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

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Rogue River, OR, Woman Meets Her Mother After 38 Years

by Cat Mauldin

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Anyone who's ever lost anything can appreciate how difficult it is to find some things. Imagine trying to find something you didn't know was lost, or some*one* who doesn't want to be found. For some it would be too much to pursue. For one local woman, it was something that *had* to be done.

For reasons known only to her adoptive parents, Arlene Peterson Wytcherley was not told during her childhood she was adopted. Then, in 1973, as she neared graduation from Rogue River High School, the Wimer resident was called into the principal's office.

"I thought I was in big trouble," recalled Arlene. "The principal said he knew—lots of people did—and he thought we should know, that me and my sister were adopted. It was incredible."

Arlene got in her car, drove home, and confronted her parents. "I got into a big hassle with them. I just couldn't imagine why they had withheld that from me and my sister (who's about 15 months older). I guess they just never figured out how to tell us. It caused hard feelings."

It was also the beginning of a long, arduous search that involved two continents and spanned 38 years.

When Arlene was a young girl, her parents owned property "all over" and Arlene spent much of her youth back and forth between the Evans Valley and California's Coachella Valle. Her parents suffered heart and other medical problems and the dry, desert climate was helpful.

Arlene and her sister would spend the winters in California schools, then the spring back in Oregon. Transferring school credits caused some problems, and the constant back-and-forth made life interesting for the two small girls. But there was nothing in Arlene's day-to-day that offered any clues that Arlene and her sister were not the birth children of the couple she knew as her parents.

But once the truth was revealed, once she knew she and her sister, Carolyn, were adopted, Arlene was bound and determined to learn more. And, if at all possible, she wanted to meet her birth parents.

Describing herself as "pig-headed," Arlene went first to her adoptive parents for information. They could not, "or would not," give her any information, Arlene said. More determined than ever, Arlene resorted to investigative techniques, uncovering the adoption papers while her parents were out of town.

"The papers were in German, all of them in German," Arlene recalled. "I discovered I was born in Germany, and my real name is Rose Marie. If I had known earlier, I think I would've changed my name back, but it's too late now."

Once Arlene knew of her German ancestry, vague, fleeting memories came to mind. "I think we must have gone back and forth (to Europe) when I was very young because I remember as a little girl being scolded for speaking German, and being told, 'speak only English'," Arlene said. "It didn't make sense then, but it does now."

Feeling a need to know more, Arlene jumped into action. Using the addresses included in the found papers (which were by now nearly 20 years old), Arlene wrote several letters, the first to the American Consulate General in Munich, one to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, one to an "adoption embassy" in Nuremberg, Germany.

She heard nothing from the Senate, but in 1980 received a letter from the adoption embassy. "The letter said my mother and father were divorced in 1955, my mother was remarried and the situation was not good," Arlene said. "I was told

Continued on pg. 4, col. 1

WHO I WAS IS GONE

by Gary Freeman

Hi. My name is Gary. Strange name to have, wouldn't you agree? Maybe it is and then again, maybe it it's not. I'll let you make the call.

My father was an African-American soldier. I was very proud of him. He taught me the things a father should: baseball, football, responsibility, the meaning of manhood. I loved him very much. I remember how, at times, I could sit and listen to him for hours, with such admiration, as he told me stories of where he came from and how it was getting to where he was. It wasn't easy for him, but he made it. One of my childhood aspirations was to one day be like my dad.



My mother was a beautiful African-American woman. She was strong in character and personality. She cuddled me and nurtured me as a mother should. She taught me to respect the African-American woman and her many virtues. I was the only boy in the family. I was her pride and joy. She always told me that I was special, that she couldn't have chosen a better little prince. I wanted very much to be a good son, to always make her proud of me. I loved her very much.

I was their son, their only son. I would carry their name and one day pass it on. This was who I was. It felt good. I belonged.

Mom and Dad aren't happy tonight. Sometimes they argue. I guess most parents do, from time to time. But it's hard to sleep on those nights, or at least until Mom comes in to tuck me in and assure me that everything is alright. Here she comes now. She always gives me such comfort with her words. "Listen, Gary Baby, Mama is here, it's alright. Mama has something to tell you tonight, Gary. You're not our son, you're adopted. Mama loves you though. It will be alright."

