GD™

Geborener Deutscher®

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

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A Searcher's Observations on Cultural Duality and Integration

by Leonie D. Boehmer, ISC

Most German-born adoptees, if they are searching for their birth family, have some interest in their German heritage. There are several ways to acquire knowledge about the history, customs, manners, language and ideology of the German people. Those are, of course: books, tapes, films, German clubs, German language or other courses at Community Colleges or Universities, etc. Most of you who have found your family in Germany may ultimately take a trip to visit them and the place where you were born. Invariably, this is a fun thing to do and, although you have not grown up there, you may feel a "connectedness" to the people, their lifestyle and the country.

In a few cases, in the course of my work as a "facilitator" for searching German-born adoptees, I have observed this feeling of "connectedness" to be so strong that the adoptee is not satisfied with visits, telephone calls and/-or letters. This seems to be the case particularly if the adoptee was placed with his/her adoptive family as a young child, rather than as an infant. Such adoptees had, perhaps, bonded with their mother and/or other birth family members so strongly before their adoption that they seem willing now, at first contact, to virtually "throw away" the life and family they have built in their adopted country and move to Germany immediately.

I understand such feelings completely, but this urgency you feel may diminish with time as you make personal contact with and get to know your new-found family better. Before allowing yourself to be overwhelmed by such feelings, you should sit back and think about whether transplanting yourself, and your spouse and/or children is really what you want to do in the long run.

You have grown up in America. You know the social customs and manners; the school system; the language; how to find a job; even the "dos" and "don'ts" of grocery shopping. When you go to visit your German family, you will be just that: a visitor; a foreigner. And you will be treated as such, even though, within your birth family, you may feel completely comfortable; even though you may feel a kinship with the people and the country; even though you may love the cuisine! It's great fun to visit other countries and see new places; but in order to live there, you will have to learn new social customs and manners; how to manage a different and more "aggressive" school system; how to speak, read and write a new language; how to navigate through a *German* bureaucracy; how to live in a smaller space than you're probably accustomed to here; and how the German people *think*.



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Alternatively, one could combine two cultures in one's own home, whereby one can pick and choose among the things about the other culture which appeal to you and integrate them. Having been born in Germany, and having lived approximately two-thirds of my life here, in the United States, this is something I have done in my own life, but it takes time, lots of work, and cannot be accomplished overnight. With luck, after visiting Germany and your German birth family and getting to know one another and your respective cultures better, you will be able to find a happy medium and integrate your German heritage into your American identity. Ende

Search Workshop — The INS Revisited (Form G-639)

"The *Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. §552a) with certain exceptions, permits individuals (US citizens or permanent resident aliens) to gain access to information pertaining to themselves in Federal agency records, to have a copy made of all or any part thereof, to correct or amend such records, and to permit individuals to determine what records pertaining to themselves are collected, maintained, used, or disseminated. The Act also prohibits disclosure of individuals' records without their written consent, except under certain circumstances.*"

So states, in part, the **Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Request** form (*Form G-639*), the form a German-born adoptee uses to request a copy of his/her Immigration and Naturalization Service file. The form should be filled out as completely as possible and may be either mailed to or submitted in person at the INS field office closest to the adoptee's current residence.

Given that this is a "general-use" form, meant for a variety of purposes and not *just* to permit searching German- or other foreign-born adoptees access to specific and vital information concerning their birth and adoption, some specific guidance as to how to answer certain of the questions contained in the form is in order:

1. Type of Request: Privacy Act (PA).

2. Your Name, Address, etc.

3. Action Requested: Copy.

4. Specific Information, document(s), or record(s) desired: "Copies of any and all documents referring or relating to the Naturalization of [*adoptee's name*]."

Purpose for which desired: Not required, but helpful if provided. Suggested answer: "To obtain, and/or verify accuracy of, data contained in my INS file."

5. Data for Identification of Personal Record: This information will usually be obtainable from (a) the Naturalization Certificate, and (b) documents, such as a passport, associated with the adoptee's travel to and entry into the United States.

6. Verification of identity: When submitted in person, bring along identification, preferably your Naturalization Certificate or, alternatively, a valid passport; when submitted by mail, attach an notarized affidavit of identity or other valid proof of identity.

