Geborener Deutscher®

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

Volume V, Number 2 *(Issue #15)* *Summer 1992*

Featured Letter From A Reader

Rockford, IL, Adoptee Finds Mother and Three Half-Brothers in Virginia

February 29, 1992

Dear Bill –

It has been a while since I have written to you, but a lot has happened since then. You had previously referred me to Leonie Boehmer and I had done the things she said needed to be done to continue the search for my mother.

I ended up writing to my mother's last known address in Germany and eventually received and address she had given–which was in Hutchinson, Kansas. I tried everything I could think of–wrote to Prodigy members in Hutchinson, asking them to check the telephone book, city directories, etc., but nothing ever showed up in her name. I called the public library and was told I would need to contact whomever handles the genealogical section, because no information could be given out over the telephone. I felt like I was banging my head against a wall at that point; it all seemed as though I was so close but so very far away!

One day, I was logged onto **KinQuest BBS** [718-998-6303] and happened to come across a list of searchers which contained the name of Susan Lovett in Hutchinson, KS. I called her, and after talking to her for a while, I decided to ask her help in my search because I had no other information on my birth mom. Two weeks to the day later, I heard from her: my birth mom lives in Alexandria, Virginia. After writing down all the information Susan gave to me, I called directory assistance in Alexandria, and then I called my birth mom.

The first time I called, after talking for a while, she told me I had the wrong person. I called Susan, and she told me that my birth mom was just denying the whole thing and that I should call back. When I did, I couldn't help but cry during the whole conversation, and my birth mom then told me that, yes, she had me, and we ended up talking for at least an hour.

She had been married for 34 years and has three sons. However, she never told her family that she had given up two daughters for adoption. I, in turn, told her that, after this long, why bother, because I am not calling to cause trouble, but I just wanted to know. We have had monthly conversations and she has always been very nice and never not talked when I call.

In January, a girlfriend suggested we take a train ride from here to Washington, D.C., where my girlfriend's daughter lives, and I could possibly meet my birth mother. After talking with my husband, whom I wanted to be with me, we decided to fly.

I called my birth mom and asked if it would be

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Search Journal
by Sharon Harris

Being told at age six that I was adopted made me feel very special. Special, in that I was "picked" rather than "born to" my adoptive parents. My adoptive mother always told the story that, out of all the little homeless German children, they wanted me and they " picked" me. So, as you can see, I was made aware at a very young age that I was wanted. As time went on, however, many questions went around and around in my mind. Do I look like someone? Did my mother not want me? Do I have brothers and sisters? But the one question that haunted me the most was, Why?

While growing up, I asked those questions of my adoptive parents and was told several different stories. The only thing I was absolutely sure of was the fact that I was German, my mother was German, and my father was an American G.I.

My adoptive parents were extremely uncomfortable and insecure with my persistent questions, and after years of getting no answers and feeling quite frustrated, I said no more to them about my biological family, keeping only imaginary pictures of a mother and family that were probably living somewhere in Germany in my mind.

Were they also wondering about me? Did they wonder what had become of the 15-month-old, freckle-faced, blonde child they knew from way back when? The questions, although never again asked of my adoptive parents, still remained in my mind.

The day I made my decision to find my German family was the day I gave birth to my first child. A beautiful daughter, weighing over eight lbs., was born to me, and while lying in bed, looking into those innocent eyes, I became determined that one day, one way or another, I would find the person who at my birth, probably looked into similarly innocent eyes and wondered what would become of *her* daughter.

The years passed, and as time went on, I found that, because I knew nothing about my mother, it would be virtually impossible to locate her. During the course of the next eleven years, tragedy took place in my adoptive family. My mom died of a rare and devastating form of muscular dystrophy very soon after my second child was born. Then, ten years later, my father died suddenly of a massive heart attack. Being pregnant with my fourth and last child at the time of my father's death, I was emotionally devastated.