Who I was, is gone. Who are these strangers I live with, anyway?

My father was an African-American soldier, but *he* wasn't there to teach me the things a father should. There were no long hours listening to *his* stories. I don't know *him* to love him, but I do.

My mother was a beautiful German woman. *She* wasn't there to cuddle or nurture me. I don't know if she ever thought of me as her pride and joy, or her little prince. I don't know her, but I love her very much.

I am their son. You see, who I was is gone. This is who I am.

My name is Gary. Not such a strange name after all, is it?

Ende

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WILLIAM L. GAGE

The USA Meets Germany: Too Many Years Apart

by Lissa A. Forbes-Knoche

Part Two of Two

The postman arrived saying he had a registered letter for me. I knew before I signed for it that it was from him. My heart began to pound and I felt the flow of warm, salty teardrops on my face. I couldn't believe that I stood with the first hint of connection to my birth family in my hands. My last thought before I opened the envelope was, "This is going to change your life and once you open this you won't be able to go back."

I opened that first letter with such excitement and anticipation that I could hardly wait to read it before I felt the urge to call a friend to say that it had arrived. I laugh now at the thought that I actually had to instruct myself, "Read the letter first, Lissa." I then found that nothing was as I could ever have dreamed. Wolfgang had known about me for 25 years and assumed he would never know me. He had grown up in an orphanage, not in a loving home, walking side by side through life with our mother. He is older than I by 5 years. Although physically impaired, he expressed himself in a warm, sensitive and compassionate manner.

To my surprise, I have two other siblings: another older brother, Günther, who died at the age of 24 in 1977, and a younger sister, who is mentally handicapped since birth. I was third and the only one adopted-out. Our mother didn't raise any of us. She must have had her reasons. I still feel a void there, if only for information.

The biggest shock in the first contact came in the form of a photograph. Günther had a moustache, dark hair, olive skin and was wearing an Army uniform!! How interesting I should see that in a dream.

I proceeded to arrange our reunion—a trip to Germany. The big day would be December 30, 1992. Wolfgang welcomed me initially through letters (the first two included English translations) and although I was very nervous, I sensed all would be fine. My greatest concern was the language barrier. Wolfgang spoke only German and I only English. We exchanged several letters between August and December and I tried to assimilate as much German as possible.

Finally the day came. The day when I would meet a person we all consider family, my brother, but who was yet a stranger. I felt the anticipation mount as my plane came closer to completing it's journey to Stuttgart, Germany. The plan was to take a bus from the airport to the main train station where I was to call to announce my arrival and Wolfgang would come to pick me up. I waited, looking at each face of passers-by for the familiarity I only knew from a photo. Of course, I didn't follow directions and wait inside. I waited outside in the cold where I thought I'd be a few steps closer to meeting him just a few moments sooner. Suddenly, I heard behind me the click of his canes. Turning in curiosity, to put a "picture" to the sound, I realized Wolfgang and his companion, Inge, were standing before me. In only the moment it takes for a breath, we said hello and embraced as though we had known each other for years. The difficulty: I didn't understand a word he said. My friend, Peter, and I followed to the car and we proceeded to Wolfgang's flat to do something familiar to all—eat, but attempt to communicate using paper, pencil, pointing and using hand motions and dictionaries.

The plan was to spend a week. I hesitate to say that on the second day I was feeling very scared and very much like it was just too hard to understand one another. I admit I wanted to run away and go back where life was easier. But I'm glad, in this case, that home was 5,000 miles away and I was forced to stay. The blessing came in several forms. Wolfgang and Inge took us out each day to participate in a bit of their lives. They are wonderfully warm and sensitive people. As each day unfolded over the next week I was to experience something not too familiar to me. Wolfgang was very patient with me and the dictionary. We found that even as I learned to communicate in German we found some common humor and the laughter seemed to flow. Before I knew it, I was feeling quite comfortable and realized that I was actually happy.

Suddenly, I noticed that I was jabbering away in a language other than that familiar to me, laughing, and feeling I had found a kind of connection I had not known growing up—a common sensitivity, a common sense of humor, and an incessant curiosity and thirst for personal information.

