

Forrest Fenn's Treasure Hunt



by Miles Mathis

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I have had several readers ask for my opinion on this, and I do know some things. I have no proof the whole thing was a fraud, but I believe it was and I am going to tell you why.

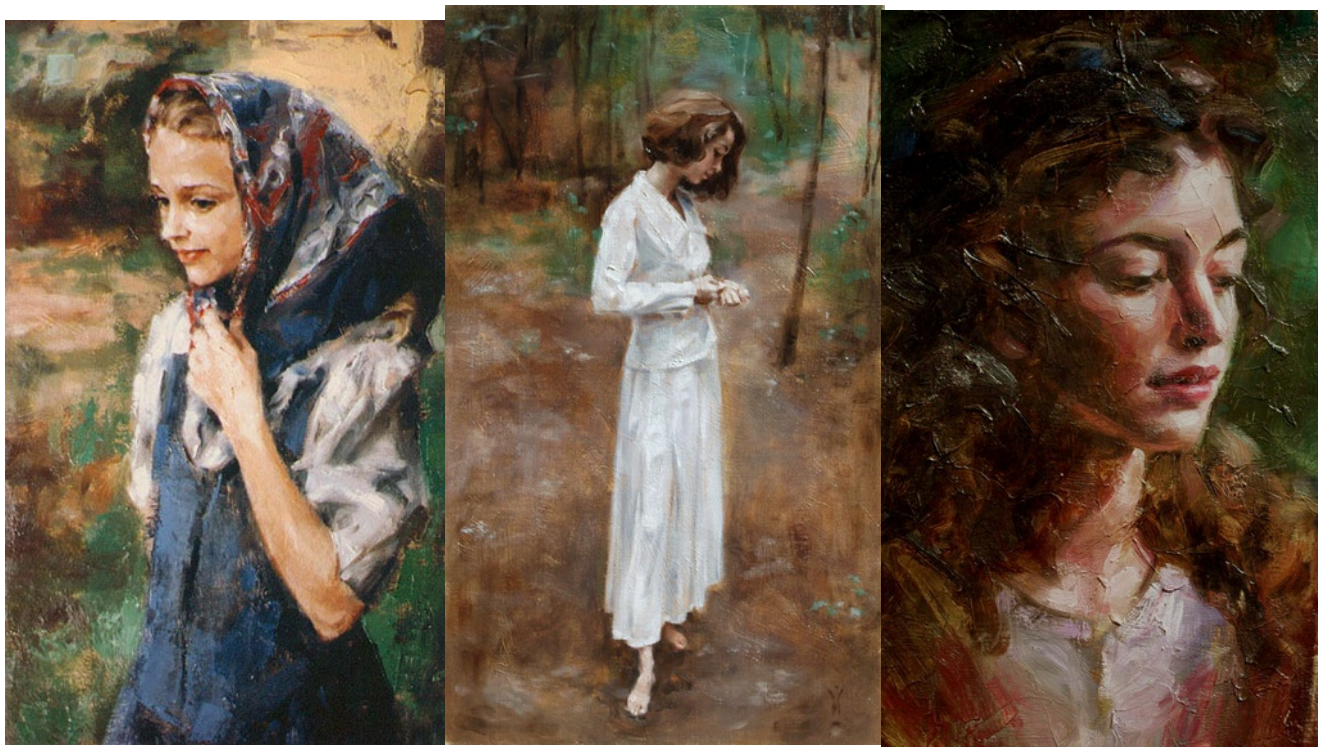
The main reason I believe that is because neither Fenn nor Jack Stuef—the guy who allegedly found the box—ever posted a convincing solution to the clues. Stuef is still refusing to give the location, using Yellowstone to shield him. He says he can't reveal the location because Yellowstone can't handle the foot traffic. Right. That's an obvious cover story, made up by Fenn and Stuef just for that purpose. Plus, Yellowstone is way too far north to fit the clues. The treasure was initially supposed to be hidden “north of Santa Fe”, and in context that implied not too far north of Santa Fe, likely still in New Mexico. Fenn said the treasure wouldn't be too hard to find for someone who had solved the puzzle, requiring no long treks. I would say driving all the way to Yellowstone was a long trek. Also, in more recent reports, we are told the box was found half buried in dirt. That also doesn't fit the clues, since Fenn later added the statement the box was probably wet, indicating it was hidden on the edge of a creek.

