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

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Adoptee Searched for—and Found—Three Siblings

by Terri Snow

Part One of Two

I have known from an early age that I was adopted and came from Erlangen, Germany. My uncle, Lee Farrell, was stationed in Germany during the 1950s as a major in the U.S. Army. My aunt and uncle found out my parents wanted to adopt a child, so they checked into it in Germany. My aunt was friends with a Frau Erna Barth, who was the assistant to the *Bürgermeister* in Erlangen. She was to prove a great help in the adoption. My birth grandmother and Frau Barth were also friends, so Frau Barth wanted me to go to a good family. Since she knew my aunt, I guess she thought my aunt's sister would be okay. My parents were very interested and so the process began.



Terri Snow

A home study was conducted on my parents and sent to Germany. The social workers indicated that the process of adoption would be speeded up if there was a particular child. A letter from my aunt to my parents on September 21, 1956 said, "The child is a girl and I will not take her unless I get an okay from you first, but from what the story is over here, this is an excellent baby, and no telling how long you'd wait for a boy. She comes from a good mother that already had three other children. From pictures I've seen they are nice looking kids and look like their mother. Those three children have been taken by the same family who now live in Florida. This little girl has been saved for this family, but now they have decided that all they can handle is the three. So now she is up for adoption. She is in the Protestant Children's Home and her name is Edeltraud Platzer.

"This little girl is six months old and has been in the home since the day she was born. She has a fat little face, very white skin, blue eyes and some brown curly hair. I cannot truthfully call her pretty, but she is appealing. The back of her head is a bit flat from laying on her back for six months. You must remember that the children in these homes do not receive individual attention at all. I don't want to say anything that will be encouraging or discouraging. I am getting a bit scared myself now that we are down to the final stage of picking out a child."

Thursday, September 27, 1956. "Hi, I'm very excited, nervous, apprehensive, and half a dozen other adjectives. In fact, I'm scared! Your daughter is coming Monday. I get her at 1:00 p.m. our time which is 7:00 a.m. to you. So on Monday when you get out of bed think of me because I'll be handling a baby again after nine years. I have a doctor appointment at 3:00 and if the doctor says she is okay then we will keep her, otherwise not. Now please hurry and write to me and tell me what her name is! I can't go on forever calling her baby. I do hope you will like her, but if for some reason you should not, or change your mind you do not have to keep the baby. That is definite. You have the final say after you see her. You don't have to keep her on my say-so.

"As soon as we get the baby home here we will take pictures and send them to you. It is definitely better that we take her now and start her on good food and good care, rather than let her lay in the

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Adoptions in West Germany: Attitudes of Social Workers

by Martin R. Textor

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Part Two of Two

ATTITUDES TOWARDS BIRTH MOTHERS

In the past, a negative view of women who have relinquished children for adoption was quite common in the general public and among social workers (Napp-Peters, 1978, p. 306). My impression is that, at present, birth mothers experience more public disapproval than women who have an abortion. Thus it is interesting to explore the attitudes of social workers who have contact with biological mothers. From Table 1 it can be inferred that social workers in the field of adoption no longer espouse a negative view of birth mothers.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Since the publication of books by Kirk (1981) and Hoffmann-Riem (1984), it is known that it is better for family life and the development of adopted children if the family defines itself as an adoptive family ("acknowledgement-of-difference") and not as a "normal" family ("rejection-of-difference"). For example, Kirk showed that if the adoptive parents' readiness to acknowledge the difference between birth and adoption status is great, a more open family communication as well as more trust, flexibility, closeness and empathy could be found. Napp-Peters (1978) had the impression that social workers further the attitude of "rejection-of-difference" by placing great importance on secrecy and closed adoptions, by severing contact with adoptive families after the finalization of the adoption, by giving little information about the birth family, and by negating problems typical of adoptive families.