Then, it happened. While going through my father's legal papers the day before his funeral, tucked

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WILLIAM L. GAGE

away in his safety deposit box was a sealed envelope marked "For Sharon." My brothers both knew what was in that envelope and as my oldest brother handed the envelope to me he said, "Your years of questions can now be answered." (For the record, both my brothers were my adoptive parents' biological children, and because of a promise they had made to Mom and Dad, they had agreed never to discuss the adoption with me.) In the envelope was not only my birth certificate, but my adoption papers both in German and translated into English, along with my mother's full name and address at the time of my birth, and my father's name and last known address.

Such a wide range of mixed emotions began to erupt. Not only was I feeling a great sense of loss for the only father I had ever known, I was feeling a strange sense of "rebirth" while looking at my past and finally knowing that I did indeed have a mother and father out there somewhere who whether they wanted to or not, knew of my existence. To top it off, I was also feeling a sense of guilt and betrayal to my adoptive family.

I returned home after Dad's funeral, and for two days did nothing but stare at the papers outlining my "past." After sorting out all the different emotions and thinking everything through, I decided it was time to start my search. After calling and writing to several agencies, I was referred to Leonie Boehmer in Albuquerque, NM, and it was then that the open book began turning its pages.

Within three months I learned my mother's new address, which was only two houses down from where she lived when I was born! Just prior to learning of my mother's whereabouts, I gave birth to another beautiful daughter, and I promised her along with my other three children that I would see to it that they would someday meet their grandmother.

Just before I wrote that first letter to my mother, Leonie and I spoke on the 'phone. She explained the stigma my mother had probably dealt with, and also that she might need time to deal with her past and her "newfound daughter" before she could contact me. She warned me that this might take some time. Leonie also told me that my mother probably had told no one of my existence and that the only people who knew were most likely immediate members of her family.

Now I must explain the final twist with this wonderful story. My husband is black. Not only was my mother going to have to deal with me, but how would she react to this news? Leonie gently told me that interracial marriages and biracial children (of which I have two) are sometimes not as easily accepted in Germany as they are in our country. Although I felt very strongly about my convictions, I also hoped and prayed that this news wouldn't prove to be a barrier between what I had wanted for so long, to meet my German family. And so I began, just in case, to prepare myself for the worst.

In February I sat down at my typewriter and proceeded to write the letter that I had written and re-written so many times in my mind. I explained who I was, how I had found her, and, per Leonie's advice, said nothing in that first letter of my husband and children being of a different race. After taking the first big step, I then left the rest in my mother's hands to make the next move. The time that followed seemed like an eternity. Would she write back? Would she want to get in contact with me? Would she want to deal with her daughter after all these years? Could I handle the possible final rejection that I might face? Again, I was filled with so many different thoughts and emotions.

Two weeks later, on March 7, 1992, I received the best belated Valentine's Day present ever! At 2:30 that afternoon, my telephone rang. My mother's sister, who was living in Pennsylvania, called me as a favor to my mother, acting as a "buffer." She called to let me know that my most welcome letter was received by my grandmother in Germany. She went on to explain that my mother was now living in America, and had been living in different areas of the U.S. off and on for a period of 29 years, and that everyone–all ten uncles and aunts–was elated that I had found them. What a wonderful exciting day that was! The only difficult news was that my mother, now married with a son, had never told her husband and son of my existence. Because of the horrible stigma and shame she felt for what had happened, she never could find the right time to tell them. Even though I knew the situation would be a difficult one for her, I truly believed that somehow she would find the right words and time to tell her family.

During the course of my 2-hour conversation with my aunt, I learned all about my German family. Then I set up a time to contact my mother at her place of employment to finally have the conversation that I had been waiting for all my life. The following Monday, after a very long weekend (it seemed like weeks), I made that long-awaited call. For 2½ hours, we laughed and cried, both happy and sad tears and finally, many of the questions I had asked for the past 32 years were answered.

