GD™

Geborener Deutscher®

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

Volume IV, Number 1 *(Issue #10)* *Spring 1991*

THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

"I Think of Her Every Day"

So Says Inga Schou About the Daughter She Surrendered to Adoption

by Marete Aller

There is, in Denmark, a group of women who carry a painful secret which makes their lives a daily, hidden hell. This is the group of unmarried women who became pregnant before the new abortion laws went into effect in the early 1970s. Their condition was judged harshly by society, as well as by family and friends at that time, and the women were never able to confide in another person. Their undisclosed secret is that they were forced to bear their children clandestinely – discreetly away from home – and to offer their children up for adoption after birth.

Every day they think of the child they gave away. All they know is the child's age, if it is even alive. The questions of whether their child's early years have been good ones, whether the child has had a good start in life, and whether it is aware of its adoption, are all questions which haunt these women day and night.

Their feelings of guilt and privation are daily companions, regardless of the number of children they subsequently bear. Upon seeing a child the age of their own, they may stop in the middle of the street: "It could be mine. I seem to recognize myself in the child's smile and movements." Bawling, they hurry on, possibly to the nearest bar to bury their grief.

Every year on the child's birthday, the events of the past surface. Their families do not understand their abruptly distant gazes, or why their eyes fill so quickly with tears, and their interest in daily tasks disappears. Inga Schou is one of these women.

Inga is 57 years old. In contrast to her fellow sisters, she wants to tell her story. Her purpose is to create openness and discussion around the taboo subject of anonymous adoption, and to effect a retroactive change in the adoption laws so that biological mothers might seek and find their children when these turn 18 years old.

Inga or her sisters do not want to become mothers to their regained children – they are, after all, strangers. But they want to find peace of mind. They want to assure themselves of the children's happiness, and, when the children so desire, together with them, assemble the puzzle of roots.

"Stamtræet" ["The Family Tree"] **is a national association which seeks to help those hapless mothers, who, at one time, before the recent changes in the abortion laws, were forced to offer up their new-born children for adoption. These mothers have only one hope for peace of mind, and that is to find their children. Inga Schou is one of these mothers. Here she tells how it is to have your child adopted by someone else, and, for forty years, to live with the uncertainty of your child's fate.**

"I was 16 years old when it happened," relates Inga. "At that time one did not talk openly about sex and contraception. Consequently, my debut as a lover had consequences. I did not take notice when my period was late, and I wondered why my mother kept asking if I had 'it.'

(cont. on pg. 2, col. 1)

Search Journal

by Michael Taylor

(Part One of Two)

As you know, my search for my German birth mother has come to a successful end. The process I set in motion about a year ago has resulted in my discovery of some very warm and caring people who have been thinking about me all my life.

Last October I submitted my Freedom of Information Act request to the INS. Four weeks later, I received the information contained in my file. It arrived at my office one morning, and I must tell you that that moment was a turning point in my life. As I held the bulky envelope, I contemplated throwing it away, knowing that my life was fine just as it was, and that the information within would forever affect my life, not necessarily for the better.



Of course, I opened the envelope and began reading. Most of the material pertained to my actual entry into the USA, but the German replacement birth certificate contained my birth mother's name and my birth name, and the adoption decree contained my mother's birth date, place of birth and a few other pertinent items. At that time, I was not able to understand anything written in the German language, so I called a native-German attorney in Dallas to find out what these documents meant. I sent copies of these documents to Leonie Boehmer on December 1, 1989, and she sent a letter to the *Magistrat* requesting my mother's present address on December 14th.

It seemed to me a very long time to wait, but it was less than a month later that she called with my mother's address! Leonie spoke with my wife, Cheri (who was at least as impatient as I), around 6:00 p.m. on January 12, 1990 and told her the news. I was driving home from my office and was about halfway there when my carphone rang. I answered, it was Cheri, and she was very excited. She told me about Leonie's call, and I hurried home to call for more details. I remember that Leonie advised me to start learning the German language and to write a letter to my mother, Marga, as soon as possible.

