GD™ Geborener Deutscher®

A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees and Their Birth/Adoptive Families

Volume II, Number 2 (Whole Number 4) July 14, 1989

Adoption Reform Goes "On-Line"

Adoption & Search Related Computer BBS Offers Users 24-Hour Search Support & Information

Attendees at the recent annual conference of the **American Adoption Congress** in New York City were witness to the birth of a new, high-tech addition to the resources of the Adoption Reform and Search-and-Support Movements. On Saturday, April 8, 1989, **The WOMB BBS**, an adoption-oriented computer bulletin board system (BBS) made its debut with a hands-on demonstration by William L. Gage, its System Operator (SysOp).

For those not familiar with the concept, a computer bulletin board is essentially the combination of a computer, a modem and software which allows other, remotely located computers to communicate with the BBS computer through the existing network of telephone lines, usually for the purposes of data exchange. A BBS can also allow its users to post messages to one another, much as one might leave a message on a public bulletin board; and to exchange electronic mail (e-mail).

The power of a BBS lies primarily in its ability to act as a repository for a variety of information and data, which may then be accessed by a large number of different individuals from different parts of the country/world. In addition, by their utilization of a BBS's public and private messaging capabilities, these same individuals can communicate with one another directly, thus creating a greater sense of unity within a particular group.

The WOMB BBS is a single-line system (meaning that only one person can access the BBS at a time) which will, except for those times when the system must be taken off-line for periodic maintenance, etc., be available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, according to Mr. Gage. Among the features which will be available via **The WOMB BBS** are:

- Public message bases for wide-open discussion of a variety of user-selected topics of concern to those involved with or affected by adoption;
- Special-interest subsections for searching, German-born and gay adoptees, birth and adoptive parents, where topics of interest to these groups, among others, can be discussed;
- Special message bases for each member of the Triad (adoptees, birth and adoptive parents);
- Information and data files concerning adoption issues, including newspaper and magazine article "reprints," transcripts of various radio and television broadcasts, etc.; as well as
- Resource lists of search-and-support groups, Independent Search Consultants (ISCs), adoptive parents' groups and much, much more.

In addition, **The WOMB BBS** will feature an on-line, "electronic" edition of *Geborener Deutscher*, the newsletter of German-born adoptees, etc.

The WOMB BBS was first brought on-line on April 14, 1989 and logged its first remote log-on on April 16, 1989. Mr. Gage reports that he has high hopes for the potential of this communications medium to bring some measure of unity to what is often a disparate and fragmented Movement in this country: "It strikes me that by being able to 'network' on a national level, many who may now feel isolated and alone within the Movement will have a place to which to turn for news, information and support." Ende

The WOMB BBS may be reached via modem at (718) 998-6303; BBS-related or other "voice" communications should be directed to (718) 627-0811. Your communications parameters should be set to **8** Data bits, **1** Stop bit and **N**o parity (**8/N/1**); users of communications software with **MNP error correction** should turn this feature **OFF**.

Search Workshop | Some General Observations

Once the decision to search has been made, the hardest part of the process is behind you. What remains thereafter is simply the assembly of available information and data for the purpose of making various inquiries and, ultimately, establishing your birth parent's(s') whereabouts. It is with this process of gathering information and data generally that I want to concern myself now.

Your first and primary source of information and data is your adoptive family, in particular, your adoptive parents. In the course of adopting you and bringing you back to this country, they had to go through a number of steps, virtually all of which generated a variety of forms or other pieces of paper, the originals or copies of most of which were given to them for their records and safekeeping. They would, as a matter of law, have been given an amended birth certificate, and perhaps even a copy of your original birth certificate; at least one, and often more than one, copy of the Contract of Adoption; sometimes, a copy of your birth mother's Surrender Agreement is also given to the adopting couple, either separately or as a part of the Adoption Contract; the Adoption Decree (issued upon finalization of the adoption); and, if your name was changed prior to your entry in the United States, various papers associated with that legal process.