During the first 15 minutes of our conversation, when I could finally quit crying and find my voice, I told her of her Black son-in-law and biracial grandchildren. I explained to her that even though I prayed it wouldn't bother her, I loved them more than anything in this world and, regardless of how she felt, we came as a package. Her response couldn't have been any better! She didn't care who I was married to just as long as I was happy and the children were well taken care of and loved. And, she also felt that her–my–*our* "family" would feel the same way as she did.

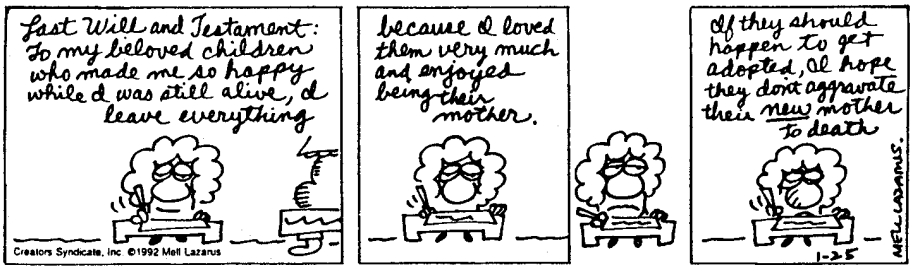
After breathing a sigh of relief, I realized that she and I were more alike than I ever imagined. We talked about or similar hobbies, found out that at one time we lived only 500 miles apart, and also discussed when we would meet. After hanging up at the end of our first conversation, I knew my mother then had to face the difficult task of informing her husband and son of the daughter born to her long before she knew them. I felt so very sad and anxious for her wondering how I would handle the same situation if it were me. The following weekend, I received a telephone call from her quite shaken husband and found that he, after the initial shock, was as excited as she was to meet me! He has made the transition from husband and father to stepfather better than I ever hoped.

After all the excitement, I wrote Leonie thanking her for the wonderful gift she provided me. Without her, I wouldn't have known where to begin. The end of this story is actually the beginning of my new life. I am scheduled to fly this next weekend to finally meet my mother again after 32 years. And the best part is that my husband and I are scheduled to fly to Germany this summer to be welcomed into my long lost family! Everyone, especially me, is so excited and I am looking so forward to finding the void in my life that I could never explain.

I couldn't have asked for a better "beginning" to a happy ending. — *Sharon Harris*
Missoula, MT

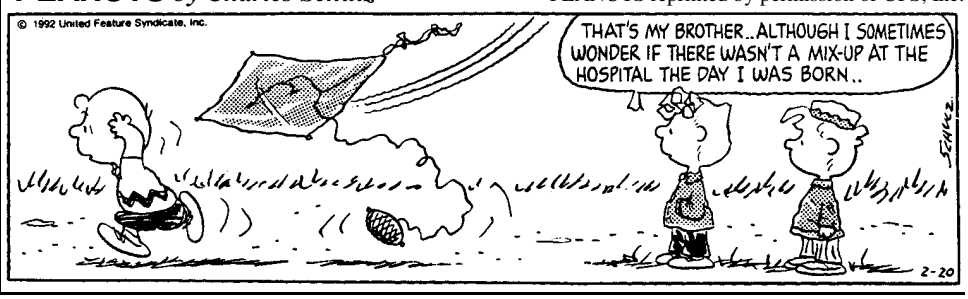
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PEANUTS ***by Charles Schulz***

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Briefe

(Letters From Readers)

November 22, 1991

Dear Mr. Gage:

My name is Patricia Lynn Mauss, and I am a German-born adoptee. Ever since I was in elementary school, I have known that I would try to find my natural mother someday. Like many adoptees, I wondered, "Why do I look like I do?", among other questions.

My search began six years ago, after I watched the Oprah Winfrey show. The show was about adopted children, and it made me cry. At the show's end, Oprah provided the telephone number for ALMA.

