



## Tips for Finding Living Relatives and Long-Lost Friends

"I'm trying to find a girl I went to high school with. She was my first girlfriend, and I've always wondered what happened to her": this request for help came my way last month. This week a woman planning a high school reunion came in to confirm whether one of her classmates had died. We here in [Local History](#) spent a lot of time recently helping people locate long-lost classmates. As a result of this work, I discovered a few new websites that are useful in searching for family and friends who have fallen out of touch, so I updated our subject guide to "[Finding Living People](#)." My colleague [Sara Allen](#) wrote this article, which has scads of useful information for a successful search.

I thought I'd share a few ideas from this guide for those of you who are planning class or family reunions, wondering what happened to that guy you dated 15 years ago, or trying to find a cousin you haven't seen in decades.

As you might guess, the more information you have about the person, the better your chance of finding them. But even with just a name and one additional piece of information you can often find your friend or relative. (From here onward, I'll simplify by substituting the phrase "your person" for the phrase "your friend or relative.")

For example, if you remember your person's address or street, you can use city directories to help your quest. Contact the public library in the town where the person lived, find a directory for the time period in question, and use the reverse street directory to find the full name of the resident or property owner. Then look that occupant up in the main part of the city directory to find a fuller name, name of his or her spouse, and his or her occupation. If these residents were the parents of your person of interest, look in an obituary index for that geographic area to see if your person's relatives died and left an obituary. Often obituaries mention the full (married) name of survivors such as children, where those children are living, and those children's spouses' and kids' names too.

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## A Random Sampling of Some of our New Books

*101 Brick Wall Busters*, by the editors of *Family Tree Magazine*

*AM General: Hummers, Mutts, Buses, & Postal Jeeps*, by Patrick R. Foster

*Chickasaw by Blood: Enrollment Cards, 1898-1914* (vol. III), by Jeff Bowen

*Civil War Battlefields: Then & Now*, by James Campi, Jr.

Butler County, Ohio, books (cemetery, death, and marriage records)

*Family Maps* series by Gregory Boyd (more than a dozen new books, covering counties in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio)

*Going Home: A Guide to Polish American Family History Research*, by Jonathan D. Shea

*Michigan's Haunted Nightlife*, by Nicole Bray and the Rev. Robert DuShane

*The Practical Guide to the Genetic Family History*, by Robin L. Bennett



## Tips for Finding Living Relatives and Long-Lost Friends, continued

Armed with a current name and location for your person, their approximate age, and names of those associated with them, you can use some of the online search databases mentioned in Sara's article. On [Spokeo.com](#), for instance, you can input your person's name and then look at listings for people with that name. Knowing additional information such as age and location will make it easier to decide which listing is for your person. That listing will then show you not only publicly available information such as contact information, but also information from social networking sites such as Facebook. You may find someone's current address, phone number, age, marital status, occupation, hobbies, and even whether they have children.

Keep in mind that not everyone is listed on sites like these, though. For a variety of reasons, such as having an unlisted telephone number, not having a landline, or never sending in change-of-address cards, some people will not be findable online. But you'll be amazed to see how many people are.

Try these techniques with your own name and marvel at what you find! I did, and was surprised at how much information turned up: almost every address I've ever had; old phone numbers; my parents' names; and links to my articles on the SJCP website and to blog and wiki posts elsewhere. Before I removed my information from Spokeo, it also showed my approximate income, marital status, homeownership status, and even a list of my interests (culled from my social networking activity, I assume).

Let me add some things to keep in mind when carrying out research using these sites. Many of these sites, but not all, let you "opt out" of having your information revealed (at least to people conducting free searches). Thus you may find few results for your person if that person, like me, is diligent about asking sites to remove personal information. Even in my case, though, my birthday turned up on more than one site that would not let me opt out. Another possible complication is that some of the information I found was just plain wrong. For instance, Spokeo estimated my salary to be much higher than it actually is. (Alas.) Also, several sites linked my name not just with my parents', but also with a woman's name I've never even heard before. (Marilyn Boune, who in the world are you, and how did you come to be associated with me?) My search for my own name also turned up results for other Elizabeth Feils. For example, I had discovered several years ago, by means of annoying calls from debt collectors, that there was another Elizabeth Feil who lived not far from me; she was a prison therapist who had helped her inmate lover escape from jail. (!) Not surprisingly, my recent search for my name turned up lots of interesting articles about the other, infamous Elizabeth Feil mixed in with items that pertained to me. So when you are searching, keep in mind that not all the results you find may relate to your person.

Got your own long-lost relation or love that you'd like to track down? Read [Sara's wonderful article on this topic](#), and then call us if you'd like more help.

Good luck!