7. Authorization/Consent: Not applicable unless form is being submitted by a third party on the adoptee's behalf, e.g.

8. Fees: By signing the form, the adoptee, or the person submitting the request, agrees to pay any fees associated with the request.

When filling out such governmental or other official cont. on pg. 4, col. 1

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The Editor's Page

"Seeing Double"

I was riding home on the subway one evening after work recently when the person in front of whom I was standing got off, thus freeing his seat for me to occupy (a fortuitous occurrance, especially when it happens not long after getting on the train, as was the case here). It being fairly early in the afternoon -- approximately 3:30 p.m. -- there weren't a great many people in this particular car, and I was able to see quite clearly the people sitting opposite me.

In particular I noticed two men, seated side-by-side. One appeared to be in his mid-to-late 40s; the other was obviously a teenager. At first, I didn't realize it, but after I recognized that they were talking to one another (as a rule, people don't usually speak to one another on the subway unless they know one another), it hit me that they knew each other; and, not only did they know one another, but a moment's reflection brought me to the inescapable conclusion that they were *related*; that they were, in fact, father and son.

What brought me to this realization was the simple and quite striking fact that the younger man looked so much like the older one that he could have been the same person at an earlier time in his life; as if the same person were caught in a time warp, finding himself at age 40 or so seated next to himself as a teenager.

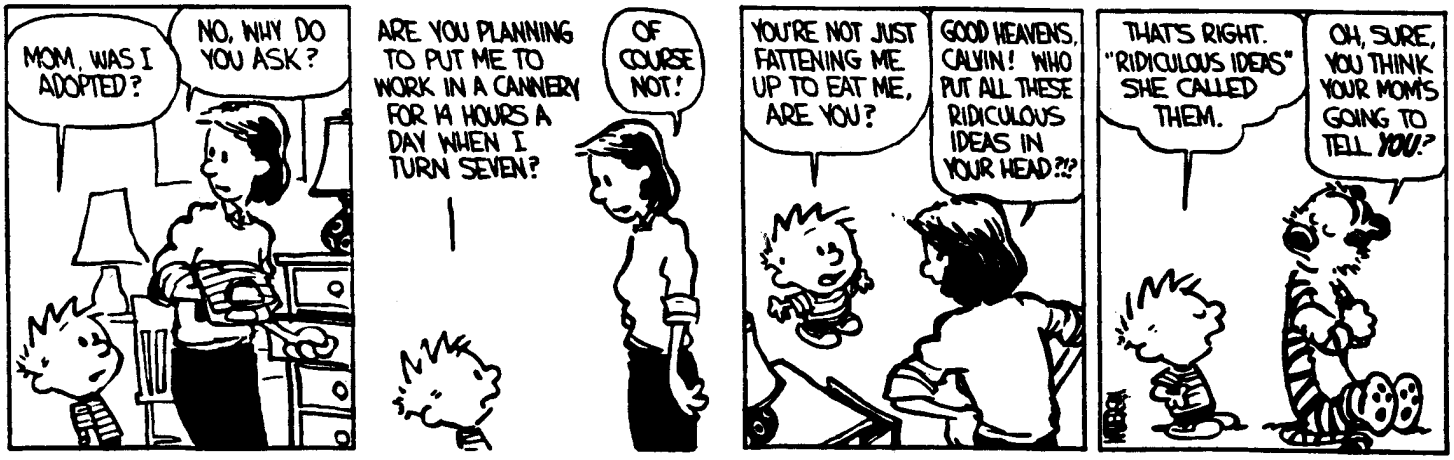
It was very intriguing to me -- and slightly unnerving -- to observe these men, because, as I observed them -- observed how when they spoke, they revealed almost identical overbites; observed how their mouths and noses were obviously cast from the same mold -- it struck me with great emotional force how remarkable it would be (for me) to be able to look into the face of another human being and see myself (whether from a parent's or a child's perspective).