I wrote down the number, but never called. Why, I really don't know. Maybe it was the fear of rejection. I eventually lost the number, and a few years passed before I thought about searching again.

About two years later, when I was in high school, my adoptive mother gave me my birth certificate. Hoping to contact my biological mother, I wrote to the address on the certificate. A few weeks later, the landlord called to tell me that my mother, Hannelore, didn't live there anymore. I was very disappointed and frustrated. I didn't know where to go from there, so again, I waited a few years.

After waiting a while, I called New York City information and requested ALMA's telephone number. The agent at ALMA gave me your name and address, and you provided me with the address of the Magistrat in Frankfurt.

I wrote as you advised and within one month I received a response that included Hannelore's current address. I was so excited–this was it!



Patricia Mauss (r) & her sister, Suzanne, in Frankfurt/Main, Germany (March 1991)

My adoptive parents' reaction was as I had expected. My dad told me to proceed, if I really wanted to. My mother was at first upset, but she eventually came around.

I then Federal Expressed a letter to Hannelore. After about a week, my telephone rang. I just knew the call was from Germany; and I was right! But, instead of my mother, it was my half-sister, Suzanne, who speaks both German and English. We spoke for about half an hour. I was so nervous, I didn't know what to say, so I called her back two days later. I asked her questions about our family, and I asked her if I could visit soon.

Within two weeks, I was en route to Frankfurt. (I work for United Airlines, so my flight benefits made the trip easier, financially.)

On the plane, my thoughts were confused. What if Hannelore had married? What if we didn't like each other? Etc.

When I arrived at the airport, I had Suzanne paged. When we finally met, our greeting was not emotional, but I felt a familial bond. She took

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Be Kinder to Your 'Kinder'

Trying to change the 'child unfriendly' Germans

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by Michael Meyer

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Germans, cynics say, like dogs better than children. Few would kick a cur, but a kid? That's another matter–so much so that Germany's Parliament has proposed tough new legislation barring parents from "nagging, spanking, boxing ears or withholding affection. "Kids who feel abused can sue, fulfilling every adolescent's dram: "Gimme the car keys, Dad, or I'll tell the police you yelled at me."

Germans' chilly attitude toward children is such an established fact of life that there's even a word for it: *kinderunfreundlich*, or "child unfriendly." You quickly learn to keep your *Kinder* out of the way. My first memory of Bonn is of a woman in a fur coat knocking over my 3-year-old son–who'd gotten in her way–without even a backward glance, let alone an apology. Neighbors may call the police when children play outdoors on Sunday, a sacred "quiet day." Go apartment hunting and watch your coveted 2 BR + NU KIT go to someone who doesn't crave kids. Or take your preschooler to a bookstore. He asks to buy a comic, and the saleswoman tells him to shush–and tells you, "Can't you control your offspring?"

Der Spiegel, a German newsweekly, recently reported that as many as 400,000 children are "severely abused" each year. The German federation for the protection of children puts the figure closer to a million. "It's a scandal," said youth minister Angela Merkel recently." We Germans treat house pets better than children. "Most typically, *Kinderunfreundlichkeit* shows up as intolerance or neglect: parents who lock their kids out of the house for misbehavior, shop clerks who ignore a child trying to buy something, landlords who bar children from playing on the grass. Sometimes hostility masquerades as exaggerated solicitude. "People will ask why your child is crying in the supermarket, or tell you that he isn't properly dressed," says the wife of a foreign diplomat in Bonn. "The implication is that the child shouldn't be there at all."