Your primary source of information is your adoptive parents.

In Issue #2 of *GD*, I detailed how it is possible to write to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and obtain copies of virtually all of the above-mentioned documents, an option which can prove invaluable if and/or when the adoptive family is "uncooperative;" if the adoptee wishes his/her search activity to kept secret; or if these precious documents have, for whatever reason, become lost or destroyed over time. (I note now, with the arrival of a letter from Robyn Skelly [*see page 3*], that the INS has begun using a specific form for requesting copies of INS file documents. Hence, the initial letter to the INS may need be no more complex or detailed than a simple request for this form.)

Once the necessary papers are in hand, the inquiry process can begin in earnest. I have suggested that the first step in this process of inquiry is to write to the Adoption Office (*Adoptionsvermittlung*) in the municipality in which the adoption took place. This avenue of inquiry is designed to obtain information other than what may be cont. on pg. 4, col. 1

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The Editor's Page

William L. Gage

The WOMB BBS

In May 1988, I purchased my own IBM-compatible personal computer (PC). At the time, I anticipated using it for the purposes of word processing and communicating (via modem) with other computer users. About a month later, I began logging onto local and other computer bulletin board systems (BBSs) around the country. I soon discovered the power and versatility of this communications medium, and I began to wonder if there were any BBSs devoted to the topics of adoption or searching. Research into this question, however, yielded no substantive results other than a story from one computer-using friend about a **CompuServe** subscriber who was discussing these topics. As time went on, I imagined what it might take to start such a venture myself.

Eventually, in late January or early February, 1989, I came across an article in *People Searching News* (P.O. Box 22611, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33335-2611) about an organization in Pittsburgh called Kinsearch. The article told how the organization's founder, **Russ Saupe**, had established connections with two pre-existing BBSs (one in California and another in Colorado) for the purpose of posting search data. I immediately logged onto the California BBS and left a message for Mr. Saupe to contact me. As time went by, and I heard nothing from Kinsearch (I had also written a letter addressed to a P.O. Box in Pittsburgh), I attempted to contact them by telephone using the number given in the PSN article, whereupon I discovered that Kinsearch's telephone had been disconnected. It was at this point that I made a firm personal commitment to setting up an adoption- and search-related BBS myself.

I already had a second PC sitting in my bedroom in Brooklyn, so all I really needed, then, was another modem, some BBS software and a second (dedicated) telephone line, all of which I was able to acquire in time to be able to put on a demonstration of the BBS (which I dubbed "**The WOMB BBS**") at the 11th annual national conference of the **American Adoption Congress** this past April.

Since then--having solved some minor problems connected with the modem I had originally installed in the BBS computer -- I have been well-gratified by the response to this project, and I am hopeful for the eventual success thereof. I encourage others to publicize this project and hereby give full permission to reprint the article about the BBS [*pg. 1, col. 1 of this issue*] in search-and-support group newsletters or other Movement publications.

Anyone interested in participating or assisting in this venture is urged to contact me by mail at my Brooklyn address. I am particularly interested in establishing contact with people who would be willing to monitor their local print and broadcast media outlets for adoption- and search-related stories or articles which they could transcribe and either upload to the BBS directly or send to me on (IBM-formatted) diskette.

AAC National Conference

The 11th annual national conference of the **American Adoption Congress** (AAC) was held here in New York City at the Roosevelt Hotel from April 5th through April 9th, 1989. Owing to the fact that I had to work during the day during most of the conference's duration, I was unable to attend most of the workshops and other meetings, but I did manage to put in an appearance on Saturday, April 8th, both as a conference/workshop attendee *and* in connection with the above-mentioned demonstration of **The WOMB BBS**. I was much pleased to be able finally to meet many of the people with whom I have heretofore only spoken on the telephone or corresponded, and to renew old acquaintanceships.