And I speculated silently on the sort of quizzical and disbelieving reaction I might have gotten from these men had I asked them how it *felt* to see so much of themselves in one another…. -- **WLG**

Calvin and Hobbes

by Bill Watterson

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IMMEDIATE FAMILY

Directed by Jonathan Kaplan; Written by Barbara Benedek; Starring James Woods, Glenn Close, Mary Stuart Masterson & Kevin Dillon

I think the most positive thing I can say about this movie, other than that it is a yeoman effort by filmmaking professionals that doesn't *excessively* insult one's intelligence, is that it leaves one convinced that so-called open adoption is probably the most reasonable and humane means of effecting this peculiar form of commerce in human flesh. Once upon a time, this film would have dealt with the issues facing the respective birth and adoptive families independently of one another, as if they bore no relationship, one to the other; as if the child born to the birth mother on the one hand wasn't really the same child that is placed with the adoptive parents on the other; as if the process of adoption could eradicate biological as well as legal bonds. A reasonable person knows this isn't so, and *Immediate Family* is obviously a film made by reasonable people.

Perhaps a little *too* reasonable. This movie tries so hard not to offend its audience that it almost fails to make even the marginally positive impression that I ultimately came away with. And, unfortunately, it ultimately fails, both as entertainment and as parable. (The only really natural, unforced laugh comes as we see Lucy and Sam (Mary Stuart Masterson and Kevin Dillon), the teenage couple whose baby Michael and Linda Spector (James Woods and Glenn Close) are planning to adopt, driving off in the Spectors' car and Michael quips to Linda, "Okay, Let's have it. Your most paranoid fantasy. … They drive off, *with* the baby, stopping only long enough to rip off a few convenience stores along the way.")

In the course of watching this film, we learn nothing new about adoption, open or otherwise. Cliches abound, from the opening scenes, under the credits, of a child's sixth birthday party, complete with a pregnant friend of the family, (apparently non-adopted) children being -- well -- children and (apparently non-adoptive) parents being -- well -- parental, to the final scenes where Lucy and Sam, having tried to make a go of raising their child themselves and seeming to have come to some degree of maturity in the process, inexplicably decide to surrender the baby to the Spectors anyway (the requisite "happy ending").

The film was also very frustrating at times, in particular in a scene in the office of the (female) lawyer who is handling the adoption for the Spectors. Michael and Linda are discussing the process of independent, open adoption with the lawyer when the lawyer quips that, "Birth is nature's way [of providing children to a couple] and adoption is God's way." (?!?) Michael questions the meaning of this statement -- and, I must confess, so do I, but when Michael presses for an explanation, he is dismissed by the women for his "obtuseness" in not being able to see the statement's "obvious" meaning. I guess I must be as dense as Michael, because I *still* can't see what that statement was supposed to mean….

Another character -- apparently a social worker doing the home study of the Spectors -- observes that, "Adoption was once about finding homes for children; now it seems to be about finding children for parents." This is a sentiment I can more easily understand and with which I can much more readily agree….

It's a shame that *Immediate Family* is such an eminently forgettable film (particularly judging from the swiftness with which it has disappeared from local theaters) since it does make a pretty good case for the practice of open adoption where birth and adoptive parents come to know one another in the context of the adoption process -- even to the extent of being present in the delivery room when the child is born! Perhaps most people don't feel that the issues addressed in the film -- infertility, teenage pregnancy and adoption -- directly touch or affect their lives and so they cannot identify with any of the characters or their problems. Even I, as an adoptee, had only the child being exchanged as a point of reference for identification.

Still, despite its obvious flaws and shortcomings, the film may be seen as positive statement about open adoption that may serve to enlighten some viewers on the subject. -- **Bill Gage**

Briefe

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 29, 1989

Dear Mr. Gage,

Your newsletter has proven to be a great help to me. However, since I began this search last November, I have discovered a few "tips" that I thought I would pass on. I am a German-born adoptee. My adopted parents hid this fact from me until I found out by accident when I was 17. My mother and father would be hurt if they knew I wanted to search for my natural mother. I consequently waited many more years before deciding to try and search without their knowledge.

I requested my records from the I.N.S. in Atlanta and received my adoption records very quickly. I got enough information from your newsletter to write then to the Stuttgart *Adoptionsvermittlung*. They responded, however, that they do not retain documents longer than *30 years* (I am now 31). I was hoping for a copy of my actual birth certificate, which was not in my I.N.S. papers. I know my adopted mother has it, but I am reluctant to ask her for it. Also, it appears that my particular adoption may have been handled privately anyway.

