5th Year

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

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Adoption Information Access Law Reform Spreads "Down Under"

It began in New Zealand in 1985. In that year, the New Zealand Parliament adopted a revised statute which made state-held adoption-related information more readily and easily accessible by adoptees, birth parents, and their respective relatives. In time, the new law took effect, and since then, the results of this legislative reform have been studied by concerned professionals and legislators in both New Zealand and neighboring Australia.

In particular, in Australia, the Standing Committee on Social Issues in New South Wales conducted a wide-ranging and in-depth study of the New Zealand legislation and its subsequent effects. The Committee issued its report in October of 1989. As a result, the New Zealand law, with only minor changes, was quickly adopted in New South Wales, as well as Queensland, in 1990. These laws took effect the following year.

Common features of the new laws include:

- Equality of access for adoptees *and* birth parents with respect to obtaining information about the opposite party.
- A "pre-emptive" veto provision, whereby either party may unilaterally limit of deny access by the other party to identifying information.
- Access to *non*-identifying information, which was already available under prior statute, remains unaffected.

The laws enacted, and in particular the veto provisions incorporated therein, embody a compromise between the two conflicting positions with respect to open records legislation. It is believed that, by simultaneously opening the state-held files for access by adoptees and birth parents and also permitting adoptees and birth parents to register their desire *not* to have identifying information given out, the privacy rights of both parties will be adequately protected, while also facilitating reunions between those individual adoptees and birth parents desiring either to search or be found. *(See also article at bottom of page 4.)* ***— WLG***

Teen Half-Sisters Reunited By Their Grandmother

BRISBANE: Mardi Holst and Kristie Ferguson went to the same Brisbane school for two years without ever knowing they were sisters.

They would go to the same church on Sundays, and their homes were only two kilometers apart. ***Continued on pg. 4, col. 3***



From left to right: **Mardi Holst, Betty Kennedy & Kristie Ferguson**

EDITORIAL

REUNION REGISTRIES

I recently received an envelope in the mail containing an announcement of the establishment of a new adoptee-birth parent reunion registry called the "National Adoption Reunion Registry" (NARR) (P.O. Box 2494, Danbury, CT 0613-2494).

Needless to say, I immediately began to wonder why the Adoption Reform Movement might need another "national" reunion registry, since we already have, and have had for more than 10 years, the International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR). Had something happened to the ISRR of which I was unaware?



The fact is, the ISRR is still around and actively reuniting birth parents and adoptees, as it has since its inception. Apparently, Geraldine Kalter, the woman behind the NARR, feels that the ISRR doesn't advertise enough. She bases this opinion on the fact that, according to her, she joined three different support groups—ALMA, CUB and Joe Soll's Adoption Crossroads—before learning of the ISRR's existence.

Many of you are probably nodding your heads, thinking, "No wonder!" ALMA is a notoriously insular group which, as far as I am aware, makes no referrals to any other support groups or registries, except other ALMA chapters. I have no idea, however, why Ms. Kalter wouldn't have received a referral to the ISRR from any existing CUB chapter. (Perhaps this was a simple oversight on someone's part.) Of course, since Joe Soll is on the ISRR's board, Ms. Kalter must have finally gotten a referral to the ISRR after joining Adoption Crossroads.

Ms. Kalter is soliciting a $15 registration fee for her registry, as compared with the ISRR, which accepts registrations at no charge. Ms. Kalter has also allegedly advertised her registry in *USA Today* and *The New York Times*, but it remains to be seen how cost-effective such advertising might be. However, since such advertising is the only feature Ms. Kalter offers to distinguish her registry, it is no wonder she feels constrained to charge a registration fee.

It is the opinion of this writer that the ISRR more-than-adequately serves the need of the Movement for a passive reunion registry, and that a competing registry is not only unnecessary, but potentially harmful to the Movement as a whole.

— William Lewis Gage

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My Neighbour Is My Long-Lost Sister

For nine years, they lived only minutes apart in the same country town, never knowing they were sisters!

Eleze Patterson and Dale Foster believe in fate ... and with very good reason. They had been neighbours in the Victorian country town of Wangaratta for nineyears before they discovered that their bond was something stronger than friendship— that they were, in fact, long-lost sisters.

"We lived just minutes from each other. Our children have played together for years ... and we just had no idea," Eleze says.