According to our findings, neither position was clearly supported. On the one hand, more than nine out of ten respondents said that adoptive families should know about their specific family structure and be conscious of it. Nearly all agreed that adoptive parents should get all information about the background of their children, even if it is negative. On the other hand, two out of five social workers characterized adoptive families as "families like all others." With respect to child care, three out of five respondents required that one parent should not work until the adopted child had entered kindergarten; only 1/4 expected that one parent should stop working at all. This mirrored the view of the general public (Bertram, 1990): the same behavior was expected from adoptive families as from families in general. Moreover, a signi-

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ficant number of social workers still practiced "matching": when placing a child, they considered similarities between the child and adoptive parents with respect to color of hair (6%), color of eyes (3%), height to be expected (12%), constitution (11%), temperament (19%), and intelligence (29%). While the first results were indicative for the position of "acknowledgement-of-difference," the latter were characteristic of the attitude of "rejection-of-difference." From the available data, it was not possible to resolve this contradiction.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLACING CHILDREN

Twenty years ago, nearly all social workers preferred applicants belonging to a church; usually they were supposed to be members of the same church. Those who were single had virtually no chance of having a child placed with them. Divorced and remarried applicants were considered as adoptive parents only in rare cases (Napp-Peters, 1978). Today, however, the situation has definitely changed. Our results as presented in Table 2 indicate the great impact of socio-cultural changes on the practice of adoption. It cannot be inferred, however, that social workers actually place children with applicants who are single, remarried, handicapped, etc.

In the '60s and '70s, it rarely happened that a handicapped child was considered for placement in an adoptive family (Napp-Peters, 1978). Older children were rarely accepted by adoptive parents. Today—due to the limited and decreasing number of infants relinquished for adoption and the ever-increasing number of applicants—the situation has changed. And so have the attitudes of social workers. One-fifth of the respondents agreed with the statement that *any* child could be placed in adoptive families, another fifth said that this was often the case. Only one significant correlation could be found: the less time devoted to adoption-related tasks, the less often respondents believed that all children are adoptable.

Most social workers were optimistic that adoptive parents could handle handicapped or disturbed children. Only 6% of the respondents believed that children with moderate or severe handicaps could be helped better in a children's home than in an adoptive family—and only 4% held this attitude with respect to children with psychological illnesses or severe behavior disturbances. Nearly 1/3 of the social workers agreed with the statement that too many children live in children's homes who could be placed with adoptive parents. And more than 1/3 believed that many more children who had been physically or sexually abused and neglected could be adopted—if courts would be more willing to free them. Thus many social workers seemed to believe that there is still a number of children who should be freed for adoption.

It is often discussed whether children in long-term foster care should be adopted (e.g., Bush and Goldman, 1982). Usually, two arguments are brought forward. First, it is emphasized that this would provide more emotional security and continuity for these children. Secondly, it is argued that the state would save money, as fewer allowances for foster parents would have to be paid. This position, however, was supported by only 1/5 of the respondents; more than 1/3 explicitly disagreed with it. Just three social workers believed that a child in long-term foster care should be taken out of a foster family and placed with adoptive parents if the foster parents did not want to adopt him/-her. If a foster or adoptive placement broke down, only 5% of the respondents were in favor of placing the child in a children's home—half of them definitely would not act this way. This shows again that most social workers preferred adoptive or foster families to children's homes.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEARCHING ADOPTEES

During the last two decades, the issue of adoptees searching for their birth family has been discussed widely in journals, magazines, radio and TV. However, the discussion was mostly confined to countries with sealed birth records like the United States. In Germany, any adoptee who is at least 16 years old has access to public records detailing the names of the birth parents, without having to ask the adoptive parents for permission. This might be the reason why searching adoptees have not attracted much attention so far. No research has been done about them in Germany, and few articles in professional journals focus on their plight. According to British (Triseliotis, 1973) and American studies (Sobol and Cardiff, 1983; Aumend and Barrett, 1984), searching adoptees described their relationship to the adoptive parents more often as unsatisfactory in comparison to non-searchers. They reported unhappy childhood experiences more often, had a less positive self-concept, and suffered more often from identity conflicts. They also were less satisfied with their present lives.

In contrast to those research results, Bavarian social workers espoused a positive view of their clients in this study. Nearly all respondents (94%) considered the search for birth parents as something perfectly normal. About 2/3 did not regard it as a sign of great intrapsychic conflicts (only 4% saw it that way). Another 91% rejected the statement that the search is a sign of great problems in the relationship between adoptee and adoptive parents. It is not possible at this point to explain the contradiction between research results and the attitudes of our respondents—especially as the experiences of British social workers who counsel adult adoptees (Haimes and Timms, 1985) who also contradict studies finding great intrapsychic and interpersonal problems in searching adoptees. It has to be added, however, that most of our respondents had little contact with adult adoptees: half of them had contact less than once a year and another 44% between one and six times. Thus their attitudes were not based on extensive experience (in contrast to the opinions of the

