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News To Move You Forward

Brought to you by Jill Scheppler, Bob McManus & Angie Domine

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DNA Kits Are Helping Adoptees Find Birth Parents

At-home DNA kits have soared in popularity in recent years, spurred by a growing curiosity to know more about our health and our heritage. According to a recent study by *MIT Technology Review*, more than 26 million people have taken DNA tests purchased from consumer genetics companies like Ancestry, 23andMe, MyHeritage, and Gene by Gene.

Amongst those people are adoptees who, either by design or accident, discovered their birth parents after submitting their cheek swab results to one of these genetics databases. It's an incredible by-product of a test that wasn't ever marketed as a way to reunite families.

For most adoptees who have discovered biological ties this way, the process looks something like this: they complete the test, they receive the results, and then they get a notification that they share a significant percentage of DNA with someone else using the database.

That was the case for John Larson, who recently shared his story with *Reader's Digest*. He was adopted in the San Francisco Bay area in 1967 after his birth mother ended her engagement to Larson's father and headed west. With incredible adoptive parents, Larson never thought about looking for his birth family.

After completing a 23AndMe kit, he was notified that his DNA was significantly similar to that of Rachel Brill, a woman who turned out to be Larson's half-sister. Brill told Larson that not only did he also have a half-brother, he had a birth father who had been looking for his lost son his entire life.

Are You a First-Time Buyer? Get My Free Guide



Buying your first home is a big step, and one that is likely to impact your financial future for years to come.

Make it easier by requesting my free guide, "How First-Timers Can Make a Wise Buy."

Just call me at 715-387-1122 and I'll send it right out to you.

Home Decorating: What to Finish Before You Start

When it comes to home decorating, deciding where to start can sometimes feel a little overwhelming. Should you start with furniture shopping or painting? Should you hire a pro or do it yourself?

You may be looking at the decisions you make today for many years to come, so you want to make sure they are ones you can live with. To get the best results, start with a few pre-project tasks. These will give you perspective and guide your efforts in a good direction.

1. Reflect: Consider your current interior surroundings. What do you like? What would you like to change? Think about what appeals to you most regarding colors, fabrics, and styles. Avoid choosing things just because they are familiar or match your current décor. Determine what you truly like and let that guide your redecorating plans.

2. Write: Make a wish list. If cost were not a factor, what would you do with your space? Write everything down. This will give you a starting point. From this list, you can prioritize and decide what projects you can and will do based on room size and budget size.

3. Review: Look at pictures. See what others have done with similar spaces. Get ideas on how you can accomplish the look and feel that you want for your home. Find inspiration online and in magazines that can help you nail down the details to create your redecorated surroundings. This research will get your creative juices flowing.

With a little reflecting, writing, and reviewing, you'll be ready to tackle your redecorating projects with confidence. Now go ahead and get started!

Protect Your Privacy (and Your Curb Appeal Too)

A 50-foot fence would provide plenty of privacy. A moat will keep people out of your yard. But I'm guessing you probably want something a little more attractive for your property. Fortunately, there are tasteful, appealing options that will allow you to keep nosy neighbors at bay. The two main areas to focus on are windows and landscaping.

Windows provide sunlight, outdoor viewing, and fresh air, but they can also provide your neighbors with a play-by-play of what's going on inside your home. If your property is feeling more like a fishbowl than a house, try adding a privacy feature to the windows.

Window tinting can be a great option. These tints can block visibility from the outside while allowing you to enjoy your views. As a bonus, some window tinting can also reduce sun exposure, which can help keep your home cool and protect décor from fading.

Of course, window treatments such as curtains and blinds can also provide privacy, but these can make your home feel like a cave. To maintain privacy and

natural light, choose cellular shades or lightweight and light-colored curtains that keep rooms bright.

The right selections in your yard can also provide privacy. Plan your landscaping to include features that block neighbors' views into your yard and home.

Attractive trellises are a good choice. These create wonderful privacy screens while adding greenery to your surroundings. Choose your favorite vine or other decorative plant and arrange it so that it adds beauty to your backyard and privacy to your home.

Potted plants are an alternative to trellises and can be just as effective in making your home less visible to prying eyes. Place tall plants strategically in your space to create a private backyard oasis or shield your living room window from the world.

What else is nice about all of these options? They are versatile. While fencing is a fairly permanent fixture and can be expensive to install, these privacy options are easy to switch out at any time, and they can fit budgets of any size.

Ask the Agent: This Month's Question

How do I know if a property is a good deal?

The key to answering this question is a working relationship with a real estate agent.

I can research the market for you to determine a fair price for a property. I will pull "comps" (comparable properties) from the multiple listing service to see what similar properties have sold for in the area. This comparison will also include the prices of other homes currently on the market.

I will review the size, location, and other features of the home to determine what other properties are comparable, then I can figure out the home's approximate value in the current market.

We can then compare this value to the seller's current asking price to determine if the property is priced too high, just right, or is a good deal.

If you decide to move forward with the property, I can also use this information to help you negotiate the best price possible for the home.

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