Dale, who at 40 is eight years younger than her new-found sister, explains: "The funny thing is that my husband Nigel was always saying how much Eleze looked like my mother."

Like so many other adoptees in Australia, Eleze had always wondered about her origins.

"I thought about my mother all the time, especially on birthdays," she says. "Two years ago I had a really good cry on my birthday because I was thinking about her so much. There really was something missing in my life."

Eleze was six weeks old when, in 1942, she was adopted by Albert and Ruth Thomas.

"They were older parents," Eleze explains. "Mum was 52 when they got me and Dad was 60. They had married at 17 and 25, but they had Grandma living with them and she didn't approve of adoption ... so they never adopted until she died."

The joy Eleze brought to the "lovely" parents who so desperately wanted children was, sadly, short-lived; her mother died when she Eleze was eight and her father when she was 19.

A short time later Eleze married her husband Dudley and as she started her own family she began to wonder more and more about her unknown parentage.

"I started thinking more about it then," she says. "I would never have done anything while my parents were alive but seeing they were gone, there was nobody to hurt."

However, it was almost 30 years before Eleze made the move that would tell her who she really was. Following the introduction of new Victorian laws allowing her to trace her natural mother, Eleze wrote a letter to the Community Services Department earlier this year [1990].

"I carried it around in my handbag for months," she laughs. "For some reason I couldn't get motivated to post it.

"Then one day my daughter Heather was posting a letter and I got it out of my handbag and handed it to her."

Within a fortnight Eleze had a reply. On July 17, [1990] she went to Melbourne and was given a copy of her precious birth certificate and her adoption papers.

"I found my Mum had named me Helen Patricia. Just to find out I had another name, a name she had given me ... well, I would have been content with that," Eleze says, her voice trembling with emotion.

Eleze discovered she had been born at the Salvation Army home for unmarried mothers in Melbourne on January 3, 1942. And there was something else written on the adoption papers —the address and phone number of the house where her natural mother had been living at the time.

Eleze looked up the name in the phone book, "not believing it would be there 48 years later," but, sure enough, there it was with the same address and phone number.

Remarkably, it turned out that Eleze's aunt still lived at the house, and she gave Eleze her mother's phone number. To Eleze's astonishment, she also said that her mother had a daughter who lived in Wangaratta ... a daughter whose name was Dale Foster!



From left to right: **Eleze Patterson, Rachel and Dale Foster**

"I just couldn't believe it," Eleze says. "I'd known Dale for years. I'm a store detective and Nigel (Dale's husband) is a police prosecutor, so we often had to work together.

"And the really strange thing is that although I knew Dale quite well, it was always her youngest daughter Rachel I was drawn to most.

"I used to pick out earrings for her at the shop for Nigel to buy."

After the shock of discovering her friend was actually her sister came Eleze's first emotional phone call to her mother. Her eyes brim with tears as she recalls the moment when they spoke.

"I rang the number and asked for Mum and I said, `Does January 3, 1942, mean anything to you?' I could hear her saying, 'Oh, it's you, it's you.' She was so emotional. The first thing she asked me was, `Have you got the black hair?', which runs in the family and yes, I do have it."

Then Eleze had to tell Dale the news.

"I went to Nigel and said, 'Is Dale home? I have to see her.' "

Dale recalls: "It was a shock. I always had my suspicions that there was someone because when I was about 10 years old, I heard Mum and Dad discussing it.

"I'd thought about it a lot over the years ... and then to realize that Eleze was my sister! She came round and opened the kitchen door and said, `Hello Sis.' And that was it. We had a big hug and a big cry."

The most momentous moment for Eleze was her reunion with her real mum after all these years.

"My mother's crippled with arthritis, but I walked in the room and she was standing there.

"Oh, I'll never forget the look on her face– she had this big grin and we both sort of just fell into one another's arms.

"She had me for six weeks. That must have been hard, to give up your baby after that," Eleze says. "I don't feel angry or bitter about what she did.

"In those days there was really no support for unmarried mothers and she probably couldn't afford to keep me.

"I actually feel very lucky. I had a wonderful first family. And now I've found a mum who loves me still after all these years and has probably never stopped loving me.

"All I can feel is love for her because she's my mum."

However, Eleze admits she is curious about her father but isn't driven to find out who he was.