As the week came to a close, both Wolfgang and I experienced a sadness that something wonderful was coming to an end. I tried to tell him to please remember the fun we had together and not be unhappy. But as I got on the train, we definitely created a scene one often sees in movies. I believe we both wondered if what we had just experienced for a week was only a dream.

The wonderful thing is that we have continued to write to one another and he and Inge are saving for their first trip to the U.S. to visit me in Arizona in 1995. I still look for those letters in the mailbox and when it seems too long (about two months) I find myself wondering when I will hear from him and worrying a bit if all is okay.

Clearly, meeting my German brother does not replace the love and care my parents fostered over many years and the family I grew up with, but there is room to love and receive love from many people. I feel very fortunate to have both the family who raised me and instilled the morals and values I carry with me daily as well as my "German connection." I have had and will continue to have opportunities because of adoption to learn and experience much that others will never comprehend. I believe I am very lucky indeed!

Now I realize this "little girl's" life really did begin in June 1955. **Ende**



December 24, 1993

Dear Bill,

I enjoyed the article "Simon's Come Home," especially the part about Simon's birth mother recovering from a psychiatric illness. The article shows that people like me, who have mental illness, can improve when we work hard. My improvement began with volunteering for the Adoption Rights Movement. *— Ed Branca*
Orangeburg, NY

December 27, 1993

Dear Bill,

I am writing to tell you of my efforts to locate my birth mother, and how I found a brother and sister that I did not know I had.

It started in June, 1992, when I wrote to the town in Germany, Wangen im Allgau, where I was born, for a certified copy of my birth certificate. I needed it for Social Security purposes. When I received the copy, I noticed that it was written in German. I went to the German consulate here in Chicago and asked them to translate the document for me. Among other things, they told me that my birth mother's address was on the certificate.

I decided to write her and see if she would have any contact with me. A couple of weeks went by before I received a telephone call from Germany, in the afternoon of June 2, 1992. I had trouble understanding the person on the other end, who kept saying "Ellie," which is my mother's name. Her full name is Elisabeth, but she used Ellie for short. I then realized it was my mother. However, we could not understand each other because of the language difference.

The next morning, at about 8:00 a.m., I got another call from Germany. This time it was a young woman who spoke some English. She said that she was a daughter of my sister and that they were happy to know that I was alive and had found them. I told the girl, Bianca, that I was surprised to discover that I had another sister.

I was able to talk with my mother until she passed away in February of 1993. I was hoping to be able to see her in December of 1992, but my sister had personal problems and I was not able to go.

I have been in contact with her throughout the year with the help of Leonie Boehmer. My sister told me we had a younger brother and she wanted to find him also. I started to inquire as to his whereabouts by sending a letter to International Social Services in Frankfurt/Main. One day while talking with my sister with Leonie's help, she suggested that I write to the *Jugendamt* (Youth Office) in Wangen. I wrote to a Mr. Bischof at the *Jugendamt* and he said that he was familiar with the matter and would look into it. All this was done with the help of my sister and Leonie Boehmer.

Well, I received a letter on December 10, 1993 from my sister, saying that she had located our brother. The next day, I got a telephone call from Germany at 6:30 a.m. It was my bro-

ther. He spoke little English and I told him that I would call back in about three or four hours and we could then talk with the help of an interpreter. He agreed. I called back at about 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. He was glad that I called back and we spoke for about 20 minutes.

My sister and brother would like for me to come over there in the summer to visit. Just to let you know, I have a sister in Texas who is my biological sister also. We were adopted together by the same family and grew up together. My sister in Texas was not real enthusiastic about my searching at first, but now she is real happy and wants to know more about everything. I send her copies of the letters I get from our sister in Germany, and now she understands why I was looking for our family.

I would like to express my gratitude for all the help of Leonie Boehmer. Without her help, I do not know what I would have done. She has been an inspiration and an angel. *— Harold Hogan*
Oak Park, IL

April 13, 1994

Dear Bill,

This letter to you is long overdue and I am very, very sorry! It seems as though my life is in full gear.

