GEBORENER DEUTSCHER™

The Newsletter of German-born Adoptees & Birth Parents

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SEARCH JOURNAL

by William L. Gage

8/17/87. I was born on the 14th of April 1957 in the city of Frankfurt-am-Main, in the Federal Republic of Germany (commonly referred to as "West Germany"). According to my birth certificate, my birth occurred at 6:15 a.m. on a Sunday morning, my mother being one Elfriede Lucie Butzke, an unmarried "Hausangestellte" (domestic servant). My birth was, therefore, as stated in the contract for my adoption, illegitimate. My birth documents reflect nothing of my father's identity, and so, until I began my search, he was an enigmatic mystery, and thus the subject of much speculation and fantasy on my part. I have since learned that he was an American serviceman, as is the case, it appears, with so many of us who were born illegitimately and adopted by Americans in the several decades since the end of World War II.

According to the surrender agreement, my mother gave official consent to my adoption on September 9, 1958, almost a full 18 months after my birth. I was told by the social workers in Frankfurt that she had placed me in at least one foster home, but that, because of her own negative experiences with foster care as a child, she did not view this as a long-term solution to the problems posed by my existence. According to an immunization record from the time, I was placed in an orphanage in Köppern from at least July through December 1957. Answers to the questions of where I was at any given time, however, remain elusive.

My placement with my adoptive parents was almost immediate following my mother's execution of the surrender agreement. The adoption was finalized and a decree issued in March of 1959. My parents had already relocated me to their quarters in England, where my adoptive father, then a major in the USAF, was stationed. In August of 1959, my adoptive parents and I returned to the U.S., first to San Angelo, TX, again, due to my father's being stationed there, and then, after may father's retirement, to his own hometown of Williamsport, PA.

I had first learned of my adoptive status while living in Texas. My memory of exactly when and how this event came about is so hazy that I can only say that I cannot recall ever not knowing that I was adopted. By the time that active memory really kicks in, I had already incorporated being adopted so thoroughly into my self-image that there simply is no specific demarcation line between the time before I knew and the time after. Thus it is, I feel certain, that I have not experienced any negative emotional or psychological consequences solely as a result of being adopted.

My greatest problem, in fact, vis-à-vis being adopted, has been one of identity, of being able to define who I am and how that self-definition relates (i.e. how I relate) to the rest of humanity. I do not know that I have ever been as successful as I might like to be with respect to this process, and I cannot say that successful completion of my search will in any way further this end, but I feel certain that it is at least a step toward that goal, if nothing else.

cont. on pg. 2, col. 1

"VOLUME ONE, NUMBER ONE"

This is the premier issue of a new adoptee/birth parent-oriented periodical, which I have named **GEBORENER DEUTSCHER** ("German by birth") because it is designed to meet the needs, answer the questions and otherwise provide a forum for discussion of topics of concern to German-born adoptees and birth parents, particularly those now residing in the United States of America.

Because this is such a new venture, this first issue is "necessarily" limited in its scope and contents. Still, it includes the following features, which I hope will be included regularly in future issues:

--> **SEARCH WORKSHOP**, wherein we will impart advice, tips and other forms of information on the nuts-and-bolts topic of search technique. (Searching in Germany is not like searching in the U.S.) (See page 5.)

--> **PROFILES**, wherein individuals who have contributed significantly to the furtherance of adoption reform, or who have been of particular help in helping others search, e.g. by founding a search-and-support group, or by providing assistance to others, will be profiled. (See page 5.)

--> **SEARCH JOURNAL/FIRST PERSON**, wherein the personal experiences of adoption, search and/or reunion of German-born adoptees will be presented "in their own words." Readers are especially urged to consider contributing material in this vein for publication. (See Column opposite.)

I also hope eventually to be able to report on more esoteric matters, such as a detailed analysis of the German adoption law, past, present and future; as well as periodic updates on "finds," reunions and

cont. on pg. 6, col. 1

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In addition to always having known that I was adopted, I have also always "known" that one day I would search for my mother. Even as a small child, when sitting alone in deep reverie, or even elsewhen and elsewhere, whenever I thought about my mother, my "real" mother, I knew that one day I would try to find her, to bring my life, as it were, full circle. My only regret, if regret it can rightly be called, is that I have had to wait for so long before becoming ready to undertake this all-important inquiry.