"It just doesn't mean as much to me as finding my mum. I've found such happiness now and I don't want to spoil it by finding out something I might not want to know," she says.

Now, like most other families, Eleze enjoys comparing the family likenesses.

"Before, I used to just sit there and all I could say was, `You look like me' but not go any further. Now I can say, `Well he looks like a Patterson, but she takes after my family,'" Eleze laughs.

Dale, too, has picked up family traits in her older sister.

"I noticed she used a lot of Mum's sayings," Dale smiles. "And whistle! They both whistle all the time!"

To Eleze's delight, she has taken on a whole new family. Eleze's children—Graham, 28, Howard, 26, and Heather, 23—are enjoying their new-found cousinship with Dale's three children, Christine, 23, Brett, 20, and Rachel, 8.

Eleze gives Dale a warm hug.

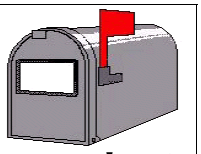
"I thought for years and years about finding my real mother. Now it has happened. And I've got so much more as well," she says tearfully.

Ende

Story: ***Suzanne Monks*** **/ Photo:** ***Viki Yemettas***

The foregoing article appeared originally in the December 11, 1990 edition of the Australian magazine, Woman's Day.

Briefe



(Letters From Readers)

June 23, 1992

Dear Mr. Gage:

I would like to thank you for the newsletters you have sent me since I wrote to you four or five years ago. At that time, I asked if there was any way you could help me find my son, who was born in Windsor, Ontario, in 1963, after I came to Canada from Germany. The good news is, I have found him after searching for four years through a birthday ad I put in the Windsor newspaper under the "Personals."

I met him on October 17, 1987. I was so nervous, I sat at the window watching for every car from 8 o'clock in the morning. The bathroom was never too far away, and I changed my clothes at least five times. I wanted him to approve of me in the worst way! We had talked on the telephone a few weeks before, but he couldn't come to London, Ontario, where I live, sooner.

My (second) husband understood my anxiety, as he is also adopted; he has been a great support to me.

When my son finally arrived, with a friend, I thought I saw my father again; he has a lot of the same features. He looks more like me than my other two children. We gave each other a big hug. I knew that he was also nervous, which was understandable.. He is a good-looking man and has a very nice personality (after all, his is my son!).

I took my family picture book out and I talked and talked. When I think back, I must say how awful it must have seemed; it's a wonder he didn't run! I thought I had to tell him everything in these few hours, in case I never saw him again. His friend was so excited that he remarked: "I wish I could be adopted, this is just great."

He wanted to know more about his sister and brother. Both are older than he. Monika always knew, well, since she was 10 years old, that she had another younger brother. Andreas didn't know, but was told by his father when we divorced that I had had a child after he was born. I feel bad that he had to find out this way. I think it is best to be honest with your children.

Since all this happened, other nice and exciting things have happened, too. Phil, my son, got married to a wonderful girl, Cathy, she is so loving and caring, and I am very happy to have her as a daughter-in-law. Phil's parents are also wonderful, very open-minded people. They adopted three children and all knew that they were adopted.

When I attended Cathy's wedding shower, I was very nervous, but soon felt at ease because everyone welcomed me and introduced me as "Phil's mother" to all the relatives. The common remark was: "No doubt about that."

My daughter, Monika, flew in from the Fiji Islands for the wedding. She was on tour around the world. Andreas was there, too; he lives right around the same area where Phil lives. ("Phil" is the name his adoptive parents gave him; when he was born, I named him "Klaus.")

The wedding was beautiful and I was very happy to be there, but it took a lot out of me. My emotions took over and at around 11:00 p.m. I had to leave. Monika and Andreas stayed right to the end.

Since then, we see each other on birthdays and other occasions, such as Mother's Day. I see him the day before or the day after; after all, his adoptive mother is his mother. I learned to respect that. I try to stay in the background. I realize that I have to respect their space. In time, we will all be tolerant enough to understand one another.

So far, Phil has not asked to meet his father, but he told me when I mentioned him, "I want to wait a while." I do want to be able to prepare myself for that time, but since I no longer have any contact with Phil's father, I do not know exactly where he is. As far as I know, he is still in Germany.