I had started my German language instruction on January 4th, about a week before I had talked with Leonie. My instructor was from the DDR, from Jena. She had married a guy from New York and was able to get out of East Germany in November,

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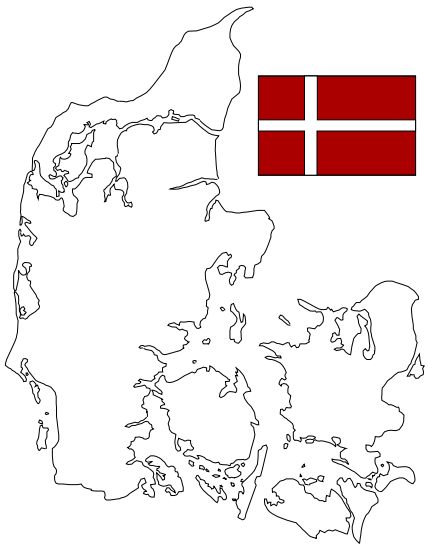
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"We lived at Bornholm, and I worked on the Bornholm Ferry at the time. I remember my mother's questioning eyes each time we docked at Rønne. It took three months before the awful truth dawned on me. I was pregnant. Something had to be done. I leapt from the outhouse roof 25 times with the result that I almost could not get to work, my legs were so sore.

"We had whispered in school about the secret things which we thought we understood. I remembered hearing that eating something awful-tasting would cause the child to fall out. I was naive – I guess we all were at that time. I stirred mustard, British sauce, American oil, and other ghastly things together, fastened a clothes pin to my nose, and consumed the mush. The medicine worked: I got a stomach ache and diarrhea.



"I hid my growing stomach by tightening my belt so snugly I could hardly breathe. But at five months, this no longer worked. I made a decision. I was going to Copenhagen, disappear in the crowds, and place my child for adoption.

"My mother was extremely kind. She said I should stay at home. But I did not want my family to become the talk of our small community. Soon the rumors would flow, and the judgment of the Schous' whore, who was with child, would be harsh and without charity toward my parents.

"One day I gathered my belongings in a red hat box, and with one dollar to my name, I jumped the Bornholm Ferry in Copenhagen. I found lodging in a rear court on Rømer Street, where I was fortunate to receive not only a daybed, but also compassion. Then my journey went to The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, which, at the time, was only too willing to help young girls part with their children.

"Then, it was only to go out and find work. And, because I am quite impenetrable, I always had a comeback for my fellow workers when they, more or less gruffly, alluded to my growing stomach.

"Christmas was approaching, and my child would be born the first part of January. So, as others were filled with the joyous expectations of Christmas, I withdrew and hid behind the doors of my cubbyhole. On Christmas Eve, I went to bed early. 'It was, after all, just an evening like any other evening. Away with thoughts about how Christmas used to be at home in Bornholm!'

"I corresponded with my parents, and I told them that I managed and was well. That was all lies. I felt awful, but why bother them with that? It was my problem, and I was going to handle my misery alone.

"On January 1, 1949, I entered the hospital in labor and was the victim of the same cold treatment as all other 'loose birds' who had brought on their own predicament. No charity.

"On January 2, 1949 my daughter was born. She weighed 7 lbs., 7 oz. and was 18 inches long. I was placed in a six-bed room with five properly married women. They received visitors, gifts and congratulations. I turned my back on the world, concentrating my attention on the little being who had been lent to me for just a few days.

"On the fifth day, a forbidding nurse appeared to announce that the adoptive parents had arrived. In a flash she snatched the cradle and drove it away. It was not until later that it dawned on me what had happened. I did not even have time to say good-bye to my nameless little daughter.

"Unfortunately I had caught puerperal fever, and was 'given permission' to spend another six days with the proper ladies, and to listen to their babies' coos and cries. The screen which had been placed between us to separate me from them did not obstruct sounds. I felt the screen had been placed there to prevent my infecting them through exposure. It was horrible.

"But I made myself tough. I tried to suppress the memory of the sight of the nurse as she propelled the cradle away. It was all over now, I thought. Physically, it was all over, but psychologically it is still my nightmare. This year, on January 2, my daughter turned 40, if she is even alive. I could be a great-grandmother. It is the not knowing that hurts the most.

"Later I was married, and, in 1956, I had a beautiful set of twin boys whom I love above everything on earth. They have made me a grandmother, and I have nothing to complain about. Really.

"When their father and I were divorced, I had to tell them that they had an older sister. Fortunately, we have been able to talk much about her. But, I will never have peace of mind until I know that she lives and is well.

"Two years ago I found new hope. I heard of 'Stamtræet,' a national association of biological parents/adult adoptees/brothers and sisters. The association seeks to help mothers who want to find their children, as well as adopted children who want to find their biological parents.

"The association was started by Lillian Molin, who herself, until two years ago, was in my situation. At that time she found her son. That has given me new hope.

"Now that I am about to retire, I help Lillian at the association as much as I can. She has undertaken a huge task, and she did it because she knows the hardship of living with not knowing.

