

# A CASE STUDY: USING 3 DNA TOOLS TO BREAK DOWN A BRICK WALL

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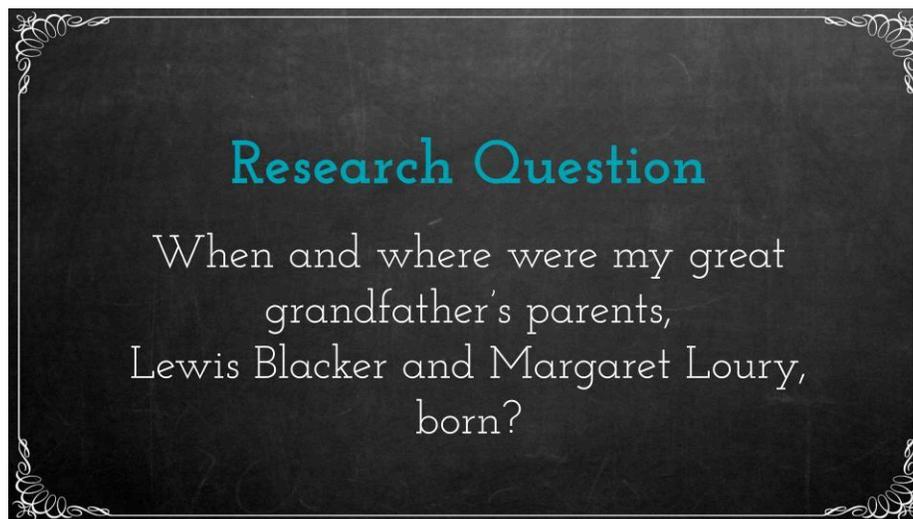
This presentation recounts my personal experience in finally resolving a persistent family history mystery. My aim is to illustrate the usefulness of DNA testing and offer strategies that could assist you in overcoming your own genealogical roadblocks.

In addition to traditional genealogical research, the DNA tools used for this case study involved the following three key tools:<sup>1</sup>

1. Reviewing and Categorizing DNA Matches
  2. "Quick & Dirty" Trees
  3. "What Are The Odds" aka "WATO"
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## TOOL #1: REVIEW AND CATEGORIZE AUTOSOMAL MATCHES ([Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))

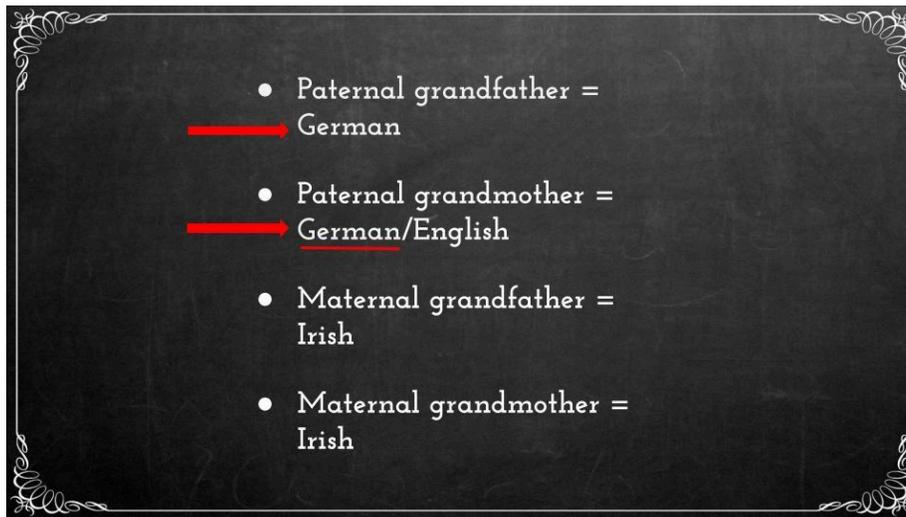
- Begin with a research question to help focus on relevant DNA matches.