I worked on this mystery briefly in about 2018 and believed I had solved it, taking me to a likely hiding spot on the creek flowing out of Ojo Caliente that fit all the clues. It fit the hot springs clue, which I consider the primary one. It fit the wet clue. It fit the marked tree clue. But there was no box there. Had there been a box there back in 2010? I have no way of knowing. But I believed at the time this was the spot Fenn had in mind when he made the puzzle. Ojo is near Santa Fe and Fenn did visit it. Remember, I lived near there at the time, in Taos, so I knew the area and all these people. It would have been an easy and likely place for an old man to have hidden a box.

Many others have posted similar solutions, including several guys on Youtube, and I admit their solutions are as good as mine. But that just reminds us that Fenn's clues never had enough resolution to limit the solution to one location. I realized that soon after checking out the spot in Ojo. I realized there were thousands of locations that would solve the puzzle just as well, so you would either need

insider information or some additional biographical information about Fenn to hope to solve it, even if it weren't a fraud. In other words, the whole form of the event should have indicated it was a fraud from the start. It wasn't logically a feasible hunt on a first reading.

You will say there was later a revealing of the box, and even an auction. Yeah, well it wouldn't be the first auction these people had faked. Even Wikipedia now admits Fenn was a fraudster, selling fake Old Master paintings. But I knew that long before Wiki admitted it. My artist friends and I used to visit Fenn Galleries and laugh at the obvious fakes. The ones I remember best are the Fechin fakes. Nicolai Fechin had a house in nearby Taos, and I was very familiar with his work. I learned knife painting mainly by studying his works in person. So although I wasn't the one who faked those works, I could have been. I knew exactly what was involved.



Those are three of my knife paintings from that period, and the last one is actually still available. Anyway, Fechin famously didn't varnish his paintings, since he didn't like the shine. He liked his paint to be very dry. He made his own paint to be sure it contained as little oil as possible, since oily paint is dangerous in the thick impastos he liked to use. It would be prone to crack. So one of the ways we could spot a fake at Fenn Galleries was a thickly varnished Fechin, looking way too clean and new.

I didn't actually *know* Fenn, but I had met him very briefly. I was more familiar with Nedra Matteucci and those people, since by the time I came along he had already sold his gallery to her. She and her directors were also nasty people, unfriendly and snooty, like most gallery people. I showed them some works back in the 1990s and they couldn't have been less encouraging. By that time I had already sold some large works through Jan Ballew for good prices, so they shouldn't have been so dismissive. I was already selling better than many of their artists, but they were too self-important to care.



Jan sold those first two in the early 90s and Dassin Galleries in Los Angeles sold the third one in about 1995. They are 84", 64", and 60" tall, so quite large and impressive. Those are lousy photos of them, since we are pre-digital age there. Those are just snapshots. Those paintings turned a lot of heads and generated a lot of comments at the time in Santa Fe, but only among other artists and real connoisseurs—which didn't include these rich gallery people, who were only in it to shine their own butts. For them it was all about sitting around making pronouncements and looking important. When a young artist like me walked into their galleries, they immediately climbed up on a high horse, pursed their lips, and began making the power plays. That was the sign for the artist to begin curtsying and groveling. The same could be said for the other top galleries of the area, like Gerald Peters or Parsons Gallery. I hated to go in those places since it was like visiting a dragon's den. And it was ten times as bad if you admitted you were an artist, since they immediately put the thumbscrews on you.

To be fair, Jan Ballew wasn't like that. She was fairly welcoming to me. The only gripe I have in her direction is that when she closed the gallery she refused to give me a client list, so that I knew where my sold paintings were. I still don't know where those second two paintings are. And why do I need to know? Well, beyond the matter of retrospectives, it is the artist's right to know where his paintings are.