Next year's conference is slated to occur over Memorial Day Weekend in Chicago, IL. Those interested in joining the AAC or wanting to obtain more information about this organization and/or the next annual conference are urged to write to the **American Adoption Congress**, P.O. Box 20137, Cherokee Station, New York, NY 10028-0051.

Publications

Many Search-and-Support groups publish newsletters. Among those which I receive on a regular basis, and which I would recommend to anyone interested in monitoring the activities of the Adoption Reform and Search-and-Support Movements here and elsewhere, are the newsletters of: **Today Reunites Yesterday** (P.O. Box 381, Easthampton, MA 01027); **Adoption Circle** (401 E. 74th St., Suite 17D, New York, NY 10021); **Adoption Information Exchange** (P.O. Box 1917, Matthews, NC 28106); **Operation Identity** (13101 Black Stone Rd. N.E., Albuquerque, NM 87111); and **Parent Finders** (P.O. Box 5211, Station F, Ottawa, Ontario K2C 3H5, Canada), among others.

Worthy of particular mention are several Movement-related publications not associated with any particular group or organization. *People Searching News* (published by **J.E. Carlson Associates**, P.O. Box 22611, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33335-2611; $16.50/-year for a 6-issue subscription; $20.50 Canadian; and $25 foreign) is recommended for the breadth and variety of its Movement coverage. *Donors' Offspring* (published by **Candace Turner**, P.O. Box 33, Sarcoxie, MO 64862; $20 for a 2-year subscription) addresses the issue of anonymous and non-anonymous donor insemination (DI); DI-produced children often do not know the identities of their donor-fathers, and are often kept in the dark well into adulthood regarding the truth of their origins, and are thus subject to many of the same identity and other problems as adoptees. Finally, *Chain of Life* (published by **Janine Baer**, P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley, CA 94707; $2 per issue, or $6 for a 4-issue subscription) is a new Movement periodical intended to address the issues and concerns of lesbian and gay male adoptees, birth and adoptive parents. The first two issues are already available.

Reunions

Pictured below is *GD*-subscriber **Carol Werzenski** (left) with her half-sister, Mary Jane, on the occasion of their first meeting on October 26, 1988 in Barrington, IL. Ms. Werzenski located her birth mother rather fortuitously by searching through telephone directories for a name she had obtained from the German Red Cross. She found her sister shortly thereafter.

Rose Hayes, a *GD*-subscriber from Connecticut, also reports success in her efforts to locate her birth mother. Interestingly enough, she obtained her mother's current address by telephoning the translator (*Dolmetscher*) who had interpreted the adoption proceedings for her adoptive parents, whose name was listed on the *Adoptionsvertrag*.



Carol Werzenski (l) w/half-sister, Mary Jane

Letters From Readers

We strongly encourage readers to write in response to any materials published in GD. *The opinions expressed in letters published herein are the authors' own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor. Letters may be edited for clarity and/or brevity.*

August 30, 1988

Dear Mr. Gage,

I just wanted to send along a word of praise and encouragement for the newsletter [*Geborener Deutscher*] that CUB [*Concerned United Birthparents*] here in Minnesota has received.

I particularly enjoyed your thoughts on intercountry adoption [*The Editor's Page, Vol. I, No. 2, June 14, 1988*]. A large percentage of adoptions in this state are with children from Korea and much press has been given here lately that the Korean government is now embarrassed over the large numbers of babies that are exported for adoption and will stop it soon.

Little has ever been written as to the child's needs for connection to their culture and I feel that we steal them as much as the slaves were stolen from their homeland. The Norwegian parents may name these children Erik, buy them O.P.s and skateboards, but they're still "lost." My heart aches for these children who look to their new families and do not see themselves. I wonder when the pain of these children will be addressed or acknowledged.

I have met black adults who were raised by white families in our white suburbs and attended white schools with little or no minority contact. They are on the "outside" of the white group, never totally accepted, and since they have never experienced their own culture they are *afraid* of people of their own race.

