

Jerry Nelson of Volga, South Dakota is a columnist and author of the book 'Dear County Agent Guy'

Jerry Nelson grew up on a farm near Volga, South Dakota which his great-grandfather homesteaded in the 1880's. Jerry and I have known each other for about 15 years now. Jerry was a dairy farmer who had a near death experience in a manure pit when he was overcome with hydrogen sulfide. Six weeks in the hospital including a month in ICU gave Jerry a new look at life. So what do you do after that? Well in Jerry's case, he became a writer. His stories are mostly about rural life and his obscure look at the simple things on and off the farm. I've told him that many times I think he and I are twin cousins separated at birth. The stories from the farm are very similar. Only his were in Volga and mine in West Concord.

Jerry writes a humorous column weekly for Dairy Star magazine. He has also authored a book called *Dear County Agent Guy*. With Jerry's permission, I am going to share a recent column of his that was nothing short of amazing. And it has a connection to our neighbors to the north in Kenyon. We've seen stories like this on TV but you wonder how they get started. Read Jerry's story about a girl who grew up in Kenyon but wanted to find her birth parents. You'll see what I mean by amazing.

### **A Search for Family by Jerry Nelson:**

A few years ago, out of idle curiosity, I took a 23andMe DNA test. I was certain that I'm approximately 100% Norwegian, so it wasn't surprising when 23andMe confirmed that I'm probably the whitest person on the planet.

There's a box on the 23andMe website that you can tick that allows your DNA info to be shared. I have nothing to hide, so I clicked the box. Maybe it would help some unfortunate individual uncover the roots of his or her tragic pickled herring obsession.

Every so often I'll get a message via the 23andMe website. The gist of it is usually something like, "Hi, I see that we could be 18th cousins! Would you have any info regarding an ancestor of mine named Laszlo who was born in 1847 in Bratislava?" I politely reply to the inquiries, telling the questioner that I have no idea regarding their great-great-great-whomever's long-forgotten perambulations.

One day a different sort of missive popped up on 23andMe. A young lady messaged that it appeared we could be second cousins. This was based on the fact that we share a significant percentage of DNA. I showed the message to my wife. Her initial reaction was, "Geez! How many kids do you have running around out there?" I pointed out that the young lady and I didn't have enough DNA in common to be parent and child. Even so, my wife remained somewhat suspicious.

The mystery woman told me that her name is Tammi. She currently lives in the Pacific Northwest, but was born in 1977 in Pipestone, Minnesota and was given up for adoption at birth. Did I know anyone who lived in Pipestone back then? "Yeah," I replied unthinkingly, "My cousin Greg." I've known Greg my entire life. My gut reaction to the implied possibility was, "Nope! No way." But then I thought things through. After high school, Greg attended a vocational institution before taking a job at a Minnesota welding shop. This would put him in Pipestone in the year... No! Could that be right?

Tammi shared some info she had obtained from the adoption agency. Her mother was 18 and her father 20 when Tammi was born. Her parents were young and didn't know what their future might hold, so they decided that it would be best if they put their daughter up for adoption. Tammi's parents eventually got married and had three more children, two sons and a daughter. A bolt of recognition shot through me. Greg and his wife, Sandy, have three children, two sons and a daughter.

There was more. The adoption agency had furnished Tammi with some general information about her father's family. This included the genders of his siblings and their ages at the time of Tammi's birth and the ages of her paternal grandparents. As I read and reread Tammi's message, three words thundered through my head: Oh. My. God! Tammi was describing Greg's siblings and his parents!

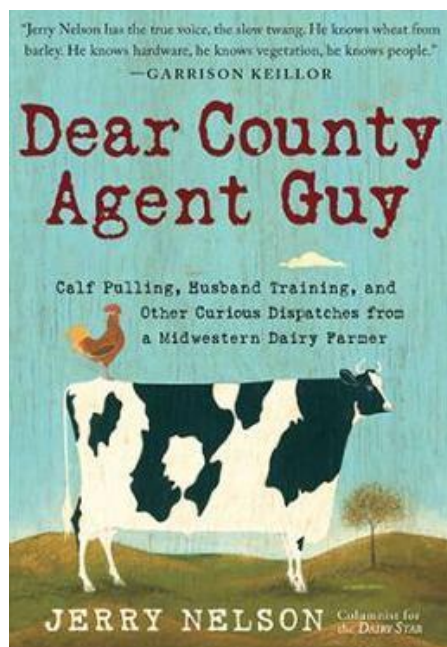
There was zero chance that this could all be some crazy coincidence. I wrote back to Tammi that I was approximately 100% certain that she is Greg and Sandy's daughter.

It's nearly impossible to portray deep feelings via electronic text messages, but Tammi managed to do it. She wrote that she had begun to peruse Greg and Sandy's Facebook page and was overwhelmed with emotion when she looked upon the faces of her biological family for the first time. She wanted to make contact with them, but was anxious about the repercussions. I encouraged Tammi, telling her that I couldn't imagine that Greg and Sandy would be anything less than loving and accepting.

One day I casually dropped in for a visit with Greg at his welding shop and acquired a business card belonging to Greg and Sandy's eldest son, Michael. I promptly passed this intel onto Tammi. A few days later Tammi messaged a draft of an email that she was thinking about sending to Michael. She told Michael that she had been raised by a loving farm couple at Kenyon, Minnesota. She explained that she had spent 19 years in the Air Force and is currently an airline pilot. Tammi said that she and her husband, Kevin, have a young son and a full, happy life. She ended her email by telling Michael that she would like to meet him someday and, hopefully, begin a relationship.

The email left me teary-eyed. I would be proud if Tammi were my daughter; Greg and Sandy could not but feel any different. Tammi asked if she should send the email. I said absolutely.

"Done," replied Tammi minutes later. "The torpedo is in the water."



I followed up Jerry's story the next month as he gave me what Paul Harvey called 'The Rest of the Story'. You can read the next column from September, 2018 for part 2. My thanks to Jerry for sharing this fascinating story. Again you can read Jerry's columns in the Dairy Star magazine or DairyStar.com. Look for the book *Dear County Agent Guy*. I know you'll enjoy it. He writes about how on their wedding night, his wife Julie declined to help him chase cows back into the barn while still in her wedding dress. There's also the story how Jerry offered the delivery room doctor the use of his calf puller during the birth of his first son. They have two boys who he taught to vaporize bugs on an electric fence. It only gets better from there.

Jerry's book, *Dear County Agent Guy*, is available at [Workman.com](http://Workman.com) and in bookstores nationwide.