7th Year

Geborener Deutscher®

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

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Back to the Future

From the *Atmos Reporter*, the newsletter of the Atmos Energy Corporation, Dallas, Texas—August 1993 edition.

On February 1, 1993, Ingrid Smith, receptionist a Lincoln Centre [at the Atmos Energy Corporation in Dallas, TX], started on a journey into her past. Smith, who is adopted, wanted to start this journey for a long time. Even though she loved her adoptive parents and was very content in her relationship with them, she still had a driving curiosity about her birth parents, their background and medical history.

Because smith had a copy of her birth certificate she knew her birth mother was from Germany. Smith said, "I told myself I probably would never find my birth mother—that hiring an agency to locate her would be too expensive. I postponed doing anything for several years."

Over the years Smith's desire to know her birth family grew. "I finally couldn't stand it any longer," said Smith. "When I called the adoption hotline listed in the Yellow Pages, the representative referred me to a non-profit organization in Irving called Search Line of Texas." Smith said Search Line referred her to a Ms. Boehmer in New Mexico, who specializes in German adoptions. She said, "It took me two weeks to finally get up the courage to call Ms. Boehmer and she asked me to send her my birth certificate—the one thing I had from my past."

Smith said, "I fretted for nearly two weeks before Ms. Boehmer called to tell me that my birth mother had been issued a U.S. passport in 1968 and that she had changed her name." Ms. Boehmer asked her if she knew anyone on the police force. "I told her I had a friend who was on the police force in Flower Mound," said Smith. "She suggested that I ask my friend to do a computer search to see if [my] birth mother lived in Texas."

The very remote chance that [her] mother lived in Texas turned into a positive reality. "On April 27, at 9:30 a.m. my friend called to say that my birth mother lived in El Paso," she said. "My friend had not only located my mother but had talked with her, telling her that I would respect her privacy if she preferred it that way, but that I really wanted to make contact." About 15 minutes after the police friend's call, Smith's mother called. Smith said, "We cried and cried. We got rid of a bundle of tension with that first call." Three weeks later, Smith and her husband flew to El Paso to meet her mother and younger half-sister.



Smith and Ingrid Brown, her birth mother

Smith arrived in El Paso on Thursday and stayed through Monday. Every night she and her mother talked until three in the morning. Even though they do not look alike, they have very similar personalities, have the same likes, interests, hobbies, outlook on life. "My mother is a licensed European seamstress, artistic, creative and interested in fashion and I definitely have the same interests," she said. "It seems like genetics carry with you no matter where you go."

After looking at family pictures, Smith and her mother decided that she looks like her maternal grandmother.

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The International Scene

Irish Man Seeks Court-Ordered Access to His Birth Certificate

DUBLIN, Thursday, June 24, 1993 — A man who was adopted and wants to find out about his natural parents and to see his birth certificate began proceedings against the Adoption Board in the High Court yesterday.

The man, who is now married with grown-up children, says he believes a lot of his psychiatric problems have been caused by knowing nothing about his natural parents and in particular his natural mother, and that he had been refused access to his proper birth certificate.

He states that he has no desire to cause difficulty or problems for his natural mother or any member of his natural family. However, his adoptive mother and his own family, and his psychiatrist, believe that his mental health would greatly improve if he was made aware of his natural family and had access to his original birth certificate, he says.

Mr. Justice Morris is being asked for orders quashing a decision of the board allegedly determining the issue of his entitlement to trace the connections between the entry relating to him in the Adopted Children's Register and the corresponding entry in the Register of Births.

The man, in an affidavit, said he was born in the 1940s and placed for adoption by an adoption society.

When he grew up, he went to England and when he wanted to marry, he wrote home for his birth certificate and discovered he was adopted. He married, but even then, he did not have a birth certificate and had to rely on his adoption certificate. His adoptive father, who is now dead, was against him inquiring about his natural parents.

He made such inquiries but the Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths told him it would not give him his birth certificate because he was adopted. He contacted solicitors, who wrote to the Adoption Board, the man said in the affidavit.

The board said in a letter that the Adoption Acts did not provide for any right of access to birth records by adopted persons.

