me then and didn't want me then, then he wouldn't want me now. Or the sad possibility that maybe my father had passed away. I didn't know but I didn't want to be crushed again. This was a big enough blow to find this out, but to be crushed again would be really hard to swallow. I had to make a decision if I really wanted to pursue this, or did I just want to live my life never knowing. I felt like I owed it to myself to find out.

There was never any question when I grew up that my mom was my mom and my dad was my dad. There were just little bitty things that always made me wonder. I didn't truly look like my dad and I didn't truly look like my mom, so who did I look like. Everybody always assumed I was Irish after taking one look at me. Little things like, I was such a little nerd. I loved to read, I would be in the library all the time and read 2 books at once and when I was done with those I would read 2 more. I just loved to draw and I loved to sing. I love all music there is and I'm always singing and humming and whistling. Neither one of my parents were really like that. I always thought that was kind of odd. I just wanted things to make sense.

So I jumped in with both feet and made it my mission to figure this out. My family and kids were slightly neglected for a couple of weeks. I would come home from work and just bury myself in research. Even my boyfriend looked at me and said, "Monica, you gotta stop. You've gotta slow down. Pump the brakes, you're getting a little crazy." It just fueled my fire even more. To my detriment, it was eating me alive. Every moment that I could I was trying to research things. I knew it wasn't healthy. I knew I needed to calm down and stop, but I just couldn't. There was this fire raging inside of me and it was consuming me.

I remember one day in January of this year, I had gone to church on Sunday morning. I said, "Listen up God. You've gotta take this from me. Just take it away from me, I don't need this anymore. I'm cool not knowing. You've got to take this from me so I can stop obsessing about it. Or you need to lead me by the hand to show me how to figure this out. One of these 2 options, there can't be any gray area. One of these 2 paths, put me on one, because I can't do this anymore." It was the very next day when I had a breakthrough.

I woke up more consumed than ever. I thought, "Gosh dangit. I could've sworn I asked for this to just go away." I was crying on the way to work, I was just so consumed with everything and so upset. I just knew that I would never find out, that there wasn't enough information. I just kept coming back to that name Amber Hansen. So I decided to look her up on Facebook, hoping that was the right name. I didn't know if that was her maiden name or her married name. I didn't know if she was 13 or 75. I looked her up on Facebook and holy smokes, there's a lot of Amber Hansen's on Facebook! (laughs) I had no idea where to start.

I decided to take a screenshot of my 23andme profile to show that she and I were connected. I randomly sent friend requests to people named Amber Hansen with a message showing them this profile saying, "Hey this is my 23andme profile and it shows that I'm related to Amber Hansen. Is this you?" Then wait for a response. I was going to go down the list and just start crossing them off. There were so many I was overwhelmed. I looked at the pictures and thought I would pick the one that looked nice, hoping I would be let down nicely (laughs). I came across one that looked so sweet and I friended her and sent her the message and she messaged right back. Much to my surprise, her answer was, "I don't know! I have 23andme, let me check." So she got right back to me and she said, "Yeah that is! That's me! We're related!" I thought, "Holy cow! The first Amber Hansen I messaged on Facebook out of hundreds is the one that I'm related to, because I thought her picture was pretty and she looked nice (laughs)."

### **Scott**

Who says you can't choose your family, right?

### **Monica**

Right?! There was something about her that my DNA knew, "I think I'm related to this person, I'm going to message her." It went so fast from there. My heart was racing. I felt sweaty. I was so excited I was jumping out of my skin. I thought, "This is her, the person I've been trying to message." I even said something to her like, "Hey, I did message you on the app." She said, "Oh my gosh I'm so sorry. I didn't see it, it goes to a different email. I don't ever check it. I got it just to see what my heritage was and once I got it I never looked at it again. So sorry!" I said, "Ok, I have a huge favor to ask of you. I need help finding out who my biological father is and you're my only connection. If you would spare a few minutes to try to help me I would greatly appreciate it."