Forrest Fenn liked to admit he knew and cared nothing for art, being only in it for the money. He thought it was funny. [*See People Magazine*](#), 1986:

Does the guy selling used cars like clunkers? Art is a business, and what I love is the business. I'm not particularly into art.

But that is how most of these gallery people are. Many decades ago galleries used to at least pretend they were concerned with and involved in the history of art, guiding young artists. But they gave up on that pretense long ago. Soon they saw the artists as just another category to be fleeced. It happened in my lifetime, and I watched that attitude destroy the realist market in Taos and other places. Starting in the 1980s, say, Southwest galleries began preying on their artists directly, to make up for lack of sales. They had been preying on clueless buyers since the beginning, selling them fakes for vastly inflated prices, but when the bottom began falling out of that scam, they switched to scamming their own artists. The galleries took bigger and bigger percentages, going from 33% to 60% in only about a decade or two, and also mined their artists for promotional fees. The artists were expected to carry their own insurance, do their own advertising, their own promotion, and to pay for mailers and brochures. About the only thing the artists weren't asked to do is pay the gallery's rent, but they did that indirectly.

The point of all that was that gallery people are generally very nasty people, and I know that first hand. Forrest Fenn was among the nastiest and a known conman, so we aren't very far out on a limb guessing that he faked this whole treasure hunt, just to get attention and help sell his book. [*The Guardian in London accused Fenn*](#) soon after his death of using the fake treasure hunt to meet younger women, asking them for nude pictures when they contacted him about more clues. We know this is true because the women blew the whistle on it themselves. *The Guardian* also blew the whistle on his illegal tomb raiding, not only of Native burial sites in Arizona and New Mexico, but from Italy and Africa. *Newsweek* also ran similar accusations. So this was all going south very fast for Fenn in 2020 when the box was allegedly found and he died.

Here's another problem. During the auction, one of the items that allegedly sold was a short autobiography in manuscript form sealed in a glass jar. We are expected to believe someone paid \$48,000 for that?



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

But of course that is one way they got the alleged value of the box up to a million dollars, since that was said have been in it, along with some gold nuggets and coins.

Another clue is that the box was found and Fenn died **in the same three-month period**. He had allegedly been sick since 1988, **32 years earlier**, so it strains believability that he died right when the box was found. One of the guys who filed a lawsuit has claimed Fenn faked his death, and I think that is definitely a possibility. Since he was 90, more likely he was on his death bed and needed to finalize this fake hunt, so he hired this Stuef guy to help him fake an ending to it.

Then we have this clue: the auction was online, not in person, run by Heritage Auctions, but it wasn't run for Jack Stuef directly. It was run for Tesouro Sagrado Holdings, some mysterious entity that allegedly bought the box from Stuef. Who or what is Tesouro Sagrado? No one knows, but it means Sacred Treasure, so it seems to have been created just for this event. It sounds like another front for Fenn, doesn't it? But you should ask yourself this: if the box really was worth over a million, why would Stuef need to sell it to Tesouro, and why would Tesouro need to auction it? Most of the value was allegedly in gold coins and nuggets, and you shouldn't need to auction those. All you need to do is weigh them or confirm a state, since gold already has a set value. Many places would have paid him cash immediately, so why would any normal person spin this out for two more years?

We are told Justin Posey is the man behind Tesouro Sagrado Holdings, but all that reads like a con as well. Here is how he leads off [this interview](#):

Thank you, Jenny! I feel **blessed** to have procured the treasure chest. I consider myself **merely a steward** of the chest for a small period of its **epic** lifetime. **A thousand years from now**, I hope its possessor might contemplate its **significance** with the **depth of reverence** I hold today. I started searching in 2012; it's been an epic journey for the last decade! The hours devoted to adventuring with friends and family, and the consequent **fortification of those cherished bonds**, constitute what I value most **profoundly**. The end of the chase was the **end of an era**. The Fenn treasure hunt offered an **unparalleled adventure**, and I believe **we all yearn for the resonance of that experience to endure**.