I attribute this delay in no small part to the fact that I was born and adopted in a foreign country (i.e., foreign to my adopted self). This circumstance has placed between me and the idea of searching what has at times seemed to me to be an insuperable barrier. Even just to read my adoption papers requires, in addition to a German-English dictionary, the patience of Job and a keen eye for what are convoluted and arcane foreign (legal) grammatical constructs. Even now, translating these documents is no easy task, although it proceeds ever faster as I gain more and more experience.

My desire to search for my birth mother can be characterized as nothing more than nascent for the greater portion of my life to date, however. When, in junior high school, we were first given the opportunity to learn a foreign language, of the choice between German, French and Spanish, there was, for me at least, no choice at all. Or at least no problem in choosing. By the time I got to high school, however, it became abundantly clear that I was not linguistically talented, and I was forced to drop out of the German program. It seemed at the time that, even if I were fortunate enough to find my mother, I would never be able to communicate with her save through an interpreter. I was, at least subconsciously, dispirited and discouraged.

In early 1979, after having spent the last three years in and out various institutions of higher learning and after I had dropped out permanently, I joined the USAF as a hedge against continuing unemployment. I attended technical school to learn computer programming, and, when given the opportunity to select an "ideal" assignment locale, I naturally indicated that I would most like to be stationed in Germany. I did not expect to get my wish.

You can well imagine, then, my surprise and delight when indeed I did receive a posting to Germany. Thus it was that I spent the period from October 1979 through the end of July 1980 in the land of my birth. It seemed an ideal chance to begin my search, but, unfortunately, I still lacked even a rudimentary command of German, and, more important, I lacked any idea of where to begin or how to proceed. At one point, while discussing my desire to locate my mother with another American serviceman, he allowed as how he had connections with the German Polizei, so I gave him copies of my documentation to give to his "connections," but nothing ever came of it. That was the extent of my inquires of the period.

On the other hand, and in a more positive vein, I did begin at this time to again study German. Initially, I began my study with little hope of success, given my one prior experience with such study, but I was more surprised than anyone else when I began to absorb and retain the material like a sponge. I thus began a process of learning German which continues to and beyond this day.

Upon my return to the U.S. (and discharge from the USAF), I moved to my present address in Brooklyn. Three years of driving a taxi for a living did not permit me to consider traveling back to Germany, and it was not until I had been working for well over a year as a temporary word processor operator that I was finally able to afford such a venture.

In August of 1986 I joined A.L.M.A. here in New York City, but was disappointed when they were unable to provide me any insight into the process of searching in Germany. I returned to Germany in any case on October 14, 1986 and stayed, ultimately, for five weeks, during which time I personally pursued my mother's "paper trail" through the year 1967. At the end of my stay, I visited the adoption placement office in Frankfurt (which I might just as well have done at the beginning rather than the end of my visit), and secured their promise to look up my file and send to me the information from that file I had requested. They even went so far as to conduct further inquiries after my mother, by which they were able to establish her whereabouts as of 1972.

On December 15, 1986, I received the promised communique from Frankfurt. The letter was long and informative. Not the least of what I discovered thereby was the existence of two older siblings, a brother born in 1951 in Hannover, and a sister born in 1954 in Osterholz-Scharmbeck. In the intervening months, I have been, as the result of a letter of inquiry sent to the Hannover adoption office, put into contact with my brother, Frank; but my sister, Eleonore, remains, like my mother, ever just out of reach.

I return home each day from work with the greatest of expectations and hopes as I open my mailbox. Each day brings with it the promise of more news of one kind or another. But I do not despair with the lengthening time of waiting, as I always take it to mean that something is being done, and that someone else is waiting on a reply, upon receipt of which they will contact me.