The *Jugendamt* did send my request on to International Social Services in Munich. They responded very quickly to tell me that, if you do not reside in Germany, you *must* make your request in the country in which you live. Their office in the U.S. is in New York. I sent all my paperwork to them at the end of June and have not yet received a reply.

I am currently sending a request to the *Einwohnermeldeamt* as both you and a kind lady at the German Consulate in Atlanta suggested. She also recommended sending international postal coupons to speed up reply time.

The biggest problem I have run across, and also what held me back for a time, was the language barrier. I do not speak any German and that overwhelmed me. I should not have worried. Although you recommended sending information requests in German, I have been lucky so far with requests made in English. The translation which I have needed, a local German teacher in our high school has helped me with.

I regret in many ways the years I hesitated to begin this search. I realize now how long it may be before I even locate my mother, if I do at all. I can only hope that she is still alive. She was 51 this year. If I do locate her, I will write to you again.

Thank you for your help via your newsletter.

Regards,

-- Dolly Conley,
Snellville, GA

August 21, 1989 (Postkarte)

Dear Bill,

I am here in München! I am here because of the newsletter. Jenny Jansen read my article and called me from München and told me she would be here for me. So I say danke, danke, danke to you and *Geborener Deutscher*!

I have found my mama Efie and we are having a wonderful time, without a lot of communication because she spoke hardly any English. I use my dictionary and have an interpreter. I will be home in USA on the 26th of August. After I calm down, I'd like to write the sequel to my story.

Happily,

-- Robyn Skelly
(now Petra Harner Ziemer)

September 8, 1989

Dear Bill --

Our mutual friend, Leonie Boehmer, gave me a copy of your July [14], 1989 newsletter. I was *very* impressed with its content and presentation. I am an adoptee who was recently found by my birth mother, who lives in Düsseldorf, and my sister -- two wonderful surprises!

Keep up the good work!

-- Kathy Hearne
Garland, Texas

October 4, 1989

Dear Mr. Gage:

This is to thank you for not only contributing a highly professional and informative newsletter to the Movement, but also **The WOMB BBS** computer bulletin board.

Out of over 1,000 requests for search information received by AmFOR [*Americans For Open Records, P.O. Box 401, Palm Desert, CA 92261*], so far, none has yet been for a search in Germany (we've had Korea, France and of course Canada) but Leonie Boehmer and you have been on my mailing list (also for referrals) since we organized. I am sure my correspondents with German heritage would be interested in your newsletter and I will mention it to them.

As it happens, my husband has a birth daughter in Germany, but until I showed him your newsletter, he would not believe there was a chance of locating her. We are now about to pursue that possibility.

-- Lori Carangelo
Palm Desert, CA

November 28, 1989

Lieber Wilhelm,

On 14 September 1989, Lenora, wife of birth father Wayne Danver, asked me for help in locating Wayne's daughter. You had suggested they call me for assistance. Lenora, Wayne and birth mother Gerda had been searching for Wayne and Gerda's daughter for 10 years, to no avail. With all the information Wayne had gathered over the years, it did not take very long to extract the pertinent facts. He located the adoptive mother, who was delighted to find such a caring birth father. Susan, the daughter, called Wayne the following day, 28 October 1989. A reunion soon followed, prompting this note to me:

November 9, 1989

Dear Leonie,

Further to our recent conversation, enclosed is a photo of Susan and myself taken during the wonderful reunion visit at our home last weekend [*see below*]. Susan's visit was even greater than we could have hoped for. A wonderful relationship is in the making. Susan flew out to Lake Tahoe Wednesday and is currently visiting with her mother, Gerda. You have certainly touched our lives and I'm sure many others, and have brought happiness and joy.

If we can ever be of assistance or grant a favor, please feel free to call upon us. If your travels ever should get you to our area, we would love to meet you and have you visit with us.

Thanks so very much, God bless.

-- Wayne and Lenora Danver

Just thought I'd share this good news with you and your readers.

-- Leonie

Dear Readers:

We at GD are pleased and happy to be able to publicize the reunions which almost inevitably occur when German-born adoptees and birth parents search for one another. The knowledge that others have been happily reunited with birth family members encourages others who have, for whatever reason, not yet found; as well as those who may not yet have begun their searches.

