

Hello there!

SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON LOSTFRIENDS.ORG WHICH WILL, I HOPE, HELP YOU WITH YOUR SEARCH. GOOD LUCK!

What is Lostfriends.org?

First of all, it is important to understand that www.lostfriends.org is NOT a fee-based investigative service. I cannot make a personal, manual search for you. But Lostfriends.org does nevertheless work. It is a free, non-profit, non-commercial web-based database which is simple to use and easily accessible for everyone via the internet. I set it up myself simply to help myself and other people find their lost friends and relatives.

Most of the other "people finder" sites seemed to me too complicated to use, or were too local in their operation. Lostfriends.org is user-friendly and works on a truly international scale, so there is a better chance, for example, of finding a lost friend who may have moved out of the country.

There is also a special section for people looking for school or college friends, members of other special groups such as the military, and for class or group reunions.

How does Lostfriends.org work?

AS I SAID IT DOES WORK! People simply register their lost friends and their contact details in the "I'm looking for..." section of the website. The entries then either get picked up by search engines like Google or you have to hope that your lost friend – or someone who knows them – visits Lostfriends.org and looks for their name. There are no guarantees especially if the person you are looking for has a very common name, but as I said, it really can work. How?

After some time – it may even take a month or two - Google and other search engines find and register the entry on Lostfriends.org, and if your lost friend has an unusual name and enters this name in Google, the entry in Lostfriends.org should come up pretty high in the list of Google results. Try entering the lost friends "peter naughtie" or "alexander ivan gumbs" just like that in Google with quotation marks and see what comes up! (The quotation marks mean that the words have to be found next to each other. So it doesn't work so well if you just enter "naughtie" or if you do not use quotation marks.)

If the Google entry does not work, perhaps because the name of your lost friend is too common, then you have to hope that your lost friend or someone else who knows them will find the entry in Lostfriends.org. This may sound unlikely, but believe me it happens quite often. I found my lost friend Janet within a month or two in this way, and I have many mails from people who have found their lost friends, as well as from families who have been reunited in this way.

How many people use Lostfriends.org?

Thousands of people all over the world are using www.lostfriends.org to post and look for lost friends and relatives. Because it is free and works on a worldwide basis for all kinds of lost contacts, it is one of the very largest databases of its kind, and probably the largest which does not charge a fee or require any formal registration.

As of April 2005, Lostfriends.org had over 35,000 "lost friends" registered and was being visited by an average of 20,000 people each month (around 120,000 page impressions). I have the stats to prove it! And it continues to grow by leaps and bounds!

So you will perhaps now understand why I cannot personally help you to carry out your search. I simply do not have the time as Lostfriends.org is a hobby, not my job!

(continued)

How do I use Lostfriends.org to register a lost friend?

All you have to do is to enter the details of the person you are looking for in the "I'm looking for..." section.

Make sure you complete all the relevant fields, and do not forget to read the text at the bottom of the page and click on ENTER. If you don't, your entry will not be saved on the Lostfriends.org database.

If you change your mind about making the entry, just close the window and leave the website without clicking on ENTER. (See below about what to do if you want to change your entry or cancel it AFTER you have saved and entered.)

Are my personal details safe on Lostfriends.org?

Will my e-mail address or other details be used for spamming or other purposes?

Please remember that any information you enter can in theory be read by any human being who looks at your entry for any reason. So please think twice when you enter any personal details. I suggest for example that you think very carefully before entering a telephone number. And only enter a street address if you cannot be reached by e-mail or if you expect to change your e-mail address – which of course you may well do these days because of abuse of spam mailings etc.

A word on spamming. Your e-mail address is "hidden" in your entry to prevent automatic spammers from getting to see it. A human user first has to click on "details" and then on "via E-mail" before they actually get to your e-mail address. It is therefore very unlikely that your address will be found by spammers, but I cannot 100% guarantee this. If I hide it completely, then your lost friend will not be able to see it either!!

I also personally faithfully promise never to pass on any of your contact information to anyone else for any reason, except perhaps to your lost friend! I am the only person who has access to the database as a whole. I might use your e-mail address very occasionally myself to contact you with some important news about Lostfriends.org, but I have done this only once in the last few years, and I do not for example send out regular newsletters. So I certainly won't be bothering you.

What do I do if I want to change or cancel my entry?

If you want to change something important in your entry, the easiest way is simply to make a new entry and include a note that this entry is more recent than any previous one. Your lost friend will normally see all the entries so he/she should be able to take note of the latest information.

If something is embarrassing you in a previous entry, or if you really want to remove an entry completely from the database, contact me at help2@lostfriends.org and I will make the necessary changes for you or cancel your entry. Make sure you tell me the exact name of the person you have entered, the approximate date when you made the entry, and please send your request if possible from the same e-mail address as the one you entered in the original entry. It would help if you could also briefly explain the reason for the change.

As Lostfriends.org is just a hobby which I finance out of my own pocket, it would be too expensive for me to include an editing system open to all users via a password system.

What happens if someone else wants to change or cancel my entry?

Sometimes I am asked by someone else to remove an entry. If this is the "lost friend" him/herself and the lost friend does not want to be found by you, then I will usually remove the entry if I am satisfied that the request is genuine. As it says on the home page, "Some people do not want to be found, and that is their right." Depending on the circumstances, I may or may not inform you that I have done this.

