

How to Disappear... Alcatraz Style

Those of you who recognize my name know that I am a skip tracer, one who finds people; however, more interesting, I teach people how to disappear. About a year ago, I met up with some famed Hollywood Producers about creating a show about me finding people who have disappeared - titled Missing. The producers were interested in doing cases where it was possible the missing people maybe alive. Like Whitey Bulger leader of the Winter Hill Gang, DB Cooper skyjacker and bank robber, Lord Lucan British high society and suspected murderer, Moana Pozzi Italian porn star. Out all the cases that were kicked around they were interested in brothers Clarence & JW Anglin the famed escape from Alcatraz, made popular by Clint Eastwood in his portrayal of Frank Lee Morris one of the escapees. My attitude was negative I figured there is no way the Anglins or Morris made it out the dark waters with their makeshift rafts, boy was I wrong. Therefore, the journey of locating the Anglin brothers begins, I started my search by locating family. The Anglin name is somewhat of a common southern name, most searches on line brought me to IMDB.com the movie site that linked the movie Escape from Alcatraz. I located an old book written titled Riddle of the Rock by Don Denevi, an interesting book that discusses the escape in detail - unlike the movie that simplified the break out. The theory is that Bumpy Johnson a notorious Harlem mob boss assisted in the escape by having a boat out in the bay waiting for the escapees. However when I did my research on Bumpy Johnson he had no power left and no money to finance such a feat. In addition, the environment on the rock was hostile, amongst the different ethnic groups, though some believe that the escape plan united the groups and kept it a secret from the guards. The vital hope amongst the prisoners was that if the escapees made it out alive, they perhaps would shine light on the horrible conditions in Alcatraz. The big house was filled with small cells, no exercise and high carbohydrate diets to keep the inmates lazy although the Warden allowed painting on canvas. After days of spinning my skip tracing wheels, I was unsuccessful in locating any of the Anglin family members. Sometimes when one skip traces the simple things are forgotten. I finally hit www.ancestry.com and start posting that I am a writer searching for Anglin family members. A few days later, I get an email from a woman who knows the oldest brother and patriarch of the family. I will refer to him as Man a family nickname. I dial Man's cell phone number and an easy southern voice answers. I tell him my story that I am working with some producers who want to do a TV show about his brothers. Of course, I leave out the part that we are looking to capture them. Man agrees to meet me at a nearby Arby's restaurant the following day. The next day I arrive at the Arby's restaurant about forty minutes early, checking out the scene. I wasn't sure what to expect from Man or other family members. When you're a skip tracer being paranoid at times is your best tool. The paranoia can keep you one-step ahead. After assessing that, all was cool I walk in a sit down, shortly after walks in the kindest looking person I ever met, Man brother to JW and Clarence. As Man was sitting down, he asked if I was going to make him rich and famous, I laughed. Although Man was not joking, he told me how the media pretty much used him and spit him out. He told me everyone else made money off his brother's infamy but the Anglin family never received a dime from books, TV shows and movies made. My answer was simple, how bout we start with a cup of coffee I am buying. Man smiled, he preferred bottle water. I wanted to know about the brothers, how they found themselves in a place like Alcatraz. Clarence and JW robbed a bank in Alabama, what most people do not realize is a third brother was with them and the supposed ringleader Alfred Anglin. Man told me that Alfred was always in trouble and prior to the bank robbery in Alabama Alfred was on the lam for several years living in the middle of Florida working a farm picking fruit and vegetables. While hiding out in Florida Alfred fell in love with a sixteen-year-old beauty named Jeanette. Like Romeo and Juliet it was a forbidden love, the couple crossed the state line and married. Not far from the Arby's restaurant is a small graveyard with Alfred's headstone and an old photo of Alfred and Jeanette announcing their marriage for all to see, quite brazen for a man on the run. That was just the way Alfred was, he feared nothing and wanted to give his new bride more in life so he devised a plan. While Alfred was picking fruit under the hot Florida sun, Clarence was working a road gang somewhere around Ft. Meyers. Turns out Clarence's mother Rachel and another of her sons' went to visit Clarence in the jail. Clarence told them not to come next week that he would be visiting them at home. The mother and brother shrugged it off to Clarence's usual banter. The following week, Clarence true to his word escaped the road gang with two other prisoners. Clarence was barefoot and made his way up the Gulf Coast, wading and swimming for more than sixty miles. Man told me that Clarence and JW were thick as thieves and since childhood, they had a unique way of communicating between each other, secret destination to meet up at, phone calls with certain amount of hang-ups determined locations. JW received such a message and met up with Clarence when he escaped the Florida road gang and took him to stay with Alfred on the farm. Farm life was no life for Clarence, he had a tough edge to him and preferred easy money for the day as opposed to a weekly paycheck also picking fruit never paid that much. The plan, Man told me that originally, Clarence and Alfred were going to rob the bank in Alabama, and originally JW wanted no part of the crime. JW was a ladies man, sharp dressed and loved fast cars. A fast car was needed for the bank robbery, JW refused to lend his car and eventually decided that he would go along and drive the getaway car. What the brothers did not know was Alabama supposedly still had the death penalty for bank robbery. My meetings with Man became weekly, more like a Tuesday with Morrie but in an Arby's sipping bad coffee and him the usual water. Man was always cautious about how he answered my questions; in his late seventies, he was sharp. One time he was bold and told me he had to watch what he said, he didn't want to get in any type of trouble. Not sure, what he meant I pushed on, but his big southern smile always brought the conversation to another topic. In another meeting with Man, he implied that I might be a US Marshal trying to capture his brothers and wanted to know if I was wired. I told him I was not, he asked me to take off my shirt and prove it to him. That afternoon in the Arby's I stood and took off my shirt as the patrons looked at me as if I was crazy. Man, pulled out a business card of a US Marshal, forty years after the escape the US Marshals actually approached Man and asked him to take a polygraph test. They picked him up from his small lot where several trailers housed Man and a few siblings. The Marshal drove him to an office asked him thirteen questions, drove him back home and never discussed the results of the test. The bank robbery, JW drives his brother up to the bank door. Clarence and Alfred enter the bank a toy gun is used a woman near faints. The two brothers stop the robbery and give her a glass of water - about 19k is stolen. Eventually the brothers are