— Irmgard Mills
London, Ontario
Canada

Ms. Mills forwarded a copy of the following article, which appeared in the February 3, 1990 edition of the London Free Press*, along with her letter. The woman identified as "Erika" in the article is Ms. Mills.* ***— WLG***

Parent Finders Aids in Reunions of Biological Relatives

by Mary Malone

Truth is certainly stranger than fiction. And families are a good place to find the most surprising truths.

One group which knows this better than most is the London [Ontario] chapter of Parent Finders, a Canada-wide, non-profit support group that helps adult adoptees and birth parents uncover information about the biological relatives they've lost and, when possible, to arrange reunions.

On Wednesday nights at the Salvation Army London Citadel, they take a few hours away from busy family lives to talk about that part of themselves that very few other people can understand.

Tonight, Meg and Erika, birth mothers who found their children, tell how they managed their search, what sort of relationships they have with them as adults, and how those relationships affect their husbands and other children.

Linda and Bev are birth mothers who are still looking. They hang on every detail, sifting for tips to use in their own searches.

Larry and Lisa are adoptees who have met their birth parents. Their adoptive parents were leery, at first, but they co-operated in the reunions. (Studies show that adoptive parents who help in the search almost always strengthen their ties with the child they raised.)

Larry and Lisa joke, with a heavy dose of seriousness, about how they now juggle the new rewards and demands that suddenly materialize with two families.

Across the table, Agatha is an adoptee who's still looking; her adoptive parents feel threatened by the search. She asks how to get them on her side.

Jim Bobier chairs the meeting. He grew up thinking adoption was someone else's story, until he found out, to his complete surprise at the age of 40, that his mother had another son and a daughter who were adopted away.

His successful search for his siblings took almost three years and called for patience, caution and sensitivity to the unpredictable range of feelings that spring up with long-buried secrets.

Despite legal amendments for more open governmental records, the search is frustrating and emotionally wrenching. Searchers spend years fantasizing about the lost relative. ("She'll be beautiful, successful; she'll love me on sight.") Unfortunately the truth, when it comes out, can be jolting. Larry's recommendation is blunt and practical: "Expect the worst. That way, if you find something good, it's a bonus."

Lisa was put up for adoption during a temporary family breakup. Her parents later reconciled, had more children and tried, but failed, to get her back. Then Lisa found them. Last year she met a whole new family of brothers and sisters.

At the Wednesday night meeting, she passes around the prize that everyone hopes for—a package of family of other people who look like her.

Although successful reunions are the goal, the people here know from painful experience that they aren't always possible. Sometimes there is just to much anger, unrealistic expectation, or crippling terror of change.

There are also thousands of adoptees who want to leave well enough alone and birth parents who are terrified of being found. While Parent Finders respects their rights to keep their secrets, they promote the idea that, once everyone involved in an adoption becomes a consenting adult, it may be time to take another look at decisions made so long ago.

Erika waited until her son was 23 before she started looking. She found him through a happy birthday ad in the personals column.

"We talked at first over the phone. I didn't want to push. I waited for him to come to me. I emphasized that it was his adoptive parents who brought him up. I just wanted him to know who I was, and then it was up to him. It worked out okay. His family who brought him up, my husband and family that I have now, we've all met each other and we socialize occasionally. We haven't all become intimate friends, but that's fine.

"Every year of his life, I had made him a birthday cake on his birthday and I ate it by myself. Last year, I had it with him and his brothers and sisters. His feeling about the whole thing is just, as he said to me once, 'Well, I guess you can never have too many friends.'" ***Ende***

Mary Malone is a magazine writer and communications consultant based in London, Ont.

Clue from photo album leads to mother-daughter reunion

LONDON: A 53-year-old Perth mother of three who was adopted when she was nine months old has been reunited with the English mother she never knew.

Mrs. Brenda Strahan of Second Avenue, Mt. Lawley, was adopted during World War II and grew up in Northern Ireland with her new parents before migrating to Australia 25 years ago.



The emotional search for her mother began when a document fell from the back of a photo album belonging to her adoptive aunt and she discovered her surname was Robinson.

"I had no idea what my surname was. I needed this before I could start tracing my mother," she said

She knew that she had been born in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, so she contacted the town's register office for details and found her mother's name was Isabelle Robinson and an address.

