6th Year

Geborener Deutscher®

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

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The Urge to Outlaw Hate

Germany, America and the free-speech debate

by Charles Lane (in Berlin)

To combat the neo-Nazi violence that cost three Turks their lives last November, the German government reached deep into its legal arsenal. Among the weapons: bans on four neo-Nazi groups, the proposed criminalization of symbols and phrases widely used by skinheads and, just last week, police raids on homes and offices of singers and producers of skinhead music. To silence two neo-fascist leaders, Bonn even dusted off a rarely used law which permits Constitutional Court to strip individuals of their civil rights. In the reaction to the crackdown, one response was conspicuously absent. Except for other rightists, almost no one rose to defend the neo-Nazis' right to express their views (as opposed their right to commit violent acts).

To an American observer, it seemed oddly ... un-American. In the United States, civil libertarians armed with the First Amendment have attacked state, local and campus restrictions on racist expression. Last June, in a probably fatal blow to most "hate speech" codes, the Supreme Court struck down a Minnesota law that, in language similar to German codes, banned cross-burning, the Nazi swastika or other symbols "which arouse anger, alarm, or resentment in others on the basis of race, color, creed, religion or gender." The court was upholding once again this widely (if sometimes grudgingly) accepted view: democracy requires giving even the most repugnant ideas a hearing.

Germany's experience reminds us how unique this American legal tradition is, even by the standards of stable, thriving Western European democracies. The degree of freedom a country allows its citizens is a matter not only of legal theory but of history and political culture. And the past weighs heavily on German concepts of freedom. As in much of continental Europe, Germany found its way to democracy only after a long experience with iron chancellors, princes and dictators. Above all, there was Hitler, whom Germans willingly followed down the road to crime, war and national division.

As a consequence of the Nazi era, both the victorious World War II Allies and the postwar West German authorities remained deeply suspicious of mass mobilization and unrestrained public debate. The country's 1949 Constitution, drafted under Allied tutelage, established the same freedoms as the U.S. Bill of Rights. But unlike the American charter, it also permitted the government to make exceptions to these freedoms to head off serious threats to the constitutional order, public morality—even "individual honor." Germany specifically outlaws the display of the swastika, the Nazi salute and denying that the Holocaust took place.

These restrictions, as well as West German postwar anti-Nazi education, have taken deep root in the culture, making many Germans queasy about any sort of open expression that might be interpreted as anti-Semitic or nationalistic. Prominent Germans recoil in sincere horror when it is suggested that, in a democracy, even Nazis should get to say what they want. "When someone waves a swastika, it is as if he is saying 'God Bless Auschwitz'," says Freimut Duve, a member of Parliament from Hamburg. This "cannot be allowed." Laws muzzling Nazis, and the will to enforce those laws, are widely seen as elements of a *wehrhafte Demokratie*: a democracy that can defend itself, unlike the Weimar Republic. "We can't be so liberal that we are killed by it," says Justice Ministry spokesman Klaus Meyer.

Old slurs: In effect, proponents of U.S. hate-speech laws want America to make itself more like Germany. They offer a similar rationale: that America has its own not-so-distant history of racism,

Continued on pg. 3, col. 3

Search Journal

by Cyndi Miller

Ever since about the age of ten, when I discovered I was adopted, I"ve wondered about my biological parents and why they relinquished me. I mulled over the possibilities, which gnawed at me continuously throughout my life. I vowed to myself that one day—yes *one day*, which seemed an eternity away—I would at least *try* to see if they were still alive. My efforts may be put forth in vain, but I knew in my heart I would never be satisfied until I made some attempt at discovering them. A one-in-a-million chance perhaps? Who would ever know? Who would ever think that after so many years of never knowing *anything*, that my search would be concluded in the rewarding way it has. Certainly, not I. I have truly been blessed.

At the age of 24, I took a vacation to Germany and visited the town I was born in. At that point in time, the only information I had was my former name, birth date and birth place. I had recently learned of four older siblings as well, but I had no idea if my parents were still alive. On that vacation I did not know where to begin and so did not pursue the issue. I did not feel comfortable to show up on someone's doorstep and announce myself as their long-lost daughter after 24 years. However, upon my return, I was convinced that at some point in time I would contact an agency to see if my mystery could be solved.

