

# The Genealogy Racket

## Or How to Make Money Off the Faithful

By Joseph Hall

Suddenly millions of people are searching for their "roots," as Mormons have been doing for generations. And, like many Mormons, they find that at some point the easy-to-find records reach a dead end. And they need help.

There are several very good reasons for getting professional help: most of us find it cheaper to have an English genealogist do a search than to go to England to do it ourselves; most of us lack the expertise to know where to look and what to find when we look there in parish records from the distant past; and most of us have a lazy streak that encourages us to go out fishing on the lake while our money does the walking through those yellowed pages.

But genealogy is a business—a suddenly expanding business—and as all those who have had bad experiences with repairmen and used-car salesmen can testify, not all who *say* they can, can.

How can you tell a responsible, qualified genealogist from one who is ir- and un-? There *are* two institutions in the U.S. that test genealogists. The National Board for Certification in Washington, D.C., gives a correspondence test for people doing genealogical research in United States records, and the Genealogical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (you've heard of them) in Salt Lake City gives an eight-hour test in its library for genealogists doing research in any part of the world. Both places have a list of those who have passed the exam.

But passing a test is no guarantee that a genealogist *will* do what he says he *can* do.

For example: a family organization hired a very large Salt Lake City genealogy firm, agreeing to collect the money to send a monthly check for services rendered. The genealogy firm, in exchange, agreed to do research and compile a family history at the rate of \$7.50 to \$10.00 per hour. Twelve months and a thousand dollars later, the family organization had to send someone to the firm's office to regain possession of their files. Only

fifteen hours of research had actually been done, work had not even begun on the family history, and to top it off, the firm had even contacted individual family members for further payment, contrary to the agreement in advance.

Another example: A woman in Kentucky hired an accredited genealogist to submit some names for temple work for her, to be extracted from wills (which she provided). She paid \$300, only to find out, a year later, that the genealogist had still not done the work—and when she complained, he almost refused to return her wills to her.

Another woman paid \$50 for an accredited researcher to help her. The advice she was given was to look in parish registers in one county in England, though her ancestors lived in another county entirely—and lived during the time of nationwide civil registration of vital records and excellent census records, both of which were far easier sources to research than the county records—and both of which included more complete information.

Let's face it. Any time you hire somebody to do something you don't know anything about, you run the risk of being "taken."

And to confuse things even further, some of the best genealogists have never had formal training and never taken an accreditation test—all they have to offer is a wealth of experience and a job well done. Which is, after all, what you want!

The best way to find a genealogist to help you, of course, is to get a recommendation from a friend or relative who has worked with the genealogist for years, with good results. But if you don't have someone recommended—and sometimes even if you do!—there are things you should find out before you contract for work.

First, make sure that the researcher is qualified to do research in the records of the geographical area where your ancestors lived. Record-keeping methods varied from county to county—from nation to nation the differences are tremendous. Just be-

cause a genealogist is trained in English parish records doesn't necessarily mean he knows a hill of beans about Danish records or the reporting system in Milan in the eighteenth century.

Second, find out his standing among genealogists. As with any other profession, genealogists come to know each other and each other's work, and you can probably avoid the out-and-out frauds by asking around—though, of course, nobody will have heard of a brand-new researcher just starting out. In any case, if a genealogist will furnish you with the names and addresses of a couple of his clients, you can contact them and find out what kind of work the researcher does.

Third, the genealogist should be willing to discuss rates with you—and set them in advance. He may charge by the hour or by the job, but in any case, he should be able to explain it in terms you understand. An important thing to watch for is a genealogist who promises too much. Like most research, results cannot usually be predicted on a time scale, and you should be wary of a genealogist who says he'll *definitely* get results within six hours of research—particularly when you've already worked on that line for months with no results. Genealogists rarely work miracles—you hire them to do hard work that you just can't do. And sometimes overpromising is a signal of the worst kind of genealogy fraud: in the past some people posing as genealogists have resorted to fabricating results, rather than reporting that research findings have been negative. The simplest solution to that, however, is to make an agreement in advance that where possible, xerox copies of the sources of particular kinds of information (birth dates, death dates, marriage dates, names of kin, etc.) should be provided to you.

Avoiding frauds and incompetents should be fairly easy if you take reasonable precautions. But another danger area awaits you: genealogists offer many different kinds of service, which all have different payment rates, and you should be careful to get—and pay for—only as much as you need. And when a genealogist charges a flat rate, it's a good idea to check on the kind of service he offers: if he has a high overhead, you will be paying for *all* his services whether you need them or not! Some computer services, for instance, can be very expensive, and yet you *may* not need them—so you should make sure in advance whether a computer search will be needed, and perhaps insist that no such expensive research be

launched without your specific approval in each case.

