



J6 Tiger King—Forensic Document Evidence Involving the Disappearance of Jack Donald Lewis

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have an understanding of the documentary evidence that has been discussed during and subsequent to the airing of the Netflix® mini-series *Tiger King* and specifically involving the disappearance of Jack Donald Lewis.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing the detailed analysis of evidence often discussed in person and in the media concerning issues related to the mini-series *Tiger King*.

On August 18, 1997, Jack Donald Lewis left his home in Tampa, FL, to make an early morning delivery. He was never seen again. Lewis was a wealthy real estate and used car businessman with property holdings in Florida and Costa Rica. Lewis and his wife also co-founded Wildlife on Easy Street (now Big Cat Rescue). His estate at the time of was worth approximately five million dollars. Mr. Lewis' car was found on August 20 at the Pilot Country Airport some 40 miles away in Spring Hill. Mr. Lewis owned aircraft and was an experienced pilot. Investigations in Florida and Costa Rica purportedly turned up no evidence of foul play. With the release of the Netflix® mini-series *Tiger King*, authorities were hopeful that new evidence would come forward.

A questioned documents examiner was approached by two investigative reporters in order to conduct an examination of signatures on two documents. One was a Durable Family Power of Attorney (POA) dated November 21, 1996, and filed with Hillsborough County Clerk of Circuit Courts on September 2, 1997. This document had the unusual reference to its validity not being “affected by any disability or disappearance.” The other document at issue was a “Will and Testament” (Will) also dated November 21, 1996, and also filed with Hillsborough County Clerk of Circuit Courts on September 2, 1997. The work assignment was to determine whether or not the evidence supported that the signature of Jack Donald Lewis was written by Jack Donald Lewis.

An examination was conducted of the questioned documents and numerous documents bearing signatures of Jack Donald Lewis. During the assessment of the questioned documents, a step in the industry-wide standard process of examining handwritten items, it was noted that the Lewis signature entry on the POA and the two Lewis signatures on the Will looked nearly identical. Individuals have natural variation in their writing due to the inability to reproduce complex muscular movements with machine-like precision. There has never been a record of one writer producing two writings that are exact replications in every facet. However, in this instance, the signatures were nearly identical. The degree of similarity was striking. A review of the submitted known specimens noted normal range of variation in Mr. Lewis' writing such that a very unusual narrow range of variation could not be supported by the evidence.

A key piece of evidence submitted as part of the examination was a marriage record for Jack Donald Lewis and Carole Ann Stairs dated October 10, 1991, and filed with the Polk County, FL, Clerk of Circuit Courts on that same day. The provenance of this document was significant and was also a key factor in this examination as the Jack Donald Lewis signature entry on this document was also nearly identical to those on the POA and Will dated five years later. Both the POA and Will denote Carole Lewis as “wife.” As such, there is strong support that the marriage record pre-dated the questioned documents independent of the stated dates on the POA and Will.

Based on the evidence provided, it was opined that the Lewis signature entries on both the POA and the Will were tracings and that the signature entry on the marriage record was the model signature from which they were traced.

It was further noted that the notary signatures and witness signatures also bore nearly identical signature entries one from the other. While no identifiable model signature was located, it was opined that at least two of the three signatures on the POA and Will of each writer were products of tracing. Subsequent to this examination, the notary and one of the witnesses have disavowed their involvement in their alleged signature entries. The other witness has made no statement per this study's research.

While this material is interesting, particularly to those who watched *Tiger King*, it must be emphasized that this examination in no way proves or even implies anyone's direct or indirect involvement in the disappearance of Jack Donald Lewis.

The questioned documents examiner has not watched any episodes of the program.

Signature, Forgery, Estate