About 1½ years later I met a co-worker by the name of Irene who supplied me with some information on adoption. If it had not been for her help, my entire dream may never have transpired. I thank her from the bottom of my heart, sincerely. Through a series of letters to various people, I eventually connected with Leonie Boehmer. I truly thank her too, for all she has done for me. Without her, this may never have been possible.

Leonie was very quick to respond to all of my letters. Soon after she and I had made contact, she called me on the telephone to let me know my parents were still alive and living in Erlangen, the town where I was born! I couldn't believe that, after all of these years, they both remained where I had been born! I was absolutely ecstatic when I received her phone call. She gave me their full names and addresses, two separate ones—I assumed because of a divorce. I could not wait to write them!

Now the question was—*where* do I begin? How do you write a letter to someone you"ve never known and introduce yourself as their daughter?! It wasn't easy. I tried my best and supplied them with just the very basics about myself—name,

Continued on pg. 4, col. 1

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AZ Woman Is Reunited With Her German Birth Mother

By William F. Rawson
(Associated Press)

PHOENIX, AZ (AP)—It took German-born Deborah Sedillo nearly a year to find the mother she had never known and then another month to get up the nerve to write to her.

"I found her last May," Mrs. Sedillo said as she waited for Monday's plane that brought her mother, Ursula Sossenheimer, from Frankfurt, Germany, to Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. "It took a month to write to her because I was afraid of her reaction. But then when I did write, she wrote back and was just as happy as I was."

They have corresponded through an interpreter since July and began planning the reunion almost at once.

Mrs. Sedillo, born in Germany in July 1963, was adopted by an American family when she was only a few weeks old. She has lived in Tucson since 1970.

"As far a I know, from what my mother has told me, when my father found out she was pregnant he split," Mrs. Sedillo said. "She keeps telling me she didn't want to (give up her child) but she already had a son and she wasn't married. She just couldn't handle it."

Mrs. Sedillo said she always knew she was adopted and had been born in Germany, but all she knew of her mother was the name on her birth certificate.

"I always wanted to find her," she said. "I always wanted to know what she looks like, if I look like her. As I had children, it became more and more important. It was like a void, something was missing."

She began her search in July 1991 by contacting an organization known as Trackers Unlimited [sic], Mrs. Sedillo said. They put her in touch with a woman in Albuquerque, N.M., Leonie Boehmer, "and I don't know how she did it but she found my mother."

The first letter from her daughter was a shock, Ms. Sossenheimer said shortly after her plane landed.

"I thought all of her life about it (finding her) but I never thought it would happen," she said. "And now it all has happened so fast."

Ms. Sossenheimer said she had no trouble recognizing the daughter she had not seen for more than 29 years.

"I knew her at once," she said. "I knew she was my daughter."

Since she doesn't speak German and her mother speaks no English, Mrs. Sedillo said they have corresponded through one of her husband's co-workers, Trudy Cody, who moved from Germany to the United States in 1959.

"I may have to have to ask Trudy to take a couple of weeks off from work," Mrs. Sedillo said. "I don't know how we're going to communicate. It's easy to say, 'This is a table,' or 'This is a chair.' But it'll be hard to express feelings, to say everything I really want to say."

Mrs. Sedillo said she wants to show her mother as much of Arizona as she can during her two-week visit before Ms. Sossenheimer returns to her home in Wiebersbrunn, which is near Frankfurt.

She said it took a while for her adoptive mother, who lives just down the street, to get used to the idea that she had found her biological mother.

"She tried to hide it but she was, I guess, kind of jealous. Maybe she was afraid I was going to push her away. Now she says she understands and she is going to have us all over for dinner," Mrs. Sedillo said. She said her adoptive father died in 1986.

She said she also has had some explaining to do to the two oldest of her four children.

"My oldest, she's 11, thinks it's great that she's going to have a new grandmother," Mrs. Sedillo said. "Kristyn, she's 5, knows I"m going to have two mothers and she really doesn't understand it."

Ende

German Couples Apply to Adopt Bosnian Infants

Among the alleged atrocities being committed in the former Yugoslavia by Serbian fighters in their civil war with Muslims in the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as many as 20,000 Muslim women are reported to have been systematically raped—and thereby impregnated—in connection with the process of "ethnic cleansing."

