

How to Locate Anyone Anywhere

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Without Leaving Home

TED L. GUNDERSON
WITH ROGER MCGOVERN

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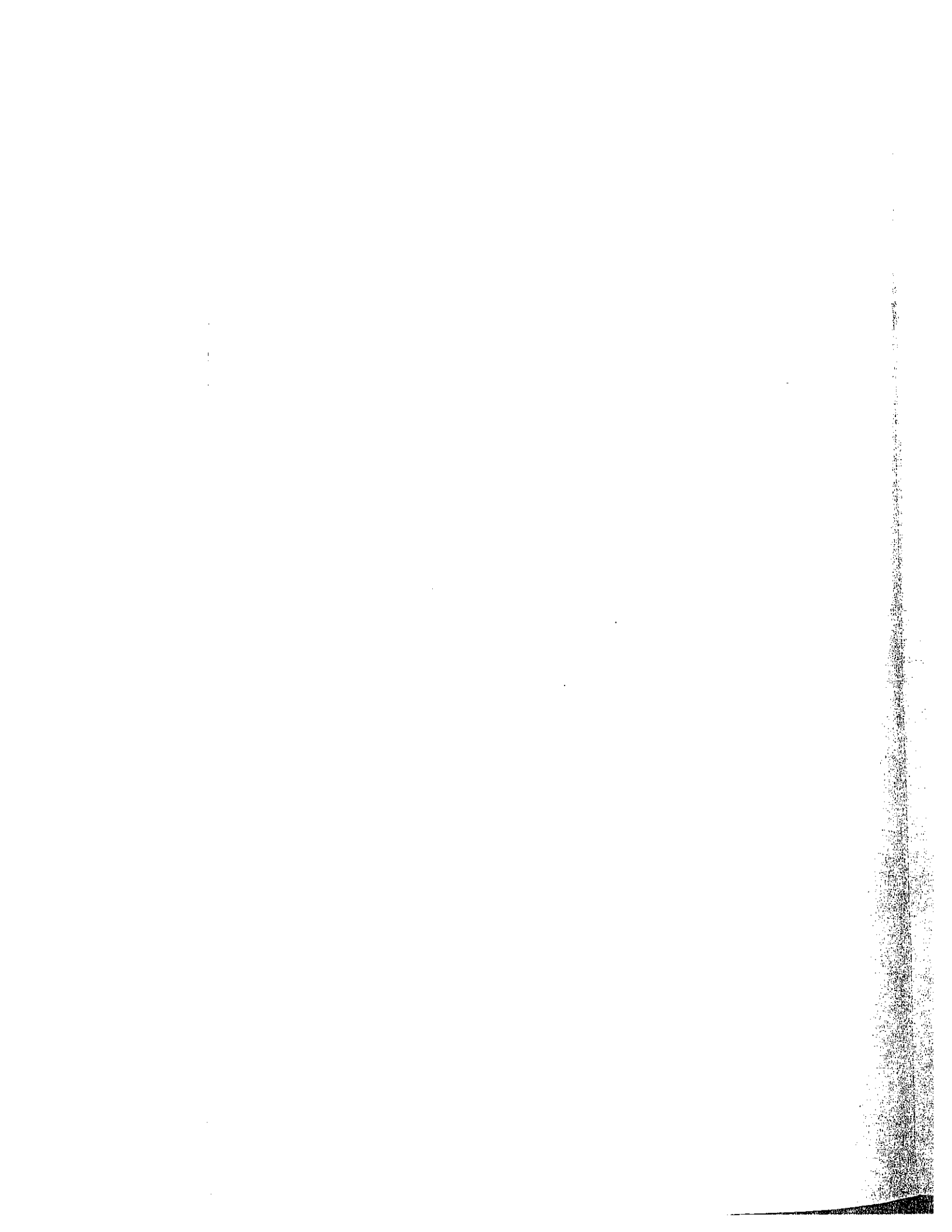
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TED GUNDERSON served in the FBI for twenty-seven years and retired as one of its top officials. He now heads his own private investigative firm in Los Angeles. ROGER McGOVERN is a Los Angeles-based writer.



TED L. GUNDERSON
with **ROGER McGOVERN**

**HOW TO
LOCATE
ANYONE
ANYWHERE**

*Without
Leaving
Home*



A PLUME BOOK

PLUME

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*I'd like to dedicate this book
to the more than one million Americans
who disappear every year, many
of whom are never heard from again.
God bless them.*

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other, Betty Gilliam.

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Preface

For almost all of my thirty-eight working years, my job has involved looking for people. People and evidence. But mostly for people important to an FBI case, or to one of my own. And at some point I became aware that almost everybody seems to be looking for somebody. So it occurred to me that it might be helpful to pass along a few of the search methods and information sources I've learned about, especially to those who can't hire somebody to do the looking for them and who can't go looking for themselves.

So I wrote this book in order to provide information about ways to search without leaving home base. It shows you how to reach more than 1,500 different, responsible, and usually cooperative sources of information on individuals through the use of the postal system and the telephone.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer guides on orientation, motivation, a short treatise on private investigators, and a look at some basic hunting tools.

The book is arranged with convenient records segments, so that you can pursue one specific search phase at a time: city, county, state, and federal. Because *that*—as they say—is where

it's at; in the countless files that keep millions of bureaucrats employed full-time.

We have listed the files by name, spelled out the kind of information you can expect to get from each of them, and suggested ways to retrieve it with the least amount of contention.

Chapter 7, "Miscellaneous," gives your common sense a chance to come up with some of your own solutions. In Chapter 8, "Computers, Credit, and Consumers," we name the best of the personal information-retrieval services for a fee, and show how credit cards can sometimes give out information about those who own them.

Chapter 9 is about "Missing Persons," as opposed to "misplaced persons," and Chapter 10, "Safety Tips," is followed by Chapter 11, "The Adoptee/Birth Parent Search."

I also have felt compelled to say something about "private eyes," the professional private investigators. Maybe it has crossed your mind, if you can afford it, to hire a P.I.—which brings me to one of the reasons I have prepared this book.

Investigation of the sort you want to pursue in locating a "lost" individual doesn't demand that you have a P.I.'s experience, but common sense helps a lot. No special skills are required; one logical step follows another. What I hope to do is organize that progression and help you develop the discipline that will keep your search efficient and make it productive.

I must emphasize that you should be flexible enough to accept help from unexpected sources and in unusual instances. The Salvation Army once gave backup to a New York City patrolman I know, who can still get round-eyed remembering something he witnessed at Grand Central Terminal last year.

A young woman and her six-year-old daughter were waiting on a mobbed platform to board a train to Yonkers after watching Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. The train pulled forward for some reason, leaving the tracks beside the platform bare. The train was backing up again when the child suddenly fell onto the tracks and lay there stunned. The cop himself admitted that he was completely unable to move, frozen to the spot. But an instant before the child would have been crushed beneath the wheels of the train, a shabby old man leaped down from nowhere, seized her, and saved her from death. The man vanished

into the throng after restoring the child to the platform and into the arms of her hysterical mother.

Each Friday until Christmas week, the mother returned, traveling the thirty miles from Yonkers to search the crowds with my policeman friend, looking for her scruffy hero. The cop finally asked the Salvation Army for help. From the description of the man, by Christmas week the Salvation Army had a street name and an address for the shabby one. He was "Felix," a resident at the Salvation Army shelter in Greenwich Village. "Felix" was located and compelled not only to listen to the mother's tearful speech of thanks, but also to eat a magnificent breakfast at a fine restaurant under the policeman's watchful eye. (You'll learn more about the Salvation Army's helpful record-keeping efficiency later.)

None of the foregoing is typical of the search methods we'll pursue here. The point is that almost no one—not even the homeless—goes unrecorded by one agency or another. And that is the foundation on which this book is based: records. Records that can mean a successful search whenever there is a genuine desire to locate someone for whom you have either great affection or great need. You will find the tools for doing that—at minimal cost, for the most part—in the pages ahead.

Something else I think you'll find is a growing excitement as your search gets under way and clues and leads fall into place. This has been my experience. This is what has kept me fascinated for more than thirty-eight years as an investigator.

So be prepared for a little "rush" that comes with getting information you need out of a balky agency, discovering a clue that has been there all the time without your seeing it, the long shot that works out.

Also be prepared for the "down" days, when nothing goes quite right and you experience an epidemic of right names, wrong people; telephone numbers said to be valid turn out to have been disconnected for months; the person you've selected as your cheerleader and main support suddenly says, "C'mon, let's forget it." Don't you do it!

Nobody ever said being an investigator was easy. I've known searchers who got caught up in their need to succeed to

the exclusion of almost everything else. You may not want to go that far. But if you begin to feel the pinch of frustration and sense that your main support is failing, act fast.

Sit down and rethink your entire plan and, if necessary, select someone else as your lead supporter. Fire off a new batch of correspondence to sources you have not written before, but should have. Consult your supporters. Ask them for some fresh suggestions. Stop thinking negatively.

In any case, you haven't really started just yet. So let's explore a search in which I was involved, mostly as a consultant. It will give you some idea of the courses to pursue, the wide range of information sources available, and the kind of tenacity it sometimes takes to bring a search to a successful conclusion.

As you will see from the following, Danny Nolan's reason for initiating a search may appear to be something less than urgent compared to the one that caused *you* to pick up this book; the worst result of failure would have been Danny's profound disappointment. But regardless of the degree of urgency you're feeling, read Danny's story as the *anatomy of a search*.

HOW TO LOCATE ANYONE ANYWHERE





ORGANIZING YOUR SEARCH

ABOUT DANNY NOLAN

Danny Nolan called me in Los Angeles as soon as his midterms were over and he knew he would graduate from the University of Nebraska in June.