From May 3 through 24, 1994, I will be on holiday to visit my mother and other half-siblings for the first time! My mother and a half-brother came to visit me back in August of 1993. We had so much fun together. So many of my other, adopted family couldn't believe how much alike we were! Their traits were also similar, too! I truly felt so happy when I had this time with her. I long to enjoy seeing her again. When I go to her, she tells me, I will enjoy myself so much!

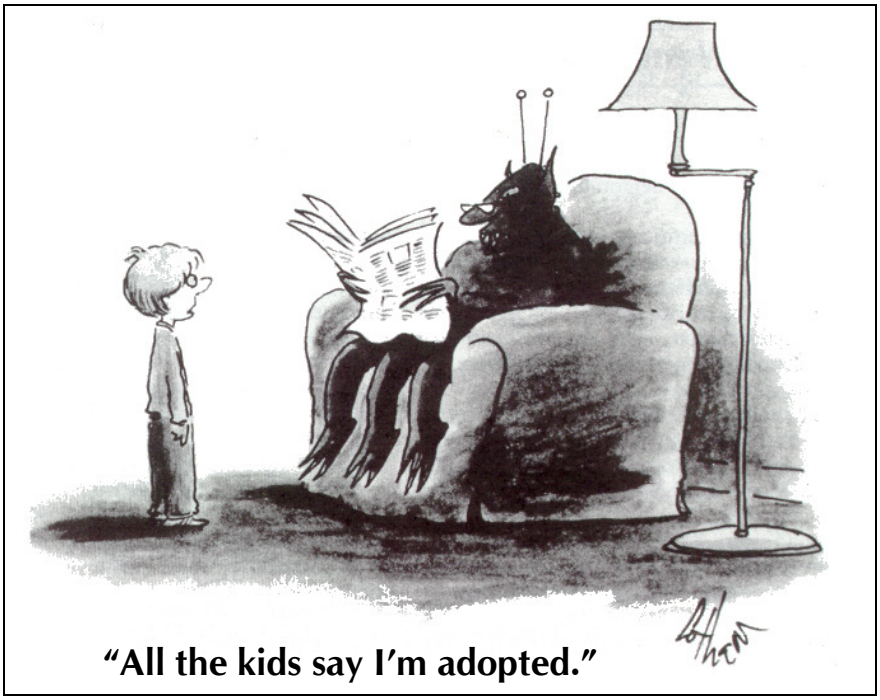
It will be the first time in my eight-year marriage that I will be separated from my husband and two children. But they insist on my going and enjoying my time with my "other" family.

Mother is now very much a part of my life. We speak on the telephone at least once a week, and she is always sending a package to us. She has a very hard life still, and I am very thankful I was adopted. We will always share a bond of unity, but my adopted family is just as much a part of me as ever before!

We really had a great time together, and she plans to return to Florida along with her husband. My older half-sister will be here in July for three weeks.

I truly owe you my life! You and Leonie are truly very special and caring people. I wish to help other adoptees, but am not sure how to begin. Please tell me! I would one day like to find my father, who was in the military while in Germany.

Thanks again, both of you, and I wish you eternal happiness, always! I will send you photos when I get back from my holiday! *— Michelle Crews*
Fernandina Beach, FL



Drawing by Frank Cotham. Reprinted courtesy of *Omni* magazine, from the April 1994 issue.

Dear William,

Thank you for the copy of *Geborener Deutscher*, which had an added interest, as the story, "Simon's Come Back," was written by a member of my family!

Up 'til now, we have not had much contact with German children, but since the Associated Press published a picture of one of our members greeting his father in North Carolina, I have been inundated with letters from Europe. Not only did the [print] media there pick it up, but in addition, a [broadcast] program, "Bitte Melde Dich" ("Please Call"), gave out the information.

As you may know, your Brooklyn address is in my book, *Bye Bye Baby*, and, unfortunately, cannot be corrected. I only wish *Bye Bye Baby* were available in Germany, because the listings at the end would help them. These people, unlike the majority of your readers, were not adopted into the U.S., but live still in Germany. I have had an extra explanatory flyer printed explaining that we are a non-profit, self-help group so they understand. They are asked on the Teletext to write to me in English, as it is a "second language" there.