3/9/88. Dae Leckie, LCSW, of Parenting Resources in Tustin, CA, writing in the American Adoption Congress's Fall 1987 newsletter says, "[Adopted c]hildren [of about 8 years of age] ...have a normal grief response as they begin to realize they have lost their first family. ...[They] need to be able to express their feelings, and understand that it is normal to feel sad about their loss." Many people in search-and-support groups also counsel their adopted members that it is "okay to grieve," and much talk is given over to the need to grieve and obtain a necessary release of emotions thereby.

I never wanted to grieve for my birth mother. For me, she was not dead, and I believe it's only appropriate to grieve for those losses, if any, which are permanent, such as death. My birth mother was always very much alive for me in my imagination, and as long as the hope remained that my belief coincided with reality, I refused to give in to the naysayers and "advocates of grief." (Even now, unless there is proof, I say, "Save your grief!")

My search began when I visited the adoption placement office in Frankfurt, West Germany, the city of my birth, where the social workers promised to help in any way they could. (Adoption and adoptees' birth records in Germany are open to adoptees aged 16 years and older.) Eventually, they established a "last known address" for my birth mother, which dated from 1972; but they also regretfully reported that they could do nothing more on my behalf. I then wrote to the German Red Cross's "Suchdienst" (Search Service) in Munich and asked them to help me ascertain, if they could, my birth mother's present whereabouts. Initially they sent a postcard acknowledging my inquiry, and advising me thereby that it would take time to fulfill my request.

On March 2, 1988, my search (for my birth mother at least) ended when I was informed by the Red Cross that my mother had died on May 31, 1976, following marriage to an Englishman on September 1, 1972. It was not reported how my mother died, but I was told where that information could be found.

In the course of my search, I learned of a woman who was told that her mother had died only weeks before she received the news, and upon hearing of this I stopped to ask myself, "How would I feel in

her place? What if my mother has only recently died, and I have lost the chance to know her for want of alacrity in beginning my search?" Given that there is nothing one can do about such events, it seems to me wasteful and useless to cry or to feel regret or anger; better, I think, to channel what negative feelings are generated into some other, constructive activities, than to indulge in an orgy of grief.

And so I said to myself that I would do just that, believing all the while that it would not be necessary, believing that my biggest problem would be to find the words to tell my mother that I love her. With the certainty of death, however, comes a kind of peace, and I am strangely calm, serene in my belief that all is as it should be. Was it Emily Dickinson who wrote that Death may not always be welcome when he comes, but he's always on time?

I am also not one who favors ostentatious displays of emotion, so my grief, such as it is, and which I am now free to acknowledge and to feel, will be of a quiet, inner variety; and what grief I feel will be for a real and palpable loss, i.e. that of my birth mother to death. I shall endeavor not to feel too much regret, however, for really, there is little in this tale of woe to regret.

In many respects, I am, in fact, fortunate. I have (at least) three (presumably half) birth siblings, two of whom I have already "found," if not yet met; and given that my mother married before she died, there is, then, someone, I hope alive, who can help me sort out my feelings, and perhaps even answer some of my questions, depending upon how much of his wife's past he knew. I hope to obtain a (relaively) recent photograph, at least, and perhaps some measure of comfort. I fear, however, that I may now never know who my father was, unless by some miraculous or serendipitous chance there exists someone else, someone alive, who possesses that knowledge as well. I am nothing if not hopeful.

I take comfort also (and one must seek comfort wherever it may be found) in the knowledge that my mother died long before even my first opportunity to search occurred. I can say to myself, therefore, in seeking to minimize my regretfulness, that even if I had I begun to search when first I had the opportunity, I would still have found only a corpse; somewhat fresher, to be sure, but nevertheless still just a corpse. I was, as I reckon it, 19 when my mother died, and to imagine that I could have found her before then stretches my imagination to its outermost limits (as far as one may go without actually trespassing into the realm of the impossible). I take comfort in these thoughts, if only because it's the only comfort I can find, so soon after getting the news.

