Dillinger reloaded

Crime legend's great-nephew responds to Times article on his campaign

By Jeff Scalf  
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I am the great-nephew of John Dillinger. I was recently featured in P.J. Huffstutter's L.A. Times article "Safeguarding the legacy of a crook." I would like to clarify a few statements within the article.

My purpose in granting interviews is to bring attention to the fact that John Dillinger never killed anyone. Those individuals who take the position that he did, and who then try to prosper from it, are likely to find themselves facing litigation.

The article states, "Scalf does acknowledge that his hero had flaws," but I do not consider Dillinger a hero. I stated that there were some individuals of the time (the 1930s) who viewed him as such. My position is the same as my grandmother, John's sister, Doris. She said, "Don't romanticize him and don't villainize him; what he did was wrong, but he was my brother and I loved him. He wasn't mean-spirited or vicious, and he never killed anyone."

The article may have left the impression that Dillinger book author Dary Matera and/or his publisher said I tried to block the publication of his book. I never "tangled with" either Matera or his publisher. Before this article was written, I had never spoken with Matera or his publisher, nor had anyone who represents me. We absolutely never tried to stop Matera's book. In a conversation with me this past weekend (after the publication of the article), Matera stated that someone had contacted his publisher about copyrights to photographs, and he had assumed this person was my representative. It was not me nor my attorneys, and if someone did contact his publisher about the copyright to photographs, that hardly constitutes an effort to stop the book. It means that they were trying to stop the use of certain photographs.

The article says I have "filed lawsuits or threatened legal action against those who blame [my] great-uncle for the police officer's killing, including cafe owners, museum organizers, historical societies and rural township officials." I have never sued historical organizations. (Lake County Convention and Visitors Bureau is a tourism entity.) I never said I had dreamed about the glamorous image of John when I was a child. I did say that when my brother and I were kids, we used to argue who got to be John when we played cops and robbers. As far as my saying I looked liked John, all I said when asked about it was that when I was younger and thinner, I was told by some relatives that I favored John. I posed for photograph(s) per the photographer's instructions and as directed to use the smirk. I was also asked if there is a market for this type of thing (referring to a museum in Mooresville) and I said, "Yes, I believe so, and hopefully it will do some good for the town of Mooresville and will help establish The John Dillinger Troubled Youth Fund."
Please don't interpret this to mean I am upset with the writer of the article. She is an accomplished professional and did what she felt was necessary to provide both sides of an issue. Unfortunately, I felt I was placed in an unflattering light and appeared to be someone who was unreasonable and quick to resort to litigation. I always try to reason with individuals and explain both my position and the law before resorting to legal action. Lastly, I only resort to litigation when individuals refuse to stop calling John a murderer and/or to take corrective measures to clear up the harm they have caused. Thank you for your time.

Jeff Scalf, whose great-uncle was John Dillinger, is trying to fulfill his grandmother's request that he make it known that Dillinger never killed anyone. He has a doctorate in jurisprudence as well as several degrees in history.

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