Geborener Deutscher

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

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THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

The End of the Beginning

by Rev. Dr. John Cameron

The following is the text of an address by Dr. Cameron, of the Campaign for Adoption Reform in Europe ("CARE"), given to the NORCAP A.G.M.

On the 25th of May 1989, at its Annual General Assembly, the Church of Scotland, which until recently ran the largest adoption agency in the country, declared unanimously its support for the campaign to have natural parents given the absolute right to non-identifying information about the progress and well-being of the children they relinquished for adoption. This was an historic moment, since it was the first time such an agency has accepted that natural parents had any rights whatsoever. In addition, the Church of Scotland gave its blessing to "Birth Link," the process used by Family Care in Scotland to facilitate the reunion between natural parents and their lost children. This second move was an even greater psychological step, in that the Church at last recognizes the terrible, life-long feeling of grief and regret suffered by the natural mother, and at the same time recognizes the immense importance to an adopted child of knowing its background and biological history when building a true sense of personal identity.

The debate was carried live on both the BBC Scotland and STV, and part of it will be incorporated into the 4-program series "Someone Else's Child," which is being produced by STV for the network screening in the spring of 1990. The decision of the General Assembly had a major impact on Scotland and the issue of adoption has rarely been out of the public's mind since then. It was first a major public success for CARE, the Campaign for Adoption Reform in Europe. But no one should be deluded as to the magnitude of the task which remains. We live in a country where authority, from the most petty official in an obscure local authority office to the Prime Minister and her great officers of state, have a perfect mania for secrecy. In addition, our whole legal system is biased in favor of property rights, which are seen as paramount and have the same aura as was once ascribed to the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Yet I think at this juncture we may say with Churchill that though "it is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, it is the end of the beginning."

It is the end of the beginning in Scotland simply because the issue has been raised and brought into a sphere of rational debate. For too long it lay in the grey area, in the twilight zone. The general public had been told that it [closed-records adoption] worked and certainly hoped that it did, but the whole issue of adoption smacked of adultery, and fallen women, and bastards, and [was a] fairly unpleasant topic which gentlefolk did not much care to discuss. In addition, it seemed that all of those actually involved in the mechanics of adoption had a vested interest in pretending that there were no problems at all: that adoption was the one piece of social legislation with no drawbacks; the wonder drug of social science with no unpleasant side effect. You must not think that because adopted children have the right, under Scots law, to trace their natural parents, that Scotland has an enlightened attitude to adoption, or to the plight of the natural mother. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Those who have had the experience of trying to help adopted children trace their natural parents on both sides of the border since 1975, such as NORCAP's own representative in the north, Charlotte Edwards, comments again and again on how deliberately obstructive Scottish officials are in comparison to their English counterparts. There is a grim band of Calvinism in the north country

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Search Journal

by Paul McCarthey

My story begins on November 30, 1954, in Frankfurt, Germany, where I was born as Raymond Hüttl. My mother was unable to care for me and my older brother and work at the same time, so she did the only thing possible for her at the time: she placed me in a children's home to be cared for until she could afford to bring me home. (I would like to point out that, due to a case of measles at age 3, my mother had been legally blind since then, so things were very difficult for her.)

I was placed in Belib in Dehrn for the first few years, then in Eppenheim, ten minutes north of Frankfurt. My birthmom would visit me on weekends whenever possible. My birth father, also named Raymond, was from the Boston, MA, area; he left a couple of months before I was born to come back to the United States. No more was ever heard from him, but he was aware of the pregnancy.

My birth mother was concerned about me growing up without a family. She was unable to keep me because of financial problems and a lack of adequate housing. She learned that a couple wished to adopt me who were able to provide me with the family and security she felt unable to give.

I was adopted out to a military couple and brought to the United States. They also adopted a girl from Gießen and another boy from Hamburg. So I now had a family. I was five at the time.

While growing up, I did all the things boys are supposed to do, like Boy Scouts and camping and all the family things. My adoptive brother and sister were great and we had a nice childhood. We were all told we were adopted and if we wanted to search for our birth parents, it was fine to do so.