Of the children resulting from these rapes that have been born to date, *Panorama*, a German documentary, reports that only about ten have been rejected by their mothers. Rolf Bach, the leader of the central adoption bureau in northern Germany, reports (as quoted by *Panorama*) that he has received "at least 50" applications from German couples to adopt these rejected infants.

Mr. Bach said also that similar numbers of applications have been received by about 100 other adoption placement offices throughout Germany.

Ende

Search Journal *by Iris Kathryn Stewart*

My name is Iris Stewart and I was born in Schweinfurt, West Germany, in 1955. I was taken from my birth mother while she was at work. My birth mother could not find anyone to keep me while she worked, so she took me to work with her and hid me in the bathroom. The police came and checked the bathroom and found nothing, but when they walked out of the bathroom I started crying. They came back in and took me from my birth mother.

Then I was put up for adoption because my birth mother's family would not help her take care of me. The adoption agency told my birth mother that her daughter would be well taken care of and that they had a family that wanted to adopt her.

I was adopted in 1957 by Mr. and Mrs. John Hunt. After I was adopted and before I reached the age of 6, my adopted parents started beating me and locking me up in an outside storm cellar. I started to run away and going to jail instead of going back to the adoptive parents because they wanted to abuse me. I told the police about the abuse as the years went on, but they would not do anything about it.

My adoptive family had a black maid to clean the house named Louida. She told the Hunt family, if you don't want her, give her to me. But the Hunts did not want anybody else to have me. All they seemed to want to do is make me suffer.

When Christmas came around, I did not get anything, but John and Cara, the Hunt's two boys, got things for Christmas. The Hunts just made me sit there and watch.

This went on until I was about 16 years old. Then the Hunts sent me to Gaineville School for Girls. It was just like a prison. I stayed there for 6 months and then I started a life of my own. I got married at 18.

I always wondered who my birth mother was, so, in 1991, I wrote a letter to Leonie Boehmer asking if she could help me find my birth mother, and she did. She did some checking, but nothing positive came up. Then she told me how to write to the Social Security Administration and asked them to forward a letter to my birth mother.

I wrote in that letter how much I would love to meet and see her and mailed that letter in March 1992. I did not hear anything. Leonie had told me that it might take 3 to 6 months, and sometimes one does not get an answer. But in October, 1992, my real sister called me and told me to call my birth mother, because she was in shock. So I did. I didn't know what to say and I told her that I would try and come to Alamagordo, NM, where she happened to live, that weekend.

So I went and we met the first time since February 1955, when I was born. It has been 37 years since I last saw my birth mother. I have two sisters and two brothers.

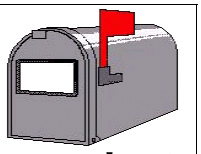
I would like to thank God for allowing Leonie to help me find my birth mother. All I can say is, don't give up on your search, it just takes time. I gave up one time, but that was because I was trying to do my search on my own. So the next time I started, I found Leonie to help me. She is a very sweet and understanding lady.

Just remember, when you are searching for a loved one, it takes time. Leonie, I would just like to say "thank you" for your hard work.

If it wasn't for your help in my search, I would still be searching.

— Iris Kathryn Stewart

Briefe



(Letters From Readers)

January 3, 1993

Dear Mr. Gage:

I contacted you back in September of 1992 and was able to access information from your BBS [**KinQuest BBS**, *(718) 998-6303*] that helped me to eventually locate my birth mother. The information about the CompuServe Phone*File system is specifically what I used.

I had also attended an ALMA meeting in Manhattan in early October and that was emotionally helpful as well. I had received an offer from CompuServe for a free month and a free hour of services as well as a $25 coupon for premium services (such as Phone*File). The same day I received the package from them I was in touch with my oldest sister and had my mother's name and telephone number. I called her the very next morning (I didn't call the same day due to the time of day being late) and I have been in a euphoric state of mind ever since.

My mother had tried to establish contact a number of times through the years (I found this out and knowing this helped me to decide to search) and her response on the telephone during that first call, after I had her sit down and tell her that I was her son was, "I've been praying for this all my life." Needless to say we both broke out in tears. My wife was in the room with me when I made the telephone call and she was able to hear this as well and she also started crying. I am 46 years old and had never seen or spoken to my Birth Mother prior to this.

