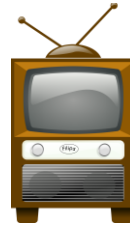


## Doing Background Research for Genealogy Television: It's NOT Like it Looks on TV



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### WHAT ARE THE MOST WELL-KNOWN GENEALOGY TV SHOWS? (this changes with each new season, but these remain groundbreakers)

- *Who do You Think You are?* (TLC, current status unclear)
- *Finding Your Roots* (PBS, new season about to start?)
- *Genealogy Roadshow* (PBS, season 4 pending?)

Plus some lesser known ones or ones that are no longer being shown and probably more in development

### WHAT IS THE HIERARCHY?

This will vary, but will not follow the standard organizational diagram. The Network is the entity that everyone wants to please and, even when the show is pitched and there is interest, until the product is purchased (contracts signed), anything can change. (Even after contracts are signed, things can change.)

1. Money source (person or company)
2. Executive producer
3. Co-Executive producer
4. Producers (these sound like important titles, but these are the people who screen things before handing them to the Executive producers)
5. Writers (these people write the scripts)
6. Casting (these people connected with the general public as well as, possibly, the “experts”)
7. Editors (these people prepare the recorded material so it fits into the allotted time and adheres to whatever the Network wants and the law permits)
8. On-air talent (these are the ones who are presenting the information)
9. Expert researchers (these are the folks who actually do the grunt work and may or may not be given credit)

Researchers communicate with the casting people and the writers and producers (not usually the executive producers). To the best of my knowledge, no one who has knowledge of the actual research ever gets access to the editors (though different shows may have different processes, and things may change as the producers realize the need to have the final product screened before airing).

#### AS THE SHOW GETS CLOSER TO AIR DATE

- The researchers are cut loose (but may be contacted for clarification)
- The writers are in full swing
- The producers go into panic mode (“hell week”)

The order in which episodes are filmed is not necessarily the order in which they will be aired.

#### CONCERNS FOR THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

- The “ordinary people” or the “celebrities” who agreed to appear on a particular episode, filmed on a specific date, may
  - Back out
  - Get a conflicting item on their personal schedules
  - Change their minds due to family objections
- Someone might sue the Network and/or Producers over any one of a number of things
- A “reveal” might create a later issue (incorrect information, etc.)

#### THIS IS ENTERTAINMENT, NOT EDUCATION . . . WHAT THE NETWORK WANTS IS

- ▶ Exciting stories
- ▶ Research time: 4-6 hours
- ▶ Everything found on-line or for free elsewhere
- ▶ Everything on shoe-string budget
- ▶ Facts
- ▶ Certainties
- ▶ A good experience for applicants
- ▶ A good experience for viewers

#### THE EXPERT RESEARCHERS ARE EXPECTED TO

- Make the on-line talent look good
- Make the Network look good
- Provide well-researched, factual information
- Remain quiet, behind the scenes
- Let the producers know if they see a potential problem (e.g., lawsuit by a family member, danger if someone who sees the show might be “after” someone who is highlighted on the program, etc.)

## THE NON-DISCLOSURE (CONFIDENTIALITY) AGREEMENT (NDA)

- Must be signed by every person behind the scenes
- Must be carefully adhered to under penalty of lawsuit

*We may not reveal the name of the show (until it is made public), let people know we are working on the show (beyond “I’m working on a show”), reveal anything about celebrities we are researching, reveal anything about any “surprises” to be shown to the audience, mention anyone who will be on it . . . **We keep our mouths shut!** (and any information we need to give to those enlisted to pull records – only with permission of production or casting – must be advised the same . . . this is why many viewers feel as if they are “in the dark” about what will or will not be renewed, aired, cancelled, etc.).*

## AS MUCH AS YOU ENJOY GENEALOGY, MOST PEOPLE DON’T, INSTEAD . . .

- ▶ They crave reunions and “first meetings”
- ▶ They want drama and excitement
- ▶ They love embarrassing moments
- ▶ They enjoy knowing that someone else’s family was worse off, more hated, less intelligent, etc. than their own

## SUGGESTIONS IF ASKED TO WORK ON GENEALOGY RESEARCH FOR TV/MOVIES

- ▶ Learn what you can about the production company before signing anything
- ▶ Understand the NDA
- ▶ Realize that TV people are not genealogists
  - ▶ They do not know what a full story involves
  - ▶ Their ethics may not be commensurate with yours
  - ▶ And they likely will look down on you (you’re not in the biz)
- ▶ Have an understanding about your work – who owns it
- ▶ Honor the Non-Disclosure Agreement (heavy fines can result if you don’t)
- ▶ Keep careful records of the money you receive and examine your 1099 or W-2s closely

## IT’S NOT AS GLAMOROUS AS PEOPLE THINK!

- ▶ Don’t expect to get rich (you might not get paid until the program airs!)
- ▶ Be sure to check your tax documents for accuracy!!
- ▶ Television producers see no days/times as off-limits
- ▶ Plan to surrender your life to the show for as long as it takes to put it together . . . And beyond!
- ▶ Double the time expectation (over what they say it will take . . . They really don’t know)
- ▶ Be sure they know how to spell your name for the credits