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Six years ago, this Mayo graduate discovered he had an adult daughter

Steven Larsen received the jolt of his life when he discovered he had adult child; it prompted him to write a book about his life.

Author Steve Larsen is pictured Wednesday, July 16, 2025, in Rochester. Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

By Matthew Stolle
July 29, 2025 at 6:45 AM

ROCHESTER — Six years ago, Steve Larsen got the shock of his life.

A 1969 Mayo High School graduate, Larsen was sitting on his porch in Phoenix one Sunday morning when he received a call from a cousin. The cousin asked if Larsen was sitting down.

"Should I be?" Larsen replied.

"I think it's a good idea," the cousin said. "You have a daughter.

"I just sent you her email. Read it."

The cousin hung up.

Christie Will, Steve Larsen's daughter discovered through DNA testing, Larsen and Ginger Larsen, Will's half sister. Contributed / Steve Larsen

Aside from the jolt it delivered, the discovery would be the impetus for Larsen, a tech entrepreneur and collector of yellow sports cars, to write a memoir, “My Heart Has Been In It From The Start.”

The book weaves early memories of his early life in Rochester in the late 1960s and '70s along with descriptions about his passion for motorcycles and high-performance cars, but the part about his discovery of an adult child he didn’t know existed is one of the most poignant and affecting.

And father and daughter’s lives would have continued on their divergent trajectories but for separate decisions each had made.

Christie Will, Larsen’s unknown daughter at the time, had bought a DNA kit in the pursuit of finding her dad. Years earlier, Larsen was scheduled for open heart surgery — one of three he’s undergone — and had taken a 23andMe DNA test for medical reasons.

On a form, Larsen checked a box to allow his DNA results to be made public. It proved a consequential decision, but one that he didn't give much thought to afterward.

Raised in Rochester but now living in Elko New Market, Minnesota, Will had grown up believing that the man her mom had married was her dad, Larsen said.

Steve Larsen working at Schaak Electronics at Apache Mall in the early 1970s. Contributed / Steve Larsen

Will's mom, LuAnn Fitzgerald, died when she was young. One day, Will uncovered her birth certificate; in the area of the certificate marked Father was the word "unknown." Her mom had taken the secret part of her parentage to the grave.

Or so she thought.

Larsen said he and Will's mom got to know each other through their work at the Apache Mall. It was a time when the Free Love movement was in full swing. Parties were going on regularly. It is possible that Fitzgerald didn't know who the father was.

Also about the time of Will's birth, the company Larsen worked for transferred him to Milwaukee and he lost contact with Fitzgerald.

One Christmas morning, Will received a text message informing her that her DNA results were in. She opened the app. “Merry Christmas, Christie, you have a father.” Aided by a posse of family members, a monthlong search of the internet yielded the name Steve Larsen as her dad.

Fearful of rejection — she had assumed that her father had abandoned her — Will approached her dad in a tentative and oblique manner. She contacted the daughter of a person who was Steve Larsen’s cousin.

“I don’t want anything from him, but I’d want him to know he’s got two granddaughters,” Will had written to Larsen's cousin. “I'd like to know a little bit about his life.”

And so Larsen received that fateful call from his cousin that Sunday morning.

What happened next is related in a sermon that Will made to her church.

“Christie, as you no doubt surmised, this is quite a surprise,” Larsen wrote in his first email to his daughter. “I do remember your mother but was unaware she was pregnant or had you. With only a few hours to process this, let me tell you my initial feelings. First, I am thrilled that you reached out to me and would love to meet you and your daughters and your husband if you would want that.

“The fact that you thought of Ginger and her being your half-sister and having two nieces she never met indicates to me you are a pretty wonderful and thoughtful woman. In fact, your entire letter was so expressive and beautifully written, I can’t imagine any man not being thrilled by the idea he might be related to you,”

The moment changed her life, she said in the sermon before church members. For someone who experienced Father’s Day as a spectator rather than a participant, Larsen’s email was everything she didn’t know she needed to hear, she said.

By Matthew Stolle

Matthew Stolle has been a Post Bulletin reporter since 2000 and covered many of the beats that make up a newsroom. In his first several years, he covered K-12 education and higher education in Rochester before shifting to politics. He has also been a features writer. Today, Matt jumps from beat to beat, depending on what his editor and the Rochester area are producing in terms of news. Readers can reach Matthew at 507-281-7415 or mstolle@postbulletin.com.