Amber and I, the little super sleuths that we apparently are, narrowed it down so quickly. Hansen was her married name, not her maiden name, so we figured that out. I got my aunt Debbie, my mom's best friend, on the phone. I said, "Hey stay by your phone, I'm going to shoot you some questions to try to help narrow this down." She said, "Ok." I asked if Amber's maiden name sounded familiar. She said, "No that doesn't." Then I asked if Amber's grandmother's maiden name, McClain, sounded familiar. She said, "Yes it does. There was a Tom and Dave McClain that lived right down the street from your mother and I." I told Amber, "Yep, McClain is a go as a possibility."

Amber said, "Those are my great uncles, my dad lives right down the street from my great uncle Tom. Let me call him really quickly and see if he can go ask my uncle Tom if he knows your mom." So I gave her some specifics, like my mother's full name Brenda Barksdale, it was in summer or fall of 1980. She told her dad and he marched right down the street and asked Tom, "I have a weird question to ask you, do you remember a woman named Brenda Barksdale?" Right away he was like, "Yeah of course, why?" He said, "Well, it turns out you might have a daughter." I can only imagine his shell shock.

**Scott**

Yeah.

**Monica**

I picture those old cartoons where their jaw drops to the floor and they have to roll it back up. That's what I picture my dad having done. Just saying, "What do you mean? You mean after 40 years I have a daughter?" Right away Amber messaged back and said, "Hey my dad just called me and said that your dad definitely remembers your mom. I think it was a little bit more than fondly. Here's my dad's name and number, call him tomorrow." It was getting kind of late when this was all happening. So she said, "Give him a call tomorrow and he'll fill you in on some details and see where we go from there. Hey, welcome to the family." That started the big journey.

**Scott**

How did you even sleep that night?

**Monica**

(laughs) I don't remember sleeping actually. I was so wired, like somebody shot straight caffeine into my veins. My boyfriend was just laughing saying, "Hold on. Pump the brakes Monica. You don't know for sure if this man is going to be your father. She said she has other uncles, maybe it's one of them. Maybe this guy knew your mom but he might not be your dad. Just don't get your hopes up yet. Let's wait and see." I had ordered 2 extra DNA kits in the instance I found someone who was potentially my father. I wanted to have it confirmed. I wanted to be certain, not just guessing. My boyfriend said, "Wait, and send him the information and kit to have him tested. Then we can get excited, but honey let's not get excited just yet." Of course I didn't listen and I got excited.

**Scott**

He's the sensible one in this relationship, I can tell.

**Monica**

He is WAY more sensible than I am. I think with my heart and leap with both feet first and ask questions later. He's like, "Whoa, back up. Highly suspect. We need answers first. Let's get all these 7 million answers first and then we can decide if we want to pursue or not." I was like, "No, let's go. I can't wait to find out and hear about him."

**Scott**

Did you even know what his initial response was when he found this out?

**Monica**

Well, the next day I called Doug, Amber's father, and we talked for a couple hours. He said, "You know honey, he's in shock right now. I don't think there's really a question in his mind that

you're not his but he's just shocked. He doesn't have any other children. He didn't know about you or that you existed. He was just the type of guy that stayed childless, not because he didn't like kids, he just didn't think kids would be in his future. So he's a little shell shocked right now so we are going to give him a little time. But don't you worry, I'm gonna work on him and you'll talk to him soon I promise. It will be ok." I just kept reassuring Doug, "Hey it's ok if this is too much for him. I really just wanted to know. Once I know I'm ok. If he wants to just keep at that, that's totally fine, if he doesn't want a relationship with me that's ok too, but I need to know for myself." He said, "No. We're not having any of that. You're definitely in the family. Tom is definitely going to come along, he just needs a minute to process everything."

I had a good laugh about it too because the father that raised me, his name is Thomas, and my biological father's name is also Thomas. At least my mom did kind of keep some names straight (laughs).

**Scott**

(laughs) It might have been a little confusing for her at the time I would imagine.

