

# [***The Billionaire And The Con Artist***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BG2-TR91-DXVP-5000-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

**Roger Williamson claims to be the illegitimate son of the late Las Vegas casino mogul Sheldon Adelson and another billionaire s bookkeeper. But the only thing about his life that s rich are the lies it's built upon.**

**By Will Yakowicz, Forbes Staff**

The email from a dead billionaire s secret son was promising. The sender, a man who said his famous father had built the world s largest casino company, the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, explained how he had a lot of information to share. I should know, he wrote, I am the biological son of Sheldon Adelson.

The first time the man who introduced himself as Sheldon Adelson, Jr. called, it was from a phone with a Las Vegas area code. Within minutes, he spun a wild yarn about how his ultra-rich father whopassed away in 2021leaving a $35 billion fortune to his wife, Miriam, and his kids and a global $10.3 billion (2023 net revenue) casino empire with properties in Las Vegas, Macau and Singapore met his mother.

My father was friends with Sumner Redstone and in 1959, to be exact, he stopped into Sumner s office and saw this beautiful Italian woman, he began. Redstone, who eventually became the billionaire chairman of Viacom and CBS, had apparently told Adelson that the woman, his bookkeeper Anna Paradiso,was a life saver but to leave her alone as she was divorced and had five kids.

They had a five-year romance, and I was the product of that, he continued in a nasally Boston accent. When they were expecting me they had a conversation and agreed that I would not be any responsibility to Mr. Adelson; there are court documents to prove this. He also said there is a birth certificate filed in Revere, Massachusetts that would confirm that Adelson is his father.

Then Junior made a mistake he claimed he was Sheldon Adelson s**only**biological child. While Adelson adopted his first wife s children, plus the children of his second wife, he and Miriam had two children of their own, Adam and Matan.

Local prosecutors claim he also tried to extort Adam Sandler, who was filming a movie in the neighborhood, by falsely stating the actor and his crew had ordered $2,500 worth of food and didn t pay.

Still, he insisted that his father s friends would verify his story from Steve Forbes, the chairman of this publication, to Steve Wynn, the billionaire cofounder of Wynn Resorts. Both said they had never heard of him. But that shouldn t be too surprising.

Because the real problem is that Sheldon Adelson, Jr. doesn t exist.

The man who claims to be the late billionaire s namesake son is in fact a convicted serial con artist named Roger Williamson who grew up in Revere, Massachusetts. (That last detail was true although the birth certificate he claims exists, does not according to the city s department of vital records and statistics.) Williamson is a man with a long history of inventing identities and ripping people off he has gone by at least 11 different aliases and is described by multiple family members, ex-girlfriends, former landlords and other victims of his schemes, as a compulsive liar who is not playing with a full deck of cards.

The Adelson family, through a spokesperson, confirmed that they have known about Williamson for years, but they are not going to dignify the silliness of these claims by providing specific answers to each of them.

In an email sent to**Forbes**, Leonard Adelson, Sheldon s brother, added: I m totally astonished that this man would make this claim, noting the whole thing is outrageous and ridiculous.

When Williamson realized his scheme to make it into the pages of**Forbes**magazine as the previously unknown scion of a billionaire wasn t working out, he stopped returning calls. In an email written from an address associated with a non-existent firm called The Adelson Company, he tried to backpedal and said the two previous interviews he had given must be from someone else, he wrote. I don t know you.

In his last email before going dark, in response to a question of who is he if not the bastard son his words of Sheldon Adelson?

I m nobody, he wrote.

Thisnobody was born at 10:35 p.m. on January 24, 1962, in Boston. His mother, Anna Paradiso he wasn t lying about her name, and she did work for Redstone but at a concession stand at one of his drive-in movie theaters was married to his father, Robert Williamson, a Merchant Marine with a gambling problem, according to family members. Robert Williamson died when Roger was 8 years old. When Robert wasn t on the sea, he was home gambling whatever money he had, says a family member who asked not to be identified out of fear of what Roger might do in retaliation.