The board, in its statement of opposition, says that before the beginning of the proceedings and in correspondence, the man's request concerned solely the production of his original birth certificate. By way of preliminary objection to the proceedings, the board alleged they were premature. It was usual to see if the natural mother and adopted person both consented to the obtainment

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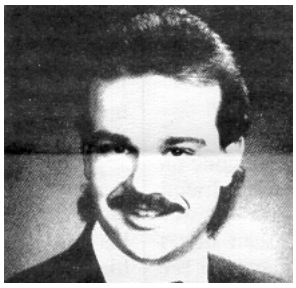
Remembering

by Jeff LaCure, MSW, LICSW

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Part One of Two

I entered the world February 2, 1960, a German citizen. At the age of 10 days, I left the hospital, healthy and alive. However, unlike so many other children at the hospital who went home, I went to an ophanage. The "Youth Office" as it was known then, was in Frankfurt. I don't remember the orphanage. I never saw pictures. I can, however, remember as a child, wondering what the "building" I spent my first 7 months of life looked like. I still do.



My parents told me that when they adopted me, I did not know how to be held. I just sort of laid there, limp; legs and arms sprawling, wanting to be held—just not knowing how to. Was I ever held in the "building"? And, if so, by whom? My parents told me that when they first saw me I had big brown eyes, a gentle smile and a large flat spot on the back of my head. Further reinforcing what was already suspected. Apparently, I wasn't held much and was left lying on my back. (I've always slept most comfortably on my stomach.)

My parents could not have children through birth, but because of adoption, they could have children of their own. They went through the battery of intrusive tests, together, yet, doctors could never determine the cause of their infertility. "Back then," there was very little fertility treatment available, however, the medical community could determine that both appeared fertile, but together were unable to conceive a child. Good thing, or I wouldn't have been their son. I almost wasn't.

While stationed in Germany as part of the United States Army, my parents decided to pursue adoption, or maybe adoption decided to pursue them. They were notified of a child who was available. But at the last minute, the child's birth mother decided to parent her child. I was the next available child; German by birth, American in spirit.

As you might expect, I don't remember being adopted. I was told I was a happy baby, a baby who loved attention and wanted to be held—constantly. As I got older, I can remember my mother telling me that as a baby and toddler I would watch everything she did. My eyes would follow her around the room. Hearing this as a child, I didn't know why I may have done this, nor, did I give it much thought. Today, however, I wonder if I watched my mother so much because one day when I wasn't watching, *my birth mother disappeared*.

Growing up adopted—reminds me of the old cliché: "If I only knew then what I know now." As a child I don't remember thinking much about adoption. Oh, sure, I asked questions, and my parents were very open and honest with their answers. I just don't remember thinking that being adopted was that big of a deal or that different. After all, it was all I knew—for the time being.

My parents used to tell me the story with amusement of when I was 4, and we (my mother, father and I) were leaving to go and get a bite to eat, when I exclaimed proudly, "I know what it means to be adopted. It means going to get hamburgers." The fact of the matter being, my family and I frequently talked about "adoption" during meal time or when we were dining out.

In my own way, I was trying to understand what being adopted meant. I would have to wait about twenty more years. Not because my parents did not tell me—they did. Not because my parents and I didn't talk about adoption—we did. But, because it would take that long to admit and recognize that being adopted and most importantly, being surrendered did have an impact on me. That being surrendered did help shape who I was and who I became, both in positive and painful ways.

Even though I did not know why at the time, I would frequently cry or feel "empty" after an ending. I can remember crying or at least feeling like crying when my grandparents left after visiting for a few weeks. Or if a friend moved, a family pet did not work out. Bambi's mother dying. Growing up in the military lifestyle, I moved or my friends moved with familiar frequency. They left. I would even open Christmas presents slowly, just so Christmas wouldn't end. I still do!

Looking back, I was a happy child and I had a great childhood. My memories are satisfying and peaceful. However, there were "those" times—those unforgettable times when I would feel an emptiness. Not often, not for long, but an emptiness—a familiar, reliable emptiness that still remains. Unpredictable and subtle, painful and confusing, the "emptiness" could make me feel alone in a crowded room. Even the love and support of my parents could not take away the emptiness, and to their credit, they did not try.

I remember at the age of 5, my parents were tucking me into bed one evening, just like every other evening, except this evening would be different. They told me I was going to have a brother. We were going to adopt him. I was so excited, so ready. To adopt a brother felt natural to me. That is how I joined my family and that's how my brother was "born" into ours. It is still one of my most cherished memories and he is still one of my most cherished people.

I still remember holding him, my brother, my "real" brother. I didn't sit there at age 5 and wonder about my adoption, my past. I was captivated by the moment. I know now, however, that somewhere inside the 5-year-old boy from Germany, was the infant, the infant who always wondered.