I find myself wondering how she died; hoping that she went peacefully, painlessly, with a minimum of regret or discomfort. I hope that in the last years of her life, she had finally found some measure of happiness in her marriage. Until I meet him, I cannot judge the kind of man her husband is or was; but I imagine that my mother, having already lived so much of her life alone, had grown accustomed to her solitary existence, and had not, therefore, married out of anything other than love.

I am sorry that I will never have the chance to know this woman who brought me into the world, and I find that I have now within me a great many pent-up emotions, many of which have become so over the course of my search, and because of it; emotions which I had anticipated being able to dissipate upon consummation of the search and reunion, and for which I now lack an appropriate object. I am thankful, therefore, that I have become so much involved in the Adoption Reform Movement, in that it provides an outlet for much of what I am now feeling, even though now it will probably take somewhat longer to achieve equilibrium once again, to integrate this new data into my self-perception and outlook.

I wish that I could tell you how to cope with it, this ultimate and final "non-reunion"-type end to searching, but I know that each of us copes in his/-her own fashion, and that what works for one will not always work for every other.

In truth, I am not all that certain that I fully comprehend everything that I am feeling. It seems as if the process of accommodation is a slow one, taking time to become fully realized; I can still look at the picture of my mother which my brother's adoptive parents were kind enough to give me, and imagine that she isn't dead at all, that it's all some sort of ghastly mistake. Perhaps when I stand at the foot of her grave and read the name on the stone; perhaps when I have had the chance to speak with her husband, to whom she was married when she died, and who (presumably) was there at her side during the last days and weeks of her life, if not at the exact moment it ended; perhaps then it will all become real for me in some substantive way. Until then, I live from one day to the next, as I always have, and occasionally it dawns upon me that my birth mother really is dead.

3/29/88. As I sit in the waiting area in front of the door marked "Certificates" in the Standesamt in Hameln; as I wait my turn in order to be able to request a copy of my mother's death certificate, I am too excited and overwrought to feel much emotion. I have come to accomplish a specific task, and my focus is solely upon that task, rehearsing what I will say, and extracting the necessary papers from my briefcase in order to be prepared when my turn came.

Obtaining the copies is a fairly simple and straightforward affair: I show the letter from the Red Cross and ask if I could obtain a copy of the certificate referred to therein. The woman with whom I speak then fetches a book from within another office and opens it to the appropriate page, and there it is -- I can see it quite clearly: my mother's death certificate.

A quite unprepossessing document, it states simply that on May 31, 1976, one Elfriede Stokes died on the way to the hospital from the "accident site." Those words are pretty much as I have imagined they might be: I imagined a fiery car wreck, in which perhaps others, too, had lost their lives, and I think to myself, "How useless it is to die in an automobile accident!"

In addition to the death certificate, I am able to obtain a copy of the "Familienbuch," wherein marriages and births are recorded. Therein stands the name of my mother's husband at the time of her death: Michael Frederick Stokes. I note the birth date and calculate: he was 17 years her junior; a mere 26 years of age when they married; my own age when she died. It gives me pause, but only for a moment.

Before I leave, I ask where I might discover what sort of an "accident" it was that killed my mother, and I am directed to the Ordnungsamt, the location of which I know from having been in the Rathaus already in search of the Standesamt. I am given a man's name and a room number in which to find him.

When I knock on the door, there seems to be no one inside, so I cautiously open the door and poke my head inside, where I find a young woman. I tell her that I am looking for a particular person who is supposed to be in this room; she takes my papers and leaves me sitting in the hallway. I wait a few minutes and she returns, directing me to another room on the same floor, out of which she has just come.

Inside this room are three people: an older man sitting at a desk with his back to the wall: he appears to be in charge; a young woman, certainly younger than I, sitting across from the older man,

their desks butted up against one another, thus leaving each enough room for a chair; and a younger man, maybe my age but probably also younger, who sits at a desk adjoining that of the older man and who is busy entering data into and/or extracting data from a personal computer.

The older man already has my papers in his hand, and I explain to him where I have been and what exactly I am looking to get. He asks a few questions of me; I briefly explain my history, including my adoption and subsequent search. He then asks if I have a copy of my birth certificate. I give him the file containing all of my personal papers, including my birth certificate, adoption contract, etc., and he appears quite pleased with the extent of my preparedness. He then asks for and I produce my passport. He appears to become more and more pleased, but I begin to wonder if it is with me or with himself. Probably both.