My search began on April 1, 1988. I was already married with three sons and a daughter from a previous marriage when I decided it was time to find my "real mom." Thus, Leonie Boehmer and Bill Gage (who publishes the newsletter, *Geborener Deutscher*) entered in to our lives.

We wrote to secure my immigration papers, and other sources to secure information on where my family now was living. We had learned from papers from Germany that my mother had married a service man just before I was adopted and had two other children by this man and had moved to the United States. The papers said nothing of my older brother, however. (At the time, we assumed that "Josey" was a girl—not knowing that in German, "Josey" is short for Joseph!)

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with an unrelenting attitude toward sin: that its rewards are visited on future generations. These harsh mullahs of the Celtic twilight have no insight into the loneliness of a solitary adopted child looking for its brothers and sisters; no mercy and no compassion for the heartbreak and the longing of the teenage girl driven by impossible circumstances into parting with her child. As you may already suspect, the right to seek natural parents is simply a codicil to our laws of inheritance; it's there because of the only law that matters: the law of property.

Yet there is a sea of change in the public attitudes, but it is associated with the emergence of the most outstanding generation of young Scottish politicians this century: Gordon Brown and John Smith in the Labor Party; the Olympic athlete Menzies Campbell in the Liberals; James Sillars in the Scottish Nationals; and, above all, the great Tory mandarin, the Scottish Secretary of State, Malcolm Rifkind. Social legislation has been passed and action taken in the twilight zone in the last couple of years which would not even have been contemplated under such self-seeking Scottish secretaries as George Younger and the late, totally unlamented rajah, Willie Ross. It is against this background that the Church of Scotland has started to show a human face, perhaps even "the acceptable face," of Calvinism. But I would be wary of exaggerating how far this spirit of liberalism and reform has gone. I doubt whether it has penetrated below the surface of social work pool to the people who run local offices and with whom a searching victim has to deal. New Register House in Edinburgh has far more in common with the pre-Gorbachev Kremlin than the civilized portals of St. Catherine's House. Searchers have been physically thrown out onto the street, violent altercations take place between officials and lawyers, even with sheriffs. Not since the days of the medieval Church has a group of people thought themselves far above the law. In addition, so many searchers have been told that their records have been burnt (not simply lost but burnt) that I am of the opinion that the most dangerous animal is not the flying haggis, but a local authority records clerk with a match. The whole fife and the lothians must be ablaze!

Turning now to the legislation itself, one must admit that "closed adoption" is a frightfully "British law," as it panders to our mania for secrecy; it embodies our national infatuation with individual property rights. Yet for all its basic attractiveness to the official British mind, it is probably untenable in the long term. For a generation now, adoption agencies have insisted that adopting parents tell the children that they are adopted. This is because previous experiences have shown that children almost always discover for themselves, often in the most cruel and shocking way. In addition, Scotland, and in England since 1975, adopted children have had the right to trace their natural parents. With such gaping tidal breaches, closed adoption increasingly looks like a beached whale. It is completely out of the spirit and out of line with all other aspects of family law and can only be understood in terms of property law. The property rights to this little piece of humanity have been stripped away from this teenage girl, the natural mother, and the court of the land has awarded them to this infertile couple, the adopters. The reaction of adopters to any attempted contact by the natural mother, except in the most enlightened of cases, mirrors the trauma experienced when the burglar breaks into the family home. Some go to the police; most go to their solicitor and are outraged to find that it is not against the law for the natural mother to try to make contact with her child. They feel their family life has been fouled by this event in the same way people who have been burgled feel that their family home has been fouled by an alien presence. Adoption is certainly perceived by most adopters in terms of property law; in terms of the family law, it is out-of-date and looks increasingly incongruous.

Originally, the terrible burden of secrecy was imposed with the best of motives: to protect an illegitimate child from the dreadful treatment society meted out to the bastard. But the need for this, mercifully, has all but disappeared. In adoption, secrecy was thought to offer lasting protection to the natural mother, who could start a new life in a different area, confident that her "shame" was hidden forever. Again, this argument for closed adoption is hardly relevant since the child can now find her and any cover will be blown. This, however, is not the majority of natural mothers, who are desperate to have contact again with their lost child. Attitudes within society to the whole subject of the "unwanted child"—what a terrible, pejorative term which in no way describes the feelings of the natural mother—these attitudes have changed.

