

Reestablished Links

By Drake Rinesmith



MY interest in genealogy began with my maternal grandmother. My grandmother's mom and baby brother both died of the flu in Arkansas in 1918.

Her father, James Edward McWilliams, unable to take care of a small child, took my grandmother to Illinois, where she was raised by her own maternal grandmother. Her father came to visit a few times when she was small, but she later lost contact with him.

When my grandmother showed me some correspondence she had gathered in attempting to find her father, I began to share her interest in learning about my great-grandfather. Did he remarry? Did he have other children? When and where did he die?

As I started to search for clues about my great-grandfather, I realized that it was time to find out about my own father. Like my grandmother, I never knew my father either. My parents divorced before I was four years old. I remember my father coming to see me when I was small, and I remember getting letters from him when I was in elementary school. Again, like my grandmother, I later lost contact with my father. We moved away, my mother remarried, and my step-father adopted me, changing my name.

That summer, as my grandmother told me about her father, she gave me a picture of my mother and father on their wedding day. For years I held the key to finding my father, but I had never used it.

The key was my father's social security number. In high school through college, I drew social security disability checks from my father's account. At one point, the social security office sent me a notice regarding an overpayment. The notice referenced my father's social security account number. I filed the notice away, knowing that the social security number would be the key to learning about my father ... someday.

Twelve years later, I decided to use the key. I suspected that my father died while I was in high school, and the social security checks were survivor's benefits. I called the social security office, gave them my father's account number, and asked if they could provide me with a

address where he received his social security checks ... a post office box number. I was curious as to why my father, who was born and raised in Illinois, was living in Texas. I thought that perhaps he was staying with another relative. I knew that he had a twin sister. I called the post office to find out who was renting the post office box in Little Elm in 1992. However, that information, I was told, can only be released to law enforcement officials.

I decided to take a long shot, and I wrote a "To Whom it may concern" letter to the occupant of the post office box, seeking information on my father. I thought that even if he was not staying with someone, that perhaps the occupant might be of some help. Much to my delight, I received a phone call three days later from Aunt Pauline, my father's twin sister. A few weeks later, my father's older sister, Norma contacted me. Since then, they have both been very helpful in providing me with background information. They have also sent me lots of

pictures, including ones of my paternal great-grand parents.

If I had contacted the social security office prior to my father's death, they would not have released any information for privacy reasons. However, the social security administration will forward letters to parents or children who have lost contact with each other. For more information you may visit the social security's web sight at (<http://www.ssa.gov>).

I have yet to find my great-grandfather,

James Edward McWilliams, but I am still searching!



date of death. After checking the rule book, they said they could verify the "fact of death." They looked him up on the computer and told me that he died August of 1992 in Little Elm, Texas. I was surprised that his death had been as recent as 1992, and this brought about many more unanswered questions.

The next day I decided to visit my local social security office in person. This time, I was able to obtain the

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