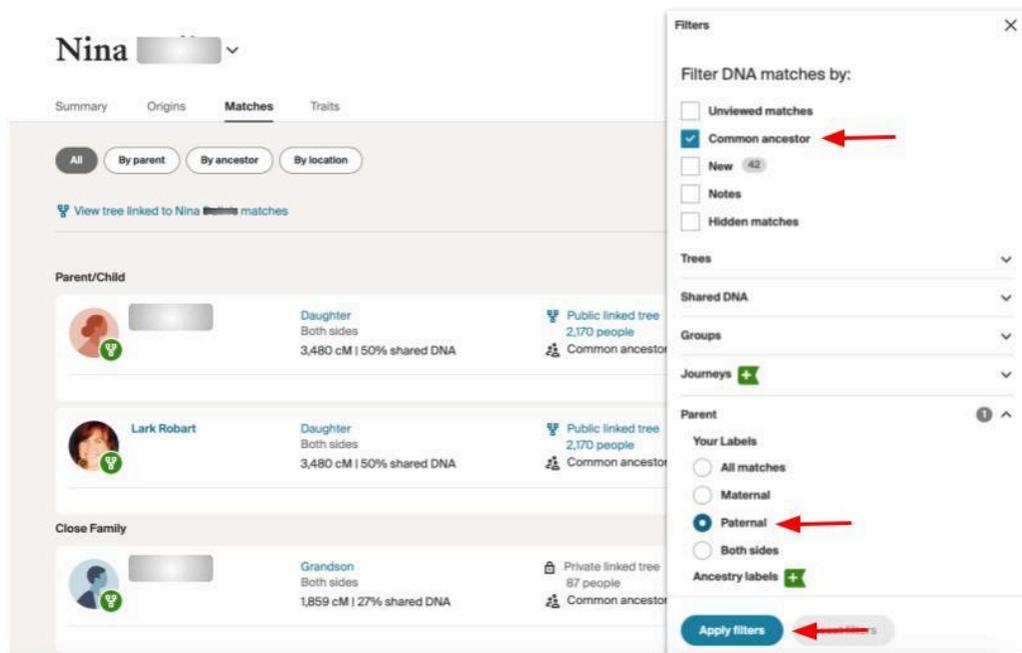
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<sup>1</sup> For this handout based on the slide presentation, the sequence of the three DNA tools might be clearer if arranged in the order shown in this handout. Apologies for any confusion!

- Analyze known grandparent lines to determine where the “brick wall” ancestors might be located.