I explain that I wish to ascertain the exact circumstances of my mother's death, and also, to ascertain exactly where she is buried. I explain that since she died in Hameln, I am presuming that she was buried in the vicinity; although I have heard that it is sometimes customary for bodies to be returned to family plots or hometowns for burial, I explain that I believe this to be unlikely in my mother's case owing to her lacking any close relatives or other ties to her birthplace.

There ensues a series of telephone calls, during which I learn the name of the man to whom I have been speaking: Herr Vockeroth. (Had I had the papers in front of me, and had I looked at them closely, I would have noted that Herr Vockeroth was the Standesbeamter at the time of my mother's death, since it is his signature which appears on the copy of her death certificate. I learn of this fact later on, however.)

Herr Vockeroth calls a number of people in various offices, and as one telephone call succeeds another, I get the impression that it is taking somewhat longer than even he had expected to obtain the requisite information. Then, suddenly, in the middle of it all, perhaps as a result of something someone on the other end of the telephone has said, Herr Vockeroth turns to me and says that he knows how my mother died. He can remember it quite plainly, he says, in part because he was Standesbeamter at the time, but also because it was such a remarkable and tragic event. It had been written about in the local newspaper, and even the other, younger man in the office and the young woman can also remember my mother's death. The newspaper report, which was printed two days after the fact, on Wednesday, June 2, 1976, reads in pertinent part as follows:

Lightning kills 47-year-old from Tündern

"The cyclist was quite suddenly there no more"

Killed with more than 100,000 amperes
in one 500,000th of a second.

KRW HAMELN. "That was the most horrible thing that I have ever experienced." Christa Meyer, kindergarten teacher from Tündern, is, 24 hours later, still under the effect of an event which, as Professor Dr.-Ing. Ing. Hubert Batz from Munich says, "only very seldom happens": she became witness as a woman was killed by lightning on Monday afternoon on County Road 12 between Hameln and Tündern! The 47-year-old Elfriede Stoks [sic] died on the asphalt of the heavily trafficked street after being struck by the full force of the concentrated energy.

Before the mother of two, who was married to an English soldier, was killed, there occurred a macabre incident. Mrs. Stoks [sic] climbed off of her bicycle in the vicinity of the VA construction site, turned to another cyclist who was riding behind her and said: "A storm is coming, I'm afraid. I prefer to turn on my light." Those were the last words of the 47-year-old. The cyclist, Christa Meyer, remembers: "The woman rode on ahead of me, it flashed and then she wasn't there anymore." -- The victim was later found lying next to the road with severe injuries of the head and upper body. According to a statement of the Police in Hameln, the lightning struck directly into the head of Elfriede Stoks [sic]. A police spokesman: "Blouse and slip were to some extent fused together."

According to a statement by Professor Herbert Batz from Munich, of the Federal Committee for Lightning Conductor Construction, lightning deaths are exceptionally inrequent. The event in Hameln is only the second such death in the Federal Republic this year. Professor Batz: "Lightning always seeks out the highest point. In the open area around County Road 12, that was the woman on her bicycle." [Editor's note: If Mrs. Stokes wasn't the only cyclist in the general vicinity -- and the foregoing report indicates that she was not -- then the fact that she, and not the other cyclist, was struck is all the more curious and remarkable.]

In some respects, I could not have been more surprised if I had myself been struck by lightning! During the lunch hour, I had gone to the newspaper office and obtained a copy of the newspaper report, while Herr Vockeroth awaited responses from his calls of earlier in the day. I sat in an ice cream parlor eating strawberry ice cream with whipped cream and fresh strawberries as I read the report in detail.

When I return to Herr Vockeroth's office, he greets me in the hallway and ushers me into the office with the assurance of one who has accomplished his mission. In a rather long and drawn-out explanation, he tells me exactly where my mother had been buried following her death, and how I can get to the cemetery in question.