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Roger the Dodger: Williamson (far right) with his siblings. The rest of us go out the door to work every day," a family member says. "He sits at home and makes up stories.

Courtesy of Roger Williamson's family

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Before hanging up, the family member explained that Williamson is not welcome around their clan anymore after years of scams and schemes. Indeed, before Williamson s mother, who was suffering from dementia, passed away in 2016, prosecutors alleged that he was stealing her Social Security payments to the point where she was nearly evicted from her home. (Williamson denies this and says two of his siblings stole her money. He was later convicted of money laundering related to opening a bank account under his mother s name and using it to deposit money he acquired during other crimes.)

Unfortunately, I m related to Roger, the family member continued. The rest of us go out the door to work every day, but he doesn t work. He sits at home and makes up stories.

The Williamsons lived in a multi-family home on Shirley Avenue in Revere, a few blocks from the beach in what was then a rough neighborhood a few miles north of Boston. Even as a boy, Williamson was known for being a con man, says Tony Iacoviello, who has known him since the first grade. His nickname was Roger the Dodger because he was always lying, says Iacoviello.

Williamson s life of crime started in earnest when he was 18 he was convicted of unarmed robbery and sentenced to three years probation. The ensuing years, he would be charged with a long string of larcenies by check. Many of the charges were dismissed after he paid the victims restitution.

In a bankruptcy filing in 2004, Williamson, who was 42 at the time, revealed that he had no assets except for an old car, some furniture and clothing, together worth $3,500. He also owed a total of $40,000 to creditors, including a girlfriend he had bilked out of $16,500.

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The Lying Game: In the obituary Williamson wrote for his mother, he reimagined his family history: Anna shared her youngest child, Roger Williamson with his father the late Sheldon Adelson."

Courtesy of Roger Williamson's family

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By 2008, Williamson had graduated to pulling off more creative cons. That year, he was convicted of practicing law without a license after convincing a woman from Florida that he was an attorney and could represent her for a $7,000 retainer. In 2009, according to an affidavit related to another case, police alleged that he began posing as a Hollywood producer named Mark Willis and successfully lured multiple women to a Boston hotel to read through sexually charged scripts and convinced at least one of them to partake in a seductive scene with him in exchange for a chance to get a high-paying acting job in a nonexistent movie with Ben Stiller. (Williamson was never charged with a crime related to this scheme; police said no assaults took place. It s nothing I did; I did nothing wrong, he says.)

Then in 2011, while running a pizzeria in Peabody, Massachusetts and going by the alias George Meehan, local prosecutors claim he also tried to extort Adam Sandler, who was filming a movie in the neighborhood, by falsely stating the actor and his crew had ordered $2,500 worth of food and didn t pay. Sandlerdenied ordering food from the restaurantat the time. (Williamson was not charged with crime related to this matter.)

I am crawling on my belly for your help, Williamson wrote to Adelson in 2016, claiming he owed in excess of $100,000, including more than $40,000 in unpaid child support. I am out of time and out of options.

But soon, Williamson s scams would catch up with him. In 2013, he began a string of cons that eventually landed him in jail for nine months and pleaded guilty to 23 criminal charges in 2015, including money laundering, witness intimidation, securities fraud, criminal harassment, publishing false financial statements, forgery, larceny by check and identity fraud. Williamson was convicted of swindling two investors out of $50,000 by convincing them to buy a 25% stake in a nonexistent catering business and restaurant called Soprano s Cafe. Another victim, a landlord and real estate broker named Fred Mattei, leased a restaurant space to Williamson and claimed he stole $4,000 worth of equipment and barely paid rent.

I eventually got the satisfaction that he went to jail, says Mattei.

As for his fabricated father, Williamson did not choose Sheldon Adelson by accident. In the mid-1980s, his sister Shirley started dating, and would eventually marry, a man from Dorchester named Richard Goodman, who is, in fact, Adelson s cousin. (Goodman s mother was the sister of Sarah Tonkin, Adelson s mother, and Goodman s brother Leonard worked at Adelson s company The Interface Group.)