**Monica**

Right. I thought that it was pretty hilarious that both of their names were Tom. I thought, "Oh gosh, how am I going to keep this straight?" So I talked to Doug on a Tuesday, and on Wednesday I woke up to a message from him and he said, "You were the first thing on my mind this morning. I'm so excited for my uncle. This is such a wonderful thing. Don't worry he's warming up to the idea. He really wants to talk to you and said he would like to call you this Sunday." I thought that would be great, I said, "Yeah Sunday works! Whatever time works for him and his schedule. I want him to be comfortable." He said, "Yeah I'll let him know and we will talk to you Sunday."

This was earlier in the day around 8 or 9 in the morning. Around 5 o'clock, I was just about finished with work and I got a text from Doug that said, "Hey what are you doing?" I said, "I'm just about finished at work. What's up?" He said, "Well, somebody is here right now and he wants to talk to you now." I said, "Oh my god I gotta go home and clean up from work. Please don't let him leave!" He said, "Don't worry he's not going anywhere, we'll be waiting for your call." I said, "Alright, I'll call you as soon as I get out." I don't think I've ever cleaned up faster at work in my whole life, I got out of there so fast.

I sat in my car, took a deep breath and dialed that phone number. I heard his voice on the other end for the first time in my life. It was amazing. It was like something out of a movie, but I've heard his voice before. I felt like I'd heard him before and that I knew him. As soon as he said, "Hello" it was soothing and comforting and almost unbelievable. It really did, it felt familiar. We spent the next 2.5 hours on the phone. It was one of the happiest days of my life, hands down.

**Scott**

Did you have a list of things you wanted to talk about?

**Monica**

I did!

**Scott**

Where do you even start, you know?

**Monica**

I did! I had this mental list prepared. I was going to ask him where he grew up and about his folks. All that went out the window and we just started talking about anything that popped into our heads. Our likes and our dislikes. Like both of us love hot sauce and hot things (laughs) my dad said, "Oh I love hot sauce. Just like the commercial says, I put that shit on everything." (laughs) I just thought that was the best and so hilarious. There is always hot sauce in our refrigerator. There are probably more hot sauce condiments than anything else at any given time.

**Scott**

Had you already seen a picture of him? Did you know if there was a resemblance or anything?

**Monica**

The only picture I had seen of him was a cell phone picture that Doug had taken. My poor dad was just sitting in a lawn chair just hunched over with his quarantine hair grown out and his little quarantine beard. After Doug sent the picture my dad was like, "Ugh why did you send that picture that's horrible!" It was also far away and taken on a crummy little cell phone. So that was the only picture I had seen of him. Right away though my boyfriend, Robert, said, "Oh my gosh you guys have the exact same eyes. They are the exact same. They're so bright and vibrant. You absolutely favor him." I said, "Ooh you think so?" Then the next picture I got he sent me a picture of his senior yearbook photo, and that was really cool. He was about 17 and had his 1970s curly wavy coif and the beautiful butterfly collar, and it looked exactly like my son who is 17. The resemblance was ridiculously uncanny, down to the little birthmark on their cheek.

**Scott**

You're going to send me those pictures and we're going to put them on the website.

**Monica**

I am, because you are just going to be blown away. Another picture I had gotten, not of my father but of my father's parents, Florence and Raymond, they have both passed on. Seeing the pictures of my grandparents was really neat, but also wild because seeing my grandmother Florence, her and I look like carbon copies. I 100% believe that will be me in another 30 years. Down to the facial features and the eye shape and the lips, everything was the same. It's so wild. So I absolutely favor my dad's side. All these years I have been feeling like I don't look like my dad or my mom, it's because I looked like my biological father and his side of the family.

**Scott**

One of the things that you told me was that you guys were talking about your dogs.

**Monica**

Yeah (laughs). He had asked me if I was an animal lover. I said, "Yeah I love animals. I don't love taking care of them right now because I have a lot of kids to take care of, but I love animals." That was one of the things I had begged for when I was a kid, and my mother was allergic to cats and my dad didn't really care for dogs. I ended up getting my way eventually. I was obsessed with NASA, I loved the Challenger, I loved Sputnik; those were my favorite things to read about when I was a little girl. I would sit down in my basement and build space crafts, I just loved NASA. So naturally when I got my dog I had to name it Laika. Laika was the first dog in space and who wouldn't name their dog Laika if you were obsessed with NASA.