But if adoption is really supposed to be so open and publicly acknowledged, why does the natural mother still have to be cut out of the child's life so completely. Is she such a threat that she must, on an adoption order being made, disappear forever and never know the destination or the destiny of her baby? In spite of the plethora of arguments given to justify this continued exclusion, I suspect that at the heart of the matter is still an unconscious deception. The adopted child is still seen as the orphan lamb strapped into the skin of the dead lamb. I suspect that social workers and adoption agencies retain a caricature of the adopters as the ewes that might reject the child unless they are allowed to pretend to themselves that this child is indeed their own; the fantasy child of their own infertility.

Cutting a child away from its mother in this way is now profoundly out of keeping with all other aspects of child care. Years ago, when a child's parents were divorced, it used to be thought easier to make a clean break and one parent, usually the father, would often disappear forever and the child would never see him again. Nowadays, though sadly, this is all too commonly what happens, it is strongly discouraged by every agency involved in divorce. Fathers are encouraged to press for visiting rights, even in the face of bitter disputes and acrimonious legal battles with ex-wives. The parents are urged to put the interest of the child above their personal battles—all agree that what the child needs is to continue to love and be loved by both parents even when they can no longer live together. No doubt such meetings can be distressing for the child, but it is now generally considered far better for the child to live through that than to suffer the total loss of one parent. Mothers sometimes complain that parental visits from the father make the child cry, disturb him, make him moody, but all psychiatrists believe that this is far better than the secret sorrow and fear of losing a parent altogether.

In the same way, as Polly Toynbee has pointed out in her superb book, *Lost Children*, when a child went to hospital in the old days, visiting hours were short and infrequent. Young children were often taken far from their home for long periods of time to convalescent homes, stern matrons made parents unwelcome on the wards as they disrupted routine and, worse, they upset the children. The children cried when their mothers left. The matrons claimed that, if the mothers didn't visit, the children cried far less. It took a long, hard campaign to change the attitude of the medical profession, but eventually it was proved that the children may behave like angels in the hospital, never crying for their mothers, often suffered psychologically from the long separation. Indeed, the long-term trauma was often more serious than the original physical complaint for which the child had been admitted to hospital. Now, in the most enlightened hospitals, parents are encouraged, indeed sometimes bullied, into spending as much of the day, and even the night, as they possibly can, to minimize the separation.

In some areas of adoption, the importance of blood ties is openly recognized. When children who have been in care most of their lives are being prepared for the adoption (usually in the age range 5 to 15), they are often taken, step by step, through their family history in an extended series of sessions. Many of these children have been deeply damaged, some have suffered particularly harrowing experiences, but the social workers feel the most serious lack in the children is having no history, no family. These children are encouraged to remember everything that has happened to them and social workers use their files to build up a picture of exactly where the child has been cared for and they piece together his memories into a coherent history. Thus, the child goes off to his new and final home taking with him at least as much knowledge and understanding of himself as the staff of the institution can provide. That, to me, is an enlightened, humane and civilized approach.

But when we turn to the subject of children adopted at birth, we enter a time warp and travel back half a century. There is an atmosphere of half-truths and deception. Adoption workers say that they try to make adopters understand the importance of talking to a child about its natural mother and father, but they know that this rarely happens, and no attempt is made to see that it does occur. Indeed,

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the whole system of closed adoption seems to encourage the adopters to shut the door on the child's origins as soon as they bring him home, and settle down to a near-pretense that the child is entirely their own. At best, adopters are given conflicting messages. On the one hand they are encouraged to bring up the child as their own; on the other hand they are encouraged to help the child speculate about his mother. What are they supposed to do? Most feel impelled by their own needs to opt for pretending the child is theirs and has no history of his own.

Having studied the subject for many years and read a vast amount of research literature from America, Austral-Asia and Europe, I am profoundly convinced that closed adoption as a system does not work well. It fosters an air of secrecy, mystification and deep unease about the child's unknown, unseen mother. It usually leaves the child feeling it has no anchors, no blood relatives on earth. Is eliminating the natural mother really in the child's best interest? Do we seriously believe that, when we so obviously do not believe it to be the case in any other circumstances? We are deluding ourselves here, not just the child. We are believing our own propaganda. We want it to be true and we feel if we keep repeating it, in the end it will be true. Like Pooh Bear and Arthur Scargill, we long to be able to insist: "Anything I say three times is true!"