"I want to invite my dad to come see me get my diploma."

Not so much to ask for, I thought, unless you knew, as I did, that Danny hadn't seen or really heard from his father, Tom, in more than a dozen years. Tom had left eighth-grader Danny and his mother, Marie, to shift for themselves in an unpaid-for house on Sioux Street in Lincoln, near my old neighborhood. Which is where I had come to know Tom Nolan, and why Danny was now calling me.

Tom was a financially ambitious fellow with an irresistibly attractive personality. Before disappearing, he had made some bad investments and borrowed a considerable amount of money. So for years he had been a subject of interest around Lincoln for others besides his son. A few unsuccessful attempts had been made by others to locate Tom. But love for a seemingly

unworthy father—and *patience*—is what paid off for Danny when he decided to take up the search.

There are two sides to every story. One year after he disappeared, Tom Nolan began to send increasingly substantial monthly postal money orders to the house on Sioux Street. Only once in all those years did a message accompany the money. This agonizingly remorseful note arrived long after Danny suffered a high school football injury that put him in a wheelchair for life. But now the house was paid off, Danny had finished his education, he and his mother were comfortable. Tom also had apparently satisfied his creditors in Lincoln. What kept him away from his family? Whoever can answer such a question has the answer to a great deal of puzzling human behavior.

Marie didn't like the idea of Danny's search for his father, but she raised no objections. Now came the problem of locating Tom Nolan. It was at this point that Danny called me, and we spent a half hour discussing strategies.

The money orders were the only good clue we had. They all originated in Concord, New Hampshire. Because the money order sender is not required to supply an address, this was a "blind" lead. But Danny had his father's full name and birth date, which are required to retrieve information from any driver's licensing agency in the United States, so he wrote to the New Hampshire Division of Motor Vehicles. No luck, Danny reported to me. Tom Nolan, who had never been known to be without a car, was either not in New Hampshire or was driving under an assumed name, which wasn't likely. So the money order sender had to be just a helpful friend. Danny continued to follow my instructions.

A phone call to Tom's only surviving relative, a brother in Minnesota, produced the information that although Tom had attended their mother's funeral five years before, there had been no further family contact. But the brother had been able to add that Tom spoke at the funeral of his half ownership in a fishing boat in New Orleans.

The reference librarian at Lincoln's main library dug up the necessary addresses for the Louisiana Department of Safety (driver's license) and the Wildlife and Fisheries Department at Baton Rouge (fishing vessel licenses). Responses to letters to

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each informed Danny that (1) Tom Nolan's driver's license had expired, and (2) he had sold his share in the fishing vessel to his partner, whose name and address were supplied.

Response to a letter to the partner revealed that eighteen months earlier Tom had invested in an orange grove near Sebring, Florida. The partner had no address to offer. He wished Danny and his mother luck.

The cooperative reference librarian at Lincoln's main library found three Thomas Nolans in the Sebring area directory, none with the correct middle initial. The information operator in Sebring was of no help, so letters of inquiry, with stamped, self-addressed postcards, went to the Property Tax Office in Highlands County, where Sebring is located, and to the Department of Highway Safety in Tallahassee. Addresses were courtesy of the reference librarian.

The tax office postcard returned with a groaner: Tom had sold his orange grove to a citrus conglomerate, for some reason listing his old, useless New Orleans address. But a day later, a computer printout from Tallahassee brought pay dirt: Tom's nice, clean driving record—and his Florida address!

"Let's not risk a negative reaction to a phone call, let's *send* him the invitation," Danny suggested.

It took a week for the RETURN TO SENDER—NO FORWARDING ADDRESS stamp to bring the invitation back to the Nolans' mailbox.

"That's it. Forget it, Mom. This guy is a spook, and I don't think I want him haunting my graduation."

But Danny hadn't quite given up. One day, at the supermarket to which he sometimes accompanied his mother, he sat in his wheelchair at a magazine rack while Marie was shopping. He found himself flipping the pages of a publication called *Entrepreneur*, directed to people who want to be in business for themselves.

A tiny bell tinkled in the back of Danny's mind as he remembered something I had mentioned to him in running down the list of possible information sources. Maybe Danny could solve his own dilemma with an end around that just might net his enterprise-hopping father.

It took time to explain to Marie what he planned to do, and

it seemed much too farfetched to her to work. But at my suggestion she wrote a touching note to Tom on an *unaddressed, stamped, forwarding postcard*, which she wouldn't let Danny read. And off it went, with a letter to *Entrepreneur's* subscription manager. Now if Tom just happened to be on that subscription list, and if the subscription manager was a sympathetic type who appreciated their concern for Tom's privacy, maybe . . .

Admitting the remoteness of his chances for contact, with a resigned sigh Danny put away his search records, and with them his high hopes.

It didn't help when graduation day almost didn't dawn, the skies were so black with rain clouds. A radio newscast confirmed the expected. Commencement exercises, which had been planned for outdoors that year, would instead be held inside the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

There was standing room only as the wet-smelling audience settled down for the speeches and presentation of diplomas. From the platform, the graduates could hardly see the faces of people packed under the overhang at the rear of the hall. But then Danny wasn't looking—or was pretending he wasn't.

The ceremony was under way when something aroused the standees at the back of the room. The polite pushing and shoving attracted the attention of the graduates, including Danny. He saw a tall man shouldering his way through the crowd. It had been a long, long time, but Danny recognized the lean, handsome face he had given up hope of ever seeing again.

Tom Nolan. Adult runaway, check bouncer, reluctant family man, incurable entrepreneur, and in the end, loving father—home to make what amends he could.

As Danny Nolan's story exhibited here, and as we'll read more about in the pages ahead, knowing your subject's behavioral characteristics (along with his or her political and religious leanings) can be important to your search.

So can the degree of urgency you feel.

It isn't possible to imagine beforehand the degree of urgency, which is so important a search-motivation factor, for any of my readers. There would be a thousand variations. You, for example, could be facing a matter of life and death, perhaps needing to learn the genetic background of an adoptee who has

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become seriously ill. On the other hand, a legal or financial crisis might hinge on the success of your search. Then again, failure to find your subject might result in nothing more traumatic than disappointment.

In any case, I'm determined to get you into a frame of mind that gives your search *importance*. I want to give you something that, once your search has begun, should see you all the way through to a successful finish.

And that's what the following is designed to do.

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MOTIVATING YOURSELF

Cranking yourself into mental gear—motivating yourself—could be the most important element in getting your search under way. And of course it should come first, before you attempt any exploratory work whatsoever. So I suggest that you, as a beginning, do the following things.

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1. Read this book from cover to cover, *all* of it, not just the sections that seem to apply to *your* search.
2. Give your search a priority ranking: casual, compelling, urgent, critical.
3. Assign a beginning and completion deadline accordingly.
4. Resolve to remind yourself often that, although this is a how-to book, you aren't building a barbecue pit or knitting a shawl for Aunt Olive. You're doing this for *you* and your feeling of well-being.
5. Spend some time anticipating the pleasure and/or satisfaction to be derived from completing your project successfully despite frustrations and setbacks; there *will* be some of these.
6. Accept my word for it; this is a fascinating game, one that you should convince yourself you're going to win.
7. Look forward to the challenge to your patience, ingenuity, and—this will get a good workout—common sense.
8. Enlist the support of family and friends. Their interest will help sustain *your* interest. Their suggestions will be invaluable.
9. Plan to keep accurate records and a *journal* to which you can point with pride when your project is completed.
10. From this page forward, think *success!*

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EXPENSES

The cost of getting your "friendly" living-room search off the carpet will be modest, probably somewhat less than the more complex searches covered in Chapter 8, "Computers, Credit, and Consumers," and Chapter 11, "The Adoptee/Birth Parent Search."

Here are some of the expenses you'll incur in your "friendly" search.

MAILINGS

Ream of white writing/typing paper
 Box of inexpensive white envelopes
 Half roll (50) first-class postage stamps
 Fifty meter-stamped postcards
 Photocopying
 Local travel (fares, gas)
 Highlight pen
 Lined legal pads (2)
 TOTAL: under \$50.00

TELEPHONES AND THE THREE-HOUR SPREAD

Consider the time of day in keeping down long-distance costs. Calls made on weekends between 5:00 P.M. Friday and 5:00 P.M. Sunday, and after 5:00 P.M. weekdays in your zone, offer a discount. Be aware that 5:00 P.M. Eastern is 4:00 P.M. Central, 3:00 P.M. Mountain, and 2:00 P.M. Pacific, with the business day still under way in those zones. A 5:00 P.M. California call, then, should find a New Yorker at home with dinner over. A call from New York at 11:00 P.M. reaches a West Coast callee at just about that same stage. So act like a calculating clock watcher and you won't find telephoning outrageously expensive. Remember—a call to the right party at the right time could abbreviate your search.

DOCUMENT AND OTHER FEES

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Some document fees are reasonably consistent across the country, such as driver's license records; I've given such fee amounts individually by state in Appendix 7. Other fees, even for essentially identical documents, vary so much from state to state that I can't even offer estimates. This is more of a problem for those pursuing birth parent and relinquished-child searches. They can expect to pay not only for basic correspondence and telephone costs but for a clutch of documents as well. They usually need copies of birth, marriage, and death certificates and other records that require photocopying and notarizing. Their searches might involve mass mailings to a host of people with the same surname as the subject's. Then there could be membership dues to support groups, advertisements in—and subscriptions to—search publications.