Our relationship has blossomed since then. I found out that I also had a younger sister and a lot of Aunts and Uncles and many cousins. I spend many *hours* on the telephone with my mom and my sisters attempting to catch up with lost memories.

We had a rather overwhelming family reunion on December 4th. My wife and I flew to Florida (my mother and my younger sister live there close by each other; my older sister flew down from Illinois) and it was perfect.

I wish to sincerely thank you for the information that you make available on your network and know that this is only one of many happy reunions you helped to make possible. I am relating this story to you in an effort to motivate the continued accessibility of your BBS and the publication of your newsletter so that other adoptees may someday find the happiness I have.

I received your latest newsletter and read Mr. Hartman's story with much emotion. I am very happy for him. Now that I have been reunited with my birth family I am trying to obtain as much family information as I can. I know there are many software programs available to organize family trees and would appreciate any information or recommendations you may be willing to offer. Once again, much thanks for your help.

Sincerely yours,

-- Jacob Reisberg
Freehold, New Jersey

January 13, 1993

Dear Mr. Gage,

Thanks for your letter dated December 14, 1992. I just wanted you to know that on December 22nd, I found my son in Washington, D.C. To say the least, he's shocked. He was, however, glad to get my call.

Have a happy and healthy new year!

-- Sara O'Connor
Ocoee, Florida

January 14, 1993

Dear Mr. Gage:

It was a pleasure speaking with you on the telephone tonight. I have to say that I really admire you, and Leonie [Boehmer], for the help that you give to people like me.

I read over every one of the newsletters that you sent to me, and I think that I could practically recite each on back to you. I have always felt like I do not belong with the family that adopted me, but I guess you hear that from adoptees all the time. I know they love me, and I really could not have asked for a better life than I have had, but somehow a part of me has always been missing. Through your newsletters I see that I am not alone, that there are many other people who feel as I do.

I was happy to read the article about German citizenship. I was naturalized when I was four years old because my adoptive mother did not want to continue to have to fill out the forms for me. I always wished that she had waited and let me make up my own mind, but if I can find my birth mother, it would appear as though I will have a good chance of obtaining dual citizenship, as stated in your article.

I have tried to obtain information about my birth mother from Germany, but the answer always comes back, "We cannot release that information due to the American Privacy Act." I began to feel as though I would never be able to cross over that barrier, so I decided to take a different route. I called **Adoptees In Search** [*Contract Sta. #27, POB 323, Lakewood, CO 80215*], who are listed in the telephone book, and they referred me to you, and you, in turn, referred me to Leonie. She obviously has had a lot of experience in this type of endeavor, considering the compliments that she received, as reported in your newsletters.

It is hard for me to believe that it is almost impossible for a person to obtain information about their own family. I have a mother, a father, and other siblings who have the same blood running through their veins that I do, and I have not been able to obtain any information on them. That just does not make any sense.

My adoptive mother, Nancy, told me a little about my birth mother, Ingeborg. It seems that my birth mother had a job and would take us kids, to her friend's house during the day while she worked. The Social Services found out about this arrangement and came to her friend's house. They told this woman to have Ingeborg call them when she came to pick us up, which she did. She was informed that she was not allowed to work, that her work was in the home. She could not afford to do this, so the next day she went to work as usual, and we went to her friend's house, as usual. The Social Services came back to the friend's house and picked us up. That was the last time that she ever saw us.

Somehow Ingeborg found out where I was placed, in Baumholder, and went to my adoptive parents' address. She knocked on the door and when Nancy opened it, Ingeborg said, "You have my baby and I want her back." Nancy quickly closed the door on her and rushed to the telephone. She called my adoptive father, who, in turn, called the Social Services. The adoption was rushed through the courts and finalized the next day.

About a year later, my adoptive parents were informed that Ingeborg was pregnant again, and they were given the option of adopting that child as well. At that point, however, Nancy was herself pregnant and my parents declined the offer.

It makes me sick to think that the government has the right to destroy a person's family, and when one of them tries to reunite their family, the government throws roadblock after roadblock in front of them so that they may never be together again. I cannot imagine the pain and anguish that Ingeborg felt the day she went to pick us up and we were gone. I just hope the separation will not last forever.