According to family members, Shirley and Richie went to Adelson s and Miriam s wedding in Israel in 1991, flying on a private jet. Shortly afterwards, Williamson started using the tenuous connection with the billionaire casino mogul as an excuse to beg for money or to fund his half-baked business ideas.

In the mid-2000s, the Goodmans went to the opening of one of Adelson s casinos in Macau, and there Sheldon asked Shirley to tell Williamson to stop bothering him, family members say. But he didn t stop. In an email Williamson sent to Adelson in August 2016, he claimed he was in a bad financial position I am crawling on my belly for your help, Williamson wrote in an email, claiming he owed in excess of $100,000, including more than $40,000 in unpaid child support. (According to family court records, this is true.) I am out of time and out of options.

I will work for you anywhere in the world for free and also pay you back with interest, Williamson continued. Mr. Adelson, I have an idea for a candy bar and several other business ideas. I am not looking for charity or a handout.

Two years later, in another email**Forbes**obtained, Williamson asked the Las Vegas billionaire for a loan to pursue some new dreams, outlining a few restaurant concepts as well as a casino boat in the Boston Harbor. Either way, Williamson signed off, I m blessed in being able to bounce everything off you Sir.

It was only after Williamson s mother died in 2016 that he started telling people that Adelson was actually his father. Inan obituary Williamson wrotefor her, he reimagined his family history: Anna shared her youngest child, Roger Williamson with his father the late Sheldon Adelson of Dorchester & Las Vegas.

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La Dolce Vita: Sheldon Adelson at the opening of the Venetian, which he built, in Las Vegas in 1999.

Xavier ROSSI/getty images

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Despite not being related, Adelson and Williamson do have something in common. Both men grew up poor in the Boston area. Adelson was born in Dorchester to immigrant parents, his father from Lithuania and his mother from Wales. The Adelsons lived in a one-bedroom apartment where young Sheldon slept on the floor and his father supported them by driving a cab. But entrepreneurship gave Adelson a way out of poverty. At 12, he borrowed $200 from his uncle and bought a license to sell newspapers. A few years later, he started a vending machine enterprise. He made it big with Comdex, his personal computer conference, and in 1989 he bought the rundown Sands casino for $128 million.

By 1995, Adelson sold the conference business to Softbank for $862 million and plowed the profits into his casino, which he demolished in November 1996 to build the Venetian in Las Vegas, with thousands of suites, millions of square feet of conference space, and a Grand Canal with gondolas. (Las Vegas Sandswould eventually sellThe Venetian, which includes the Palazzo Tower and the Sands Expo Center, in 2021 for $6.3billion after Adelson died.)

But Adelson s biggest move was investing more than $12 billion in Macau and building casinos on the Cotai Strip and in Singapore cementing his reputation as the biggest casino magnate in the world. Later in life, Adelson and Miriam became political mega-donors in the world of Republican ***politics***, contributing more than$200 millionto various conservative political action committees.

While Adelson did big business in the real world, Williamson lived his life as a serial fabulist and small-time crook. Even after it was clear that his lies about Sheldon Adelson had been exposed, Williamson told one more outrageous tale before hanging up the phone.

He recounted spending a magical New Year s Eve walking the old Sands casino floor with Adelson in the late 1980s or early 1990s. According to Williamson, a liquor salesman walked up to Adelson and asked where he could find the bar manager. Well, I m the owner, he responded in Williamson s fantasy, what can I do for you? The man said he wanted to become the Sands liquor supplier and Adelson told him to drop off his price list next week and that they would talk. But the salesman came prepared and handed what Williamson described as a stack of papers as wide as two copies of**War and Peace** to Adelson.

Sheldon threw it up in the air, it was like confetti, Williamson says, breaking out in laughter.

When asked what Williamson has been after through all his years of scheming, one family member doesn t hesitate: He wants money, notoriety, acceptance, she says, what most people want.

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