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The upbeat side of all this paperwork is that you can keep within your budget by doing some commonsense planning. For example, never send for a document unless you are certain it is absolutely vital. Write the agency beforehand for search and copying costs so there are no surprises. If the need for a mass mailing occurs, use less expensive double postcards rather than a letter with a stamped, forwarding postcard enclosed. Don't be put off by needing to run an advertisement or join a support group. Search publications charge modestly for both ads and subscriptions. Support and information group membership dues average only \$20 to \$30 per year.

Above all, keep good cost records; they will help guide you in the least costly way to go. You'll get into the habit of economizing.

BEGINNING NOTES

STEP 1

Use the Missing Person statistics list on page 9 as a guide for creating a Profile of your subject. Then knock on doors. Telephone. Talk to former fellow workers, friends, enemies, lovers, relatives. Ask traditional who-what-when-where-why-how

questions and take notes—mental or otherwise—of the answers.

Your objective here is to create as complete a word picture of your subject as possible. So add anything I've missed that you think should be part of his or her physical description and background.

Your subject's Profile is a document vital to an organized search. It will become part of your Inquiry Kit, which I will tell you about a little later. Keep adding details to your Profile as your search progresses. You'll be surprised (and your subject may be, too) at the amount of information you'll be able to collect.

Make at least two dozen photocopies of the Profile, one for each kit you'll assemble (you may need more). File the original Profile for further copying as needed. Interfaced (matched) with data for others with an identical name, it will help distinguish your subject from them.

STEP 2

Much of your search will be conducted through the U.S. Postal Service. Lay in some standard 8½" × 11" white typing paper; #10 envelopes; a highlight pen (for highlighting certain Profile items—military service, for example, when contacting the Veterans Administration).

Lay in a batch of meter-stamped postcards. And depending on how fancy a working journal you think fits the project, you might find a simple, lined legal pad quite adequate. Keep in mind that it is easy to lose track of details as you go along because your search is not something you'll be working on every day. There will be stretches of time when you're waiting for responses, and your memory of what you were doing last will start to fade. Your journal with notes of everything you've done up until that last working day will always be there for you to go back and pick up from when the waiting is over. Remember, *date entries* as you go.

STEP 3

Get a membership card from your *main* (if there is more than one) *library*. Acquaint yourself with the *reference librarians* there, and explain your project to them. Librarians are almost invari-

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PROFILE OF MISSING PERSON

1. **Full name** First, middle, last, maiden, confirmation, and nicknames
2. **Gender** M/F
3. **Vital statistics** Day, month, year, place, of birth; Social Security number
4. **Physical** Height, weight, eye/hair color, glasses, facial hair, accent, lisp, tattoos, deformity, limp, scars, moles, etc.
5. **Descent** Caucasian, Black, Asian, Latin, Middle Eastern, Polynesian, etc.
6. **Last address** And the two before that, if available
7. **Education** Grammar, high, college, trade, years attended, graduated
8. **Occupation** Business, trade, profession, last employed as, retired, etc.
9. **Organizations** Labor, social, service, trade, professional, etc.
10. **Religion** Denomination, tither, frequent service attender
11. **Military** Service, period served, where, when, rank at discharge, serial number
12. **Licenses** Driver (state, number), pilot, barber, contractor, lawyer, doctor, etc.
13. **Hobbies** Fishing, knitting, hang gliding, golf, etc.
14. **Search reasons** Legal/health crisis, friendly/loving desire for contact, financial/credit
15. **Relationship** Birth parent/adoptee, immediate family, other relative, lover, friend, priest, doctor, lawyer, etc.
16. **Subscriptions** *People, Sports Illustrated, Aviation*, etc.
17. **Possible location** Where you've been told your subject is, where you think he or she is, where your common sense tells you he or she might be
- *18. **Finances** (At last word) Well-off, well paid, broke, in debt, bad credit, etc.
- *19. **Law history** Arrest record, time served, where, etc.
- *20. **Bank account** Where, how long, how much
- *21. **Politics** Party registration, where
- *22. **Credit cards** Visa, MasterCard, Diner's, Macy's, etc.

*If yours is a "friendly" search, eliminate the asterisked entries (18 through 22). Any data acquired for these entries are so personal they should not be used without purpose in Profiles sent with requests for information.

ably knowledgeable and willing to guide you through their world of facts, figures, dates, and place-names. They have the addresses of most of the important information sources you'll be contacting, plus the addresses of every other library in the United States. Knowing these details now will be important later.

STEP 4

Use your legal pad/ledger or—if yours is a more complicated search—separate 3" × 5" filing cards for keeping records of contact names, phone numbers, addresses, dates, and other data. Make progress notes for each of your activities so you will be able to pick up easily where you left off even after long periods of inactivity. *Discipline* yourself. Be neat and accurate, as though your files might someday become a court record, which could well happen if yours is a search for legal reasons.

STEP 5

Again, I suggest that you read *all* of this book before beginning work. Be aware that Chapter 8, "Computers, Credit, and Consumers," and Chapter 11, "The Adoptee/Birth Parent Search," can be helpful in all types of searches.

From this moment on, keep in mind that most successful searches result from ten vital attitude factors:

1. enthusiasm,
2. patience,
3. a sense of dedication,
4. discipline in your work,
5. willingness to accept suggestions,
6. perseverance,
7. retaining a mental image of success,
8. reliance on your common sense,
9. the commitment to make things happen when it seems nothing is about to,
10. acceptance of results if you succeed.

Number 10 is the key to finding peace and satisfaction if you are looking for a relinquished child or a birth parent and

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are successful. Without first resolving to accept these consequences, whatever they might be, it may be best not to pursue your quest.

With all this out of the way, we are almost ready to go. But first I want you to meet someone who could supply you with an alternative to doing your own searching.

ABOUT PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS

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You probably don't want to—or can't—hire a private investigator to do your search for you; that's why you bought this book. But let's take a quick look at him or her and his characteristics so you can relate to him somewhat.

To begin with, P.I.s are easy to find. There are thousands, licensed and unlicensed, at work in the United States. Very few of them are real professionals. Of course, some are trained operatives with law-enforcement backgrounds who are completely dependable.

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earch,"

Private investigators are listed in most of the yellow pages between New York and Honolulu. The problem is choosing an effective one—unless you personally know of a capable P.I. you can expect effectively to carry out your assignment without its costing you an arm and a leg. An average fee for a P.I.'s services, whether he's good or not so good, can run as high as several hundred dollars a day, with the inevitable "plus expenses," an item that can become financially lethal over a long search.

ccessful

In this book, I've discussed some of the techniques your eye-for-hire would normally use. But for the most part, although the P.I. depends a lot on personal contact with his information sources, you will be using the mails, the telephone, and public records.

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Another major difference between you and some paid sleuths is their willingness to wink at the law, using illegal acts to help shortcut the gathering of evidence; you've learned a few of these from watching television. And of course, it's not only illegal but unwise to represent yourself as a law-enforcement officer or government official at any time or for any reason. This kind of activity can get you into very hot water.

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So my firm's policy with clients is: "We'll investigate anything and anybody, but we won't go to jail for you."

However, there are legal ruses we're not above using when the end justifies the means and we feel that gaining the information you need is reason enough. You might identify yourself on the phone as a telemarketer/surveyor wanting to know your subject's present occupation, or you might say you're a friend of old hometown friends with a message from "the gang" back there. This kind of subterfuge is not illegal; just don't try to represent yourself as a government official.

Beware, too, of coming off as stupid by asking the wrong questions, or by being unsure of yourself. Anticipate questions about your identity and have the right answers ready.

If you're into an investigation that calls for subterfuge and your subject is obviously trying to avoid you and detection, leave him or her alone. Look up the subject's relatives and pay *them* a visit. Or locate a girlfriend or boyfriend, maybe former workmates. Forgo any Sam Spade stuff. Minor deceptions here and there will gain you what you need to know.

TWO YOU-CAN'T-DO-WITHOUTS

Before you begin any kind of comprehensive search, you must possess *two* vital statistics regarding your subject.

1. *Your subject's first, middle, and last names* (correctly spelled), the name he or she is licensed by, votes by, and gets credit with, whether it is a birth or adoptive name, and nicknames, if any.

If a birth or adoptive name has been changed *officially*, your identification problem is heightened and may call for a search of court records or for interviews with associates who know the subject by his or her new identity. If the subject has *assumed* a different name, an aka (also known as), that complication will also slow the progress of your search. These are all solvable problems if you read this book thoroughly.

2. *Your subject's date of birth* (DOB). Because of a population nearing the 250 million mark, there are thousands of name duplications in the United States. Of all the search data you can

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ORGANIZING YOUR SEARCH



supply to information sources—in addition to a full name—the

DOB is the clearest identifying statistic separating your subject

from others of the same name. (The place of birth [POB]

another helpful identifying item you should try to acquire.)

you don't already have it, you'll learn from this book how to get

about getting the DOB.*

*Less critical, but helpful in your search, is knowing your subject's Social Security number. The Social Security number is used in many ways as an American serial number.

SOME BASIC SEARCH TOOLS

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Most government agencies—and private ones, too—are like most people: they hate to divulge secrets, even if the secrets are not their own. "It's for me to know and you to find out" is their attitude. It's a good thing, too, for by retaining the right of privacy for you and for me, agencies protect us from irrelevant prying.

We are not going to challenge that right, nor are we going to pry in any sense. But our problem here is to make the agency person quickly aware of (1) why we want to contact a subject, and (2) how we can achieve this goal without invasion of the subject's privacy.

You can use a mailing device that will allow you to make contact without arousing suspicion or resistance in those guarding citizens' privacy.

Here is how it works; it's very simple.