**Scott**

Of course.

### **Monica**

So my dad and I were talking and he said, "Oh I had a German Shepard." I said, "Oh that's cool. What color was yours?" He said, "Oh she was black, she had a little bit of tan on her but she was mostly black." I said, "Oh that's cool, mine was white." We were kind of laughing like, "Oh yin and yang I had the black and you had the white." He said, "Mine had a really unusual name though." I said, "Oh it can't be any more unusual than mine. Mine was super obscure, most people couldn't even pronounce it when they saw it written down." He said, "Well my dog's name was Laika." I just stopped. There was a really long pause. He said, "Yeah my dog's name was Laika, that was the first dog in space." I said, "Yeah I know, that was my dog's name. Are you serious right now?" Yeah we both had German Shepherds named Laika.

### **Scott**

That is so incredible. It's such an unusual name. I didn't know that was the name of the first dog in space.

### **Monica**

We were just laughing and from then on everything that we were finding had so many similarities. In our beliefs and our likes and reading and what we liked to read about. It was just so fun. Then it turned sad. I had to tell him about my mom. Just before I had told him about her, he had said that he could picture my mother and remember everything about her. He said that she would sit in the sunlight and that her hair was so black that it looked blue. I found that so endearing and almost romantic. He really cared for her, you could tell. I had to break the news to him that the reason I had to search for him on my own was that my mom isn't around anymore. You could hear his heartbreak over the phone. He was just so sad for me. He asked about how it happened and I told him all the nitty gritty details. He was just so sad.

At the same time, during the story he had a burst of happiness because when he and my mom were together, she had only ever talked about wanting to own a restaurant. That was her dream to own a restaurant one day. He didn't want to hold her back from that if she wanted to achieve that. So when I mentioned that she was leaving her factory job he said, "Whoa whoa she never owned a restaurant?" I said, "No she did, she had it for many many years. She just got tired of working so hard everyday so she sold it and moved into a factory job." He said, "Wait. She did? She bought it?" I was like, "Oh yeah she bought the restaurant and owned it for many years." You could just hear him clapping and he said, "That's awesome! That's so amazing I knew she would do it." I thought, "Oh my gosh what a cheerleader. This man is wonderful.

It was a great day. I again had another day where I was just left on a high. I asked him, "Would you mind taking this DNA test if I sent it down to you?" He said, "Well of course I will if you want me to. Just so you know I don't have any doubts that you're my daughter." I said, "Well that's very sweet of you, but we should probably be sure." He said, "No, no I know that you are. Everything makes sense timeframe wise and I was with your mother at that time." He said that most of his adult life he had had visions or daydreams of a little girl that he never had. He always thought, "It would have been really cool to have a daughter. Or to have a set of twins." So he'd try to picture them and he could picture the little girl but he could never picture the little boy. He could never make it appear, but he could always picture what that little girl would look like from itty bitty to grown. I had sent my cousin Doug a few pictures of me and my mom and my kids. Now my dad wasn't just the proud owner of a bouncing baby girl, he had 5 grandchildren. So I wanted him to be able to see those pictures so my dad knew what I looked

like. He said, "As soon as I saw your picture I knew you were my daughter. I've had daydreams about you my whole life. You're the little girl in my daydreams. I've always pictured that I had a daughter and she looks just like you. With brown reddish curly hair and green eyes and fair skin. It's you that I picture." I was just blown away.

**Scott**

Did he know at the time that your mom was pregnant?