"The association has grown to 300 members. I do the office work while Lillian spends hours listening, serving as spiritual counselor, psychologist and social counselor in the adoption jungle. The telephone bill is enormous, and the phone rings at all hours of the day and night. Lillian, who is 61 years old, has not had a day of vacation since she started the association. In return, she puts in a 15- to 16-hour day.

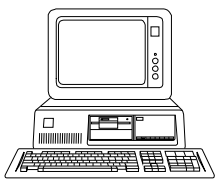
"Neither Lillian, who has been a social worker and is used to talking to people with problems, nor I had any idea of the number of such mothers existing in Denmark – nor of the depth of their distress. Mothers who, like myself, were forced to give their children away, and who have only one dream: the reunion.

"'Stamtræet' has two yearnings. One is that others will help; the need far exceeds the capacity of those presently running the association. The other is that 'Stamtræet' will shoot branches, and that local associations will spring up throughout the country.

"When one is totally devastated and no longer feels capable of carrying this painful secret, it is a long way to Copenhagen, if one lives in Northern Jutland. It takes strength to pick up the phone and cry out to a stranger, and strength is an unknown luxury to those who know that, somewhere, there is a human being walking around, a being once carried under one's own heart." ***Ende***

This article was originally published in a 1989 issue of the Danish magazine, Familie Journal. *It is reprinted here in an English translation which was rendered by Eriksen Translators of Brooklyn, NY. A copy of the original, Danish-language article was provided to* GD *by Karin Bierstein of McLean, VA, to whom we extend our most heartfelt thanks.*

***Stamtræet** founder **Lillian Molin** may be reached at **Folkets Alle 37, 2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark**. – WLG*



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(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.

December 3, 1990

Dear William!

My daughter just had her first visit with her birth father and four of her siblings. She was very happy and all loved her very much. She is not alone; now she has eight half-brothers and -sisters on both sides. There is a lot of sad stuff I still have to deal with, but when her birth father accepted her, my healing process began.

I plan on taking her to Germany someday to meet all her aunts and uncles and many other relatives.

Thanks you very much for publishing *Geborener Deutscher*®. I love reading all the news, and now, after reading your article entitled "Am I German or American?" [GD *issue #8* – **Ed.**], I wonder if my daughter feels more German or American.

– Hildegard Sanders
Renton, Washington

January 5, 1991

Dear Mr. Gage,

First of all I'd like to say thank you for all your help. The advice you gave us was the key to finding my mother.

My girlfriend spoke with you on February 21, 1990 and you told her we should contact the Resident Registry Office [*Einwohnermeldeamt*] in Germany. So, the following day, we call the Resident Registry Office that morning and gave the man my mother's name, and he gave me her address and telephone number.

After speaking with that gentleman, I was very nervous, but I called the number he gave me and, sure enough, it was my mother's. I was surprised that my mother did not speak English, but I said to her, "This is Jörg, your son," and she understood that.

I hung up and called the American Red Cross here in St. Petersburg, Florida, and explained the problem; they found a volunteer who could speak German who called my mom and talked with her. She said my mother was very happy that I had searched for and found her.

I tried to call her again later. She knew a girl who spoke English. We have called each other and written letters. Finally, on September 19, 1990, I met my mother for the first time. My mom and brother flew from Germany to Tampa, Florida, and stayed for three weeks.

I know now I have a sister, also. I have not yet met her, but I have written to her. My brother's name is Stefan, and my sister is Carmen.

– Thome (Jörg) Klein
Pinellas Park, Florida

Search Journal

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a week before the wall opened. She and her husband have become good friends of ours during this time, and I still take instruction from her. She has been involved in my correspondence with Marga on an intimate level, and she has experienced the emotional highs and lows along with me and my wife.

So, I began writing my letter, got it translated to German, and sent it to my mother on February 6th. I waited, and waited, and then on March 16th Cheri called me at the office and told me I had a letter from Marga, with lots of pictures! She could not read any of it, but I knew it was a favorable response since she had sent pictures. Then Cheri told me I was in for a surprise: I had a sister! From the writing on the backs of the photos, Cheri could read that her name was Monika, that she lived in Canada, was married and had two grown twin sons.

(When I had discovered Marga's name and birthplace from the INS documents, I wrote to the Magistrat for additional information regarding her and her family. I had later received a birth certificate for one of her sisters, a marriage certificate for her parents, a death certificate for her father, and no indication that she had married or had any other children. So, I surmised that I was her only child, that she had one sister, her father had died, and that her mother, who would be 79 years old, was still alive and probably lived with her. My records search, however, had proven incomplete because I did not write to each Magistrat office in the nearby towns of Kriftel and Goldstein where additional information was on file. As I was to later discover, Marga had two sisters, two brothers, a daughter [my sister Monika]; her mother, my Oma Paula Hack, had died in 1974.)