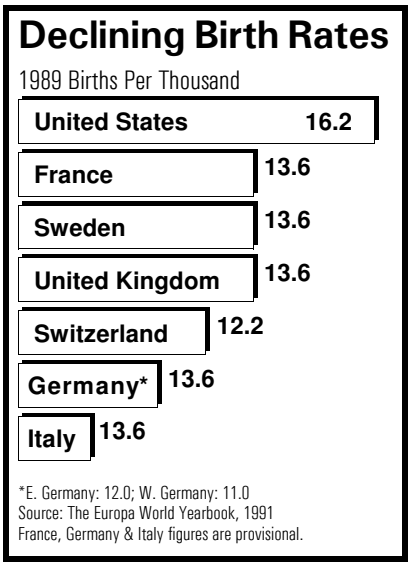
There are no easy explanations for such behavior. Many sociologists say Germans are too materialistic and too busy to bother with children these days. Housing is expensive; living costs are among the highest in Europe. To afford that shiny BMW and vacations in Tenerife or Guadeloupe, both partners in a modern German marriage must work. But since day care is almost unknown in Germany, a Mutter must drop her job and become a Hausfrau. The result is stress–and resentment. Small wonder that births are down to 1.4 per family, and that nearly half of all German couples have no children (chart).

Other explanations look to psychology or history. Some observers suggest that children, naturally unruly, offend the Germans' love of order. Others argue that Hitler's glorification of good "Aryan" mothers has stigmatized children and motherhood for younger generations of Germans. The simplest explanation may be the most troubling. As one schoolteacher in Bonn puts it, "We are not, in general, an especially open or friendly people."

The new concern for children's rights reflects a changing spirit in Germany. As Europe unifies, Germans are gradually adopting many of the more liberal ways of their neighbors, especially in such fields as education and women's and family issues. Indeed, Parliament's ne child-protection law was proposed specifically to bring German social practices into line with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by Germany last year.

One plus One: The question is whether the state can mandate attitudes. Mindful of the declining birthrate, Bonn has long encouraged Germans to breed by offering generous fertility stipends–$500 a month for the first 18 months of a child's life. Federally funded advertisements portray cuddly lovers crooning, "One plus one makes three ... We want a child." Neither the money nor the ads has made much difference. The new legislation presents its own problems. Under the new law, children will be informed of their rights from kindergarten onward–and be encouraged to report parental transgressions. "this will sow mine fields of conflict within the home," declared the liberal *Die Welt*. The larger difficulty is that Germany's child-friendly legislation addresses symptoms rather than causes. Without more fundamental change, from government-funded day care to general cultural attitudes, Kinderunfreundlichkeit will continue to shape even such things as this real-estate ad in Bonn's local newspaper: "Available: two-bedroom apartment with spare room suitable for children or dog." The "room" turns out to be a dark and airless storage space under the stairs. And they say that Germans love dogs?

Ende



Michael Meyer holds an MS degree from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and an MA in International Affairs from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Mr. Meyer has been Newsweek's Bureau Chief in Bonn since August, 1988.

Featured Letter *cont. fr. pg. 1*

okay for my husband and I to visit and she said yes without any qualms. On the day of our arrival, I called her when we got to our hotel room and she said she'd call back after her husband had gone to work. It seemed like forever!

She invited us to visit her at home. I took the gift I had bought for her and our camera. The 5-minute ride seemed like an hour! When we first saw each other, we hugged for a while and just stared at each other–both wondering who looks like whom.

When we sat down, she told us that she told her husband, and that her oldest son was on his way over, not knowing the reason. Her husband told her she should see me, that he would like to meet me, too, and that the boys should meet their sister. Wasn't that something!? I about fell off the sofa. He also said she should have told him a long time ago instead of carrying it around inside her all these years.

When the oldest son, Kenny, got there, Mom introduced us, introducing meas his half-sister. He gave me a big hug, and all he could say was, "Awesome!" The youngest son, John, came home while we were there and we were introduced to him in the same way, but at the time, he wasn't really listening–he had to make a telephone call and was on the telephone all the rest of the time we were there. Mom told him again after we left, and he said he was sorry he didn't really pay that much attention.

The next day, we met Kenny's whole family, and John was there again. Everyone was very nice to us. On Thursday, we met Mom's husband, who made us feel right at home.

