

A Relative ...or perhaps Not?

By Howard Maynard Faulkner

As experienced genealogists we are careful **not to assume** who our relatives are. The fact that you may have grown up in a household, as I did, that had lots of folks visit frequently who were referred to as *aunts, uncles, and cousins* does not necessarily mean they are truly *related* to you. As I have sadly learned, sometimes 20-40 years later, many of these *relatives* really weren't. I truly loved these nice people that often came bearing gifts, especially on birthdays, Christmas, or Easter and they could just as easily have been my relatives. They were simply old family friends that my parents and grandparents had *collected* through the years and when they *came calling* my brothers and I referred to them as *Aunt Annie, Uncle Bill, Cousin Jane*, etc. My parents thought we should not address them by their given name (Annie, Bill or Jane) and Mrs. Johnston, Mr. James, Miss. Kerry was much too formal. So *Aunt, Uncle, Cousin* seemed to work for all. It was disappointing to learn in later years that those were not truly correct titles. There was not a clear title for us young fry to distinguish the *blue blood* relatives, from those with blood from other families. In defense I must say that being in an all boy family this matter was not a high priority for brothers and me as long as the gifts kept coming.

It was many years later when I got seriously interested in family history and relationships that I learned more about these exciting *non-relatives*. For example *Uncle James* I learned was an early childhood friend of my grandfather. They went to school together from grade one right through high school. They continued to live in the same city all their life, they played golf together, married friends, wintered in Florida near each other and even could be found at the race track at the same time.

Aunt Annie I always assumed was truly related but never knew how, nor did I give it much thought. It was only several years after my parents and grandparents had died that I learned the truth...this beautiful person was not a true family relative but she played the part very well. She was a friend of my grandparents who had lost her husband shortly after being married and never re-married. My grandparents always included her in all family events. We loved to hear her infectious laugh, didn't mind her strong perfume, and will always remember her mile long smile.

Uncle Bill was another *non-relative*. He was always the life of the party, played many musical instruments, told some great jokes (most were not intended for my tender ears), always came alone, drove a fancy car, dressed to the 9's, loved Cuban cigars and his straw hat. Returning from the Army I attended his funeral. I asked my father if *Uncle Bill* ever had a wife. Dad told me was gay. Being gay was never an issue in our large family, but the family kept his secret from *us boys* till his death.

Oh yes, there was one more *Aunt and Uncle* who really weren't. The Butterfield's lived near us. My father lived with them for a couple of years and "*Mr. B*" gave dad a job during the depression working in his furniture store. "*Mr. B*" also gave me a job when I was in Jr. High School, cleaning out his chicken coop and weeding his garden. I got one more thing from "*Mr. B.*", his first name, Howard.

These folks are clearly not my relatives in genealogical terms. However, they have all been *relative* to my life giving me unforgettable memories, encouragement, sharing wisdom, teaching me golf, and an appreciation for what was important. Makes you wish you could pick your own relatives.

Most true genealogies will omit these *non-family* treasures. Those who prepare a less formal *family history* may well add them as they will not be bound by the strict 'blood' rules. I am sure I'll find a way to include my *non-family* treasures to my genealogy even if only with asterisks and photos.