Michael Taylor with his birth mother, Marga (r), and her sister, Renate, in Bad Soden, (West) Germany – Sept. 1990

So, I hurried home that evening to read my mail. It took me some time to translate, but I had a good understanding of what the letter said within a couple of hours. The next day, Saturday, my instructor translated it for me exactly. It was a very nice letter, somewhat tentative (you have a copy of it now). Marga said that, yes, "*Ich bin die Frau, die Dich vor 37 Jahren geboren hat.*" ["I am the woman who gave birth to you 37 years ago."] I thought it significant that she made no claims on me; she did not call herself my "mother". She told me of the very hard times which led to her giving me up for adoption. She was only 20 years old when I was born; my sister was two. She expected me to reproach her in my letter, and I did not. She wrote that she knew some day she would hear from me, but that my letter did surprise her and that it took her a few hours to open it. She knew that it was from me, because she knew my last name was Taylor (she sneaked a peek at the file one day at the Jugendamt).

I read the letter over and over, and I looked at the pictures every day for a while. There were pictures of my sister and me when we were small, and pictures of Marga's trip to Canada last year. The most fascinating thing for me was the fact that here were people, in every picture, to whom I was related. I looked like these people for genetic reasons, not coincidence. This was a very unique experience for me, this realization.

I received a very long letter from Monika one week later, in English, and she told me how happy she was to find out about me. My mother called her when she received my letter, and then sent a copy of my letter with the pictures I sent. It was very emotional for me to read about our early lives and the conditions in Frankfurt when I was small. My mother's father was apparently not a very nice fellow. He drank a lot and beat his wife and children regularly; Marga and Monika will not talk about him. He only had one kidney and did not fight in the war, but he worked in a factory at that time.

After the Allied bombing of the cities in Germany began, Hitler ordered the women and children out of the urban areas in and around Frankfurt. My grandmother and her children lived on a farm with a family about 40 miles northwest of Frankfurt from 1944 to 1947 where they would be safe. When they returned to where their home had been, they found nothing standing. Millions of Germans suffered similarly. A full 65% of the buildings in and around Frankfurt were totally destroyed; the rest were damaged to the extent that they were uninhabitable. People whose families had lived for many generations in the same area now had no place to come home to. In addition, millions of displaced persons from what would become East Germany had fled to the West, creating an even more impossible situation.

Near their former house in Goldstein, our family was ***(cont. on pg. 4, col. 1)***

resettled on the south bank of the Main in a camp which was comprised by small, makeshift dwellings constructed from whatever material could be salvaged from the rubble. Life in "*das Lager*" was hard; people had no jobs, no hope, no willpower and most of all, no food. There were beatings, rape, incest and suicides. My grandmother had to support the children by working as a cleaning woman all day in a pub and a school in Griesheim. My mother helped her sometimes and worked when she could. My sister and I both were born in the camp with the help of the same midwife.

After I was born in 1953, the situation worsened, there was no work, and our family was very, very poor. The government had very few resources at that time, so there was no assistance there, either. There were, however, American church missionaries active in Germany after the war. Their functions included helping out in situations such as those which existed in the camps, but they were also looking for orphans and children of unwed mothers to place with adoptive parents in the States. They came to our little house with food and clothing and convinced my mother that I would be better off in the USA.

My sister remembers the day I left in September, 1954, and wrote me about it. As I read her account, I felt very sad for all of them. I also felt a little bit of guilt for having been the object of their thoughts for so many years without knowing anything about them. After I left them, I stayed with the church agency in Sachsenhausen until February, 1955, when I came to Texas. Monika met her husband Marcel while he was stationed with the U. S. Army in Germany. She returned to Canada with him in 1968, they got married, and her twins were born to her when she was only 17 years old. They live near Montreal now and are a very happy family.

I cannot remember a time when I did not know that I was adopted. I have an adopted sister eleven years older than me, and an adopted brother three years younger. I love them very much. My parents never treated us as other than their very own children. We were given all we ever needed; my parents made very real sacrifices to see that we received the best education possible. We were given every opportunity to pursue the things that interested us, and we were encouraged to excel and to be independent. Our house was one of very real love. So, being adopted was different, I knew, but it never really made any difference to me. I just knew that I was somehow different from the other kids; I could not explain my place of birth (how many times do we have to write this down, or tell someone this, in our lives?) without disgorging my life story. It was not really a big deal, but it set me apart from everyone else in a way.