It seems to me beyond dispute, and supported by research literature in every area of family care and child development, that it is healthier for an adopted child to be brought up more like the child of a divorce. Unhappy circumstances have forced upon him a complicated family life -- but it is not made easier by artificially cutting away part of that complexity. Just as in divorce, it does not help a child to lose its non-custodial parent, however difficult and painful visits may be, so one must doubt whether an adopted child's life is made better or easier by obliterating his parents and his roots. Wherever possible, the adopted child should keep some contact with his own, natural mother and family. He should know exactly who she is, in order to know who he is. Above all, closed adoption is totally out of the question when a colored child is taken in by a white family. The child must have access from the start to its own colored relatives.

An adoption order, as a present, should guarantee custody of the child to the adopters—there could be no questioning of the finality of that order. The adoptive parents would need the security, rather than live in a limbo of uncertainty where a mother might reclaim her child. But having once established that rock-like foundation for the relationship between the adopters and the child, then the child should keep some contact with its natural parents and brothers and sisters. Natural parents, at the time of the adoption, should be encouraged to seek some access to their child. If there were disputes or problems, this access would be agreed by the courts as in similar circumstances in all other areas of family law.

It would not, of course, be the perfect upbringing. No one would choose to complicate a child's life unnecessarily. But, like the children of divorce, death or other disaster, these children have no perfect option open to them. They have two identities and it is not helpful to them to try to cover up the problem. Just as the child of divorce is torn between loyalty to two parents, so the adopted child knows himself to belong to two families, even if one family is invisible. It might well be that an adopted child will find meeting with his natural mother hard to deal with, difficult to accommodate in an otherwise-orderly life. He may not appear to enjoy the visits; they may unsettle him for a few days. But it is better for the child to face the truth than invent fantasy he may never rid himself of for the rest of his life.

We must not forget that a very large number of children nowadays have a complicated set of relations, and from the present divorce rates, it seems unlikely that we shall return to the time when virtually all children had a straightforward, two-parent family. But, in fact, it was only for a relatively brief time, from the end of the First War 'til the beginning of the '70s that the two-parent family was the norm. For death, especially in childbirth, used to break far more families than divorce does currently. Throughout history, children have had half-brothers and -sisters, relations of dead parents, step-siblings and their families to contend with. Conflicts of loyalties, difficulties with different sets of antagonistic relatives have always been the very stuff of that family life. I cannot really see that the lonely adopted child with his orderly, adult-oriented life and padded surroundings is really in a better position than if he were encouraged to have contact with his brothers and sisters, his grandparents, his natural mother and father. For he will have brothers and sisters -- that is one thing about which we can be pretty sure. His natural parents may have had many inadequacies, but they were not infertile, and in the vast majority of cases, one of them, at least, produced other children. We tend to overlook the state of affairs and treat the innocent brothers and sisters of the adopted child with the same callous disregard we afford his natural mother.

It would be foolish not to admit that the bottom line here, as in every other aspect of adoption, are the attitudes of the adopting parents. These are often colored by unresolved grief centering on their own infertility. Adopters certainly require help, support and counselling in dealing with this problem. We should in no way underestimate the heartache felt by infertile couples: it is a profoundly sad situation. But their unresolved grief cannot be the central issue in adoption: that cannot be the ultimate argument for continuing closed adoption. CARE holds that the adopted child is the key figure in the issue. Brutal as it may seem to the adopting parents, it is better for everyone -- even themselves -- if they are helped to face up to and become reconciled with the feelings of grief and inadequacy. Infertility is a heavy cross to bear and those who are not so afflicted can only dimly imagine what it must be like.

Yet, if in the future, access were standard practice and an automatic precondition for embarking upon an adoption, I doubt whether many adopters would shrink back. This was the argument in the past, when agencies were desperate for anyone to take children out of institutions. There is, today, an acute scarcity of healthy, newborn babies and those adopters who succeed in being chosen know themselves to be extremely fortunate. Indeed, any prospective adopter who could not tolerate the thought of allowing the child access to his mother ought to be regarded with grave suspicion as to their motives and likely attitudes towards the child they are taking on. If the natural mother is such a dangerous specter to them, the adopters might later on have equivocal and strange fears about the emergence of alien genes in the child.