1. Determine which public or private agency is likely to have your subject's current address, or a source for the address:

- Veterans Administration, Social Security, a state vital statistics office, an insurance company, whatever.
2. Write a short, clear *letter of inquiry* addressed to either the director or the supervisor of the agency (see directly below).
 3. Enclose a photocopy of your subject's Profile, highlighting statistics that might apply to that agency: military service, for example, when contacting the Veterans Administration.
 4. Enclose a *plain, post office meter-stamped postcard* (see page 16) on the back of which is a brief, clear message to your subject

LETTER OF INQUIRY TO THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION
 Director, Regional Office
 Veterans Administration
 (your regional VA office address)

Regarding: Charles Thomas Ingham
 Date of Birth: 9/14/29
 In Louisville, Kentucky

(Date)

Dear Director:

I have an urgent reason for contacting the above-named former serviceman: U.S. Army, 1950-1953, Korean Theater, approximately 10/1/52 to 8/1/53. Discharge rank: sergeant. I have enclosed a vital statistics profile. If his present address is in your file, I request that you please forward to him the enclosed, stamped, unaddressed postcard. If his address is not available, please have the postcard mailed back to me.*

Thank you for your help.

Peter J. Anderson (your signature)

Peter J. Anderson (typed or printed)
 107 Maple Terrace
 Montgomery, Alabama 36104

*Note: Always request that the forwarding postcard be mailed back to you if your subject's address is not available. This will help you keep accurate files and eliminates the agency or individual as an information source.

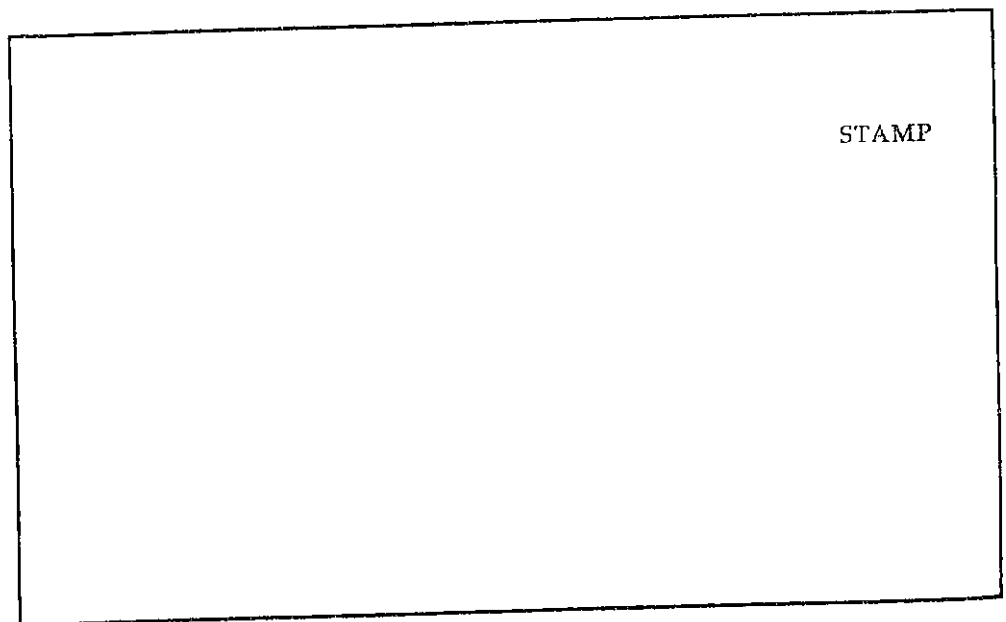
asking him or her to contact you; your name, signature, return address; and—if desirable—your telephone number. Leave the front (stamped) side of the postcard blank, so that your subject's name, if available from the agency's rolls, can be applied for forwarding. You now have—with your letter of inquiry; Profile; and stamped, unaddressed, forwarding postcard—what we will call from now on your Inquiry Kit. (An enclosed photograph of the subject would help.)

Note: If your longhand is as illegible as mine, I suggest that you print all your correspondence rather than use a typewriter. Pen and ink tends to attract the attention of clerks and officials exposed daily to bales of typewritten material. Furthermore, pen and ink will enhance the personal nature of your inquiry—and of the postcard to your subject.

Also, ask for the names and phone numbers of a couple of your subject's former neighbors. They just might be nosy enough to have learned where your subject was going when he or she left town.

You may have a same-name problem; Browns, Smiths, and

FORWARDING POSTCARD



Leave front blank for your subject's address.

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SOME BASIC SEARCH TOOLS



Dear Chuck: I asked the Veterans Administration to forward this postcard, since I have no idea where you are and we need to talk. I've got good news for you. Please write or call collect: 512-555-4567.

Pete Anderson
107 Maple Terrace
Montgomery, Alabama 36104

If the postcard is returned to you, take a deep breath and try again somewhere else.

Williamses take up dozens of pages in metropolitan directories. But if you don't have this problem, and want to do a thorough directory search, don't hesitate to call all the numbers listed under your subject's surname. You could well reach a relative who knows exactly where your subject is. Just be prepared to fib a little, if necessary, about your reasons for wanting to reach the subject; families don't give up the location of a relative to strangers all that easily. You might want to say you're the subject's former insurance agent and that you have some cash residue from an old policy you want to return to the subject. This should get you at least an address to work with, and maybe a phone number.

THE HAINES CRISS-CROSS DIRECTORY

The Criss-Cross is an amazing cross-reference directory. It lists every street in any given community alphabetically, from Abbe Lane to Zoetrope Circle, and gives the names, addresses in sequence, and telephone numbers (except for unlisted numbers) of the people who live on those streets.

That's the first half of the Criss-Cross. The second half lists all the telephone numbers, in sequence—with the prefix as a base—and the street names, addresses, and residents. So if you have nothing to go on but a telephone number, the Criss-Cross will let you run it straight down to the address and name.

TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES

Once in a while I get calls from people in Greater Los Angeles who are quite serious about hiring me to find someone without their first checking telephone directories for southern California. They ignore a rule of common sense. More than 6 percent of the nation's population—some 14 million people—live within Greater L.A.'s area codes: 213, 714, and 818. Because I begin all searches by starting from ground zero, occasionally I have been able to respond to search callers on the same day with a confirmed address I've found in a phone book here in my office. Directories can be helpful tools and often are overlooked.

But if you've already checked local directories for your subject with no luck, try your public library, which has a collection of current phone books for various regions of the United States. (Telephone companies used to provide libraries of directories for every area of the United States at their main offices, but they don't any longer.) At your main library you'll probably find a directory for the community in which your subject last lived.

OK—you found the right directory, but not your subject. Then try this: almost all public libraries also maintain a file of *local* phone books for past years—up to twenty years or more in some cases. Write or call the reference librarian in your subject's suspected area and ask for a check of local directories over the past three or four years. If his or her name pops up in one, ask the librarian to run a check in her Haines Criss-Cross Directory for who's living at your subject's old address *now*.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

You probably already have a library card. If you don't, get one, if only to be on the library's records. Most of the material you'll be looking up will be in the Reference Room, and whatever is there stays there. It can't be checked out.

Be aware that your main library—if your town has more than one—is probably better equipped with reference material than the branch libraries.

Go out of your way to be pleasant and appreciative to the reference librarians. They are absolutely invaluable in helping you with search information.

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CITY RECORDS

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Long experience with the most marvelous free public library system in the world has led me to a dependency I hope *you* acquire. Many reference librarians seem to know everything about everything, or have answers at their fingertips in volumes of exotica or minutiae that make them fountains of information. These people are—without exception, in my experience—not only incredibly patient but blessed with understanding and an aversion to your leaving their rooms with your information problem unsolved. Take advantage of this extraordinary service. It's free.

I bring up the subject of libraries often because I think so much of them and the people who run them. At this time I also want to mention a source of information they have that isn't related to the books on their shelves.

It's the collection of card-holder names they have in their computers. I doubt very much that these dedicated people would release this kind of information to the public. But they would regard helping you make contact with someone on their card-holder list as part of their job. There are thousands of public

libraries throughout the country, most of them with computerized record systems, giving you still another way to go in your search.

Get in touch with the library system in the area where your subject may be living, and put your Inquiry Kit to work.

I haven't mentioned before, but I do now, that there is a *law library* in just about every American courthouse, or in a building nearby. Most law libraries maintain well-cataloged and updated state and federal literature on adoption, child relinquishing, child abuse, kidnapping, parental abduction, foster parenting, and so on, free for you to use.

University and college libraries offer—aside from massive collections of textbooks and classics—the results of special studies and research directed to family relations and child abuse. The library system of the University of California's campuses alone (eight campuses total, excluding the Medical/Dental Center in San Francisco) contains over 19 million volumes! Even the smallest campus, that of UC-Riverside, has several libraries holding over 1.25 million bound and unbound texts, including tens of thousands of rolls of microfilm.

All of the library services I've mentioned here are free. And again I remind you that the list of card holders at any of these libraries may be a source of information to you—if you use your Inquiry Kit.

POLICE DEPARTMENTS

Police departments and all law-enforcement agencies are tied into terminals for the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computers in Washington, D.C. You can now ask your police department to list a missing child with NCIC just a few alarming hours after his or her disappearance. It soon may be possible to do the same with missing, mentally capable adults if planned modifications are made in allowable entries into the NCIC system. (Only retarded and aged adult missing had been eligible for NCIC entry up to mid-1988.)

The typical police department maintains extensive records. It keeps a file of local known active lawbreakers and nuisance perpetrators. And a twenty-four-hour running account of who is doing what to whom comes over the statewide teletype net-

work that reaches all law-enforcement agencies as well as the NCIC. This flow of crime information can be interrupted at any time by any agency so that it can enter its own report of local criminal activity, with physical descriptions of suspects, modus operandi, and vehicles operating in that agency's jurisdiction.

