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Holocaust Secret Exposed

How Forensic Genealogy Cracked the Misha Defonseca Case

by Sharon Sergeant

Sandy applies to her genealogy the same work ethic that has brought her feats of accomplishment and memorable moments in other times of her life: She played Snow White in her second-grade musical and confesses to murdering the song "Someday my Prince Will Come." She grew up in a rural small-town farmhouse that had its first bathroom and furnace installed in 1963 and then watched the same house burn down in 1964. She put herself through college on nights and weekends with an employers' tuition reimbursement program and graduated Cum Laude. She has been featured on the cover of *Communications Week* magazine. She was selected one of twelve women from among numerous Cable Operators nominees to the Betsy Magness Leadership Institute management training program. She has had a "My Favorite Ancestor" article published in *New England Ancestors* magazine. And, she has served as President of Women in Telecommunications, Program Chair for Women in Cable Telecommunications, Rocky Mountain Chapter, Special Events Coordinator for the Foothills Genealogical Society in Colorado, and, currently, as treasurer for CAPG.

Forward-Thinking Philosophy

Sandy admits she may never earn her living from genealogy. "I only occasionally take clients and usually that is for specific research tasks and record lookups. I belong to APG because I believe in the promotion of ethics and high standards of research, as well as records preservation and access. Genealogy is attracting so many people these days that have a misguided focus on collecting names and instant genealogies without documentation, which is creating huge problems for future researchers. Along with today's instant access to wonderful sources of accurate data comes self-perpetuating mountains of misinformation that will make it much harder for future genealogists to sort out the truth. Imagine how important good genealogical

research standards will be to tomorrow's researchers."

Teacher Genealogist

Tim Pinnick

Tim Pinnick left his career as a public school teacher to pursue his research of African American coal miners. To feature his body of work, he put together the website African American Coal Miner Information Center <<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~blackcoalminers>>, where a large database of African American miners, summaries of his research, and his commentary draw the reader into the pages and the history.

Coal Miner Research

Tim began his genealogy in 1986. He discovered his roots going back to the small town of Braidwood, about sixty miles from Chicago. Tim determined that members of both sides of his family had worked the coal mines of the region. His research took a turn from family history toward the coal miners' records. Tim's studies took on the collateral research of uncovering the records of the African American miners of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The website, a means of sharing his research, tells the history of the African American Coal Mining experience and contains Tim's database of miners as well as a wealth of information about coal mining in general and African American coal miners in particular.

Tim writes that he actually has two areas of passionate interest: "One is the coal miner research. There is an expansive and varied collection of really interesting material on this topic in existence that many genealogists have never tapped into—I love trotting out into uncharted research territory!" The second area is African American newspaper research. "So few researchers know about or utilize this

resource," says Tim, "and I feel it somewhat of a mandate to expose to the world the incredible richness found within."

Tim's website and lectures reflect his avid interest "in the contributions of the common person to the collective history of America."

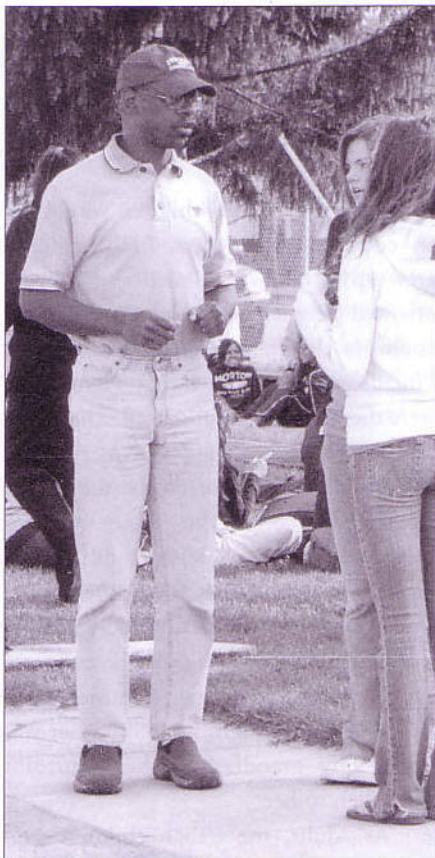
Playing Favorites

"Probably my favorite relative would be my Aunt Sadie who was married to my father's brother," Tim remembers. "She was a take-charge lady with a ton of charisma and a heart of gold. She had a wonderful sense of humor and whenever I heard her entering our house I would immediately rush into the room so as not to miss any part of the experience. It was guaranteed entertainment!"

Tim's favorite ancestor is Martha Pinnick, his father's father's mother. "One of her sons, William Pinnick Jr., fought in the Philippines during the Spanish American War and contracted some type of debilitating illness from which he died about six years later," Tim explains. "Martha mounted a relentless campaign to secure a mother's pension from the government and some of the letters in the file give remarkable insight into the courage, tenacity, and self-worth of this woman as she fought for what she thought was fair and just (she never got any money). A former slave, when Martha died she is purported to have uttered, 'Come sweet Jesus.' She told the family she did not want to be taken to the cemetery in an automobile, and apparently her Creator made sure that her desire was fulfilled because there was a heavy snowfall prior to the burial, and the only way to get the body to the burial plot was by a horse-drawn wagon."

Influences and Accolades

Tim cites a well-known genealogist as influential: "The late James Dent Walker, who worked at the National Archives for many years, devoted a lifetime to bringing records of value to African Americans to the attention of researchers and provid-



ing instruction in their use. I was able to experience firsthand the impact he had on African American genealogy and hope, in some small measure, to contribute to this essential work."

Tim has early accomplishments. He was the Illinois high school state champion in the long jump in 1976 and a 1980 Olympic Trials qualifier. He continues his track and field activities as he coaches the Downers Grove South girls track team in suburban Chicago.

His more recent awards include a Formby Research Fellowship as well as the Richard S. Brownlee Fund grant for conducting research on African American coal miners in Texas and Missouri.

Currently, Tim serves on the venerable staff of the Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research at Samford. His course "Researching African American Ancestors: Military Records" is already full, and his astute students will no doubt leave with memorable insights.



Left: Tim coaching. Right: Tim showing his Olympic qualifying form.

Tim also serves on the board of directors of the Association of Professional Genealogists.

Tim has been married for more than twenty-five years to his wife, Rosemary, who is Cuban. (Her parents came over in the 1950s shortly after the revolution.) They have one son, Daniel, who graduated from high school last year.

Tim enjoys the benefits of conferencing. "I have attended a number of national conferences and my favorite would have to be FGS in Salt Lake City for the one of a kind fringe benefit—the Family History Library. Didn't get a lot of sleep that week!"

Italian Heritage

Debora Hill

Debora Hill manages a research service for persons of Italian heritage. She is resolutely Italian herself, having grown up within a close-knit family.

"My Italian grandfather was a dominant force in our family," Debora explains. "I grew up relating strongly to my Italian heritage. Most of the immigrant generation remained in the same town; I saw these people daily. As I walked past my grandfather Tom's Italian-American grocery store on my way to school, I would see my Uncle Milly stopping by on his way to work (he was the town tax collector). I'd walk past Uncle Pat's tailor shop, and walk farther on to school where Aunt Mary was the principal. We lived right across the street from the original immigrant house, by then a duplex home. The home remains occupied today, on both sides, by descendants of the original immigrants."

Debora's college studies foreshadowed her genealogical work. In college, she minored in Anthropology/Archaeology. "Originally, I wanted to be an archaeologist," she says. "But instead of pursuing a career where I dug up the physical remains of our ancestors, I focus now on reconstructing their lives by digging out documents and tracing the evolution of individual Italian family groups." She was