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Endings always felt different for me than for most of my friends—or at least it seemed that way. Growing up in a military family for much of my childhood, "endings" occurred with great frequency; like a reliable friend, they were always part of "the lifestyle." Either I moved, or one of my friends moved. Moving was a certainty. Actually, we—my friends and I—were bonded together by the fact that we knew at some point our fathers would get their "orders" and off they would go to the next state or country. We knew up front that we had timelimited relationships. There was not going to be any of the traditional go-to-school-and-graduate-together friendships. We truly lived on borrowed time. Generally, we had four years together at best, frequently, three; sometimes, far less. Knowing this, what remained were the questions of when and who would leave first; and of course, "how much notice" would there be? Usually, there was not a lot of notice, not a lot of time. Four weeks if you were lucky. Four weeks to put closure on the relationship. Four weeks to prepare.

Now, for some, four weeks may not sound like much time, and really it's not. However, as an infant, I did not have the luxury of "time" to prepare. I can only imagine that I didn't understand at all what changes were taking place, or why. I do, however, imagine that four weeks may be far more time than I received as an infant to prepare for this sudden and frequently wonderful life change. I'll never know.

As a fourth-grader, I knew what was happening; this was the military and people moved all the time. People were destined to come in and out of your life, and they did. I didn't understand, however, how I felt. I knew it hurt to leave or to be left (although, looking back, it was "easier" to leave than to be left). I knew that I would "distance" myself every time I was about to move or when a friend was about to leave. I could be so cold, and act as if I didn't care or care about them. Inside I was truly hurting. I just did not know why I would respond this way every time there was a loss. I wanted to, but I wasn't ready for the answer. Now, I know why.

As a child, I always sided with the "underdog." If someone was going to be picked last for a team, then I would frequently pick them first or second for

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Jeffrey R. LaCure, M.S.W., LICSW, is the founder and director of Adoption Support and Enrichment Services, Framingham, MA (508) 875-6603. Mr. LaCure edits and publishes* The Adoption Advocate *and is the author of* Adopted Like Me*, a book for children about being adopted. "Remembering" appeared originally in* The Adoption Advocate *as a 4-part series, beginning in the Winter/Spring 1993 issue. Jeff was adopted at the age of seven months.

Briefe (Letters From Readers)

July 12, 1993

Dear Mr. Gage,

Thank you for sending me the seven back issues of *Geborener Deutscher*® and the book list. [*All subscribers to* GD *receive copies of all available back issues, as well as a copy of the most recent edition of the annual* Readers' Guide to Adoption-Related Literature. — ***Ed.***]

After I talked with you on July 2nd, I called Leonie Boehmer. I was amazed to find out she does what she does! [*Leonie Boehmer is a registered Independent Search Consultant (ISC) who assists German-born adoptees and the birth parents of German-born adoptees to become reunited. — **Ed.***] I have sent her copies of all my adoption papers, and she's going tolet me know how we will proceed. I was feeling quite lost until I spoke with both of you.

The "Search Journals" from your newsletters are so inspirational. I never knew there were so many German-born adoptees like myself.

I was born 29 years ago in Landstuhl, Germany, near Ramstein AFB. My adoptive parents told me I have three older (half-)siblings.

My decision to search came when I realized my birth mother might not be able to contact me if she wanted to. I always thought she could find me if she wanted to, but a friend of mine who adopted a child through an "open" adoption told me that was not the case. If I wasn't on a registry such as ISRR [*International Soundex Reunion Registry, P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, NV 89702 — **Ed.***], she (my birth mother) might not be able to contact me at all. Hence, my decision to start the search.

First I called two support groups in Denver, CO. One woman recommended Virgil Klunder's book, *Lifeline* [Lifeline: The Action Guide to Adoption Search *by Virgil Klunder — **Ed.***]. I got your name and Leonie's name from that book.

I always thought Germany was so far away it would be next to impossible to contact my birth mother, especially since I speak no German. (I know my birth mother speaks English.) I had no idea where to begin. I thank God for Leonie and her help. I feel like I've begun a very exciting journey.

The newsletters have given me such hope. To hear of so many successful reunions is so wonderful.

Thanks again for all you do. I'll be looking forward to more newsletters in the future.

Sincerely,

— Nikki Watson
Ft. Collins, CO

And I will be looking forward to sending them to you! Truth be told, I had no idea when I started this venture that it would last as long as it has. I am gratified by the response of you and others like you, who take the time to write about their search and reunion experiences. Thank you!