apprehended in Ohio. Less than 600 were spent from the loot. All three brothers were found guilty. Alfred was sent back to Atlanta since he owed the state time for his prior escape. JW and Clarence went to Leavenworth and eventually Alcatraz because of a foiled escape. Fast forward Alcatraz June 11, 1962 Allen West the mastermind behind the Alcatraz escape is unable to exit his cell, JW, Clarence and Frank Lee Morris escape into the dark waters supposedly never to be seen again. After the escape, Man told me that he was visiting Alfred in the penitentiary and in the prison bathroom Alfred said he received a message from Clarence and that he knew where the brothers were holed up and he was going to break out and meet up with the pair. Alfred true to his words attempted to escape prison only to be killed by electrocution. Long after the Alcatraz, escape there have been several sightings and assumed correspondence from JW and Clarence. The smoking gun by Hollywood standards would be a postcard that arrived one day from Brazil, written in Clarence's writing. Every year on the mother's birthday, she received two dozen red roses with unsigned cards. The roses stop upon her death. At times Man would open up and bring me closer to a world he shared with no one, not even his own siblings. They joke about if anyone knew the whereabouts, Man would know. I asked to see the postcard from Brazil, however, a week later Man told me the card is gone no one can find it. I offered him twenty thousand dollars just to look at the mysterious correspondence. Man smiled and again in that polite southern voice - it was misplaced. Some years ago, Unsolved Mysteries did a segment about the Anglin brothers; I had the good fortune of meeting the Director of that segment who was now one of the producers I was working with. We flew together to meet up with the US Marshal that worked the tips from Unsolved Mysteries. 1. A woman called in claiming to have met Clarence Anglin after the escape at a barbecue. She claimed he was with a teen girl named Rachel, strangely enough that was the name of the Anglins mothers. The woman claimed that she also visited the home of Clarence in Georgia and mentioned particular features about Clarence that only would have been recognized in person. 2. In the same area of Georgia, a bank was robbed and the MO was similar to the Anglin bank robbery in Alabama. What is so interesting is the Georgia bank robbery is in the same town where the Anglins hail from. Mike the producer told me when he was shooting the Unsolved Mysteries segment he had the wanted posters of Clarence and JW faxed to a hotel managers office, the manager remarked that the faces looked like the guy who robbed the bank a few years back in Georgia. 3. The US Marshal met with another woman who claimed she was on her father's ranch in Texas when several men showed up who were assisting a man being smuggled into Mexico. Her father claimed it was one of the Anglin brothers. 4. We learned that only a few years back the US Marshals received a tip that one of the Anglin brothers was in Brazil. The US Marshals went down to Brazil and got a confirmation from a local bartender that one of the brothers was there. Eventually the trail went cold. Mike and I eventually made our way to meet Man but first stopped in a local diner. We started talking with a few locals, one specifically who knew the family well. He told us what most people do not know is that one of the Anglin siblings was out in California during the escape and not far from the rock - information not in the FBI file. The FBI file is an interesting piece of work, the attitude is summed up that most likely the trio drowned in the bay. Across the bay was a community of people known as the colony, these were family members of inmates locked up in Alcatraz. There is no record of the FBI ever speaking to members of the colony. We picked Man up and he gave us a grand tour of where the Anglins grew up, from back woods swimming holes, to back roads where JW raced his Thunderbird. Man told stories of JW being a ladies man, dressing like a fancy preacher, Clarence being tough as nail and Alfred, well Alfred was just destined for trouble. Mike and I were hoping to get that smoking gun it never came. Either way Hollywood passed on my show titled Missing, to them there was no smoking gun. The secret of Clarence and JW still hide behind the kind smile of a gentle man named Man. Through my search, I learned of things that are best left unsaid, things that imply or point to the strong possibilities of life after Alcatraz for JW and Clarence. To me it was a great experience to dive so deep in the world of such a mystery - that will never be solved or at least not yet! That was the last time I saw Man and that's how you disappear Alcatraz style. Frank M. Ahearn www.disappear.info About the Author As featured in GQ Magazine Frank M. Ahearn is a privacy expert and skip tracer. He shares his journey of hunting for Clarence & JW Anglin who escaped from Alcatraz. New light shines on the possibility of the brothers living in Brazil.

About the Author

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