**Monica**

Not truly. She was 22 I think, and she was dating both my dad that raised me and my biological father. She had told them both separately that, "Hey, I might be pregnant." When she told my biological father they had broken up. My biological father Tom, he was working as a contractor at the mill and there were huge layoffs going on. So he had lost his job and had no more money, he lost his apartment and had to move back in with his mother. He just felt like an absolute loser and he knew my mom had all these big dreams of owning a restaurant and being an entrepreneur. He didn't want to hold her back so he said, "Brenda, you go be with this other guy. He's got a good job. He's very stable. You go be with him. You take care of yourself." That's when she said, "Ooh yikes, I might be pregnant." He said, "Well, gosh. Figure it out and let me know. Then he said that was the last he heard of her. Talking to my other dad, I found out that she told him the same thing and his first response was, "Well we've gotta get married." So that's what they did, they quickly went and got married and the rest was history. So my mom didn't have any reason to reach back out to this other guy because my dad took care of things.

**Scott**

One of the things that you wrote to me as you were communicating part of it was, "For the first time in my life I feel like I'm a part of something." What do you mean by that?

**Monica**

I felt whole. Again, there was nothing about my childhood that was wrong. I was very lucky. I wasn't abused, my folks loved me, my extended family loved me. There could have been more hands on love, neither of my folks were like that, they grew up where they didn't show that kind of affection. They weren't going to sit and cuddle with you on the couch and watch a movie or call you sweetheart or dumpling. My dad's terms of endearment were slobber box and butthead (laughs). They were never meant to be mean; those were just his nicknames. So they weren't lovey dovey in any way shape or form. We weren't the type of family to say, "Good night I love you." or "It was great seeing you today. Let me give you a hug and a kiss goodbye." It was never like that. I really am the opposite of that personally. I need a lot of affection. I'm like a cat. I need affection and I like it alot. I love to say, "I love you," I feel like it's a missed opportunity if you don't. I love to hold hands and cuddle and snuggle. So not getting that as a child I craved that.

My parents provided for me and I had everything I needed, but I always felt like there was something that was a little bit off and I couldn't tell you what that was. I felt that completion when I found out that I had a biological father and had a different family. People that were blood related to me. That old saying, "Blood is thicker than water" didn't have anything to do with that. It was just the biological connection to somebody that you can't shake no matter what, good or bad you can't shake it. I felt like this huge puzzle was finally put together and all the pieces were finally put together and I could see so clearly and it felt so wonderful.

**Scott**

You're in Indiana and your biological dad is in Florida. So you made a trip.

**Monica**

I did!

**Scott**

What was that like to meet him for the first time?

**Monica**

Oh my gosh. So I tried to keep it in but then I finally told him that I was coming down and had bought a ticket. He was just so excited to know that I was coming down. I was so nervous. I wanted to mentally prepare myself so I didn't meet him that first day. I needed a night to sleep and prepare and collect myself. My boyfriend, we had gotten out of the car and he met us at the condo we were staying at, and I didn't know Robert was recording. I got out of the car all nervous, then I saw him and we walked up to each other and gave this big old hug. Oh my gosh the emotions that I felt. I felt like my heart was beating out of my chest. I had happy tears. It was so absolutely wonderful to meet him in the flesh. I had my dad in my arms after 40 years of never knowing, it was so great. We just sat there and talked for hours. I'll never forget that moment for as long as I live.

**Scott**

Well I would imagine that people listening to this, if their dad is still around, that dad is going to get an extra hug.

**Monica**

(laughs) Yes. Hug your dad tight. Hug your mom tight. Hug everybody. If I've learned anything in my little 40 years of life, never ever pass the opportunity to tell someone right now what they mean to you. You truly never know if tragedy is going to strike and your parents or loved one will be taken from you. You never know, and life is precious don't take it for granted. Tell people you love them and that they mean something to you, it's important.

When I did confront my dad who raised me, that was one thing I made abundantly clear to him. That this changes nothing. At that point in time I still didn't know who my biological father was, but I said, "This changes nothing. You raised me my whole life. You were a wonderful father to me. Even if I found out my dad was in the next town, you're still my dad too. I would like to know my biological family but you're my father and there's nothing that changes that. I love you and want you to be part of my life. If this is too much for you to handle I would be sad but I would understand if you want to walk away if you're hurt by mom's actions."