— WLG

What's in a Name Greatly Interests German Officialdom

You Can't Just Call Your Son Sascha, a Couple Learned, Without Suing the State

by Daniel Benjamin
Staff Reporter of
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The following article appeared in THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, issue of July 15, 1993

BREMERHAVEN — Olaf and Silke Witte had a simple desire: To name their son Sascha.

German officials had a simple reply: No.

They demanded that he also have a middle name. Otherwise, they insisted, it wouldn't be clear that Sascha is a boy.

In Germany, where every change of address has to be registered with the police, where regulations govern the hours you can beat carpets outdoors or run a washing machine, and where a court has even ruled on the placement of garden dwarfs, why shouldn't naming the baby also be a matter of interest to the state?

Names that officials find odd can be rejected out of hand. Second names can be required—as in the case of little Sascha—to nail down a child's sex. (Though Sascha is a common boy's name in Germany.) Changing a name is a complicated procedure that can cost $1,500. And the surname married people take is a perennial subject of controversy and even legislation.

Monikers Non Grata

For determined, self-expressive types like the former U.S. National Basketball Association player World B. Free, musician Frank Zappa (father of Moon Unit and Dweezil) and even Hillary Rodham (no hyphen) Clinton, Germany would not be hospitable—to their names.

"It's awful, the overadministration in Germany," grouses Mr. Witte.

Mr. Witte said he didn't want his son to be teased in school over a middle name as he had been teased about his own, which is Heinz. And Mr. Witte, a highway patrolman, is the persistent type. "I don't let myself get bossed around," he says.

The state plays rough, too. For the first 13 months of his life, Sascha barely existed in the eyes of Germany. He did, however, have a passport, a pink sheet of paper that gave his name as "WITTE, WITHOUT." A friendly official has supplied the document so the Wittes could take the baby with them to Denmark on vacation.. The name game, which became a minor *cause celebre*, finally ended for them in March, when a newspaper headline declared: "Sascha Can Be Sascha." Acting as his own lawyer, Mr. Witte had fought decisions at a local bureau of vital statistics (which Germans call the registry), by the state of Bremen's interior department and by a court. He finally won on appeal.

Gott, God Forbid

Mr. Ahnert says names like *Gott* (God), *Zufall* (coincidence), and *Bierstuebl* (little beer bar) are recent rejected examples of this parental willfulness. Curiously, one name that many Germans believe is *verboten*—Adolf—isn't. Guenther Bahrdt, who is in charge of another Berlin registry, says the name can't be done away with: "Otherwise, we'd have to forbid names like Khomeini and those of other bad statesmen. That couldn't be."

But imported names, especially American ones, are a major source of trouble. Samantha, Mr. Ahnert recalls, nearly enjoyed a popularity boom in the '60s and '70s because it was the name of the character Elizabeth Montgomery played on the TV series "Bewitched." But German mothers wanted to spell it "Cementa." Registry officials, linguists as they are, figured the name would go over like a ton of bricks in other countries and refused to allow the eccentric spelling. On the other hand, Samantha, spelled that way, would have been all right with them.

At the moment, one of the five most popular names for newborn baby boys is Kevin—a name completely alien to Germany but now all the rage because of Kevin Costner and because of a movie called "Kevin Allein zu Haus." The title in the States was "Home Alone."

Celebrity doesn't always do the trick. A couple last year were told they couldn't name their daughter Whoopy, after the actress and comic Whoopi Goldberg. Registry officials knew that making whoopee is English for "letting the sow run wild."

Taste, of course, isn't always the issue, and many parents are angry about the arbitrariness of it all. "A real intrusion by the state," is how Volker Malinka describes his 1987 run-in with the name-approval people. Mr. Malinka and his wife wanted to call their son Hollas, after a character in a foreign film they had seen. Mr. Malinka, a judge, couldn't prove that Hollas was in common use anywhere, so the name was rejected. The Malinkas, thwarted, named their boy Maximillian.

Other parents, knowing the ropes, have been more resourceful. Anne Engels, a geology student in Bonn, decided after hearing the word "peony" many times while on vacation in Hawaii that she would call her daughter Sara Pioni. She and the baby's father persuaded a friend who worked at the Pakistani embassy to produce a letter saying that Pioni is a recognized name in Pakistan. The ploy worked.

Olaf Witte's experience, one might think, should establish once and for all the masculinity of the name Sascha. But who knows? In his legal briefs, Mr. Witte cited precedent: several suits in which German parents had won the right to name sons Sascha without the encumbrance of some macho middle name.