But, I had a lot of friends, was successful in school, and I believe I have been a relatively well-adjusted person throughout my life. Once in a while, I would wonder about Germany, though. What was it like, was I an orphan, how did they know when my birthday was, were my birth parents alive or were they killed in an accident, perhaps? I never dwelt on questions like these for very long, though; I was happy, and Germany was so, so far away. It was across the ocean, it was a very foreign country with a strange language, and I had no information regarding my origins. I always felt that the subject was not one to be discussed with my parents; we did not talk very much about "life" subjects and I was not comfortable talking about them in any case. So, my early life remained a mystery to me, but one I had no real desire to solve.

I went into the oil business for myself in 1980, and Cheri and I got married in 1981. We have been very happy, and although our business has certainly had its ups and downs in the past ten years, we have been able to do a lot of things together. We travel quite a bit, and we have a modest, but comfortable house. Our first daughter, Lauren, was born in 1984, Michelle in 1986, and our son Creed in 1988. We have been very fortunate to have three beautiful children. I found myself looking at them at times, wondering where their hair color, eyes and other characteristics came from.

I began thinking more often of Germany and the mystery of my life. In the meantime, I had become interested in the history of my father's family, who were some early Texas settlers. I had done quite a bit of research on the early Taylor family, and knew a lot about them. They had been involved in nearly all facets of the history of Texas since 1813, including the bloody period of Reconstruction following the Civil War. By 1989, we had organized a reunion of the family and its connections. During the reunion activities, I felt very self-conscious and uncomfortable; I had never felt like this around the family before. But later, the realization struck me that, no matter how hard I tried, I could never be a natural-born part of that family. I think that this was the catalyst that finally set my search in motion; not to find people who cared about me and included me in their family, I already had that; but to answer the most basic question a person may have about himself: "Who am I?"

(***To Be Concluded in the Next Issue***)

No "Hero's Welcome" For Allied Commander

General H. Norman ("Stormin' Norman") Schwartzkopf, the commander of allied forces in the Persian Gulf, was characterized as a "mass murderer" by residents of Pfedelbach, the German town from which Schwartzkopf's ancestors emigrated to the U.S. in 1855.

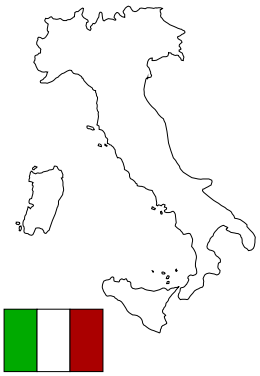
Letters of protest appeared in response to the news, as published in *Das Bild*, that the town's mayor, Jürgen Wecker, had invited Schwartzkopf to "discover his roots" in the Black Forest community as part of the forthcoming 750th anniversary celebration in July.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

Search Help Offered for Italian-Born, American Adoptees

Between 1950 and 1970, over 3,700 Italian-born "orphans" were admitted to the United States and adopted by American parents. These children are all now adults, ranging in age from 20 to 40, and many may already have felt the basic, human desire to know more about their heritage, but were deterred from pursing that desire for want of knowing where to turn for help with a foreign search.

John Campitelli of Los Angeles, California, and Diana Smithson of Albuquerque, New Mexico, are two such adoptees who have decided to undertake the arduous task of searching for their birth parents. "We have experienced how difficult it can be to approach the prospect of a foreign search when there appears to be little help in sight," said John and Diana in a recent letter to this newsletter. "We understand that searching taps powerful and basic human emotions, which can be more readily understood and easily shared by others who are in similar circumstances."



John and Diana go on to say: "We want to learn a way to overcome some of the cultural, social and linguistic barriers inherent in searching for birth family members in a foreign country. We wish, therefore, to communicate with others like ourselves for the purpose of mutual search assistance and support, based upon our shared adoption experiences as Italian-born, American adoptees.

"However, what we don't want, necessarily, is to become another organization, with formal meetings and membership or other fees. If you are seeking a reunion with your birth parents or a child surrendered to adoption, or merely wish to obtain information about searching in Italy, then we would like to invite you to write to or call either or both of us at our addresses or telephone numbers listed below. And if you know of someone who might fit this description, please let them know that we are here for them if they need help.

"We propose to keep open communication with any and all who respond, in order to share our insights, experience, frustrations, questions, and whatever advice we can each offer one another."

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