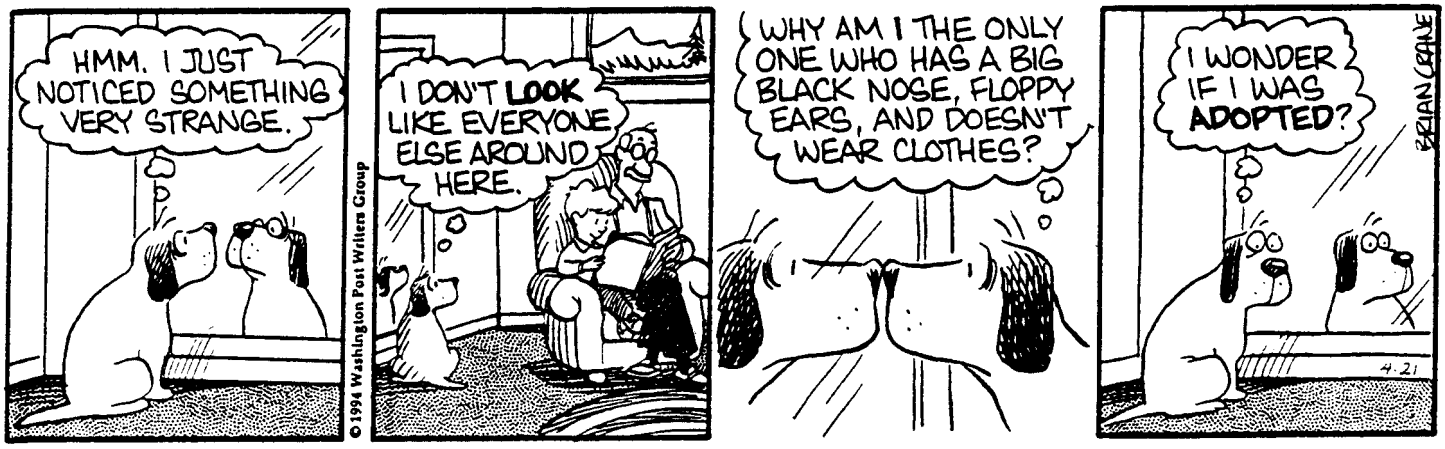
I am happy to say that the successes continue and far outnumber the rejections. People are passed to us from a variety of sources, including International Social Services and the Salvation Army, as well as advice columnists in newspapers and magazines. I did think that once the book came out, it would all slow down, but that does not appear to be the case.

— Pamela Winfield
Surrey, England

Editor's Note: *The author is president of the British group Transatlantic Children's Endeavors, The Coach House, Bet. 28/30 Langley Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 6QP, England. An American affiliate of TRACE can be contacted at: TRACE, c/o Brenda Wilson Hasty, POB 1541, Sierra Vista, AZ 85636. The book,* Bye Bye Baby, *is distributed* **Continued on pg. 4, col. 3**

PICKLES by Brian Crane

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Oregon Woman Meets Mom

continued from page 1

not to try to contact my mother, because she had not told her husband about her daughters. I was sad, and hurt that she didn't want to see me, but I was more determined than ever to find her."

From the birth certificate, Arlene learned that her mother's name was Erika Jakobi, and her father's name was Hans Joachim Barthel. She continued to write to the embassy, pressing them for information. The less she heard, the more determined she became, and the more letters she wrote.

Then one day, nearly 13 years after she first learned she was adopted, Arlene had her first success. In 1986 she received a letter addressed to Rose Marie Barthel—return address: Germany.

"I cried when I saw the envelope. When I saw the return address, I knew who it was from," Arlene said. "I was scared to open it, and scared not to open it."

In the letter, Erika admitted she was Arlene's mother, and told her that her birth father had died. Erika told Arlene that she couldn't meet with her, that she was afraid it would break up her marriage.

But Arlene wouldn't quit. "I sent cards, and letters, for every occasion I could think of. I even sent a Thanksgiving card, and they don't even celebrate Thanksgiving," Arlene said. "I told her I didn't want to break up her family, I just wanted the truth, and I couldn't get it from my parents here."

But the truth would be a long time coming. By 1988, Arlene learned she had two half-sisters, both still in Germany. Sigrid, younger than Arlene, but the older of the two half-sisters, began to write to Arlene in 1988. And though the correspondence was reassuring in some ways, it opened the door for more questions.

