

Robin Martinelli

45, private investigator

HUSBAND Doug, 52 CHILDREN Kristi, 25; Coleman, 23; Kelly, 19

HOMETOWN Grayson, Georgia

OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN

When Robin Martinelli became a single mom at age 20, she urgently needed one thing: health insurance. She visited a sheriff she knew for advice and left with a job as a deputy. Robin turned out to be a natural, but the 12-hour shifts didn't jibe with being the mom her son needed. Coleman was hyperactive, and full-time day care was tough for him. Understanding as her commanding officers were, they couldn't let Robin walk beats with a toddler in tow. Looking for a more family-friendly career, she found one when she hired a process server to obtain some of Coleman's medical records. Robin talked the company into taking her on as a trainee on her days off. After two years of working two gigs, she finished her on-the-job training, quit the sheriff's department and opened her own company, Coleman and Associates.

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

Coleman went to work with his mom almost every day. Process serving was an adventure for him. "We would track down people at the gas station, church, their girlfriend's house," says Robin. "It was perfect for a kid with attention problems." But some of the recipients of subpoenas, summonses and complaints were uncooperative. "Once a man came out with his Rottweiler," Robin recalls. "The dog was faster than he was, so I threw the papers, grabbed Coleman and ran for our car." Robin had kept the car running. "The dog was clawing at the door," she recalls.

Robin realized that in addition to a job that let her make her own schedule, she needed something less prone to confrontation—and more lucrative. Also, her family was about to grow. Robin had been volunteering as a baseball coach, and several boys on her team insisted on introducing her to a



Robin Martinelli turned a new job into a family passion.

widower from their church. On her 32nd birthday, Gwinnett County Police Department Corporal Doug Martinelli showed up for a game. The two were married six months later. She adopted his two daughters, and he adopted her son.

FAMILY AND FORTUNE

As Coleman had a decade earlier, all three kids now inspired Robin to make another change, to become a private investigator. Robin studied, trained and earned her individual license in 1999. "Sure enough, within weeks I secretly filmed while we were out 'shopping,' and snapped photos of a cheating husband while we were 'looking for our lost dog.'" Soon surveillance was the shared family pastime.

Growing a business together turned out to be a perfect way to build a new family, says Robin, since you have to share goals and be a team. When eldest daughter Kristi turned 18, she earned her PI license, most likely becoming the youngest PI in Georgia. The other two Martinelli kids followed suit, as did Robin's mother, Connie, now 70, making her among the oldest PIs in the state.

Coleman recently returned from a tour in Afghanistan with the marines and is working as a PI with Robin. Kristi, an aspiring police officer, is a process server for her mom, and Kelly is a supply specialist in the army. "It's not surprising they're all choosing work where you have to have your brother's back. That's a core value they were raised on," says Robin. "I hope they also learned that it doesn't take a lot of money, just determination, to turn a dream into a reality."

By Amanda Robb

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LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

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EDITED BY CLAIRE MCINTOSH



The *Dating* Detective

WHAT DO A SPY SHOP OWNER, A PRIVATE EYE, AN ATTORNEY AND AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER KNOW ABOUT LOOKING FOR LOVE?

By CLAIRE MCINTOSH

Don't Rule Out a Criminal Past

Charlotte Bedford, attorney, New York City

I spent two months in 2009 dating the kindest person. This tall, handsome, churchgoing, intelligent brother had a good job and a close family. I do not make a habit of investigating my dates. But I know how to access certain information. One day, a friend whose ex had been incarcerated wanted to know the charges against him. I looked him up. While we were talking, I joked, ➔

"I should look up my guy" and searched his name. Come to find out, this gentleman—whose status downgraded to dude—had served two prison terms. I was flabbergasted. On our next date, he said, "I wanted to talk to you about that. It was from mistakes I made long ago." He still is a kind, generous person—just not for me.

> GET THE 411

Try searching "inmate lookup" within your state to find links to the Department of Corrections.

Don't Break the Law Playing Gumshoe

Sedgrid Lewis, Spy Shop owner, Atlanta

Here in Atlanta—especially around the holidays and HGTV homecomings—there's a lot of interest in GPS tracking, which can be installed in a car to get real-time data on the driver's location and cell phone tracking software used to monitor texts and calls. We warn all our customers that they cannot use the software to stalk or harass anyone. It's not legal. And they must agree to those terms.

Create a Date-a-base

Maria Ooder, creator of Investigate workshops/investigative journalist, New York City

Step 1: Create one e-mail ac-

count just for online dating to accumulate information on prospects. Share the password with two friends; if, heaven forbid, something goes wrong, they'll know where to look for clues. If dating offline, e-mail information to your date-a-base. Do not post photos online.

Step 2: If using free Web sites or a bulletin board such as Craigslist, anonymously post one ad that reflects who you are. Then post a "control" ad. In the second ad, be your alter ego. If you're short, be tall; if you're an outdoorsy person, be a filmgoer. Change your age, neighborhood and job. If someone responds to both ads, he/she should present himself/herself as the same person. Check if his/her photos are the same—watch for bait and switch. Never respond as the control poster. If you think you've e-mailed with someone before, paste in his/her e-mail to search your date-a-base or try key words.

Know When to Hire a Pro

Robin Martinelli, private investigator, Atlanta

In this day and age, it's extremely important to know exactly who you are dating, especially when you have children. This goes for both men and women. Conducting a background check on an individual will provide you with information such as criminal records, assets, bankruptcies/liens, address history, relatives and associates. This



information should give you some peace of mind in knowing who exactly you are dealing with. There are too many people out there who are not who they say they are. You have to be very careful.

Be Frugal: Use Google

Darlene Adams, contributing author to Romantic Deception: The Six Signs He's Lying (CreateSpace)

Narrow down results by entering your date's town along with

the name. It's also a good idea to search previous residences. I search the e-mail address, telephone number and address. Sometimes you find prior arrests made address. E-mail address and telephone numbers bring up postings made online. Check local newspaper archives. You can possibly find information about the person's activities in the community including criminal activity.

> GET THE 411

Conduct a quick background check using your iPhone or Android with BeenVerified.com.

GOTCHA!
Look what these singles' sleuthing turned up

"I searched his e-mail address and found out his last name. It led me to a site called Mugshots.com! His photo, name and location matched. After plugging in his case number, I learned he had been arrested for check fraud charges. I stopped communication." —Tiffani, 34, Atlanta

"I call potential dates from a blocked number. I use a fake voice and accent and pretend it's a wrong number. Some are very gracious; others are nasty, curse and hang up. You can tell a lot about somebody by how they treat someone they don't need." —Dani, 30, New York City

"I googled the name of the man's business and checked out the comments. One customer complained that a product he had ordered was defective. This owner said that it was the customer's problem. If he's that callous, I do not want to date him." —Rebecca, 36, Knoxville, Tenn.