-- Tracy Bean
Centreville, Virginia

Outlaw Hate *cont. from pg. 1*

so the harm done by symbols and slurs, and the risk of resurgent oppression, outweighs the rights of racists to speak their minds. But the Supreme Court implicitly rejected this interpretation when it overturned the Minnesota law. America was from its inception a constitutional republic with a First Amendment (albeit one that didn't apply to blacks) and a respect for individualism. In stark contrast to Germany, America national crises—the Civil War, the Depression, the civil-rights revolution—have led, broadly speaking, to the expansion of rights, the enhancement of the Constitution's legitimacy and, in the case of race, greater sensitivity about offensive words. This record has helped confirm Americans" confidence in the political culture's ability to withstand, and learn from, the free play of ideas—even bankrupt ideas. Says Yale law professor Bruce Ackerman, a specialist in German and American constitutional law: "We trust the good sense of the people over the long run. The Germans don't, for good reason."

So, should Germany's neo-Nazis have free speech? The German taboos have helped confine the worst forms of race hate and authoritarianism to the political fringe, at the probably (but hardly unbearable) cost of making mainstream debate blander and, possibly, less frank. Still, they have hardly eliminated all such feelings from the culture, and probably never will. The legal bans seem more a measure of the newly unified country's unfinished political development than of its democratic strength. More significant, perhaps, are the recent "chains of lights," in which hundreds of thousands of Germans have demonstrated their abhorrence of neo-Nazi thoughts and deeds. Whether in America or Germany, the answer to hate lies not in snuffing out words and symbols but in changing hearts and minds.

Ende

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height, weight, hair and eye color and who I was. I didn't want to reveal much in the event they didn't respond. I enclosed three photos of myself at different ages in each letter, signed, sealed and sent them off to Leonie for her to translate into German. I know some German, but it had been a long time since I had used the language. I didn't want to appear ignorant in my first letter. First impressions are lasting! Leonie mailed them for me and now the waiting began.

There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't count. I tried to approximate when they would receive the letters, how long it would take for a response (hopefully not *too* long), and how long for their letters to return to the U.S. I was beside myself! I was so anxious! I had already prepared for the worst. That was all I could do—prepare for the worst and hope for the best. I prayed and I prayed and I prayed some more. Every day that passed was utter torture! Would this agony ever cease?

•

About four weeks after Leonie sent my letters, I received my first letter from my father. When I saw the envelope in the mail, I lit up like a magnificent fire works display! I was smiling ear to ear and jumping up and down! I could hardly calm down enough to open the envelope and read the letter.

I was surprised that his letter was written in fluent English! What a shock that was! He explained that he had worked at some point in his life as a translator, hence his fluency. I was certainly relieved too, I must admit.

He told me in his letter that ever since I had been given up, he had always wondered about me. He had never wanted me to be given away. He had, at one point, attempted to find me, but his leads were too slim and money was not sufficient. He wrote that his father had always said, "just pray and some day we will find her, you'll see."

I was almost in tears reading this. The impact that this hit me with was tremendous. Here was my father who had always wanted to find me, but was never able! Wow! I certainly never expected this reaction! It made me feel very good inside. He briefly touched upon the circumstances surrounding my adoption and explained that he would go into more detail in future letters. He also informed me that I had four older sisters—Angelika, Sylvia, Claudia and Barbara. I was the fifth and youngest sister. The five of us were born within five years. "Ah ha," I said! That may have had something to do with my adoption. And yes, it did.

In the weeks that followed, I received letters from my sisters along with photos. It was so eery to see pictures of people who resembled me. In my entire life I never had that experience. It was really exciting! I discovered in writing to them that we had very similar interests, goals and life experiences. This was just too weird! I couldn't believe what I was unfolding here.

Finally, after about three months, I received a letter from my mother (my parents *were* divorced). This was a letter I wasn't expecting, due to the time that had elapsed. I was *very* surprised to see it. It was a nice letter as well, telling a little about herself along with some photos. She explained from her side the circumstances that led to my adoption. It was also an eery, interesting letter" one which I needed to translate. She knew not a word of English.

During the early days of our correspondence, we decided that I would come over in the summer—July to be exact, and meet everyone. This was a chance of a lifetime" one I was not going to miss! *Nothing* was going to stop me.