He knew but he didn't know about the other boyfriend. He knew but he didn't care. He loved my mom and he wanted a family so he did what he thought was right. He was really grateful for that. We still talk and see each other. I tell him all the time that I love him and I don't want that to change. Even though I have my biological father in my life and he's a very present piece of my life right now, even though we are a whole United States away from each other, we talk every day. I love hearing from him and look forward to hearing from him. I want to be greedy and keep both of my dads.

**Scott**

Yeah you said that Tom, your bio dad, had never had a cell phone.

**Monica**

No! He's never had a cell phone. I don't know who makes it around these days without one but this guy he didn't have one. We were laughing about it and he said, "Well, golly now I gotta get one. I want to be able to keep up with you and be able to receive pictures of the grandkids and talk to you whenever I want to talk to you." So he marched himself over to the cell phone store and he is not the proud owner of a sweet flip phone. It is adorable. The messages that he sends are the absolute best. He loves to write so every text message I get is like a text haiku. It's always signed "Love Dad" or "Love the Fugitive." His wife, who is so sweet, has dementia. He went for a walk one day and she woke up and didn't realize he was gone and thought he'd been missing for days. Bless her heart she called the police to go look for him, so now our joke is that he's the fugitive. He'll now sign off like that too and it's adorable.

**Scott**

There was a story about your mom. Can you relate what happened? That was when you were here in Florida right?"

**Monica**

Yeah. That was the day that I met my dad. Backstory on this one, my mother being southern would pat me on the back of the head when I wasn't acting right. It wasn't a slap or like she was knocking my head off my shoulders, it was just a pat on the head like, "Get it together. Straighten up." I would get those quite often. She would also yell at me when I would discipline my daughter, even though it was my daughter I had no right to discipline her granddaughter. Like how dare I. They were just as thick as thieves.

The day that I had to bury my mother it was very stressful and very taxing. My daughter was 4 so she was arguing about the types of nylons she was wearing. These ones were itchy and these ones were not warm enough and I was just trying to get her dressed so we could go. It was very cold out, the day before Christmas Eve, I was trying to make sure that she was warm enough. Of course she was acting crazy and not listening and just making me so irritated, I just had no patience. So I was constantly yelling at her all day, correcting her and telling her no. At the end of the day I was spent. I put her to bed and went to take a bath. Leaned over into the tub to turn the water on waiting for the temperature to be right. Just then the shower curtain fell off and popped me in the back of the head. Initially I was like, "What in the heck?" Then I started laughing because I was like, "Oh my gosh that's my mom. That had to be. If anyone could come back from beyond the grave it would be this lady to pop me in the back of the head." I just had a good laugh about it, I said, "Ok I get it. I'll leave Ashlyn alone. I'll calm down and settle down."

That was the only time in the past 18 years that has happened. The day that I met my dad we sat outside and talked for a long time, which was wonderful. Then he had to leave. We all went back inside to sit down in the condo. My boyfriend and I were sitting on the bed just both staring at each other like, "That really just happened." He said, "Honey you did it. You met your dad. How do you feel?" I said, "Oh my gosh this is so amazing." Just then there was this big crash. I looked and the shower curtain in the bathroom had fallen off and onto the ground. We just started laughing. That was absolutely my mom. Robert knew the story of the shower curtain and we just started laughing so hard. Again, if anybody is going to reach out and truly be known, it's my mom and her shower curtain. I think it was her way of saying, "I saw, good job figuring it out."

**Scott**

Well not many people can say, “Hey I have a great shower curtain story.” But you’re one of them though.

**Monica**

(laughs) Yeah.

**Scott**

In your case, obviously this all turned out happy for everyone. But that’s not always the case. Would you say people who are wondering about their own family should still try even though the result might not be what they expect, or hope for?

**Monica**

I do. I think if you go into it with the mindset of truly expecting nothing. That way you’ll be pleasantly surprised either way. Even if it’s not ok, you know you have closure, you can start a new chapter in your life, you can close that chapter in your life, you can do whatever you want. Ultimately you spent all this time of your life not knowing anything, so the fact that one person might not want to be in your life shouldn’t change the way that you feel. It should just give you peace and just move on. Just to know I think would be enough. That’s easy for me to say because I had a happy story. I don’t want to sound insensitive to that. I know there are other heartbreaking stories out there. I am so happy that mine was a good one.