-- Sandra Sperazza
Co-ordinator, CUB, Edina, MN

February 28, 1989

Dear Mr. Gage:

Your newsletter, *Geborener Deutscher*, is refreshing and informative. I enjoy "The International Scene" and enjoy reading about fellow Germans and Americans with German birth parents being reunited. The article in the last issue where a young man found his family in Esslingen [*Norman L. Baker's "Search Journal," Vol. I, No. 2, June 14, 1988*] was heart-warming to me as I was born near Esslingen. I wish all adoptees searching for their biological roots success.

-- Kenneth E. Breitenbuecher
Philadelphia, PA

May 31, 1989

Dear Bill,

My name is Robyn Senatore Skelly and I wanted to write to thank you for your comfort and all your help through *Geborener Deutscher*. I was waiting to write after my search was completed but came to the realization that that could be quite a bit down the road and I wanted to be able to share what I can now.

Ever since I can remember I have asked my mom and dad if I was adopted and I always got answers like, "and if you were? would we love you any less?" and I would say no, but I would want to meet my birth mother and father. They -- or actually my mom -- would always say I was their gift from God. My brother and I are ten years apart and we are opposites and I really didn't resemble anyone in my family; maybe I had my dad's jaw, that is it. Growing up, my friends would think I didn't look like anyone in my family and they would tell me so. So my entire life I yearned for another motherly love. I love my mom but always looked for a mother relationship in my friends' mothers, and I never quite understood why. My inner voice was always telling me I was adopted, but my family told me no, and actually reacted with resentment when I would ask them about it, so I would back down until a year or so later, always questioning, but feeling bad to have these thoughts of being adopted.

> "...and if you were adopted? Would we love you any less?"

So I went with my friend to have my German birth certificate interpreted to me in English recently. This woman was a stranger to me and she told us that "this is some idiot paper that was made up to say I was born in München on my birth date" and that it was "only a piece of paper, not a birth certificate from Germany." So, quite stunned, my search began as I called the German Consulate in New York City for information to acquire my real birth certificate. They told me, so I sent all the information that was on this piece of paper, including my certificate number, with five American dollars to Germany. I still couldn't quite believe it, especially because I had used this "idiot paper" to get a passport with which I traveled to Paris; and I used it to get married, the whole time believing it was the real thing.

> "You know, it's odd that you called here, of all places..."

It took, I'd say, three weeks, and the day I went to my mailbox was my special day of my life. I held this thick blue parchment letter from München in my hands and even held it to my lips, the first real thing from my country, from where I came from, it was a precious moment for me before ever opening it. After I came in the house I opened it and at first I panicked because I thought it was only in German but after I remembered to breathe I saw there was a section in English as well as other languages so I could read it.

It was something I had never seen and it had my real birthday, my real name as I know it, and a mother listed I had *never* heard of and no documented father. I went into shock and carried this with me every where for, I'd say, a week and had to con stantly read it over and over again. This was such a confirmation of my little inner voice all of my life and I am twenty-eight years old.

You're probably wondering why I didn't go to my mother and father. My daddy as I think of him has passed on and my mother and I have gotten much closer through this and I almost lost her to cancer five years ago and even though I have a brother, I am her life and why she likes to be alive each day and because of her love for me, this news would probably kill her. *They went through a lot for me not to ever know*, my brother even says he remembers her pregnant and he was nine-and-a-half years old. I trust that my Heavenly Father had guided my life thus far and it was my time to finally see the truth and I thank Him for it. I also trust that by His love he will guide each step with light on my path and be encompassing or embracing me through it all. So I will try to do this search on my own with the support of God, my husband, and dearest friends and with you Bill Gage too, quietly and discreetly.