But the task of massive criminal recordkeeping is pretty much up to the county and the state. The exceptions are monster population centers such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Because of the sheer volume of lawbreaking activity in these areas, big-city police departments must share in the jailing and the recordkeeping.

In most areas, however, as prosecution and disposition of wrongdoers progresses, the county and state take up the burden of keeping track of them. At another level, the federal court and penal systems, and law-enforcement agencies such as the FBI, pick up recordkeeping and jailing for their special categories of lawbreakers.

Just keep in mind that, thanks to the Freedom of Information Act (see page 47), you can open many of the records that once were closed to the public.

CITY-COUNTY PERMITS AND LICENSES

Cities and counties regulate almost all activity within their boundaries by issuing permits. These permits include the name and address of the individual applying. Such records are normally kept at City Hall and the county courthouse. They would include permits for building projects, demonstrations and parades, as well as dog licenses, bicycle licenses, vendor licenses, and so on. City and county business licenses are located in the city and county clerks' office. Just about all businesses operating in cities and counties are required to have a license. The application for the license contains the name and address of the business, the name and address of the owner or his or her agent, the owner's home phone number, the type of business, the number of employees, the date the application was filed and the license's expiration date, and the filing fee paid.

COUNTY RECORDS

Any American county courthouse is a gold mine of records concerning the people who live there and the legal activity that takes place between them and the elected authorities.

Many of these records can be obtained simply by knowing the subject's full name and date of birth. Of course, you should have a good idea of what *kind* of record you want before you can determine which office and what clerk to contact—by telephone, by mail, or in person.

What follows is a discussion of some of the county records available for search and the range of information each of them provides.

THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The sheriff is elected, not appointed. In most counties, he is considered the number-one law-enforcement officer. (Some counties give this ranking to the district attorney.) The sheriff's deputies serve subpoenas, warrants, sheriff's sale notices, and handle sale details. They patrol unincorporated highways, in-

investigate motor vehicle accidents on private property, investigate crime (with a detective division), operate the jails, provide guards for the courtrooms (bailiffs), and transport inmates from one facility to another.

And, as if all that didn't keep them busy enough, the sheriff's staff must keep extensive jail records.

Prisoner files will include mug shot, full name, akas, next of kin, recent addresses, fingerprints, charges, jail conduct, visitor list and dates, unusual correspondence (as a rule, mail censored), statements made while in jail, trial dispositions, and much more.

These records are hard to get to, but you can access them with formally prepared requests through the district attorney and—with considerably more difficulty—through the public defender. Because the Sheriff's Department and the district attorney are the prosecutors, the public defender is necessarily an adversary to them. And because both sides are handling admissible trial material, they both tend to guard their records jealously. Of course, the defender's inventory of records at any point in time is minuscule compared to the sheriff's.

In any case, don't be too hopeful of retrieving much information from either of these sources through the mail.

Be prepared to appear in person (1) with a lawyer at your side and (2) with a good knowledge of procedure and very persuasive ways. If you can't appear in person, and a truly urgent need exists for special information, you can write to the court involved.

BIRTH, DEATH, AND MARRIAGE

BIRTH RECORDS

Copies of original birth certificates are routinely supplied on request to everyone except an adoptee, whose *original* certificate is sealed by the court on the day the adoption is final and can be opened only by court order (see page 24). The adoptee is allowed a copy of his *amended* certificate, from which all of the "identifying" information has been eliminated. These deletions include the names of the natural parents, their places of birth

their ages, the name of the certifier (usually the attending physician), and the name of the registrar for the county. In short, nothing that might help lead a searching adult adoptee to his true origins is included in the amended birth certificate.

Except for two items.

Each newborn is given an official number that is filed by date of birth in the county registry. Almost every county retains those two items *unchanged* on the amended birth certificate. So, if a searching adult adoptee knows his exact birth date and the number from his amended certificate, a matchup in the birth records could reveal his natural birth name. These things can help in identifying his birth parents.

Birth records are maintained at both the county and the state vital statistics offices. They are public information—except for adoptees' original birth certificates—available to you in person or by mail with submission of the proper request. Write for a fee figure and include a check or money order with the actual request.

PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING FACTS WHEN REQUESTING
A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

1. Subject's full name
2. Gender and race
3. Subject's parents' names, including maiden name of mother
4. Date of birth: month, day, year
5. Place of birth: city, town, county, state, hospital
6. Purpose for which certificate copy is needed
7. Your relationship to person whose record is being requested
(See Appendix 8 for addresses in each state to use when submitting requests for birth certificates by mail or in person.)

Birth Records of Persons Born in Foreign Countries
Who Are U.S. Citizens at Birth

Births of U.S. citizens in foreign countries should be reported on the Consular Report of Birth (Form FS-240) to the nearest American consular office as soon after the birth as possible. This report should be prepared and filed by one of the parents. However, the physician or midwife attending the birth or any

other person having knowledge of the facts can prepare the report.

Documentary evidence is required to establish citizenship. Consular offices provide complete information on what evidence is needed. The Consular Report of Birth is a sworn statement of the facts of birth. When approved, it establishes in documentary form the child's acquisition of U.S. citizenship. It has the same value as proof of citizenship as the Certificate of Citizenship issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Filing a Consular Report of Birth is not authorized for children five years of age or older.

A \$13 fee is charged for reporting the birth. The original document is filed with: Passport Services, Correspondence Branch, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20524. The parents are given a certified copy of the Consular Report of Birth and a short form, Certification of Birth (Form DS-1350 or Form FS-545).

To obtain a copy of a report of the birth in a foreign country of a U.S. citizen, write to the Passport Services office. State the full name of the child at birth, date of birth, place of birth, and names of parents. Also include any information about the U.S. passport on which the child's name was first included. Sign the request and state your relationship to the person whose record is being requested and the reason for the request.

The fee for each copy is \$4.00. Enclose a check or money order made payable to the U.S. Department of State.

The Department of State issues two types of copies from the Consular Report of Birth: (1) a full copy of Form FS-240 as it was filed, or (2) a short form (Form DS-1350 or Form FS-545), which shows only the name and sex of the child and the date and place of birth. The information in both forms is valid. The short form may be obtained in a name subsequently acquired by adoption or legitimation after proof is submitted to establish that such an action legally took place.

Birth Records of Alien Children Adopted by U.S. Citizens

Birth certifications for alien children adopted by U.S. citizens and lawfully admitted to the United States may be obtained, if the birth information is on file, from: Immigration and Natu-

ralization Service (INS), U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. 20536.

Certification may be issued for children under twenty-one years of age who were born in a foreign country. Requests must be submitted on INS Form G-641, which can be obtained from any INS office (addresses can be found in a telephone directory). For a Certification of Birth Data (INS Form G-350), a \$5.00 search fee, paid by check or money order, should accompany INS Form G-641.

Certification can be issued in the new name of an adopted or legitimated child after proof of an adoption or legitimation is submitted to INS. Because it may be issued for a child who has not yet become naturalized, Form G-350 is not proof of U.S. citizenship.

Certificate of Citizenship

United States citizens who were born abroad and later naturalized or who were born in a foreign country to a U.S. citizen (parent or parents) may apply for a certificate of citizenship pursuant to the provisions of Section 341 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act. Application can be made for this document in the United States at the nearest office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The INS will issue a certificate of citizenship for the person if proof of citizenship is submitted and the person is within the United States. The decision whether to apply for a certificate of citizenship is optional.

Records of Births Occurring on Vessels on the High Seas or on Aircraft in International Flight

When a birth occurs in international territory, whether in an aircraft or on a vessel, the determination of where to file the record is decided by the direction in which the vessel or aircraft was headed at the time the birth occurred.

1. If the vessel or aircraft was outbound or had docked or landed at a foreign port, requests for copies of the record should be made to: U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520.
2. If the vessel or aircraft was inbound and the first port of entry

was in the United States, write to the registration authority in the city where the vessel or aircraft docked or landed in the United States.

3. If the vessel was of U.S. registry, contact the U.S. Coast Guard facility at the port of entry.

Records Maintained by Foreign Countries

Most, but not all, foreign countries record births. It is not feasible to list here all foreign vital records offices, the charges they make for copies of records, or the information they may require to locate a record. However, most foreign countries will provide certifications of births occurring within their boundaries.

U.S. citizens who need a copy of a foreign birth record may obtain assistance by writing to: Office of Overseas Citizens Services, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520.

Aliens residing in the United States who seek records of these events should contact their nearest consular office.

DEATH RECORDS

There is the possibility that your subject may no longer be alive (see page 29 for data needed when requesting death records). If he or she is advanced in years, and you have no idea where he or she resided last, this is more than a possibility, and a good first move is to contact the Social Security office (see page 49). Under ordinary circumstances, Social Security is among the first of the agencies to be notified of a death, usually by the coroner or by the next of kin.

But some deaths *aren't* ordinary, and you should be aware that this notification can be made only if the deceased is found bearing comprehensive identification: for example, a Social Security card (which many older persons no longer carry, having memorized the number long ago), a driver's license, or credit cards. But in many cases of homicide, suicide, and accidental and unattended death, the possibility of the deceased's being separated from his or her ID after death is a strong one. If a body is discovered without positive ID, the following procedure takes place in most counties of the United States.

The coroner attempts to determine the victim's identification

through postmortem examination, referring to dental charts, fingerprints, X rays, tattoos, scars, location of the body, and other details. If all fail, the decedent's death particulars go to what is called, in California, the County Public Administrator's Office (CPAO), which has a counterpart in most American counties. The CPAO turns over whatever is found with the victim to the county treasurer or some general fund. Burial then takes place at the county's expense.

If the deceased is identified but remains unclaimed, the name is entered as a public record in the state's vital statistics office. Any researcher can usually procure a copy of the death certificate and details of the death by mail, in person, or by contacting this office. Such an office may also be maintained by the county in which the decedent resided. Check it.