What? Overstating the case by just a bit, isn't he? How is any of this epic? Do you really think this will be a story in a thousand years? What significance does this have, and why would anyone have reverence for it? Since Posey admits some of the coins in the box were found to be counterfeit, we seem to be a little short of "epic" here. 21 of the items were unsold or returned after auction, so it wasn't a very successful auction—although most reports don't admit that.

Posey claims he was within ten feet of where the treasure was found, but didn't find it. How likely does that sound? Posey explains the solution of the clues in this interview, but it makes no sense. Plus, as I read more of this interview, I began to get the feeling Posey is just another front. His way of talking is so ridiculous he sounds like AI. Reread it with that idea in mind. Why have an interview with this guy but post no photo of him? Why not tell us who he is? Zero biographical information, not even age, location, or job.

But before searching further on him, let's do a people search on Jack Stuef. [According to Instantcheckmate](#) and Intelius, the only Jack Stuef from Michigan is a John Michael Stuef, age 64.



That is four years ago. Does that guy look 60? No? How about here?



No, he is listed as 32 in 2020, a medical student from Michigan. No other Jack, John, or Jonathan Stuefs are listed nationwide. However, I am going to dig on this John Stuef anyway, since it may be his dad or other relative. John's brother David Stuef has Henrico, VA, on his list, which could be FBI. Through Maria Stuef, 58, we link to Gibsons/Gipsons, including Dallas Houston Gipson. We also link to the Petroffs, and through them to Rogers and Bartlett. We link to Tammy Wolfe, who links us to Ghoneim, Mcauley, Walker, Steiner and Vollmer. We link to Renee Wood, who links to Ableson, English, and Mapletoft. We also link to Karavite, Bowman, Piper, Bridges, Hayes, Declue, Denton, Voyce, King, Gardiner, Donovan and Cauvin. Why am I listing these names? Obviously because I am trying to link Stuef to Fenn. If I can prove they knew eachother before this, it would prove it was a fraud.

Forrest is Forrest Burke Fenn, husband of Peggy Proctor. She is also a Warnken, a Pope, a McCluskey, a Pearce, a Hancock, an Austin, and a Baker. Fenn is a Simpson through his mother, and also a Crayton, a Longden, a Davis, a Lofton, and a McElwain. The Simpsons were really McElwains, and the McElwains were Staleys and Stewarts. Staley=Stanley. It is also possible through his Findagrave pages to link him to the Kirkpatricks, the Todds, and the Balls. Meaning, he may link us to Presidents Lincoln and Washington. Kirkpatrick may link him to Kennedy. We also link to Presleys. See Elnora McElwaine Kinhead. Also to Whitaker, Cordon, Orrviller, Irwin, Rockwell, Carnegie, Robinson, Rybolt, Laughlin, Fisher, Eck, Kemp, McCulloch, Kennedy, Lafayette, and Curtis. These are the Kennedys of Lunenburg County, VA, related to Hamiltons, so they are not downmarket Kennedys, tending to confirm my first guess. Through Myrtle Cordon, Fenn is also related to Montagues. She married a Montague who was in the direct line of the Montagues of Buckinghamshire, also Greys and Woodvilles. [His 20g-grandfather Thomas de Grey was half-brother of King Edward V.](#) This also links us to George Washington a second time already, indicating the Balls we just discovered are THE Balls.

Findagrave lists Forrest's dog Bippy as his child.

But back to all those purpled names in the last paragraph. That begins to explain something no one in Santa Fe ever understood: [this People Magazine article](#) of 1986 tells us Fenn picked up Hollywood and political celebrities at the airport and housed them free of charge in his bungaloes in Santa Fe, later selling them his overpriced art objects. OK, but how did he know these people to start with? They pretend his success was due to his flair for business, but it was obviously due to these connections. So how did he come by them? From his time in the Air Force? Obviously not. They must have been family connections, and now we see what they were. Jackie Onassis and Ethel Kennedy are mentioned by name in that article, and we just saw that Fenn was a Kennedy. The article also mentions Suzanne Sommers, and guess what, Fenn was also related to her through his sister June Heath. June's mother-in-law was Bess Sommers Heath. That would also explain how he dodged prosecution all his life for art looting: these people are immune to prosecution. The laws don't apply to them.