What of the natural mother? In the vast majority of the large number of cases of reunion which have been researched or are on file, the natural mother has welcomed her lost child with delight. She has suffered keenly the separation and felt remorse and shame at having abandoned a loved baby through force of circumstances. Most later have married and, though they almost all had other children, they always felt the empty place where their eldest should have been. Once they had established a secure home of their own, their reasons for having given up their child seemed, in retrospect, hopelessly trivial. From their newfound position of happiness and security, they could not easily remember quite why it seemed so utterly impossible at the time to keep their child. Often, they had come under heavy pressure from their families, or had been rejected by their families when they were young, afraid, and alone in the world. Many appear from their descriptions of themselves to have been severely depressed at the time, perhaps owing to post-natal depression, or perhaps due to the shock of being abandoned.

When the natural mother's relinquishment experience is compared with other forms of grief, four psychologically crucial aspects appear:

(1) Although usually constructed by society as "voluntary," most natural mothers subsequently feel it [adoption] was their only option; (2) the child continues to exist and develop while remaining inaccessible to them; reunion fantasies render it impossible to say goodbye with any sense of finality, which is directly comparable with the terrible grief complications suffered in post-war Europe by the wives of servicemen reported as "missing and presumed dead"; (3) lack of knowledge creates a variety of deeply disturbing nightmares/fantasies: that the child is dead, ill, unhappy, sexually abused, abandoned, etc.; and (4) natural mothers perceive their efforts to acquire know edge about their children as being blocked by an uncaring bureaucracy; files containing the information they are desperately seeking are shuffled tantalizingly across officials' desks or stored in grey office filing cabinets a few feet from them.

What of the future? In the age of multiple access to information, it will probably be impossible to keep secrets of the type involved in closed adoption. Already in England, the information

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The End of the Beginning

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natural mothers require can be obtained with the help of private search agencies. The violent scenes in New Register House in Edinburgh suggest that the Scottish system has been broken as well. In fact, at present, I can see no reason in law why a natural mother should not approach a Scottish sheriff with a request to see her child's sealed file, claiming that she was under duress at the time she signed the forms as a teenage girl. Given the way many social workers and adoption agencies operated in the past, I do not think that it would be hard to prove duress. If this was turned down, it could be appealed all the way to the European Court of Human Rights. I am advised by a major legal figure associated with the Court that such an appeal would almost certainly find favor there. However, this is an expensive road.

It is also our understanding from our contacts in Germany that a Pan-European Adult Information Act will be introduced some time in the next decade. This would be an even more comprehensive version of the Act which at present operates in New Zealand. There is little likelihood of such an Act being brought in by a British government before then, given our mania about secrecy, but the other continental countries do not share our loony hangups and we would have no alternative but to fall into line. So I can say to the three-quarters of a million natural mothers in Britain that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

But what we in CARE would like to see immediately, and will support the colored communities in Britain in requesting, is discontinuation of the whole process of closed adoption, with all its terrible burdens of secrecy. The main opposition in this country tends to come from the Catholic Church, but their counterparts in Europe are gradually coming to the conclusion that closed adoption actually promotes abortion. This fact has been widely researched and seems to me beyond dispute. If the Catholic Church comes to accept this, I think closed adoption is finished. If this happened, and the mistakes of the past were rectified, I believe it would be a major contribution to the sum of human happiness.

I want to leave you now with a happy ending to show how things can be, even today, with love and courage and big-hearted people. Ronald Reagan has an adopted son, and when he and Nancy realized the boy wanted to find his mother, Reagan used the power of his office to track her down. There was a great rejoicing and, of course, the media got to hear of it. It was a tremendous step forward and encouraged humane attitudes throughout the USA. It made the process of reunion socially acceptable, even desirable. What I have since learned was that months later, when all the publicity died down, the boy heard from his natural father. He wished to remain in the background with no media hype, but the boy was able to meet him and his new brothers and sisters, quietly and with the utmost delight, in rural New England.