When the victim is known and claimed, the death certificate is normally prepared by the attending physician, funeral director, hospital authority, or coroner. Then it is filed in both the county in which the death occurred and at the state's vital statistics office.

The certificate is public information, for a fee, by mail or in person. It will probably contain the deceased's birth name, age, date and place of birth, last known address, physical description, injury description (if any), laboratory results of biopsy/autopsy and cause of death; names and addresses of informants, next of kin, funeral director, cemetery interred, or crematory. Also listed (if available): the deceased's occupation, military record, and other life details.

This is the same information you would be asked for if you were reporting a death to authorities.

SUPPLY THE FOLLOWING DATA
WHEN REQUESTING DEATH RECORDS

1. Full name of decedent
2. Gender and race
3. Parents' names, including maiden name of mother
4. Date of birth: month, day, year
5. Place of death (if known): city, town, county, state
6. Purpose for which certificate copy is needed
7. Your relationship to the deceased

(See Appendix 8 for addresses in each state to which you should submit requests for certificates. Write for the exact fee figure beforehand, and be sure to include it when you mail your request.)

Death Records of U.S. Citizens Who Die in Foreign Countries

The death of a U.S. citizen in a foreign country is normally reported to the nearest U.S. consular office. The consul prepares the official Report of the Death of an American Citizen Abroad (Form OF-180), and a copy of the report is filed permanently in the U.S. Department of State (see exception below). To obtain a copy of a report, write: Passport Services, Correspondence Branch, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20524. The fee for a copy is \$4.00.

Exception: Reports of deaths of members of the armed forces of the United States are made only to the branch of the service to which the person was attached at the time of death—army, navy, air force, or coast guard. In these cases, requests for copies of records should be directed as follows. *For members of the army, navy, or air force:* Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C. 20301. *For members of the coast guard:* Commandant, P.S., U.S. Coast Guard, Washington, D.C. 20226.

MARRIAGE RECORDS

The standard *application* for a marriage license is a pretty demanding document (see page 30 when requesting marriage records). It usually requires full names, dates of birth, ages, number of marriages, date of last marriage, ending date of last marriage (and whether ended by death, divorce, or annulment); birthplace of former spouse(s); groom's present address, present and last occupation, kind of employment, highest grade completed, groom's father's name, mother's maiden name, and both of their birthplaces. That's just the application.

Some of these data have to be duplicated on the marriage *certificate*, which will also show the type of ceremony (civil or church), the bride's and groom's religion, the name of the person who performed the ceremony, and the names of the witnesses.

So marriage records offer many bits and pieces of infor-

mation on people and places. The official records are filed in the county in which the license was issued, and in some states in the vital statistics office at the capital. These records are normally available on request—unless the couple asks that they be *sealed*.

SUPPLY THE FOLLOWING FACTS WHEN
REQUESTING MARRIAGE RECORDS

1. Full names of bride and groom (include nicknames)
2. Residential addresses at time of marriage
3. Ages at time of marriage (or dates of birth)
4. Month, day, and year of marriage
5. Place of marriage
6. Why you need the marriage information
7. Your relationship to the married couple
(See Appendix 8 for addresses of issuing offices—and don't forget to include the fee with your request.)



REAL AND UNSECURED PROPERTY

Real property is normally administered at the tax assessor's office, which could be either a city or a county function and is a good source of information because these are public records.

In most states, real property means real estate—homes, lots, business buildings and equipment, farmland, land of any kind.

If your subject owns real property, he or she is certain to be found on the tax rolls. The tax bill will provide you with a mailing address and the location and value of the property. If the property has been sold to an absentee owner, the public tax records will provide you with the new owner's name and business address. You can probably get from this person the information you need about your subject. Such information also is likely to be available at the local Board of Realty office—if yours is a local search. Any friend with a real estate license can get you what you're looking for. All you need is your subject's county location and payment of the usually modest fee.

Unsecured property is administered by the same tax assessor. But the goods are in another category: for example, cars, boats, airplanes, mobile homes, office furniture. Get airplane

ownership by contacting the FAA (see page 58 for the address); cars, boats, and mobile homes are usually registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles. The tax assessor's records tell where the property is and how much it's worth. Everything mentioned thus far is public information.

Simply write the tax assessor in the appropriate county.

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAMES

If your subject's business is using a name other than his or her own—a fictitious name—he or she must have filed a statement to that effect. Without that document on file, banks are forbidden to open an account for an entrepreneur in any other than a birth name.

The fictitious name files offer the business owner's name, fictitious business name and address, and home address; associates' names and addresses; whether the business is incorporated and in what state; ownership arrangement (husband and wife, individual, co-partners, general partnership, or joint venture).

You may learn more about your subject from the fictitious name files than you want to know. They are open records at the county level, and the information is available by mail for a nominal fee.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S FAMILY SUPPORT UNIT

Anyone filing for action against a parent who is defaulting on support payments can get help from the D.A.'s Family Support Unit. Its job is to go after dependent child and spousal support from absent parents. When the question of paternity comes up, the D.A.'s group will help resolve it. If there is no court order for child support, it will try to get one.

In some counties, a department other than the D.A.'s may handle family support. Your mail will be forwarded to that office.

There is a small problem involved. The files dealing with

family support are generally confidential, and in most cases can be retrieved only by the people involved.

GRANTOR/GRANTEE

Grantor/Grantee records contain transaction documents of every description, but may operate under a different name (in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the same administrator is called the prothonotary—a fancy Latin name for chief clerk). A prothonotary once rode in President-Elect Harry Truman's car in a political parade. When told who his backseat companion was, Mr. Truman asked, "What the hell is that?"

Anyway, every Grantor/Grantee's office is overloaded with agreements, trust deeds, powers of attorney, judgments, and so on. So it can be a little difficult to find what you're looking for unless your subject has a unique, or at least unusual, last name.

Yet Grantor/Grantee records are good sources of information, such as addresses, full names, occupations, personal finance information, birth dates, and a lot more. The records are filed by year and by name, not a great source to approach through the mail, but workable if you can make a personal appearance at the desk and have a little patience.

CIVIL AND CRIMINAL COURTS

LOCAL COURT RECORDS

The typical local court lineup will include superior, municipal, probate, small claims, divorce, and traffic. Some jurisdictions have courts with other specific titles and functions: criminal and orphans, for example. Court records contain volumes of personal information about plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, prosecutors, defenders. And every word of testimony and comment spoken in open court is taken down by a court reporter equipped with a special shorthand typing machine. A transcript of that record is available for a fee, which isn't cheap. The price can range up to \$5.00 per page.

COUNTY RECORDS



Most counties have a clerk of courts, or an equivalent, who is familiar with the workings of all the courts. Inquiries directed to that office should bring you the particulars about any court case in which your subject may be involved. Ask for a fee schedule when you write to inquire about your subject's court case.

These records are normally available to the public with the following exceptions:

1. criminal cases in which the accused is a minor (under sixteen)
2. adoption records,
3. criminal cases involving a witness protected by the government,
4. an order from the judge sealing the records under certain circumstances, as when confidential evidence is presented.

Confidential documents such as bank records, credit information, and other financial background data aren't normally available to the public. But you can get your hands on them through a *subpoena duces tecum* (court order) if they are critical to you for legal reasons.

Court records are usually filed in the names of plaintiff/defendant. You might find they are on microfilm, which you can review in a special booth. But they can't be removed from the records room. And only divorce case records are available by correspondence or by telephone.

It is no secret that the American system of justice is faulty. Nor is it a secret that ours is by far the best system available anywhere there is a verbal language.

Nowhere else on earth can ordinary citizens like you and me expect and receive the fairness that will ultimately be yours if you persevere in your demand for satisfaction from the courts.

COURT-FUNCTION BRIEFS

Superior Court

This court handles felony/criminal cases and civil matters involving sums of \$10,000 or more.

A *felony* is any crime from robbery to murder for which the defendant is tried by a prosecutor (district attorney) representing The People of the community and that is punishable by imprisonment of from more than a year up to the death penalty.

Civil cases deal with disputes between individuals over money, property, child custody, and so on. The People are not involved here unless the plaintiff is charging a unit of government with neglect—say, in a case involving an inoperative red light that resulted in a traffic fatality. Then a town or city solicitor will represent The People versus the plaintiff. Normally it's citizen against citizen, one (the plaintiff) charging the other (the defendant) with somehow violating the plaintiff's rights. The "sentence" for losers of civil suits is termed *damages*, and is usually awarded by the judge or jury in terms of dollars. In custody cases, loss or denial of custody may result.

Municipal Court

The "Muni" deals with criminal misdemeanors, violations that upon conviction call for imprisonment of one year or less—minor theft, battery, drunk driving, and trespass, for example. Again it is The People versus the defendant, with the district attorney handling the prosecution. And—as you've heard so many times on TV as a cop "Mirandizes" arrested suspects—a defendant has the right to court-appointed counsel drawn from a pool of attorneys called public defenders who are on the public payroll. They represent those accused who can't afford to hire a private lawyer; this applies regardless of which court is hearing the criminal case.

Civil cases tried by the Muni deal with sums smaller than the lower limit set by the superior court (usually under \$10,000).

Small Claims Court

As its name implies, there is no crime presented here. It's citizen versus citizen. The dollar limit of this court varies from state to state, but sums involved tend to range from a few hundred dollars to about \$2,500. An oddity about this court is that the defendant can bring a lawyer but, as a rule, the plaintiff must appear without one.