And how thorough do you want the genealogist to be? If you want just the information, and intend to do the analysis yourself, all you want to hire is a "record searcher," since they provide that service and generally charge less. But if you want the genealogist to do the analysis and to direct the research, you will have to pay more for that service.

Sometimes when you hire an American genealogist to research a line that goes to a foreign country, he will have to hire an agent in that country. Naturally, that increases the cost. If your genealogist plans to use such an agent, you should ask that he let you know—and let you know *what* the agent is going to do for your money.

Another service many genealogists provide is helping families get organized to do the work. A good adviser can help you set up efficiently and keep things running smoothly. And if you plan to do most of your own research as a family or family organization, a good genealogist can help you avoid pitfalls, and teach you how to do some of the more difficult types of research yourself. Of course, such services, being valuable, command a good fee—but when performed well, can be worth the expense.

And if your desire is to compile your own written version of *Roots*, you will need a genealogist with experience in compiling family histories. The best reference is a copy of a family history he has previously compiled. And a particularly creative genealogist can help you organize your history in the way best suited to your needs—not in a rigid pattern he has followed since the dawn of time.

Above all, find a genealogist who is open with you about what he is doing and who is willing to help you all he can. Though, like any professional, a genealogist hasn't time to answer two or three hours' worth of questions for free, a good genealogist, like a good doctor or lawyer, will readily tell you what you want to know. And once you've found the researcher who takes a personal interest in your ancestor search, who provides all the services you need and none that you don't need, and who gets reasonable results within a reasonable period of time, stick with him!

And recommend him to your friends. Nothing guarantees quality like competition from a lot of qualified people!

Joseph Hall, 24, with two children who are supervised by his wife, Sandra Pratt Hall (whom he met in Brazil on their missions), is a professional freelance genealogist in Salt Lake City.

# Fiction Among the Diapers

By Gladys Clark Farmer

"How do you do it?" some of my friends used to ask when they discovered that I, with four children six and under, was writing a book.

"You don't unless you're crazy," I would reply in mock seriousness. But to the genuinely interested I had an answer: you can make time to do what you really want to do.

It was a conclusion I had reached after several years of watching young (and even older) mothers trying to keep their sanity amid the demands of household chores. Every mother needs at least one escape valve. Some find it unconsciously—talking on the phone or watching the "soaps" on T V. Others plan their moments of escape—regular appointments at the spa or hairdresser, or scheduled afternoons with a friend or a club. Still others attempt money-making enterprises, like selling Tupperware or cosmetics.

Before I started writing I had gone through a series of outside involvements myself. Teaching part-time at the university was no problem with just one child and a husband with a fairly flexible schedule. But unwilling to leave two children with a babysitter, I declined the offer to continue teaching, and began, instead, to give piano lessons in my home. This worked well for a few years, with educational TV serving as my babysitter in one room while I taught three lessons a day in another. Then, as my oldest child began school, I realized that I would soon need to free myself to be able to visit and practice with my own children in the after-school hours.

It was about this time that I discovered an activity which could release my frustration and creative impulses—and, best of all, one for which I never had to dress up, leave home, or be tied to an appointed hour. All I needed was paper, ideas, and an hour or two of uninterrupted time.

The discovery came almost by accident. During one of my rare "clean the house or burn it down" drives, I was dusting the individual books in our study and picked up a mug with several papers inside. One of these was a lined, twice-folded

paper I had placed there six years earlier. It was a list of ideas for short stories about the mission field—a writing project that had occurred to me early in my marriage, but which I had completely forgotten.

The teasing words of my husband came back to me: "You're the English major of the family; why don't you write something?" (We both knew that he was a much better writer than I, and that all my "A" papers in graduate school had been those he had edited for me.)

Perhaps it was some hostility I was feeling at the time; perhaps it was my basic dislike of housework; or perhaps my intense dislike of dusting stirred the "liberated woman" in me that morning. I squared my shoulders in an I'll-show-you stance, put away my dustrag, and sat down to outline a story.

My husband left later that week to attend an out-of-state professional meeting. I found that six years of enjoying a live footwarmer had spoiled me to the point that I couldn't sleep alone in bed. So I got up at midnight, dug out all my old missionary diaries and letters and read far into the morning.

The memories (both pleasant and unpleasant) came flooding back—things I hadn't thought about for years.

During the next two days I made rough outlines for twenty more short stories, and when my husband returned, I announced to him in a very matter-of-fact voice, "I'm writing a book."