Finally, I found it. There is a possible link through the name Rogers. Fenn's first cousin was Willie May Smith, and Willie's sister is listed as Billi Smith at Findagrave, who married Ken Rogers of Houston.

findagrave.com/memorial/10329930/william_jay_smith

Find a Grave MEMORIALS CEMETERIES FAMOUS CONTRIBUTE

Photo added by Bob Rohwedder

Centerville, Davis County, Utah, USA [Add to Map](#)

PLOT Plot A, Block 11, Lot 6, Space 8

MEMORIAL ID 10329930 [View Source](#)

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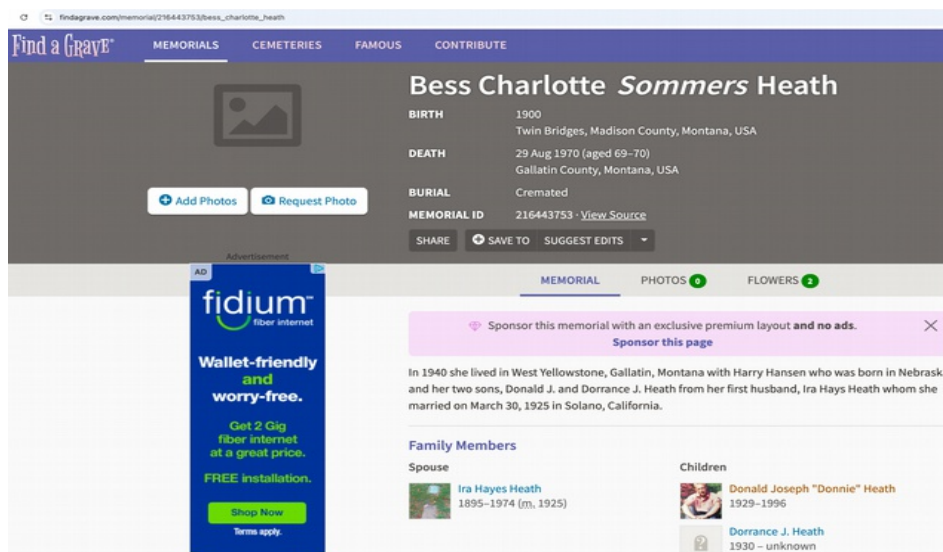
William Jay Smith Jr., precious husband, father, grandfather and brother, died July 19, 1999 at Bountiful, Utah.

He was born at Fort Worth, Texas, December 24, 1932 to William Jay Smith, Sr. and Willie May Simpson Smith. Jay married Nona D. Whitaker in Bozeman, Montana on June 9, 1954. Jay and Nona had three children.

He is survived by his wife, Nona D. Smith, Centerville, Utah; son, William Jay (Chip) Smith III (Clare), West Yellowstone, Montana; daughter, Mitzi Marie McCulloch (Dallas), Meridian, Idaho; daughter, Meta Mary Nield (Curtis), Ririe, Idaho; sister, Billi Rogers (Ken), Houston, Texas, 13 grandchildren; one great-grandchild and numerous nieces and nephews.

Rogers is a common name and I made no definite link, but my gut tells me Fenn hired a young second

cousin to help him out of this con. For those that may continue this research, I also found the name Dallas in both lines. See the Gipson lines with Stuef and the McCulloch and Irwin lines with Fenn (in the Findagrave listing above). I also found the name Hayes in both lines. See above with Stuef and see Fenn's sister's mother-in-law Bess Heath, whose mother was a Hayes.



The smartest thing, though, would be to start by nailing down Stuef on his real name. It clearly isn't Jack, so he needs to tell us a real name. It is a very bad sign that he is hiding behind a fake name or nickname.