Furthermore, Mr. Witte pretty well proved that there is nothing androgynous about the name Sascha. Thousands of German males are named Sascha, his research found. In 1975, Sascha won on the top 10 list of the most popular boys' names in West Germany. It weighed in at No. 9. Indeed, Mr. Witte could find just eight recorded instances in 50 years of girls named Sascha.

Ende

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Back to the Future

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Smith and her mother even share the same first name. "My adoptive parents were going to call me Donna Michelle," said Smith. "But my birth mother asked them to name me Ingrid, after her." Smith said her adoptive parents agreed to the birth mother's request but she never knew they actually named their daughter Ingrid until they met. "She named my half-sister Michelle, thinking she was giving her the same name I was using," said Smith.

"My scary journey into the past turned out okay," Smith happily says. "It seems as if we were never separated for 27 years." ***Ende***

This story was submitted to the Atmos Reporter *by JoAnn Smith, a Secretary in the Rates and Regulatory Affairs Department of the Atmos Energy Corporation.*

Irish Man Seeks Access

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of the information.

Inquiries should be addressed to the Adoption Society, which was registered.

The board denies it failed to give sufficient consideration to the request for information. The request related to information of a confidential nature given to it in a confidential manner over 40 years before the request was made. As a general rule, the Adoption Acts required confidentiality of records.

The board says it acted at all material times within its jurisdiction and in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption Acts. ***Ende***

The British government's Central Statistics Office reports that almost one in three babies in the United Kingdom is born out of wedlock, ranking Britain fourth for births outside of marriage in the industrialized world. Sweden is first, with almost 50 percent of births outside of wedlock, followed by Denmark with 46 percent and France with 31 percent, according to the office's 1991 statistics. The United States is fifth with 25 percent.
— From the *Chicago Tribune*, 8/1/93

NOTICE

As of October, 1993, the editor of this newsletter has relocated to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Consequently, all correspondence should now be sent to:
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Remembering

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my team. If kids teased someone because they were different, I would come to their defense. Even though I was well-liked and very popular, a part of me felt like the underdog too. It was easy for me to feel "their" rejection—their pain. After all, as an adoptee, I had experienced the pain of rejection. I just didn't know that's what I was experiencing—yet! In many ways, when another kid was picked on or teased, I experienced "my pain" of not being "good enough" all over again. Even as a child, a grade-school kid, I knew how lousy it felt to feel not good enough; and in my own way, I tried to protect others from feeling that way too. At the time, I didn't know where my "need" to be kind originated. Now, I know.

I can remember, even as a child in grade school, that nothing hurt more than to be rejected. It could be by a friend, a family member, a teacher or even a coach—it hurt. I can remember that many of my non-adopted friends (which most of them were) seemed to bounce back much more quickly from rejection than I did. I don't remember thinking, "Well, it's because you're adopted," but I was curious and noticed every time it happened. Loss experiences seemed to roll right off their backs. Me, well, loss built a big house on my back, moved in and never appeared to want to leave. As a child, I wondered why I felt this way, where others appeared not to. No, I know why.

For the most part, growing up in the military lifestyle, the joys far outweighed the pains. As a child, I saw more of the world than most people do in a lifetime. Yet, there were those subtle, almost sneaky experiences that were painful.

While living in Hawaii, at the age of 9 or 10, I had a sleepover with a bunch of friends in a tent set up in our back yard. I can remember the growing excitement and building anticipation as the cherished evening drew nearer. Soon, my friends and I would be "camping out," just us, the tent, our Oreos and a gentle, star-filled horizon watching over us like a swan protects its young. This night was going to be fun, and it met every expectation. We talked, laughed and amused ourselves with squirt guns and pillow fights. We were kids. The night continued and so did the noise, drawing attention from several "adults" on more than one occasion. And finally, defeated by sleep, we succumbed to the security of our sleeping bags. Morning came, just like any other morning. However, with morning came the end to "our" adventure; close enough to home for safety, far enough away to feel afraid.

I remember getting ready for bed that night. I was brushing my teeth when, unannounced, I began to cry. Not an uncontrollable downpour, but a smooth, steady release. Looking in the mirror, I said: "I had so much fun, and now it's over. How come everything fun ends? How come I always feel this way when it does?"

That night, the night after my sleepover, I did not know why endings hurt so much, even the "fun" ones. I was in the fourth grade, I lived in Hawaii and I had great parents. I didn't know why, sometimes, there could be so much pain inside of me. I just didn't know why. Now I do!

(To be concluded in the next issue)



"If you must know, Jimmy, you came from a box in front of the market. It said, 'Free Kittens.'"

Drawing by Leo Cullum; © 1993 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.