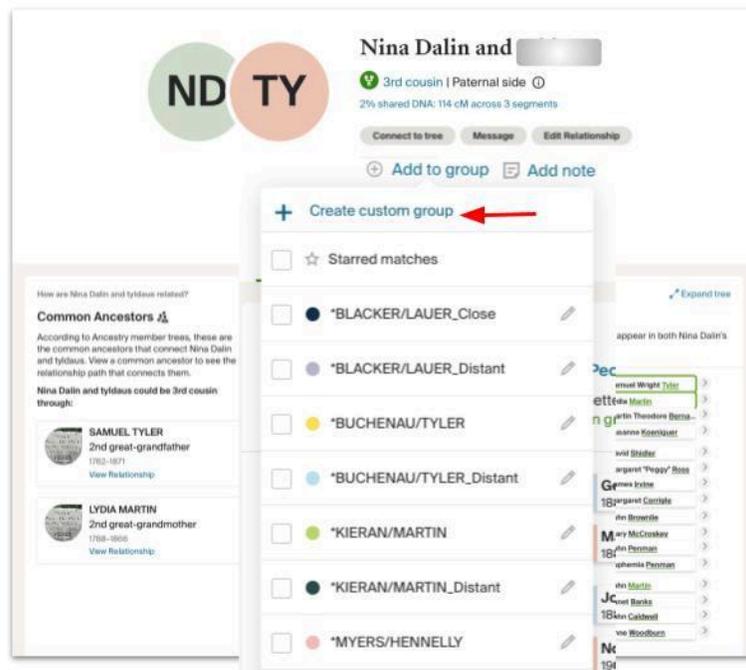


- Sort matches using the COMMON ANCESTORS filter

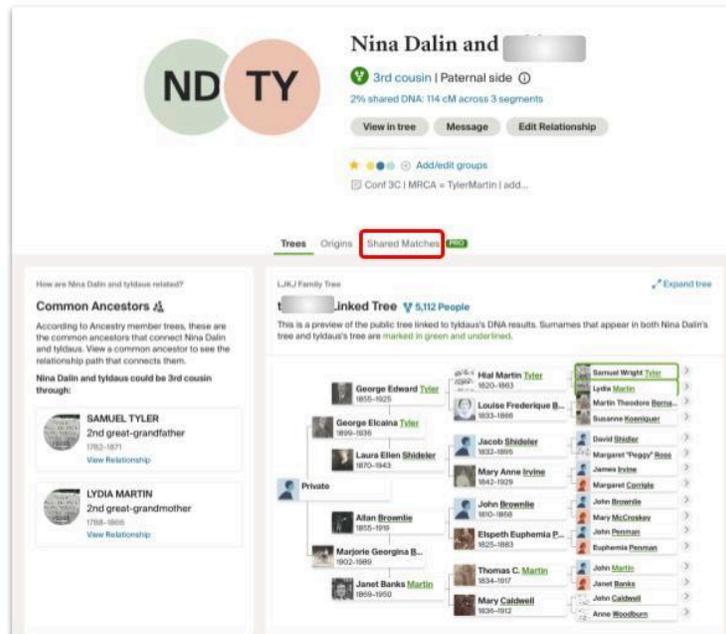


- Select a strong match (preferably 40 cMs or higher) with a tree<sup>2</sup>
  - Create a note and add the match to a CUSTOM GROUP

<sup>2</sup> The “Quick and Dirty” Tree technique (Tool #2) will help with matches that have small or no trees.



- Rinse and repeat, or . . .
- Use the SHARED MATCHES feature to identify and categorize other matches in groups you have already created.



\*A note about Y-DNA MATCHES

When facing a brick wall in paternal line research, a Y-DNA match at [FamilyTreeDNA](https://www.familytreedna.com) from a sibling or cousin can offer unexpected breakthroughs. In my research, the brick wall concerned my mother's maiden name, BLACKER. A male cousin agreed to take a test, and his top two matches surprisingly showed the surname BLEIKER. This information led to a renewed effort on my part to find alternative spellings of the surname, an approach that turned out to be pivotal.

Name	Earliest Known Ancestor	Y-DNA Haplogroup
Bleiker Y-DNA67 FF		R-M269
Bleiker Y-DNA37 FF		R-M269

Top 2 Y-DNA matches at Family Tree DNA

**TOOL #2: "QUICK & DIRTY" TREES**

This technique proves useful when a DNA match has either no family tree, or only a very limited tree. This is particularly true if the match's displayed name appears to be genuine rather than a pseudonym, and is relatively uncommon.

- To begin, search for your DNA match's name online, adding the term "obituary." This often leads to a helpful result that will allow you to initiate a family tree for that match on Ancestry.

- Then, create a tree that is PRIVATE, and that cannot be found in searches. Be sure to use a clear naming convention, such as "Q&D tree [match's name]", which will allow you to easily locate your tree later.

Public Tree

This setting allows other users to view all content in your tree—except information about living individuals and private notes. If you change your mind, you can make your tree private at any time.

**Public trees benefit you and the community**

- Through public trees you may find others who are researching your family and even collaborate with them.
- You can help other members of Ancestry sites discover information about their relatives, and they can get in touch with you using our anonymous member-to-member email service.

**All personal information is protected**

- Information about living people is automatically hidden and will NOT be included in searches.
- Only you can edit your tree unless you specifically invite others to work with you.

Private Tree

This setting allows you to keep your tree "private" so that other users cannot view the contents of your tree.

**What does "private" mean?**

Limited information about deceased individuals in your tree (name, birth year, and birthplace) will still appear in Ancestry search results. However, no one can view your actual tree without your permission. If another member wants to view your tree, they can contact you anonymously through our Connection Service to request more information. Keep in mind that these individuals may also have helpful information to share with you.

Also prevent your tree from being found in searches.