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As I was talking to Monica, we figured out that Tom is not only here in Florida, but where he lives is not that far from me. I visited one afternoon with Tom and his wife Betty, just to kind of get his perspective on this whole thing. He told me that from his point of view, it’s life-changing. He’s 68 years old and never expected to have any children, and he’s really happy that Monica was able to figure it out and find him.

One question I asked Tom is this: What would you want Monica to know about you, as a person? His answer was, “I want her to know that I’m honest, I’m loyal, and I’m fair. Those have always been my three guideposts in life.” I think Monica and Tom finding each other is a win for both of them.

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A call to 911 when someone witnesses a road rage shooting –

**Caller**

Gray Chevy Malibu. You’ve gotta hurry up because it fired shots in that truck and I’m not sure if somebody’s hit.

A family argument gets violent –

**911 Dispatch**

911

**Caller**

I just shot an old son of a bitch in my house.

**911 Dispatch**

You did what?

**Caller**

I just shot somebody!

And a young boy is trapped inside a hot car, with his drunk mother –

**911 Dispatch**

Can you roll down a window?

**Caller**

Nope the windows are locked.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok give the phone to your mother for me hun.

**Caller**

No, she's just going to hang it up.

**911 Dispatch**

Ok ok that's alright

You can sign up to be a supporter at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.whatwasthatlike.com/support)

If you want to contact me, you can always email me at [Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com](mailto:Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com), or by regular mail at PO Box 5, Safety Harbor Florida, 34695.

And here's this week's listener story. I'll see you in 2 weeks.

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**Caller**

When I was in my early 20s I moved back home to my parents in my hometown and I didn't really know anyone there anymore. I didn't really have any connections or have someone close to me besides family. I thought it would be a good idea to go down to the local mall and just walk around and see if I could find someone who looked friendly that I might be able to strike up a relationship with. I did come across someone who reminded me a lot of a friend I had in the former town where I'd been living. I thought maybe I could form a connection with this person. So we talked for a while and exchanged phone numbers.

After talking for a couple of weeks he asked me out on a date. The only problem was that he didn't drive, so I would have to pick him up at his house where he lived with his grandmother. That wasn't a big deal to me because it's common to find people who don't drive in larger cities. So I waited all week and was pretty excited. When the day came he pretty much ghosted me. I couldn't get him on the phone and he wouldn't answer my texts. So I thought maybe he wasn't as interested as I thought he was. I pretty much let it go because sometimes things don't work out. Then he got a hold of me a couple of days later and explained that the reason he had not gone out on the date with me was because of his ferret. His ferret had died and he was really

very upset and didn't feel up to getting out and being social. I understood that and took it as a reasonable excuse because anytime I've ever experienced something like that it can be kind of traumatizing.

So we made arrangements to go out the following weekend. When that day came he did not ghost me. He did answer the phone and I ended up over there at his grandmother's house to pick him up. He didn't quite have everything in order so I followed him to his bedroom so he could pick up the last few things that he needed, just to make sure that he was prepared and had his wallet with him and all those different things that you need. When he opened up the bedroom door his bedroom pretty much consisted of just 4 blank walls, a blank mattress in the middle of the floor with no sheet or blanket or anything, and probably 200 empty soda cans all around the bed in little towers and stacks. That wasn't the main thing that I noticed. The main thing that I noticed was that suddenly my eyes started burning and then the smell hit my nose. It coated the inside of my nose in a way that makes sure you'll never forget the intensity of the stench. It will be burned into your memory. He said, "Oh don't mind that. That's just my ferret." I looked over in the corner and there was indeed a ferret cage with a dead ferret in it. Obviously I was completely shocked that he had been coexisting with the corpse of his dead pet ferret that had sat in the corner of his room for over a week at this point.

He was really disappointed that we didn't get to go on that date. I wasn't that disappointed when I went home. That was enough of a red flag for me.