For now let's return to Justin Posey. [New York Magazine](#) gives us bit more information on him in one of their spooky "Intelligencer" pieces. They are still relying on their readers not knowing that an intelligencer is a spook, like a CIA agent. They give us a picture



and tell us he grew up in the 90s in Arizona, allowing us to peg him in the people searches. He is

Justin Martin Posey, 41, married to Jennie Rose, but she is scrubbed at Intelius and Instantcheckmate. She is linked only to Poseys, so we aren't allowed to know her maiden name. Radaris tells us she is Curcio, related to Frank Lesperance. Justin's mother is given as Lorri at *New York* magazine, but that appears to be a fudge, since she is listed as Laurie Sue, 67, in the lists. There is a Lu Ann, 70, but no Lorri. The mother appears to be a Dryden, since she is related to Lorraine Dryden of Oregon, either her sister or deceased mother (or perhaps another name for herself?). The father is Dennis Posey, 78, of Tucson, who has [a page at LinkedIn](#) admitting he has been the CEO of his own company for 53 years, specializing in oil and gas and **gold mining**. Proving Justin is some rich kid with a million to blow on a treasure chest or a con. Dennis links us to a Joy Thacker, 78, so probably a sister. She links us to Bishops, Monteleones, and Addingtons. Her daughter Jennifer is married to Gary Monteleone, 66, also of Tucson. We also link to Keoghs, Mazureks, Stoners, Yonkers, and Parrecos.

The gold mining thing is already curious, since it is unclear why Posey would need to be buying gold nuggets from Stuef or auctioning them off online. He should have all the gold nuggets he wants from his Dad, right? Also strange to see Posey spending so much time treasure hunting when he doesn't need the money. Besides, it will be kind of hard for people to be talking about the treasure chest 1000 years from now, since it is now broken up. Doesn't exist.

As you see, I dug around for a while in the relation lists, but didn't find any smoking guns. However, my gut still tells me these people are related, since that is what we have always found before. I predict my readers will find a link I missed.

You may have noticed I didn't hit the Jewish question here, though many of the surnames I found were Jewish. But the subject came up more prominently when I found Fenn's grandson **Shiloh Forrest Old**. On a people search for him I found his relatives Mika, Noah, and David Old, plus Linda Spier, and if we collate that we again get Jewish. A search on David also pulls up Patricia and Zoe Old and Maria Quarles. Strangely, Zoe returns no results for all states. Maria Quarles leads us to Onans, Breazeals, and Ferrells, but amazingly not to any other Quarles. Linda Spier is also a deadend, though possibly linking us to Hawleys. None of these people link us to Fenns. The Ferrells link us to Miriam Ferrell, 96, of Silver Spring, MD.

With more digging I found Forrest Fenn's daughters are named Kelly and Zoe, so Zoe Old must be Zoe Fenn. But that doesn't help, either, since the only Zoe Fenns that come up are in their 20s. Too young to be our Zoe Fenn here. So Instantcheckmate is blocking results for both Zoe Old and Zoe Fenn, at least for me. So let's check Radaris. Yep, we find her, 65, in Santa Fe, related to Spiers, Hawleys, and Michelle Langdon, aka Michael Dean Langdon and Edward Mayo. What?

Kelly Fenn is aka Kelly Sparks. She is linked to Barbara Ressino of Indiana, but we aren't sure how.

So let's see what Radaris has to say about Jack Stuef of Michigan. No new info other than that he is aka **John Stuff**. But there is no John Stuff of Michigan, so he is either lying about his name or his location. **There is no John or Jack Stuff or Stuef, age 30s in Michigan or from Michigan.** We do find a John Stuff in Rio Rancho, NM, but he is 82, aka Stauff, related only to McDonalds. What about a John/Jack Stauff(f) nationwide? Nope, not of age 30 something. What about Jack Staff? We do find a Jonathan Staff, 35, in Alvin, and Houston, TX. But according to LinkedIn he is a carpenter. No photo. What about Jonathan Steuf? Nope, unknown last name. What about Steufen? No results.