*Note: Although your privacy setting will change immediately to public or private, it usually takes about a month for this update to be reflected in the search index.*

- Remember to focus on creating a "Quick & Dirty" tree that is, as the name suggests, quick and simple. If the tree-building process becomes lengthy and complex, you may want to consider moving on to the next match. Keep in mind that this initial tree is unverified, and further in-depth research on your matches can be conducted later to confirm details.

## “Quick & Dirty” Trees

- **WHAT?** A quickly built simple and unverified tree used to assist in determining how you are related to a DNA match.
- **WHERE?** [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com)

- Ancestry is the ideal platform to build a “Quick & Dirty” tree. However, the relevant DNA match may come from various places, including Ancestry, MyHeritage, etc.
- Once you have identified a cluster of DNA matches sharing 40 centimorgans (cMs) or more, you can then move on to the next tool.

### TOOL #3: “WHAT ARE THE ODDS” TOOL ([dnapainter.com](http://dnapainter.com))

- WATO is a tool that allows you to “hypothesize about how a DNA tester might fit into a known tree based on the amount of DNA they share with people in that tree.”

**DNA PAINTER**

**What Are the Odds? (WATO)**

Hypothesize about how a DNA tester might fit into a known tree based on the amount of DNA they share with people in that tree.

Create a new probability tree

V2 with beta probabilities

Frequently asked questions

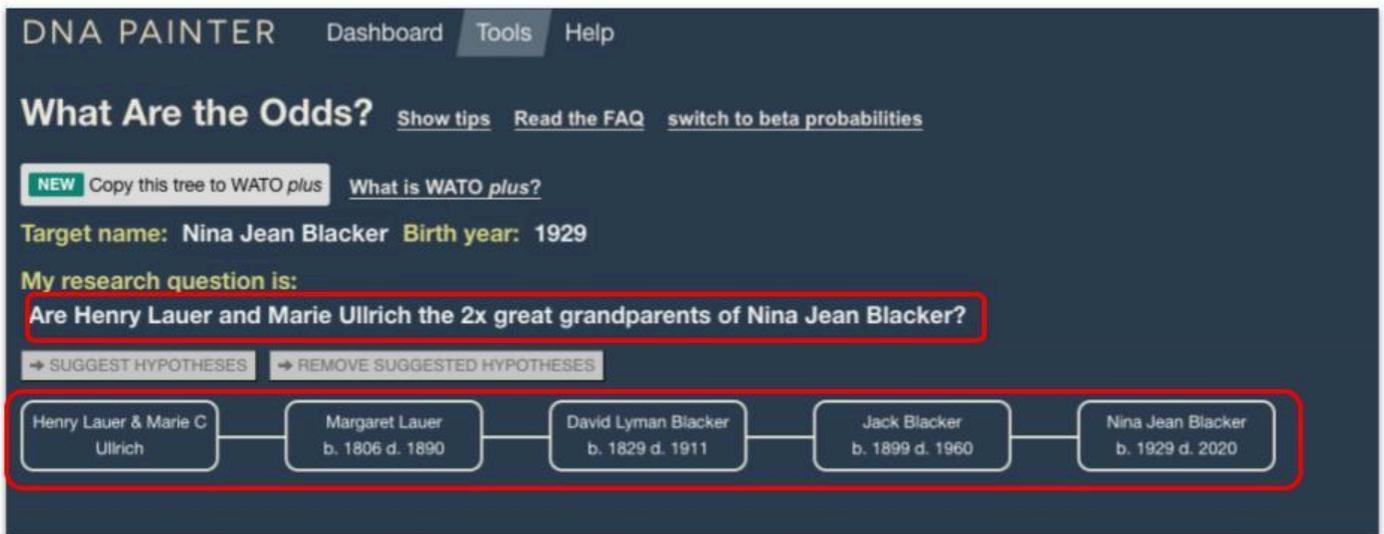
Early prototype table version

Relationship prediction

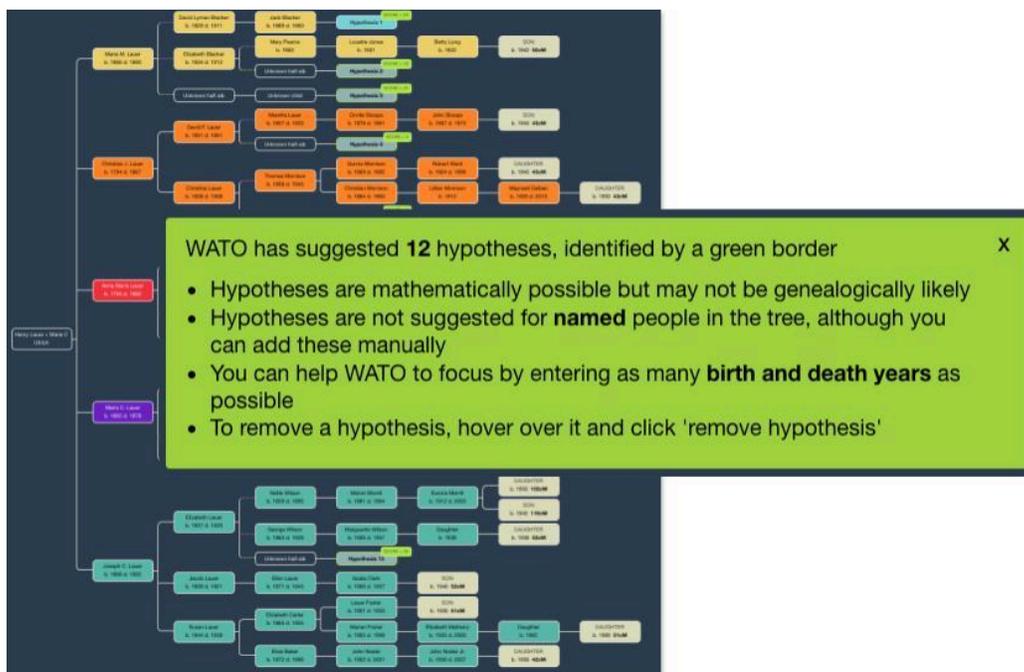
23andMe AncestryDNA FamilyTreeDNA  
Gedmatch Living DNA MyHeritage

[dnapainter.com](http://dnapainter.com)