There is a long way to go, but the cause itself is just. The future lies with us, and in a humane and generous approach. Like all of you who have come here today, we in CARE believe we have made a contribution, and in spite of the present frustrations and, I have no doubt, future disappointments, that feeling is hard to beat.

Now let us have your view!

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SCOTLAND

Search Journal

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We learned of my younger brother (Donald) being in Colorado. We knew that he'd be in his 30s and, of course, his name wouldn't change due to marriage. So we set out to contact him first, or to get him to contact my birth mother for me. We wrote a letter to Donald and asked him to send it to my mother, which he did. However, due to security aspects of my birth mother's husband's work, she chose not to reply.

So now the next step was to contact Donald himself and explain the situation. His number was unlisted and so my wife went through four supervisors to get the message to him and to have him call us back. We cited a "medical emergency," and gave both names: Raymond Hüttl and Paul McCarthey, just in case he knew about me already.

He called the next day! I was on the telephone with my very own brother. My brother! I was so nervous all I could say was that my wife was doing a family tree and would he call me back a little while later when she came home so we could explain! He agreed! I couldn't wait for her to come home so we could get on with talking to him. My brother!

A few hours later he called back and my wife verified all the information, then told him who he had been talking to. I must say that Donald is the proverbial diplomat. He took it very well—and happily.

He then contacted my birthmom who, in tears, was very happy indeed! She and her husband had been praying for years for me to find them.

My birthmom called me that night and, through lots of tears, explained everything to me. She never wanted to give me up, but felt she had had no choice. Then the German government wouldn't let her have me. She called again after she had moved to the States to try and get me back, but by then I was already adopted out. All she knew was, it was a military family named McCarthey. Through the years, she always felt that she had no right to interfere and had no idea how to go about a search in any case. She said she just prayed I'd want to find her some day.

All that night my brothers and sisters called me. I now had Joseph (my older brother), Donald, Patricia, Mary & Mark (twins). I had my whole family. It was like walking into a warm, soft cloud and being encompassed in warmth and welcomed with lots of love!

My search started in Texas and due to my work, we moved to Michigan (where my birth mother's husband is from). That's probably why Donald called back. We then moved to Colorado, where Donald lives, and we are there today. Our next move will be to Washington State to be with my family.

My search lasted two years and eight days. It would have been much shorter if I could have gotten more information out of Germany sooner than was the case.

Last month [*August 1991*], I and my family travelled to Washington State to meet my whole family.

We were all welcomed so warmly and it was if I was never apart. I fit right in! I kept looking at facial features and body likenesses. I look just like them I can see my children in theirs and its such a beautiful feeling.

My birthmom and my "dad" all talked way into the night after their surprise greeting and I felt completely at peace, as if I belonged for the first time in my life.

My birthmom and "dad" were supposed to arrive on a Sunday, but all my sisters and brothers knew it would be on Saturday, the day before instead. A surprise!

So all day Saturday we were going over all the brothers' and sisters' houses 'til it was time, and then we went home.

There in the drive way was my "dad's" Van!! I was so surprised! All I could say was: oh! oh! I got out of the Jeep and walked into my real mom's arms for the first time in 32 years!! She said, "I love you, son!" Then all the family, in tears, hugged us and we talked way into the night! It was wonderful!

To my adoptive family (to my Mom, Sandy and Michael), I love you. Thank you for understanding.

I would like to say that my adoptedfamily was a beautiful and wonderful family and I love them and they are also my family. They made me who I am today. As for the way I look and my mannerisms that is biological. Some things are learned, but the way you are inside, the part that makes you you, comes from your (biological) parents; not whom you grew up with. This I can see from watching my brothers and sisters speak, and my mom, how she does things. Some things are definitely inherited!

None of this would have been possible if it weren't for **Operation Identity** and Leonie Boehmer. Bill Gage also gave much help and support, especially through the publication of his newsletter. Leonie, thank you, and you, too, Bill—thank you so much.

It was all well worth the search, and anyone seeking *can* find—all it takes is a lot of faith and the will to continue the effort. A mother does not give up a child unless she feels she has no other choice. So all of you, search or keep searching, it is worth everything if you do!

— Paul McCarthey
September 23, 1991