Arlene's birth mother began to write, though her letters were few and far between. By this time, Arlene's adoptive mother had passed away. She told her adoptive father of the correspondence with her birth mother. He wasn't too happy, Arlene said.

Still, she was determined to meet her birth mother. And nearly 38 years after being adopted, she did.

"I got it in my head, I was going to go," said Arlene, mother of a 19-year-old son. "She wasn't getting any younger. I asked her to come here and she said she couldn't, so I told her we're coming there."

On July 10, 1993, Arlene married John Wytcherley. Along with her groom and her son, Arlene boarded a plane July 11, and arrived in Germany July 13. Arlene's step-father met them at the airport and drove them the 120 miles to Wendelstein, where her mother waited.

"We were both really nervous," said Arlene, "there were no hugs, no handshakes. We were just really nervous. The first thing she did was feed us pork sandwiches and beer. I thought it was really awful, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings. So I ate it and smiled a lot."

Arlene doesn't speak German, Erika doesn't speak English, so communication was difficult. Sigrid, the half-sister, did some translating, but most of the time Arlene used a German-English dictionary.

The 19-day visit was a roller coaster for Arlene, who learned the answer to many of her questions, but was too tentative to ask others.

"I never asked her about the adoption," Arlene admitted. "Things were going pretty good and I didn't want to ruin a good thing."

From Sigrid, she was able to learn that Erika was forced by the aftermath of the war to give up her daughters, a decision Arlene said she imagined was more than difficult. "She just couldn't afford to keep us. I think she carries many scars. I don't think she was ever very comfortable with me being there," she said. "I think she was really glad to meet me, but she never really relaxed."

Arlene's trip created hard feelings with her adoptive father, she said, but she isn't sorry she went. She and Sigrid, who correspond regularly, also have plans to locate a fourth girl, presumed to be Sigrid's younger sister, Arlene's half-sister. She also corresponds regularly with Erika, and plans to visit her again in three or four years.

Arlene, a former rodeo rider who trains horses and bulldogs, said she encourages adoptive parents to tell their children the truth. "Don't keep it a secret. Why keep it a secret," said Arlene. "It hurt me, it hurt me bad. It just caused hard feelings, and made me more determined than ever to know the truth. But then, I guess I'm just an old saur kraut."

Ende

Briefe

cont. from pg. 3

in the U.S. by Trafalgar Square, POB 257, North Pomfret, VT 05053. — ***WLG***

September 7, 1993

Dear Mr. Gage:

I know you probably do not remember me. I wrote my journal in your newsletter January 14, 1989, Volume II, Number 1/Whole Number 3. It has been a long time. I still receive your newsletters and I enjoy them very much.

I wanted to let you know that I finally got to meet a member of my family: my sister Anneliese. She and her new boyfriend came in August for two weeks. We have been corresponding all this time, almost five years now. We had such a great time, it was all that I expected. I believe having five years to communicate helped a lot. We are so much alike in our personalities, but not so much in our looks. She says that I look a lot like my sister Christa. This is so hard to put into words, all the feelings that I have, except that she is the best sister. We became very close, it was like we have always known each other.

While she was here, she let me know that I have three aunts (my father's sisters) in America. Two live in Pennsylvania and one in Kentucky, so we contacted them. They knew nothing of me. We have talked on the phone quite a few times since then, and maybe one day I will be able to meet with them. They are very anxious to meet me.

I still have not been able to make the trip to meet my mother and father and one more sister. My mother cannot travel, but we keep in touch with a lot of letters and pictures. One day I hope to make it over to Germany. More than ever, now that Anneliese has been here.

Mr. Gage, I just wanted to let you know what happened in my situation. It has turned out so far as I wished that it would. There is a lot of love for me from this family in Germany that I have not met yet, and in return from me to them. I will make that trip yet, I just keep hitting stumbling blocks, but I always believe that things happen for a reason and it is just not my time to go yet. I'm still trying though.

Thank you. — *Siglinda Splain*
Port St. Lucie, FL

Editor's Note: *My thanks to all who write! I am always happy to be able to share your stories!* — ***WLG***

GARFIELD by Jim Davis

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