- Be sure to check out the FAQ section before creating your own WATO tree. You'll be glad you did!



Screenshot of initial steps when creating a WATO tree



Screenshot of final tree, with instructions from WATO on how to proceed

- The results for my mother, who was the TARGET individual, aligned with my existing genealogical research, confirming her placement within this family tree as I had previously determined. Very good news indeed!

And finally, don't forget the importance of continuing further traditional research, taking into account any new insights gained from DNA matches. For instance, pay attention to recurring surnames and locations.

## **DNA Research + Traditional Research = SUCCESS!**

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### **FREE RESOURCES YOU MIGHT FIND HELPFUL**

#### **Organizing Matches at Ancestry**

- A YouTube video by Crista Cowan | AncestryDNA
  - Link > <https://youtu.be/T5OzqytST2U?si=ZcJdNEuzuBdcLE5c>

#### **“Quick and Dirty” Trees**

- Building Quick & Dirty Trees To Identify Your Genetic Matches
  - A YouTube video by Blaine Bettinger
  - Link > <https://youtu.be/UmOZXCxsqNU?si=0nEar0w9AS35LG08>
- Quick & Dirty Trees Strategy
  - A YouTube video by Genealogy TV
  - Link > <https://youtu.be/fvqnYeOtP0s?si=Ab5VFXK4n61BbY7e>

#### **“What Are the Odds” aka “WATO”**

- Visit the website [DNAPainter.com](http://DNAPainter.com)
- Scroll down the page to FREE WEBINARS

#### **Everything is DNA!**

- [DNA Explained - Genetic Genealogy](#)
  - Blog by Roberta Estes

#### **NOT FREE . . . but only \$50/yr and *highly recommended!***

- [Legacy Family Tree Webinars](#)
  - Most webinars are free for 1 week, then go behind the paywall
  - Register here for upcoming webinars >  
<https://familytreewebinars.com/upcoming-webinars/>
  - \$50/year includes access to their vast library of webinars