He says that because she had been married to an English soldier at the time of her death, she had been buried in the post-war cemetery maintained by the English military in Hannover (which, coincidentally, is where I am staying). I thank him and his coworkers for their interest and their help, and return to Hannover on an afternoon train.

The next morning, I determined to visit the grave. I checked the map and compared it to the subway diagram and thereby discovered that I would have to take both the train and a bus in order to reach the cemetery where my mother was interred, and although the mass transit systems in most German cities, and Hannover is no exception, provide for free transfers between buses and subways -- payment of your fare usually only entails a specific time limitation on travel within a given system -- I decided that it would be simpler, if not cheaper, to take a taxi. I went, therefore, directly to the Hauptbahnhof and climbed into the nearest available cab.

I had rehearsed my directions for the driver before getting in, so it was a simple matter to repeat my lines: "Ich möchte zum englischen Friedhof, auf der Herbergerstraße zwischen Hannover-Ahlem und Letter-Süd." The driver, as one might expect when taking a taxi anywhere but in New York, knew exactly where to go. It took about 15 to 20 minutes to drive there -- the cemetery lies just outside the Hannover city limits and the Hauptbahnhof is, as one might **cont. on pg. 6, col. 1**

PROFILE Leonie D. Boehmer



Ms. Leonie D. Boehmer, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a registered Independent Search Consultant (ISC) who specializes in inter-country searches between the USA and West Germany (or another German-speaking country). Over the past 8 years, she has conducted and successfully completed 35 inquiries with and/or for German-born adoptees or birth parents living in the United States. Leonie also serves as the current president of Operation Identity, an adoptee/birth parent search support group also located in Albuquerque. The following profile is based upon information published in the American Adoption Congress's (AAC) Newsletter DECREE, and upon letters and interviews with Ms. Boehmer conducted specifically for this profile.

Leonie was born in Hannover, in what is now West Germany (FRG). She emigrated to the U.S. in 1952 at the age of 18, and has lived and worked in Albuquerque ever since. She is presently employed as a mathematician by the federal government and works at Kirtland Air Force Base in the Air Force Weapons Laboratory there.

Leonie's Movement involvement dates back to late 1980, when she attended her first Operation Identity meeting. There she met a German-born adoptee who had just learned the name of her birth mother, but who had no idea of how to proceed from there. It took only one month for the initial "milestone" to be reached (i.e. for the birth mother to be located in the here-and-now). Leonie then proceeded to provide lessons in conversational German. About five months later, an actual reunion took place when the adoptee flew to Germany to meet her birth family.

And so it began. In 1983, at the insistance of Operation Identity's Sally File, Leonie became an ISC, specializing in searches between Germany and America. She is a member of the American Adoption Congress and, in addition to those searches she has successfully concluded, Leonie reports that she has at present 12 open case files.

Leonie wishes to make clear, however, that her Movement involvement is not her primary activity in life, however much satisfaction she may derive therefrom. She is the single mother of three grown children, is employed full-time, and is active in other areas as well. She enjoys walking and hiking, in which activity she engages most every day to "keep in shape." She sews many of her own clothes, knits, crochets, gardens and skis.

Like many who devote some part of their personal lives and time to the Movement, Leonie is a member of the Adoption Triad. In 1957 she was forced by circumstances to surrender her first child, a daughter, for adoption. And, like most birth mothers, she has never forgotten the experience; and until she was reunited with her daughter, she never forgot her, either.

For years after her daughter became old enough, Leonie scrutinized wedding pictures, hoping to see a "familiar" face. When, in 1980, she saw the obituary of the social worker who had handled her daughter's placement, she attended the funeral, hoping against hope that perhaps, just maybe, her daughter's adoptive family had been close enough to this woman to want to pay their last respects, to bid her one final farewell. But the only girl there who was of an appropriate age was of spanish ancestry.

Several months later, after reading a newspaper piece about Operation Identity, Leonie contacted Sally File to inquire about how she might make it as easy as possible for her daughter to find her, should her daughter ever begin to search. (When she placed her daughter for adoption, she had, at the suggestion of the aforementioned social worker, used an alias and had falsified her personal records.)

