

Forensic Genealogy – A Probate Case Study

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Syllabus

Decedent: Carlo Paul Duncan, born 24 March 1939 and died 9 April 2016.

Decedent's Parents: Carl Duncan and Louise Brownfield.

Siblings: Carlo was an only child.

Objective: Look for siblings of Carlo's parents and their children.

Output type: Report

Records researched: Birth, marriage and death records, newspapers, tombstones, county records

- The maternal side of Carlo's family is straight forward. However, the paternal side of the family has a lot of twists and turns that we will work through. Adoptions are involved so I will show you how I uncovered this and clues that one has taken place. Another item we will work through is an assumed adoption as the child took on her stepfather's surname but a formal adoption never happened. It is also important to note that sometimes the person needs to be contacted to confirm what the genealogist is seeing. However, it is not the genealogist's place to make the phone calls. The genealogist needs to let the attorney know what they are seeing and then they can make the decision if they need to call or not.
- It is also important to note that you should write your reports/affidavits as you go. This helps to identify any holes in the research early on. If you wait until you think you are done researching, then more time is spent backtracking to confirm you are missing something.
- This report contains a section for an analysis of each record and the pertinent information gleaned from that document. This is in a section titled "Research Notes and Analysis."
- In all forensic cases it is important to have an "Attachments" or "Exhibits" section showing all images used that are cross referenced to each footnote.
- When looking for living individuals names, addresses and phone numbers, I use websites such as FamilyTreeNow, FastPeopleSearch, BeenVerified [paid] and TruePeopleSearch. I also look at voter registration records and property tax records. For voter registration records many states require a driver's license or social security number to access while some only require a birthdate or just a name and county or zip code. Sometimes the property tax sites require a userid and password.
- Summary Letter of Findings – When a case has a large number of pages it is cost prohibitive to file the entire document with the court as most charge by the page. It is okay to present a summary letter as long as the entire report is referenced.

This client asked for a report, but I have also turned this into an affidavit. A copy of the report, the affidavit and the summary letter will be passed around for participants to look at. They will be able to see the difference between a report and an affidavit.