



FAMILY LAW INVESTIGATIONS

Chuck Cheesman, Investigator

We are often contacted by law firms and private individuals alike to deal with matters that pertain to family law. Most often these cases have to do with child custody, visitation and support issues. These cases range from verifying compliance with court orders, by one parent or the other, to alleged child endangerment. The services of a qualified investigator can be invaluable when it comes to these matters.

However, I can not count how many times I have been contacted by parties involved in custody disputes to investigate immoral behavior of the opposing party in a divorce case. We have been asked to document everything from how many different men a mother dates in a month to how late a husband stays out at a night club with a new girlfriend. Of course, more often than not these activities are taking place while the children are on a weekend visit with the other parent. And, of course, we have to explain to the potential client that unless these activities somehow endanger the children this information will do little to help in a case like this as the court usually has no interest in the social activities of a parent while the children are gone for the weekend. This is about the time that we suggest the individual seek legal counsel from a competent family law attorney.

In most cases, however, we are asked to look into things that do have a great deal of bearing on a family law case such as verifying compliance with court orders. In one case in particular the court order stated that the parent not consume alcohol. In this particular instance the parent that had custody of the children suspected that the other parent was consuming alcohol in violation of a court order during visitation. This was not difficult to verify as investigators were able to document the subject make a stop at a local convenience store and purchase two 12 packs of beer after picking up two small children for the weekend. Later, the subject was documented drinking from what appeared to be beer bottles of the same brand purchased earlier while sitting in the garage with the children playing in the drive way. This along with other evidence presented was enough to convince the court to order supervised visitation.

In another case we were asked to investigate a mother who was suspected of leaving two small children at home alone while she went out at night. This was found to indeed be the case and the court was able to take steps to ensure the safety of the children. In similar cases where drug dealing was alleged, investigators have documented what could be considered unusually high volumes of traffic in and out of a residence at late hours of the night while children are over for the weekend. Add this to other evidence gathered and there was cause for child protective services to get involved. We have investigated grandparents who would take the children and allow the other parent to meet them at another location for a visit against a court order. We were asked on one occasion to investigate a situation where the court stipulated the father was not allowed to leave the children with the grandmother unsupervised.



We have also documented other issues such as children jumping around unrestrained in the backseat of a moving vehicle on more than one occasion.

In support cases we have been able to verify unreported income of individuals working side jobs or under the table. In one of my earliest cases we were asked to investigate a young woman who had filed for an increase in child support claiming she had no income. The father of the children suspected this was not the case and hired my company to look into the matter. After some field work we were able to determine the young woman was in fact working as a dancer at a popular gentlemen's club after stating to the court she had no job and no other source of income. Using covert video we were able to document the young woman dancing on stage and picking up what appeared to be large amounts of cash following each of several dances a night on several consecutive nights. This case did not go well for this young woman. We have been able to locate undisclosed assets in divorce cases that otherwise would have never been included

All too often I have heard from attorneys that they never have need for the services of an investigator as they practice family law. It is my opinion that these attorneys, for whatever reason, are not serving the best interest of their clients in these matters. It is without a doubt that the outcome of the cases noted above would have been quite different had it not been for the evidence uncovered during these investigations.