Then, as so often happens in real life, fate intervened: Operation Identity received an inquiry from an adoptee asking about Leonie's "alter ego." A happy reunion thus ensued, and Leonie reports that her daughter, Mary Bridget, and her husband Tom have since presented her with a granddaughter named Rachael. In addition, Leonie and Mary Bridget's adoptive parents have been able to form a close and supportive friendship.

Leonie has two other children: Eric, her only son, is attending college and working for a degree in pharmacy. Monica, her other daughter, has graduated from college and is studying dentistry.

Leonie may be reached by mail at 805 Alvarado N.E., Albuquerque, NM 87108, or by telephone at (505) 268-1310 (after 5 pm local time). **Ende**

SEARCH WORKSHOP The First Step

The first step in conducting a search in Germany can be, quite literally, as easy as writing a letter. One need only know in which jurisdiction the adoption took place, whereupon a letter of inquiry may be sent to the adoption placement office (a division of the "Jugendamt") for that jurisdiction. You would, then, address your inquiry as follows (filling in the **[blanks]** appropriately):

Stadt **[name of city]**
Jugendamt (Adoptionsvermittlung)
[city postal code] **[name of city]**
West Germany

The name of the city should be known to you. (It is usually the same as the city of birth, though not always necessarily). The city postal code ("Postleitzahl") is the German zip code. It is a 4-digit number which indicates the city's relative location within the country. Frankfurt, for example, is 6000; Munich, 8000; Hannover, 3000; etc. If you are unsure of, or cannot obtain the correct postal code, it may be omitted without adverse effect.

The letter itself should be simple, straightforward and brief. It should also, if possible, be written in German. (In this way, the adoptee assumes the burden of translation, and thus, in my opinion, facilitates a quicker and perhaps even a more forthright response from the Germans.) It should identify you using both your adopted and birth names, and detail as many facts about your birth and adoption as you have in you possession (if any). At minimum, you should state when and where you were born and request any information they may have with respect to you in their files.

In addition, you should also specifically request that the recipient make every possible attempt to locate the individual being sought (e.g. your birth mother). It is a good idea to also include a request for any information concerning known birth siblings, as well as concerning the birth father.

You should include at least two (2) International Reply Coupons in order to facilitate an air mail reply to your inquiry. If you have not heard anything after six (6) months, you should send a follow-up letter. **Ende**

cont. from pg. 4

imagine, in the "Innenstadt" -- so I engaged the driver in some small talk about driving a taxi in Germany (I had myself driven a cab for a living in New York for three years between 1980 and 1983).

The temperature that morning was cold -- spring had not yet deigned to foreshadow her coming in Germany as had been the case when I left New York a week earlier -- and the skies were uniformly grey, as they had been for all but a few minutes of my stay to date. The weather was also quite changeable; on my first morning in Hannover, I had gazed out the window of my room at the Pension to find a veritable winter wonderland outside; additionally, showers tended to come and go rather swiftly, often necessitating the carrying of an umbrella. As we drove toward the cemetery, it occurred to me that I probably should have brought mine after all.

The cemetery itself was almost deserted; except for groundskeepers, no one else was in evidence. I approached the nearest of the groundskeepers and asked (in English, since he appeared to be English) where I could find my mother's grave: Plot 17, Row 1, Grave 11. He apparently remembered the specific grave, though for what reason I cannot say, since he referred to it as "Mrs. Stokes." I assumed that perhaps he, too, was aware of how my mother had died, so I said something to the effect of, "Everyone seems to remember her. But I guess it's not everyone who gets hit by lightning." To which he replied, "Oh, is that how she died?" I explained that it was, and he seemed genuinely impressed. We arrived finally at the grave site and the groundskeeper left me alone.