The middle son, Mike, lives out-of-town and doesn't have a telephone, so we were unable to reach him until Friday night. Mike drove up on Saturday morning, but were only able to spend a few hours together because we were leaving at noon.

When we got ready to depart, my mother and I both cried, brothers' girlfriends cried, and there were tears in the brothers' eyes, too. It seems as though I have always known them, in a sense, but then again, it does seem strange to now have three half-brothers, and to know my birth mother and her husband.

We were overwhelmed by everyone's kindness and generosity. Mom didn't know for sure how her sons would handle it, especially since I have a black father. She said she and her husband had always taught the boys to treat everyone as a person, that skin color doesn't matter.

Well, my mother is very happy and so am I that this has worked out like it has. She and her husband are planning to come up this year. I talked with Kenny the other night and he and his family are going to try to visit us in July. I couldn't be happier!

I want to thank you for publishing *Geborener Deutscher*. It helped me in my search. Had it not been for the ideas and tips, I would probably not have gotten as far as I did by myself. I'm the sort who likes to do things herself and always hate having to ask for help!

— Henriette E. Cain
Rockford, IL

Briefe (Letters From Readers) *continued from page 3*

me to Hannelore's apartment. Our meeting was similar. Hannelore seemed like a stern woman who has led a hard life.

I had so many questions, but Hannelore only speaks German. Suzanne interpreted our conversations. There are still a lot of unanswered questions, but I know they will eventually be answered. I don't want to by pushy.

Since my return, we have exchanged letters. I will be visiting my new family again very soon. I plan to take a German course soon, to better communicate.

In spite of the language barrier, I know Hannelore cares about me. This year, she sent me flowers and a card on my birthday. She also told me that she never forgot my birthdays.

Although we are still strangers, I do feel a familial bond with Hannelore and Suzanne. It is impossible to make up for twenty-two years in a few weeks, but we are building a good relationship.

I am glad I fought my fears of rejection and pursued my search. It took courage and determination, but my search was successful.

Also, I was lucky, because my search was so easy–thanks to you! I want to thank you for your efforts to assist German-born adoptees in relocating their family members.

By the way, my search is not yet over. I now want to search for my two sisters and one brother, as well as my biological father. I now have more confidence and knowledge to complete the search.

— Patricia Lynn Mauss
Sterling, VA

January 17, 1992

Dear Mr. Gage,

Just today, I was handed a copy of your newsletter by my new roommate, who is a German-born adoptee. I couldn't believe my eyes. I never dreamed anything like this existed! Please sign me up as a subscriber.

I also plan to call Leonie Boehmer in New Mexico to enlist her help in finding my birth mother. I recently learned that I have two half-siblings; my adoptive mother told me.

Thanks so much for the newsletter.

— Greg Dovell
Los Angeles, CA

March 2, 1992

Dear William,

On Christmas Eve, I received, in the mail, a translated version of a letter my birth mother had sent. The letter was three pages long. Christel fully acknowledges me as her daughter. She said I can stay with her when I visit in May.

The letter contained other information. I have three sisters. The two oldest are from a previous marriage. The youngest is from her present marriage. I resemble her most. And I learned she is married to my birth father. I was so excited to read that. I really didn't think too much about him before. She said she would explain everything when I come.

Today I went to file for my passport. I realized when I left the Post Office that I had made the first concrete move for my trip. I plan on going from May 11th to June 3rd. It's hard to believe that May is almost here. That I will finally be face-to-face with my birth family.

Most of my [adoptive] family has been supportive. My brother and grandma are afraid I might not come back. I joined Adoption Network in Cleveland and they have been helpful. I went to a meeting a few weeks ago. It was an incredible feeling being in a room with other adoptees and birth mothers. I felt alive being there. We are working to get Ohio's law changed.

— Monika Rodgers
Elyria, OH



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