•

Finally that day of a lifetime arrived. None too soon, I might add, either. My father and my oldest sister, Angelika, were going to meet me at the airport. Would I be able to recognize them? Would they recognize me? They assured me the airport was small enough so that they would have no problem and the pictures I sent would help.

As I exited the plane and was walking to collect my baggage, I kept thinking, "How are they going to greet me? Will we find each other? What will they say?" After I collected my baggage I walked out and, sure enough, they were correct—we had no difficulty recognizing one another! My father looked at me and said, "Cyndi?" and proceeded to throw his arms around me and lift me off the ground. I then saw my oldest sister and hugged her and grinned ear to ear. I was overcome with joy! What a feeling of ecstacy!

We then drove off and went to Angelika and Claudia's apartment where I was going to stay for the next two weeks. We all had so much to tell one another! Even though I was utterly exhausted after not sleeping for 30-some hours, it didn't stop me from engaging in some of the most interesting conversation. Who could sleep at a time like this, I ask? Obviously *not* I.

Later that evening my sister, Claudia, the third-born, came home and I met her. We talked for hours. She knew some English and I some German, so we were able to communicate sufficiently. It was such a nice feeling getting acquainted with everyone and seeing in person how much we all resembled one another.

The following day I went over to meet my other two sisters, Sylvia and Barbara (the second- and fourth-born, respectively), one brother-in-law, one nephew and my mother. When we saw one another we smiled and hugged each other. It was a very warm feeling. We all sat down and then talked.

With this group I had more difficulty communicating. They knew virtually *no* English and myself only limited German. Angelika was present and since she spoke English the best, she communicated what we ourselves couldn't. Again, I found it very interesting talking and getting to know them all. I found it especially interesting how much we all had in common!

In the days to follow I was kept extremely busy with all of the parties to attend, sights to see, friends to meet and activities to do. I think I returned much more exhausted than when I left. I wouldn't trade any of it for the world, though. I was brought to beer-fests, traditional parties and outdoor activities. Fortunately I brought a cam-corder with me to capture a lot of it on videotape. I also carried along a still camera. Between my sisters and myself, we must have taken 15 rolls of film! I savor every picture though! Every time I look at them I can't help but smile and remember the *best* time I"ve ever had in my life.

During the course of my stay, I did learn *most* of the circumstances surrounding my adoption from both of my parents. It was nothing that I hadn't half-expected; nothing came as a real surprise. It was just good to finally *hear* it.

Eventually my vacation came to a close. Two days before my departure, a big party was thrown in my honor. The entire family was present, as well as numerous friends. It was a party I'll *never* forget! I"ve never had so much fun. It was just too good to be true. I would be sad when it all ended.

Unfortunately the day to return to the U.S. arrived. I was not happy to leave. How could I be when I did nothing but have the time of my life? Everyone was so loving and fun and everything I"d hoped they be. My prayers were *more* than answered.

My sister Claudia and her friend, Uwe, brought me to the airport for my return to the U.S. We talked of what a tremendous time we had and how sad we were to part. It would not be easy for any of us to separate"—especially knowing it would be quite some time before we reunited. As I got ready to leave, I gave them both a strong embrace 'good-bye' with an achiness in my heart I knew would linger there for a while. I then boarded the plane slowly, not wanting to walk in that direction. I vowed in my heart that I would return again as soon as possible and that this wasn't "the end of the world"—it was really the beginning of many new relationships. I kept repeating this to myself as my plane took off and my eyes filled with tears.

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One week after my return home, Claudia and Uwe called me. It was during that phone call I learned Claudia cried too, during my flight departure. Now I didn't feel so alone!

Since my return to the U.S., I"ve received numerous letters, cards and gifts from all. The support I"ve received has been *wonderful*. I have written to all as well. It appears that there will always be open and loving relationships with everyone. Next year, two of my sisters and my father plan to visit me—and none has been to the U.S.! I am surely looking forward to this!

All in all I must say it was a very successful trip and encounter with everyone. My adoptive parents here have taken the news well also and have been very supportive of my efforts. I couldn't have asked for more all around. Like I"ve stated earlier, my prayers have been answered 1000-fold!

— Cyndi Miller