Quickly after reading the birth certificate I had never seen before, I called an adoption agency in Princeton and spoke to a woman there who was very helpful and said, "You know, it's odd that you called here, of all places, because while I cannot help you because you don't belong to this agency and your search is in Germany, but right in front of me is this newsletter from William Gage and he is a German-born adoptee that can help you," and she gave me your work and home phone numbers. Without hesitation I called you right away at work, and you were so very nice to speak with me (especially at work). I was anxious to receive your newsletters and when I did I read each one cover-to-cover and actually cried over the search stories of others and was fascinated and touched by yours also. I felt like I was home, a place I've never been in touch with since I was two years old, when I was brought to the U.S. (My dad was in the Army for 22 years.) I was so glad not to be alone and got excited about my quest and where it will bring me.

My search is step-by-step, one day at a time. I'm trying to pick up some German, but it is not easy, when I say a German word, though, it does seem to come naturally to me.

I'm presently awaiting my naturalization file. I sent the letter as described in your newsletter and I waited three weeks and it had to be sent to Newark, N.J. and I live in N.J. so I finally marched up there, I couldn't wait any more. At the Immigration and Naturalization office the told me that they couldn't track down my letter to see what was going on, but that to obtain my file I would have to fill out a special form that they just got one week before. So I got that form and am sending it out now. Also I am assuming the adoption took place in München and am sending the German-language letter described in your newsletter too, which means waiting another three or four weeks until I can learn if the adoption really did take place there. In the mean time, I will be busy, learning German cont. on pg. 4, col. 3

cont. from pg. 1

reflected in the adoption and other papers already in your possession. By writing to the *Adoptionsvermittlung*, one can, for example, learn of the existence of birth siblings (such as was the case for the Editor). Additionally, the social worker(s) at the *Adoptionsvermittlung* may also be disposed to assist you in your inquiries; and may, in some cases, conduct some of the below-described inquiries on your behalf (such as was the case for the Editor).

Yet another viable avenue of inquiry is to write to the Resident Registry Office (*Einwohnermeldeamt*) in the municipality where your birth mother is last known to have resided. Your birth mother's last residence of record will be reflected on both the Contract of Adoption (*Adoptionsvertrag*), her Surrender Agreement (*Einwilligung*) and your original birth certificate (*Geburtsurkunde*). Sometimes, the addresses on these documents will be different. In that case, you should use the one on the Einwilligung (if available) or the *Adoptionsvertrag*, as they will bear a later date than your birth certificate.

A typical response to a letter of inquiry of an *Einwohnermeldeamt* will possibly tell you that your birth mother still resides at the same address; or, they may inform you that she has moved, in which case they will either inform you of the new address or tell you that she left no "forwarding" address; or, they may inform you that your mother died; or, they may inform you that they have no further information with respect to your birth mother. In the case where your birth mother has moved and you have been provided with a new address, the process of inquiry simply repeats itself, with the new inquiry being addressed to the *Einwohnermeldeamt* in the municipality where your birth mother's new address is located. In this way, it is possible to follow your birth mother's "paper trail" from the past into the present.

Another office which is often the repository of useful information and data for the searching German-born adoptee is the "*Standesamt*." The *Standesamt* is the office which records and maintains records of births, deaths, marriages, and the like. For example, you may find you birth mother's date and place of birth recorded on one or more of the documents in your possession, or such information may otherwise be made available to you (perhaps as the result of a letter of inquiry directed to the *Adoptionsvermittlung*). Knowing where and when your birth mother was born, you may then write to the *Standesamt* in that city and obtain a copy of her birth certificate. This document will then tell you the names and birth dates and places of your maternal grandparents, in which case it may then be possible to locate and/or contact them as part of the search process. The *Standesamt* is also a good place to inquire if and when an inquiry of the *Einwohnermeldeamt* yields little or no substantive results.

For example, to take an illustrative case from my own experience, my birth mother was traced to a town call Cöppenbrügge, where her "paper trail" disappeared. The town from which she was supposed to have moved to Cöppenbrügge was Hameln. As a result of my request of the German Red Cross (*Deutsches Rotes Kreuz*), I learned that my mother had died while residing in Hameln. Therefore, had I inquired of the Standesamt in Hameln prior to turning to the Red Cross for help, I would have learned of my birth mother's death directly.

