

They're Alive! Searching for the Living

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Remember the days when you could look someone up in the phone book or perhaps a city directory? While those items may have gone the way of the horse and buggy, the Internet offers many new ways to locate living people.

Why Seek The Living?

Genealogy and family history is the process of tracing the facts and stories of our ancestors. Dead people, right? So why in the world would these ancestral sleuths ever seek out information about, let alone contact living people? Here are a few reasons:

- **Expand Genealogy Research** - how many times have you heard, "Well *so-and-so* used to know all about the Briggs line of the family . . ." Establish contact with those relatives who may have valuable information for your research.
- **Locate Lost Relatives** - it is fairly easy to lose touch with far-flung relatives especially after 20 or 30 years and given the way we as Americans tend to move around the country. You may need information for your genealogy database, perhaps you are organizing a family reunion or you just want to re-establish a lost connection.
- **Locate Previously Unknown Relatives** - wouldn't it be nice to see if there are other cousins or relations on your collateral lines also working on family research? I've found many second cousins using various techniques and the nice thing is we all do genealogy research!
- **Locate Heirs** - this is an area of genealogy - forensic genealogy - that some professional genealogists handle. But there are also times when perhaps you have an heirloom or family item that might rightfully belong to someone.

A Note About Access - What's Free and What's Not Free

Many of the websites and techniques used below offer a level of information about a person for free. That being said, you will find offers anywhere from \$1.95 to \$29.95 and more to purchase in-depth information. Doing so is at your discretion.

I've found that even without purchasing the actual record or profile of the person, I can glean enough credible information to assist me on my search.

Internet Search Engines

Believe it or not, a simple search using Internet search engines such as Google, Bing, Yahoo and others reveal more information than you realize.

People Search Engines

Several websites exist which not only find the same or similar results as the Internet search engines above, but they do a “deep search” of other types of websites including blogs, video, photo, public records, comments and more.

Telephone Records

Sometimes the phone book approach is the best one . . . and searching online is much easier than going to a library and checking phone directories for major cities.

Public Records

It used to be that in order to search public records you needed to know the city/state or jurisdiction and then visit the court house or public agency. Not anymore . . . many sites aggregate these public records and allow you to access them from the comfort of your home.

Social Media Tools

It is amazing what people put up on social media sites and what you can find. Personally, I was able to locate a few long-lost relatives this way - with over 250 million members worldwide, I'll bet that every family has at least one person on Facebook!

- **Family Trees:** Ancestry, Geni, WeRelate and other sites all offer free or limited access to family trees posted by members.
- **Facebook:** you will need a membership in order to get good search results. Also, in order to find out in-depth information about a person, you may need to “friend” them.
- **Twitter:** you can search on Twitter - a social media site with short 140-character max messages - without having a Twitter account.
- **Google Blog Search:** did you know that there are 30 million blogs created by US-based users? Very often these are personal in nature and you can find contact information including e-mail.

Newspapers

Besides current news websites (which can be located using most search engines), historical newspapers offer a wealth of information.

Unlikely Places

Alumni Associations

Check out university and even high school websites for information - some even list current email addresses.

Court Records

There is no one website which allows you to search all court filings. For Federal courts (includes bankruptcy filings), you need a subscription to PACER and you pay by the page to download documents.

However, you can easily find state and local courts online and many times access to indices and even documents is free.

Patents/Trademarks

Patent and trademark filings are rich with information on the dead as well as the living. Information can help establish a recent location or a recent workplace.

Volunteer Opportunities

One way to practice your people-finder skills is to volunteer for an organization which seeks to match up people or items with next of kin or their rightful owners.

Websites like **Dead Fred** allow you to post orphan photos or identify other photos already posted. Other organizations such as **Families for Forgotten Heroes** and **Unclaimed Persons** allow you to use your genealogy skills to locate living next of kin.

Contacting Living Persons

- **Expect hesitancy.** While contacting living people via telephone is preferred, understand that the person who answers might feel you are a scammer. Consider sending an email with links to your blog or website in order to build legitimacy. Or send a letter using the snail mail method, providing the recipient with your contact information. Let them contact you if and when they feel comfortable.
- **Expect to be rejected.** Some people are distanced from their families for a reason, and at their own choosing. Respect their desires without judging.

Be Careful What You Write

If you decide to document your research experience, understand that while you can't defame the dead, you can be accused of defamation and/or libel when posting information about the living especially if it is untrue.

- **Just the facts ma'am.** While blogs are often forums for personal views and free speech, play it safe and avoid injecting opinion when posting the facts which can be publicly located about a person. Don't let your personal judgments get in the way. Let readers come to their own conclusions.
- **Do your own research.** When I locate family tree data online, I always try to verify the information even if it is properly sourced and cited. The same goes for supposedly public information on living persons. Don't just copy from another site or blog without knowing the source of the data.
- **Consider the source.** Just as in genealogy research, certain sources are better than others and carry more weight. Some sources may not be useful or may be biased. When in doubt, don't include the fact if you don't feel comfortable with the reputation of the source.

Links

Alumni.net

<http://www.alumni.net/>

Ancestry Public Trees

<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1030>

AnyWho

<http://www.anywho.com/>

Bing

<http://www.bing.com>

Dead Fred

<http://www.deadfred.com/>

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com>

Google Groups

<http://groups.google.com/>

Google Newspapers

<http://news.google.com/newspapers>

Google Scholar

<http://scholar.google.com/>

Online Historical Newspapers

<http://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home>

peoplefinders

<http://www.peoplefinders.com/>

PeopleSmart

<http://www.peoplesmart.com>

pipl

<http://www.pipl.com>

Twitter Search

<http://search.twitter.com>

Unclaimed Persons

<http://www.unclaimedpersons.org/>

US Search

<http://www.ussearch.com/consumer/index.jsp>

Veromi

<http://www.veromi.net/processor.asp>

We Relate

<http://www.werelate.org/>

White Pages

<http://www.whitepages.com/>

Yahoo

<http://www.yahoo.com>

Zaba Search

<http://www.zabasearch.com/>