A week later, Mrs. Strahan flew to England with her husband David. When they arrived in Dewsbury, they discovered the house in the address on the birth certificate had been pulled down.

They went to the local newspaper for help and an article appeared about the search.

Mrs. Strahan's cousin, Mrs. Marjorie Booth, of Sandcliffe, recognized the family history and contacted the paper with details of her mother, now Mrs. Isabelle Auty, and her extended family.

There were tears of happiness when the mother and daughter were reunited after nearly 53 years.

Mrs. Strahan discovered she had five half-brothers and sisters and numerous nephews and nieces.

Her grandmother, Mrs. Charlotte Thompson, had the task of looking after her and the rest of the family. Mrs. Auty was pressured into having Brenda adopted.

"I kept her with me for about nine months and didn't want to let her go," she said. "I remember Brenda being taken from me and put on the train."

"I asked if I could keep in touch with her but I was told Number It was so upsetting and I often thought of Brenda and what happened to her but never thought I would see her again."

Mrs. Strahan said: "I always wanted to know why I had been adopted and now I know the truth. I know I was loved and that it was hard for my mum to give me up." ***Ende***

The foregoing appeared in the March 22, 1992 edition of the Perth Sunday Times. *The accompanying photograph depicts Mrs. Strahan and her birth mother, Mrs. Auty.*

Sisters Reunited *cont. fr. pg. 1*

It was not until March this year that Mardi, 18, and Kristie, 15, were reunited by a loving grandmother who for years had dreamed of reuniting her dead daughter's two children.

Betty Kennedy's daughter Donna was only 18 and single when she had Mardi.

"She was very reluctant to give her up but she realized it was best for the baby's sake," Mrs. Kennedy said yesterday. "She strongly regretted it afterwards and she wanted to get Mardi back."

Mardi was adopted by a Brisbane family but Donna and Betty Kennedy never stopped thinking about her.

Donna later married and gave birth to her second child. Kristie was only five when Donna was killed in a car accident.

Mrs. Kennedy raised Kristie, and it was always her intention to search for her daughter's other child when Mardi turned 18.

In October, 1991, Mrs. Kennedy set the wheels in motion, without telling Kristie about her search for Mardi—to save her from any disappointment.

She contacted Jigsaw and another agency that help bring birth relatives and adopted children together.

The sisters met via the telephone on March 11 this year, and when they learnt they had both been at Loreto College in 1989 and 1990, the excited girls searched school magazine pictures for photographs of each other.

Kristie and Mrs. Kennedy live at Sunnybank, and three days after the phone meeting they drove a mere 2.4 km. to Mardi's Browns Plains home. "I was just so happy I couldn't believe it at first," said Mardi.

Kristie, who is in year 11, and Mardi, who is studying business, have become firm friends.

Above all, each had desperately longed for a sister.

"They are happy and smiling all the time," said their proud gran. ***Ende***

The foregoing originally appeared in the May 10, 1992 edition of the Perth Sunday Times.

Adoption Blackout Popular

SYDNEY: More than 1,000 people have lodged applications demanding their identities be kept secret from family members trying to contact them under new adoption laws.

Since the veto register was set up in December [1990], 1,114 people have paid to have their names included because they do not want contact with either the children they gave up or, in the case of adopted children, their natural parents.

People who break the veto face a $2,500 fine or six months' jail.

But hundreds of adopted people and birth parents are expected to take advantage of new adoption information laws which came into effect his week.

Under the controversial Adoption Information Act, adopted adults now have access to their original birth certificates, while birth parents of adoptees have access to the amended certificates.

Family and Community Services Minister Robert Webster said the authorities expected more than 12,000 applications for birth certificates during the next year.

Weekend openings of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Office for the past three weeks had resulted in 641 applications from people seeking the certificates.

"This will provide the means for each to trace one another should they want to," Mr. Webster said.

"But a contact veto register has been established for adopted people or birth parents not wanting contact from one another."

Vetoes can still be lodged by making an appointment at any Family and Community Services Center.

Applications for birth certificates cost $117 while those who use the veto register are charged $50.

Mr. Webster said he was confident the new laws provided the balance between access to information and protection of privacy.

The authorities would review the legislation's effectiveness in the next six to 12 months. ***Ende***

The foregoing article appeared in the April 3, 1991 edition of The Western Australian.

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