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*As an adoptee, my biological family tree has been barren for most of my life. My adoption was never a secret in my family; my parents still glow when they tell the story of bringing me home from the agency on the first day of spring. However, I'd always remained curious about my birth mother, and I always wanted to thank her for the sacrifice she made to give me a better life.*

*In 2009, I worked with a private investigator who located my birth mother and arranged an introduction by phone. While we still haven't met in person, I've had the chance to thank her and I learned more about the circumstances surrounding my adoption. I even learned that I had a different name at birth: Justin Michael.*

*When our committee got together to brainstorm ideas for the genealogy theme issue of The News, I began to think about my experience as an adoptee. What should a librarian do with genealogy questions from someone whose biological family is unknown? For the answer, I reached out to Kenna Peterson Knotts, the investigator I worked with to find my own birth mother. Kenna's work has been featured in the Columbus Dispatch ([Long-lost brothers members of same church](#)). Here she provides wonderful insight and advice on the distinctions between genealogy and investigation for Ohio librarians.*

*I hope you enjoy learning more about this unique view of genealogy from someone who was able to bring a grateful sense of closure to my personal life.*

*-Matthew Dyer, Head, Employee Services  
State Library of Ohio*

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By Kenna Peterson Knotts, Licensed Private Investigator  
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Many people commonly— and mistakenly—assume that a genealogist can “locate” missing people and that the work of a genealogist and a “private investigator” is synonymous. While there may be some similarity, these two fields of endeavor can vary widely, particularly where the issue of the “search” comes into play and whether or not a “fee” is paid.

Merriam-webster.com defines genealogy as: “n.1. An account or history of the descent of a person or family from an ancestor; enumeration of ancestors and their children in the natural order of succession; a pedigree. 2. Regular descent of a person or family from a progenitor; pedigree; lineage.”

I am not a genealogist. I am a Licensed Private Investigator. There is a critical and important distinction.

4749.01 of the Ohio Revised Code defines a “Private Investigator” and the “Business of private investigations” as:

(A) “Private investigator” means any person who engages in the business of private investigation.

(B) "Business of private investigation" means, except when performed by one excluded under division (H) of this section, the conducting, for hire, in person or through a partner or employees, of any investigation relevant to any crime or wrong done or threatened, or to obtain information on the identity, habits, conduct, movements, whereabouts, affiliations, transactions, reputation, credibility, or character of any person, or to locate and recover lost or stolen property, or to determine the cause of or responsibility for any libel or slander, or any fire, accident, or damage to property, or to secure evidence for use in any legislative, administrative, or judicial investigation or proceeding.

Whew! No wonder being a Private Investigator can be exhausting. My specialty is searching for and locating birth parents, adoptees, and siblings. I work with both closed and open records. Although Genealogy and Private Investigations differ, both may use public information and other similar sources via libraries, printed or online resources—the methodologies may also differ considerably. Additionally, while the genealogist has at his or her disposal many well documented and readily accessible resources (which the private investigator may also utilize), the private investigator often has to ferret-out information from many not-too-public or lesser known sources. Also, while a genealogist may have a very structured and pragmatic approach to tracing a person's lineage, the private investigator often has a myriad of approaches they may utilize—it often times is a very intuitive and heuristic process.

A major difference, even when both are performing seemingly identical work is, while genealogists may perform "genealogy" work for hire, they are not allowed to perform searches for living people for money—this falls under the classification of private investigation which is a licensed and tightly controlled activity with oversight from the State. [4749.01](#) of the Ohio Revised Code continues:

(H) "Private Investigator," "business of private investigation," "security guard provider," and "business of security services," do not include;

(9) Any person who, for hire or otherwise, conducts genealogical research in this state. As used in division (H)(9) of this section, "genealogical research" means the determination of the origins and descent of families, including the identification of individuals, their family relationships, and the biographical details of their lives. "Genealogical research" does not include furnishing for hire services for locating missing persons or natural or birth parents or children.

Some genealogists may attempt to circumvent this statute by "accepting a donation." This activity is subject to another whole realm of state/federal guidelines and tax codes with regards to "not for profit" organizations, etc.

So, in summary...if a patron requests help tracking down their family tree—utilize historical documents, databases and services of a genealogist. If you they are trying to locate "living" relatives, adoptive or birth parents/siblings...suggest that they may want to hire "Private Investigator."