Sometimes a "third" person, other than the lost friend, requests that your entry is removed. I will only do this, if I am convinced that the request is genuine and for a good reason. If the "third" person is

not prepared to ask the "lost friend" or you to make the request, then there will need to be a very good reason for my agreeing to the cancellation of your entry. If however I agree to the cancellation, then under normal circumstances I will inform you of the circumstances of the cancellation.

How can I improve my chances of finding my lost friend through Lostfriends.org?

There is one thing which is just as important as entering your lost friend or relative on the Lostfriends website – and that is letting as many other people as possible know about www.lostfriends.org. You can very effectively help your own search and everyone else in the Lostfriends.org community by telling as many people as possible about the website. You could also add a link to www.lostfriends.org in your own website or in as many other websites as possible. Google takes note of how many websites provide an active, so-called "hyperlink" to Lostfriends.org and gives it a much higher placing in their list of results. This improves your chances of your lost friend finding and using the site.

And if you pass on the message about Lostfriends.org, for example by e-mail, to all your friends, and if they each pass it on to 10 friends, and those 10 friends pass it on to 10 more etc. etc. then we can reach the whole world within just a few weeks!!! Work it out – 10 x 10 x 10 just ten times over is 10,000,000,000 and that is more people than there are on this planet! Only if we can reach as many people as possible and tell them about www.lostfriends.org do we all have a better chance of finding our lost friends and loved ones!

If you would like to have a suitable text which you can send to your friends and contacts, just copy and use the text at the foot of this message.

What other ways are there of finding my lost friend?

The only real alternative to Lostfriends.org and similar web-based services are the commercial investigative agencies, but I have no knowledge of how effective they are, and I think it is quite likely that a number of them do not offer a serious service for the money they charge.

There are however some other very simple ways to try to trace friends and relatives.

These methods are more likely to work well if the name of the person you are looking for is unusual, or if there is something unusual about them (the type of job, the place they lived or worked, some organisation they were connected to etc.)

If the name is unusual, try consulting the online telephone directories (e.g. www.whitepages.com or enter "telephone directories" in the Google search machine www.google.com or your local national Google).

You can also simply try entering the name of the person you are looking for directly in Google or other search machines. If possible add something specific like the type of job they do or the town or state they live in. I found someone that way!

Just be patient and experiment a little. If you go to <http://www.google.com/help/index.html> you will find a whole list of suggestions as to how to make your search in Google more effective. This information will also be available on your local national Google site.

Depending on which country you live in, there may be other types of directories (for example an electoral register or list of social security numbers). Try using Google to trace such directories in your country, or enter "lost friends" or "people finder" in www.google.com or go to http://dmoz.org/Society/People/Missing_People/ for a list of many other websites and locator services which might be able to help you.

Who is behind Lostfriends.org and how is it financed?

Good questions. Short answers. Me. And by me. Lostfriends.org is just an idea I had in the shower one day. I paid a relatively small amount to set it up but it costs me more each year as it gets bigger. I do all the administration and answer all the mails myself when I have the time but I have to pay someone else to handle the technical side and the programming. And of course I also have to pay for

the website hosting and the volume of traffic. I do not want to take any advertising, so I am playing with the idea of adding a PayPal donation button sometime soon. What do you think?

I once sent an e-mail to all the registered Lostfriends users asking for a small donation, but after I got about 20 dollars in total back, I decided not to bother again! I don't blame you. I said it was a free service, didn't I?! However if you feel like making a donation or remembering Lostfriends.org in your will, just let me know. I am not too proud to accept your generosity!

And finally...

However you set about trying to find your lost friend, I wish you all the luck in the world with your search. I know how it feels to know that someone somewhere is out there and that they would just love to hear from you again if only you could find them. I got lucky because of Lostfriends.org. I hope you do too.

And please don't forget to use the text below to send on to all your friends and contacts. We need YOU to help us to find our lost friends too! And please let me know if you find your lost friend or relative!

Kind regards
Robert
help2@lostfriends.org

A SUGGESTED TEXT FOR E-MAILING TO FRIENDS AND OTHER CONTACTS

Just copy and paste the following text into an e-mail, making any changes as necessary. But please only send it to your personal friends and contacts. I don't want you to go spamming in my name!

Hello there!

I am trying to find a long-lost friend or relative. I hope you can help me and maybe help yourself too. I have listed my lost friend or relative in www.lostfriends.org . It is a free self-help web-based database with no commercial, political, religious or any other aims or connections - except simply to put people back in touch with one another! It also has a section for class reunions and the like. However, to have a real chance of finding lost friends, we need to make www.lostfriends.org as widely known as possible as a good place to look for lost friends.

It is a big, big world out there!

So please help by passing this message on to as many people as possible and ask them to pass it on again to their friends and contacts. Somebody somewhere out there knows the person I am looking for! In theory, if we were all to pass this message on to just 10 people, and each of these 10 were to pass it on to another 10, all the lost friends in the world would know we were looking for them in just a few weeks! Work it out: 10 x 10 x 10 ten times over is 10,000,000,000 and that is far more than the whole population on the planet! Sometimes the world is not so big after all...

IMPORTANT! I am not, repeat not, collecting e-mail addresses and I have no other motive than to find a lost friend. So please delete any e-mail addresses that you find added to this message, and you of course do not have to send a copy back to me. Also this message should not have any attachments. If it does, just delete them unopened.

Finally I apologise if this e-mail is unwanted and wastes your time. But I think that www.lostfriends.org is just a simple, good idea which needs some help. So even if you are not looking for an old friend, please pass the news on and help others who are.

Thanks for your help and good luck if you are searching for a lost friend or relative too.
Sincerely yours