Probate Records

These present the details of a decedent's estate, along with the names and addresses of those provided for in the will and the names of the executor, administrator appointed, lawyers involved, surviving and predeceased children, and the deceased's parents. You will learn also the final disposition of the will and the name of the presiding court officer.

These files are especially helpful in tracing birth parents or family roots, and they're yours—for a fee, of course—so if you write for a fee schedule first, you can include your payment along with your request for information.

Traffic Court

These records are forwarded to the state by city, county, and state officials where they are filed at the Driver's License Bureau. You might try to get to them before they leave town, and they're available for a certain period after the violation. But you'd be better off to wait until they're safely at the capital, and a matter of record there. Local authorities—once you've been cited for a driving infraction—hesitate to monkey with documents destined for your all-important driving record.

Divorce Court

The divorce or annulment decree usually gives the date and place of marriage, names of any children (excepting relinquished children but including adoptive ones), the couple's most recent address, the names of those persons from whom divorced earlier, a description and estimation of value of jointly held property. Records of the case are held at the courthouse where the decree was handed down, with copies sent to the state's vital statistics office. They are available by mail upon payment of a fee, which you should ask about before sending your request for copies. Give whatever of the following facts you know when filing your request.

1. Full name and nickname(s) of husband and wife
2. Present home address for each

3. Other most recent addresses
4. Ages at time of divorce or annulment
5. Date and place of divorce or annulment
6. Type of final decree
7. Purpose for which copy is needed
8. Relationship with the couple in question

(See Appendix 8 for addresses to which requests can be sent.)

Grand Jury

The grand jury is a "court" in the sense that it decides whether or not a case will be prosecuted. It is convened periodically for the purpose of reviewing evidence against persons who are suspected of violating criminal law. Grand jurists can number twenty-three or more (the courtroom jury of twelve or fewer is called a *petit* jury), but only a quorum (majority) need be present to hear the evidence brought by the district attorney. The jurors decide, based on the evidence, whether or not to prosecute the person. A legal quirk prevents the defendant's being represented by counsel, nor is the defendant present to hear the evidence against him or her. If the grand jury finds evidence sufficient to warrant a trial, it hands down an *indictment*.

VOTER REGISTRATION

A couple of "ifs," here, regarding voter registration.

If you know in what county in what state your subject might be living, and if he or she is a registered voter, you may be able to retrieve considerable information. *Public* information. But . . .

It seems that the people who run voter registration offices by and large prefer that you make your inquiries in person. So your mailed kit may not work here.

But send it along anyway, with modifications. It might fall into the hands of someone who will understand your problem and give you the same information you'd get if you were to ask for it in person.

LETTER TO VOTER REGISTRATION

Director, Voter Registration
 Courthouse
 (Name and zip of county seat)

Regarding: Charles Thomas Ingham
 Date of Birth: 9/14/29
 In Louisville, Kentucky

(Date)

Dear Director:

I realize that voter registration information, in spite of being public record, is not normally available through correspondence. I'm asking for an exception because of the distance and expense involved in my coming to you personally.

Would you please use the enclosed self-addressed, stamped postcard to notify me (1) if Mr. Ingham is registered at your office, and (2) if he is, the cost of a transcript of his registration information? My need for Mr. Ingham's address regards an urgent family matter.

I have enclosed a statistical profile of Mr. Ingham and a photocopy of my Alabama driver's license for my personal identification.

Thank you for whatever you can do.

Peter J. Anderson (your signature)

Peter J. Anderson (typed or printed)
 107 Maple Terrace
 Montgomery, Alabama 36104
 205-555-1234

Encl. (2)

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This might include your subject's address, occupation, political party, probably the date and place of birth, and maybe even a Social Security number.

Look up the county seat in your atlas or at the library. Send

a letter requesting any information that would be available to you if you were to present yourself in person. (See page 37 for a sample letter.) Enclose a stamped, self-addressed postcard along with a photocopy of your driver's license, which is probably the identification you would be asked for if you appeared at the counter.

PUBLIC WELFARE

Don't expect an eager response to inquiries made of the welfare people. They deal with a mishmash of federal, state, and county administrations, which would put a crimp in any bureaucrat's public service enthusiasm. In any event—and maybe as a consequence of these tangled authorities and cross-filing—the law prescribes that the names of welfare recipients are *not* public information.

The above obviously offers initial discouragement, but maybe a commonsense appeal to an individual administrator might work.

Let's pretend your subject is a young, panicky, unwed mother-to-be. Or just an ordinary, discontented-with-family-life adolescent. They're both prime runaway prospects. And when the little money they might have runs out and they haven't got the will to come home, they just might turn up on the welfare rolls wherever they happen to land.

If you have indications that your subject is in a certain area, identify the county seat from an atlas or a librarian. Write to the agency, using the sample letter on page 39 as a guide. Enclose a Profile and a photocopy of your driver's license, or that of someone at the same address. Include your stamped, forwarding postcard, this time addressed to yourself, along with your *telephone number* and a request that you be called *collect* in case the agency prefers calling rather than postcarding. With any luck, there will be confirming conversations or correspondence.

LETTER OF INQUIRY TO WELFARE

Administrator
Public Services/Welfare Department
(County seat, state, and zip)

Regarding: Sarah Carol Goodman
Date of birth: 2/3/73
(Personal data encl.)

(Date)

Dear Administrator:

I have reason to suspect my (daughter, or whomever) named above is on your welfare rolls. We at home feel quite capable of dealing with and correcting the conditions that brought her to you.

If you will supply us with her address (and phone number?), we will see that she is taken care of with generous affection. You can then replace her on your rolls with someone far more in need of care than she is.

We would appreciate your cooperation. Enclosed is a stamped, self-addressed postcard. Call us collect, or better yet, have her call.

Thank you for acting as promptly as your busy schedule allows.

Your name (signature)

Your name (typed or printed)

Your complete address

Encl. A photocopy of my driver's license, Sarah's statistics, and a stamped, self-addressed postcard.

My telephone number is 555-1234.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION

In most states, all working people are covered by some form of compensation against loss of income through on-the-job injury. In a few states, including California, even aliens are so insured.

Although these records contain certain normally confidential medical information and background data, they are available to the public, usually at the county level.

They might provide you with the information you need about your subject. For more information, call the state's Workmen's Compensation Board. The number is in your phone book.

LICENSES AND PERMITS

Today you need a license or permit to do almost *anything* commercial. In California (if anything has happened anywhere, has happened in California) even door-to-door salesmen require a permit; in that regard, selling Girl Scout cookies without permits was an issue a couple of years ago in the Golden State. Some states require permits for spaces at flea markets and swap meets. Certainly roofers, plumbers, general contractors—almost anybody offering an entrepreneurial service to the public today—are, and should be, licensed.

Such documenting requires a great deal of exposure of information on the part of the licensee/permittee. These particulars are public information at the county courthouse.

5

STATE RECORDS

DRIVER/VEHICLE RECORDS

DRIVER'S LICENSE RECORDS

Karl Malden to the contrary, the driver's license is the one document *nobody* should leave home without. It has become the single most important piece of personal identification to be found in anyone's purse or wallet—the majority's link with respectability and the establishment. Visa and MasterCard may help a little, but a driver's license is much more reassuring to the law when a confrontation occurs. This is why many people in large cities have driver's licenses although they don't own a car; parking and liability insurance can be prohibitively expensive, but they can't function as viable citizens without a license as part of their ID. Thus, the "vehicle operator's license" becomes a prime source of personal information for the searcher.

Remember this major requirement in asking for driver's license information: *you must have the subject's date of birth and correctly spelled full name.* And even these specifics won't guarantee a positive response from some states. The following pages show the exceptions, which really aren't hard to deal with.

It might save you time and aggravation if you were to write simultaneously to the driver's license bureaus in every state in which it seems logical that your subject would be driving: the one in which he or she was born; the state in which he or she was originally licensed; the one you think he or she is living in now; the one in which he or she vacationed or traveled extensively.

The response may come in the form of a computer printout with your subject's driving record, showing accidents, suspensions, revocations, date issued and expired, and so on. Some states even provide a photograph.

Here are the states from which you can request a driving record with only the full, correctly spelled name and department driver license number (DDL#), or just the name and date of birth.

Alaska	New Hampshire
Arizona	New Jersey
California	New Mexico
Colorado	North Carolina
Connecticut	North Dakota
Delaware	Ohio
District of Columbia	Oklahoma
Florida	Oregon
Indiana (Soc. Sec. no. is DDL#)	Rhode Island
Kentucky	South Carolina
Louisiana	South Dakota
Maine	Tennessee
Maryland	Texas
Michigan	Utah
Minnesota	Vermont
Mississippi (Soc. Sec. no. is DDL#)	Virginia
Montana	West Virginia
Nebraska	Wisconsin
Nevada	Wyoming

These states require the subject's written permission:

Arkansas	Kansas
Georgia	Pennsylvania
Hawaii (Soc. Sec. no. is DDL#)	

These states require the subject's driver's license number:

Alabama	Iowa
Idaho	Missouri
Illinois	

The state of New York requires a DDL#, or the name and date of birth, and the subject's last known New York address.

Only two states, Massachusetts and Washington, will not supply driver's license information.

In some states, the driver's license number is area coded. So when you write for records information, ask for a code interpretation if one is needed. This could reveal the county or city where the license was issued, which would be helpful if it turns out that the subject is not living at the address shown on the driver's license. You could then concentrate your search in the area indicated by the code interpretation.

See Appendix 7 for addresses of all fifty driving record agencies.

MOTOR VEHICLE RECORDS

Depending on the state's regulations, a check of the vehicle tag number will provide you with a computer printout of portions of or all of the following information: the name and address of the person to whom the tag was issued, all the vehicle's identification numbers, the owner's insurance company, date of registration and expiration, lien holder, year, model, and color.