I was half kidding. But the pencil pushing had begun, and I found it more stimulating than anything I had done in years. My mind kept returning to the project and thinking of new situations and problems about which I could write. My challenge was to find the time.

Somewhere I had read that historian Juanita Brooks, who raised a large family while she did much of her writing, used to find her undisturbed hours in the middle of the night. Not being one who could tolerate my sleep being interrupted any more than a young child, I searched

for some daylight hours. I found them in the last two hours of the morning when my dishes and clothes were washed, my oldest child was still at kindergarten, and my younger two children were entranced with *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers*. It was two hours of ignored housework, but I figured why pick up toys at eleven o'clock when you have to pick them up all over again at five?

I was soon sending rough drafts to friends and family members for their suggestions. To my delight, they came back with both helpful advice and words of encouragement. With these new ideas, I began to rewrite the stories, squeezing out extra time on weekends and in the evenings, and soon I realized that I was hooked and wouldn't be able to stop until my writing project really had evolved into a book.

It was over a year later, when I had found a potential publisher and sat in conference with her and her editor that I wondered if my "escape" might not have finally trapped me. Their suggestion was clear: it was good, but not good enough. I needed to put the whole thing through the typewriter again! It was July. We were leaving the state for my husband's sabbatical in just five months, and by this time I had a fourth child to care for.

I suppose it was mostly my lifetime compulsion to finish whatever I started that made me nod my head and agree to rewrite the entire book. But I knew that it could no longer be my creative release, to be played with during my free time. I would have to *make* time.

I moved the typewriter downstairs into one of the cool, unfinished bedrooms in the basement, spread out all my papers, and announced to the family that no one was to step into that room without my permission. I could still only type two or three hours a day, but I found that my mind could work when my fingers couldn't. Ignoring much of what went on around me, I worked out plots in my mind as I folded clothes and prepared meals; mentally tried out dialogue while I canned fruit and vegetables; carried my clipboard of paper with me to doctor's and dentist's offices and to the children's music and swimming lessons. Then, at any free moment I could find, I would put these ideas into typed paragraphs.

I had outlined a way to convert the forty episodes I had previously written into nine long, well-developed stories. I set a personal goal of writing and rewriting one story a week. I met the goal for the first three stories. In self-defense the older children learned

to play more at their friends' houses; the baby learned that grandma and grandpa who (fortunately) lived next door would give him love and attention when mother didn't have the time; and my husband learned to look in the washroom for his clothes rather than the bedroom. No one complained. Much.

I tried to make it clear to the children that this was a one-shot thing, and that during our forthcoming sabbatical all of my time would be theirs. Housecleaning could be (and was) ignored since I would soon be packing everything away and scrubbing down the walls in preparation for renters.

Everything was running smoothly and on schedule—until that warm August evening when my husband went for a bicycle ride and ended up in the hospital with a badly broken leg! There went my story-a-week schedule, but I was determined to persevere. My husband was confined at home for the next six weeks, but after the first two he was able to make up for the errands I ran for him by doing tasks for me, such as folding the clothes and reading to the children while I pounded away at the typewriter. For a while our baby came home for meals and diaper changes, but otherwise completely adopted his grandparents. Somehow I wrote and rewrote over 300 pages by October, revised them again by Thanksgiving, and then proofread the final edited copy the night before we left for California on December 17th.

As I climbed into the packed car to leave Provo, I let out a big sigh of relief. I was tired, and fifteen pounds lighter than I had been in July, but I had done it! I had written a publishable book.

I knew that it would take me over a year to recover; that the arrival of any more babies and my increased involvement in the activities of my growing children would be cutting still more into my "free" time. Nevertheless, I had brought with me a notebook entitled, "Notes for my next book: *Mormon Mothers*."

There was no hurry. I had just survived the first seven years of motherhood. Writing could once again become my creative escape. I would just record observations and anecdotes and play with plots until the day came when I could once again carve out a nook of uninterrupted time. Then I would be ready to launch into another major project. Writing is in my blood!

Gladys Clark Farmer, a resident of Edgemont (a suburb of Provo, Utah), is the author of *Elders and Sisters*, which is being published by Seagull Books in June 1977.

## Whitesmith By Byron Walley

For under the dark leaves  
Where I have come to walk  
There is no light.  
A thread of silence weaves  
The fear of night  
Between the phrases of my talk.  
In your lips I hear my words  
recorded,  
My thoughts shining, my love  
hoarded;  
But changed softly,  
Bent straight and drawn narrow,  
Carved sharp, my heart's harrow,  
My eye's axe, my own self's sight.  
And so you led me out of night,  
Not by showing me the way,  
But by kindling the day.