One of the first things I noticed about the grave, aside from its uniform simplicity -- all the graves in the cemetery were laid out in rigid geometric columns and rows within the boundaries of each plot, and each was identified by one of two types of stone markers: either a more "traditional" kind of marker; a flat, rectangular slab of stone, the kind you see in old Hollywood westerns, or a squat rectangular block, the top face of which was cut at an angle and upon which the inscription was chiseled -- was that whoever had carved the inscription on my mother's marker had gotten her age wrong: she had been 47 when she died, but the stone said she had been 46. A minor mathematical glitch, to be sure, but noticeable, and somewhat irritating nonetheless. In addition to the statistical facts -- name, date of birth, date of death and age at death -- there was also some generic platitude at the bottom of the stone, nearest the ground, something on the order of "Rest in Peace," but not quite so trite. It occurred to me that it was something one might find on a sympathy card, and I could just imagine Michael Frederick Stokes thumbing through a mortician's catalog of sentimental homilies, looking for just the "right" thought.

As the groundskeeper and I walked toward Plot 17 -- a process which was rendered somewhat more complex due to a backhoe's being in the middle of the central pathway of the cemetery, and also somewhat hazardous due to there being a great quantity of mud in the vicinity of the backhoe -- the weather decided to turn ugly; it had already begun to rain when I arrived at the cemetery, but now it was definitely building up to something more unpleasant. By the time I was standing in front of the stone, it had begun to sleet, and as I paced up and down in front of the thing, the wind whipped my hair and I was pelted with little white grains from the heavens. I looked skyward and imagined my mother looking down upon me, smiling, imagining me imagining her looking down upon me, smiling.... My pictures of her gravestone are peppered with large and small round, white blurs, which give an ethereal quality to an otherwise unspectacular funereal image.

On Sunday, the day before I left Hannover to drive to Berlin, my brother, his wife and I went to an entertainment called "Traumtheater Salomé," a synthesis between play and circus: the actors were, for the most part, mute -- except for a Zeus-like narrator who sat off to one side of the stage and recited passages from a script between each "scene" -- and they cavorted on the stage in front of a variety of surreal backgrounds: ballet, gymnastics, acrobatics, magic and theatrics combined for a wonderfully entertaining evening.

During the first "act," -- or rather prior to the intermission -- I sat next to my brother, while his wife sat on his opposite side. At one point during the show, and seemingly apropos of nothing in particular, particularly nothing we had thus far observed on stage, my brother leaned over and asked me if I had spoken to our mother in English or German. I was struck by the perspicacity of the question, as well as by its intuitiveness; my brother was deeper than I had yet imagined. I replied by asking (somewhat rhetorically) why he assumed that I had "said" anything at all? I then allowed as how I had spoken in English. It seemed to me, I said, that if she could hear at all, she could probably understand <u>any</u> language; besides, I continued, she had been so fond of Americans when she was alive -- and, indeed, had eventually married an Englishman -- that it seemed safe to assume that she could understand English very well.

I cannot now recall anything of what I said, but I remained in the cemetery for maybe only twenty or thirty minutes altogether, so I couldn't have said a great deal. I do remember looking at the sky on more than one occasion, and to some degree regretting my atheism; perhaps if I had some god or gods in whom to believe, it all might have made more sense, this visiting of grave sites and talking to the air and all the rest of it (particularly the lightning), but I was left with my feet still firmly planted on the ground, and no lightning bolts came to strike <u>me</u> dead. I was, however, nonetheless impressed by the fact that by the time I left the cemetery, the weather had resumed its (relatively) tranquil state, and I saw nothing more of sleet for the remainder of my stay in Germany. **Ende**

<u>"Volume I, Number 1"</u> *cont. from pg. 1*

search-and-support group activity in Germany, and other German-speaking countries (e.g. Austria and Switzerland).

Finally, it will be my intention to keep an ear and an eye open for developments on the international scene generally, and to report on what, if anything, is happening with respect to adoption and search-and-support group activity in other countries (e.g. the United Kingdom).

Those of you who have received this first issue of GD will continue to receive it unless and until you indicate to me <u>in writing</u> that you no longer wish to receive it. Persons not currently receiving GD on a regular basis may have their name added to the GD mailing list by simply dropping me a line and requesting that it be added.

-- William L. Gage, *Editor*