I want to encourage all who embark upon the journey of self-discovery that is searching to remember to share your stories with others.

Pictures submitted for publication can and will be returned upon request.

-- William L. Gage, Editor



Birth Father Wayne Danver w/daughter, Susan

Search Workshop cont. from pg. 1

forms or questionnaires, one should (a) *always* provide as much information as possible, and (b) *never leave any spaces intended to be filled out by you blank*. If a piece of information or data is "unknown," "unavailable" or "not applicable" in a given circumstance, say so. Otherwise, a conscientious civil servant might return the form to you with a request that the missing information or data be provided. Ende

Search Resource List

Leonie Boehmer
805 Alvarado, N.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108

Ms. Boehmer is a registered **Independent Search Consultant** *who specializes in Adoptee-Birth Parent reunification searches in Germany or other German-speaking countries.*

International Social Services (ISS)

ISS is an international organization that assists individuals in "social service" matters, including adoptions and inquiries by adoptees, when such matters necessitate dealing with foreign governments, offices, groups or organizations (write to the office nearest your current residence):

International Social Services
American Branch, Inc.
95 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10016

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

Service Social d'Aide aux Emigrants
72 Rue Regnault
F-75013 Paris, France

International Social Service of
Great Britain
39 Cramer House, 39 Brixton Rd.
London SW9 6DD, Great Britain

International Social Service Canada
Box 3503 Station C
Ottawa K1Y 4G1, Ontario, Canada

Service Social International
Consejo Superior de Protection de
Menores
Cea Bermudez 46, E
28003 Madrid, Spain

Stichting International Social Service
Stationweg 147
NL-2515 BM's-Gravenhage
The Netherlands

Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
Suchdienst München
Infanteriestraße 7 A
W-8000 München 40

The German Branch of the international service and relief organization, this office has been known to assist German-born adoptees in the past. Ende

Illegitimate Offspring Have Right to Information

The Way to Name of True Father Opened for Children

KARLSRUHE (*dpa* [Deutsche Presse Agentur]/*ap* [Allgemeine Presse]) -- The Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe has broadened the right of children born out of wedlock to get information about their birth father. The Court, in a decision rendered on Tuesday [01/31/89], announced that the current ruling, by which even those of age could only contest their legitimacy and demand information about their true father in limited exceptional cases, violates a basic right.

According to the opinion of the Constitutional Court, children at the age of majority also have the right to clarification of their heritage if their mother is legally married [to someone other than the child's biological father]. In their decision, the judges in Karlsruhe obligated the legislature to change the constitutional ruling accordingly.

The supreme court declared a decision of the Federal Constitutional Law incompatible with the basic law. Previously, children of the age of majority could fight for their legitimacy and, therefore, clarification of their heritage, only when the mother was divorced, the marriage was dissolved or annulled or if the couple had been separated for 3 years and it was not expected that the marriage would be reconciled.

The Karlsruhe decision resulted from a case in the police court in Hamburg: a 20-year-old female student contested her legitimacy because she wanted to have her parentage declared by the court. The mother, as well as her husband, agreed with the complaint. According to the present law, the police court would have had to refuse the complaint. The Federal Constitutional Court has now decided that the judicial limits for that kind of challenging complaints of children at the age of majority hurts their sovereign right. "The common individual right encompasses also the right to knowledge of one's own heritage," says the Karlsruhe decision.

According to the opinion of the Minister of Justice, Hans Engelhard (FDP [*Free Democratic Party*]), the Federal Constitutional Court has given new emphasis to the personal right of the child with its decree. The federal government will immediately perpare the necessary supplements to the law based upon the decision of the court.

On the other hand, observers of the proceedings said that the decision does not contain what the proceedings seemed to promise. It was expected that the Federal Constitutional Court would, with its investigation as to when illegitimate children could ascertain their birth father, turn to a much more significant question: the heavily discussed problem of whether or not children produced by artificial insemination with the sperm of an unknown donor have a right to the determination of the biological father remains unresolved.

-- **From the 2/1/89 edition of a newspaper in Karlsruhe, FRG**

(Translated by Leonie Boehmer)