Finally, we come to those options which may be viewed as "last ditch," to which one may turn when direct inquiries have yielded nothing concrete, or if the individual adoptee wishes not to take on the burden of making such direct inquiries himself. As mentioned above, the German Red Cross has been known to assist searching German-born adoptees. Also, as related in our last issue, International Social Services (German Branch) (*Internationaler Sozialdienst (Deutscher Zweig e.V.*)) is an organization which stands ready to respond to the requests of searching German-born adoptees. The addresses of these two organizations are as follows:

Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
Generalsekretariat
Suchdienst München
Zentrale Auskunfts- und
Dokumentationsstelle
Infanteriestraße 7 A
8000 München 40
West Germany

Internationaler Sozialdienst
Deutscher Zweig e.V.
Am Stockborn 5-7
6000 Frankfurt-am-Main 50
West Germany.

Ultimately, the time may come when the searching German-born adoptee will be ready to travel back to the country of his/her birth. There are many reasons for such a trip, not the least of which is simply to see the place where you were born, or just to visit a foreign country of generally incomparable beauty and friendliness. The reasons for such a trip may also include reunion(s) with various birth family members. One thing I would strongly urge all searching adoptees to do if and when the opportunity to visit your birthplace presents itself is to advise the *Adoptionsvermittlung* of your impending visit. Tell them that you expect them to pull your adoption file so that you may go through it yourself. I would recommend this even if you have searched and found your birth mother or other birth family members. While some social workers are friendly and helpful and may seem to go out of their way to be of assistance to you, there is simply no substitute for firsthand information gleaned from the source. You cannot, for example, be sure that some important piece of information or data isn't being withheld. For those who cannot read German, of course, it would be advisable to have someone available who could translate the documents for you as you read them.

(The primary reason why a personal visit to the *Adoptionsvermittlung* for the purpose of reading your adoption file may be required is that, according to the social workers in Frankfurt with whom I have heretofore had dealings, this file may not be xeroxed. I do not know whether this is a matter of law, or simply a matter of policy, or if such a policy is universally applied. It cannot hurt, in any case, when you have established contact with a specific social worker, to request that a copy of your file be made and sent to you. When making such a request, mention the obvious: the distance that separates you from the file and your inability to afford the expense of traveling to Germany personally, etc.)

Ende

cont. from pg. 3

and going to the Adoption Circle support group in N.J. for the support of other adoptees.

By the way, when I got home from Newark, in the mail was a note from Immigration and Naturalization saying I needed to fill out this special form!

I am planning a trip to München in July, August or September to try to find my mother, if only to meet her, see her and hopefully hold her. I have no anger as to why; I believe she did what was best for me at the time and I thank God she didn't have an abortion and that I am alive. I dream of the moment I will see her and I hope she will tell me all the answers to my questions and have some room for me in her life today, because this could be a secret in her past. But even if it is, it will still be so wonderful, if she is alive, to meet her. I am praying and looking for a friend that I could travel with to Germany who speaks German and knows the country.

Bill, I thank you for your work and the quick education I have received through your newsletters. Please keep them coming. Hearing about your stories and others' and how to go about it has given me the hope to go on with my own search.

-- Robyn Skelly
103 Brandywine Court
Bricktown, NJ 08724

[**Editor's Note**: *Ms. Skelly has advised me that she is interested in corresponding with other German-born adoptees. Ms. Skelly may be reached by mail at the address listed for her above. -- WLG*]

May 31, 1989

Dear Mr. Gage:

I was reading the January 14, 1988 issue of *Geborener Deutscher* last evening. It's a great newsletter! I still have not read all the articles, but did stay up late and got through Arthur LeMelle's story.

-- Sara Vick, Berkeley, CA

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