You might even receive the owner's date of birth, which would be valuable in pursuing other information sources, including a driver's license, because most states require a date of birth (and the full, correctly spelled name). See Appendix 7 for the state departments of motor vehicle records.

NATIONAL DRIVER'S REGISTRATION SERVICE

Another helpful information source is the National Driver's Registration Service. It was established to help law-enforcement agencies and insurance companies trace individuals with a suspended or revoked driver's license in one state who apply for a driver's license in another state. More details are available from:

National Driver's Registration Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1717 H Street, Washington, D.C. 20510.

CORPORATE RECORDS

Corporations active in the United States, whether American or foreign, must register in one of the fifty states. Their records are under the control of the secretary of state, as a rule. They contain the date of the corporate filing, the name of the corporation, the names of the directors and officers, the headquarters location, the corporation's type of business, and other specifics.

There are two types of corporations—public and private: *private* means without stock on the market. The stock is privately held by an individual or by an individual and members of his official family (or board of directors).

The *public* corporation's stock is bought and sold in a recognized public market, and the records show the names of the officers and substantial stockholders. A publicly traded corporation must be listed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), a federal agency. The SEC allows the government to oversee all of the corporations' stock-trading activities and requires every such firm to submit financial details of the major stockholders' financial activities.

In addition, every corporation must publish an annual report for the SEC and for its stockholders. The annual report contains details of the company's financial activities for the preceding year.

For more information on any corporation or any of its official personnel, write the secretary of state in the state where the corporation has its headquarters.

STATE POLICE/HIGHWAY PATROL

Police at the state level take on different functions in different states. California is typical of most.

The *state police* there provide protection and security for government dignitaries and officials. They investigate crimes against the state, provide bailiffs for state-level courts, serve warrants for the State Franchise Tax Board. The state's *highway*

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m- *patrol* handles interstate and state highway traffic and accidents, almost its sole functions. (I can't imagine their being able to find time for anything else.)

or Records of state law enforcement in most states are kept at the state capital, and most of them are public information. But whatever state your subject lives in, it's best to write first to learn if what you want is a public document and to ask what the fee is for a copy of it.

are Some states provide car accident reports only to those involved and to the insurance companies. The reports are excellent sources of information and include names and addresses of victims and witnesses, vehicle license numbers, next of kin, and so on.

he Vehicle accident records, when there are no state laws to prevent their being public information, can usually be found at the state capitol building, the local state office building, or the county courthouse.

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STATE TAX BOARDS

This agency, however it's known, is responsible for administering and collecting personal income tax and bank and corporation taxes. It has a clone in almost every state government, with larger or smaller tax-collecting responsibilities. You can expect little information from these folks, no matter what state you're in. But they'll be glad to explain what they can and can't talk about. Write to the state tax office in your subject's state capital.

PERMITS AND LICENSES

BOARD OF LICENSING

ent If your subject is in a *profession* whose practice demands a license—from hairdressing to brain surgery—his or her name is on file with the State Board of Licensing at the capital of the state in which he or she is operating.

for You can write to the board and get such information from a professional license as correct spelling of name, middle name, address, telephone number, and other personal data.

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BOAT AND FISHING LICENSES

In a majority of states, the motor vehicle department handles the licensing of both commercial and pleasure boats operating on inland waters. These agencies also normally license the commercial and recreational fishing vessels operating out of the Great Lakes and seaboard states.

The fisherman himself is generally licensed by an agency titled Fish and Game Commission, or something similar. And in some states the licensing of both boat and fisherman is done by this one agency. But you're after records here.

If you address the Fish and Game Commission at the state capital, your inquiry is certain to reach competent people eager to see your questions answered.

STATE SALES TAX BOARD

This agency or one like it administers and collects the state sales tax wherever there is such a law. Only products are taxed, not services. All businesses involved in the retail sale of products must file such a return.

These returns are available to you as a general rule, and they provide vital statistics regarding the business, including bank account numbers and estimated gross sales.

Some states have similar filings for businesses operating as *wholesalers*. The wholesaler is not normally taxed for sales purposes but merely as an indicator of who is selling to whom and for statistics such as total sales volume.

Contact the sales tax board at the capital of the state your subject is living in.

6

FEDERAL RECORDS

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PRIVACY ACTS

It is now our right to demand and get at the federal level information that affects us as individuals and as citizens, a right provided by the Freedom of Information Act. (Some *states* have passed their own FOIA.) All we have to provide is just cause for opening the records.

But until twenty years ago, many of the methods that I'm suggesting in this book for acquiring even declassified information from the federal and state governments would have been denied or ignored.

This all changed when Public Law 5 USC 552A—known as the Freedom of Information Act—went into effect on July 4, 1967, after being signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. It has had a powerful and controversial impact on the status of secrecy regarding federal government records. It was used by courts and the media to expose the affairs of Watergate. It opened the files on gifts from foreign officials to President Nixon and caused the Defense Department to release details of the My

Lai massacre in Vietnam. The sons of alleged spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were executed for treason in 1953, are using USC 552A to try to establish their parents' innocence. As you can see, the act is quite powerful.

The Privacy Act of 1974, 5 USC 552B, was intended to and does limit the federal government's authority in collecting and using information on individuals. At the same time, it somewhat broadens and supplements USC 552A. In any event, don't hesitate to cite either or both acts in requesting information from federal agencies. And be sure to read both acts at your library.

See below for a guide to writing your own memo on these acts, and include a copy with your letter of inquiry to let the officials know you know they must comply.

USING THE ACTS

To Those Concerned:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552A) and the Privacy Act (5 USC 552B), I request copies of all records regarding myself maintained by your office.

The following descriptive data are supplied solely for the purpose of identifying myself, and are not to be released to any other agency or individual:

Name:

Date of birth:

Address:

Passport:

Social Security number:

Hereon is a notarized statement attesting to my true identity.

Please send a summary of the information requested, along with copies of my records at a cost not to exceed 20 cents per page reproduction.

Very truly yours,

(Your signature)

(Have a notary public attest your identification in this space.)

For further information regarding the Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552A) and the Privacy Act (5 USC 552B), refer to the 1988 Edition of *Litigation Under the Federal Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act*, edited by Allan Adler and put out by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Write to: ACLU, Publications Department, 122 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, D.C. 20002.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Dealing with federal agencies is not always a simple matter. But here and there you encounter open doors, minds, and individuals with a desire to be helpful.

Such is the case with the Social Security Administration. It probably has the largest roster of names of any agency in the United States government, since most American adults have a Social Security number and a file of some kind. The chances are good that your adult subject, whether he or she is employed or has retired, will have a reasonably recent address available—either a home address, the address of an employer, or both. If the subject is receiving Social Security insurance checks, or compensation for any reason, the presence of a home address is very likely.

In any case, Social Security has formulated a policy of allowing mail contact “for humanitarian purposes” with anyone on its roster whose address is available. Simply send your Inquiry Kit, including your subject’s Profile, and your forwarding postcard will be sent to the subject. Allow for delay, as the search for a file will take time. And try to give the message on your postcard as much “humanitarian” feel as you can without fabricating.

If you do not include a Profile or a Social Security number, be certain that you *do* provide your subject’s full name, and date and place of birth.

See page 50 for an idea of how to formulate your letter to the Social Security people.

LETTER OF INQUIRY TO THE
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Director, Locator Service
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, Maryland 12135

Regarding: Charles Thomas Ingham
Date of Birth: 1/14/29
Louisville, Kentucky

(Date)

Dear Director:

It would be a great help to the family of the above-named person if you were able to forward the enclosed stamped, unaddressed postcard to him at the latest address you have available. It contains a message requesting that he get in touch with his family. If you are unable to supply a reasonably recent address, would you kindly see that the postcard is mailed back to me.

Thank you. I have enclosed a statistical profile of Mr. Ingham as well as a photocopy of my Alabama driver's license for my own identification, along with the postcard.

Peter J. Anderson (your signature)

Peter J. Anderson (typed or printed)
107 Maple Terrace
Montgomery, Alabama 36104
Encls: 3

THE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

The Social Security number is important in your search, and you should do all you can to get it. The best place to look for it is in credit reports, which we will discuss later.

A Social Security number provides verification of identification. Everything from credit reports to business license applications contain or use Social Security numbers. For example,

my insurance company uses mine as an index for their files—I don't know why or how. But the Social Security number has pretty much become the American serial number. And the administration wants to have a number issued to every newborn.

In addition to maintaining records on virtually every American, the Social Security Administration keeps track of millions of foreigners who work in this country or who once worked in this country and have since retired to live outside the United States.

Except for a few numbers issued in the mid-1970s to military recruits, all Social Security numbers contain nine digits. Those military Social Security numbers contained ten digits beginning with zero. There are very few of them.

The first three numerals are known as "area numbers" because they indicate from which state the subject applied for a number. This may be a clue to where to begin your search—maybe with a check of driver's license records for that state, which could bring you an address if the subject still lives there.

For an index of Social Security numbers, see Appendix 1. Remember, Social Security records are confidential and not available for public or even law-enforcement review.

THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Surprisingly, if you know the address where your subject was living at some time during the past twelve months, you can get the address to which he or she moved. Simply send the last known address, along with a dollar, Attention Postmaster, to the appropriate post office, and a forwarding address will be provided. If the subject has been gone for more than six months, however, you're out of luck. That is as long as the postmaster holds a forwarding address.

If you want to save a dollar—and who doesn't?—mail a letter to the old address with **DO NOT FORWARD—ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED** on the envelope. The postmaster will deliver the new address back to you free.

There are other postal service features you should be aware of, such as certified mail, registered mail, and express mail. Return receipts are available for each. *Certified* mail provides a