TABLE 1. *Attitudes of Bavarian social workers towards birth mothers of adopted children*

	N	*Yes*	*Often*	*Partly*	*Rarely*	*No*
Birth mothers are pitiable individuals who do not get along with life	101	0%	8.9%	26.7%	32.7%	31.7%
Birth mothers are responsible for (guilty of) their situation	105	0%	1.9%	25.7%	25.7%	46.7%
Birth mothers mostly have been exploited and deserted by their partners and parents	102	4.9%	44.1%	40.2%	4.9%	5.9%
Birth mothers usually lack parental feelings and motherly love	104	0%	1.0%	16.3%	26.9%	55.8%
The pregnancy is not the fault of the birth mother as preventive measures failed	95	4.2%	9.5%	46.3%	26.3%	13.7%
Birth mothers show responsibility and great courage when they decide to relinquish their child	106	67.9%	26.4%	5.7%	0%	0%
Birth mothers usually suffer from great psychological conflicts or are very unstable	103	8.7%	40.8%	41.7%	8.7%	0%
Birth mothers usually forget their children soon	106	0%	0%	9.4%	24.5%	66.0%
Birth mothers suffer their whole life from having relinquished their child	105	16.2%	46.7%	37.1%	0%	0%

aforementioned British social workers).

In our study, half of the respondents declared that social workers should give all available information about their background to searching adoptees who are at least 16 years old—only 14% disagreed with this position. Sixty percent said that social workers should do everything they can in order to find the birth parents of a searching adoptee (5% disagreed). But nearly 1/3 believed that social workers should decide for themselves whether to put searching adoptees (above the age of 16) and birth parents into contact with each other. However, only 11% demanded that the anonymity of biological parents should be protected better. In contrast, more than 1/3 demanded that birth parents should also have the right to contact children whom they have relinquished for adoption, as soon as the latter are 18 years old. Thus, the majority of social workers seemed to be willing to help searching adoptees to a great extent.

TABLE 2. *Placing children with special groups of applicants*
Question: Would you place children with the following applicants on principle?

	N	*Yes*	*No*
Singles	109	37.6%	62.4%
Unmarried couples	108	28.7%	71.3%
Remarried applicants	115	99.1%	0.9%
Applicants not belonging to a church	114	90.4%	9.6%
Spouses being members of two churches	117	100.0%	0%
Handicapped applicants	99	64.6%	35.4%
Applicants with handicapped children	108	77.8%	22.2%

ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

Foreign adoptions have been much discussed in Germany lately. Many articles in journals and magazines as well as TV programs focused on Third World babies seized from their parents or sold to German couples. Many professionals (e.g., Bach, 1986; Terre des Hommes, 1989) have noted critically that German adoption agencies are rarely involved in placing these children, as up to 80% are found by their parents via private contacts with children's homes, lawyers, welfare organizations, etc., from Third World countries (for a British comparison, see Tizard, 1991). Moreover, it is feared that these children will suffer from identity problems and discrimination. Despite the fact that about 1,100 international adoptions take place in the Western part of Germany each year, very little research has been done about them (for a review see Textor, 1991*b*).

According to our study, 2/3 of Bavarian social workers rejected the statement that the number of foreign adoptions should be increased in order to help some of the millions of starving or neglected children in the Third World; only 10% agreed with it. A quarter of the respondents were in favor of a decrease in the number of foreign adoptions, as children have better chances to develop well in their native cultures (another quarter disagreed with this position). About 14% wanted to reduce the number, claiming the foreign-born children find it difficult to integrate themselves into German society (21% did not agree).

As already mentioned, private adoptions and those by private organizations are forbidden in Germany. This is different from other countries. For example, in the United States, nearly 2/3 of all adoptions were carried out in this way in 1982 (National Committee for Adoption, 1985). Four out of five Bavarian social workers rejected the statement that private adoptions and placements by private organizations should be permitted and regulated by law as in other states. However, only two out of five respondents favored the position that private adoptions and trade in children should be punished severely. Nearly all believed that the best way to reduce the number of private and commercial adoptions was better support for poor birth parents in their native countries.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS OPEN ADOPTION

In the past, nearly all adoptions in Germany were closed ones, with no contact whatsoever between birth parents and adoptive family. Since the early '80s, however, this practice has been challenged by many social workers and other professionals. On the one hand, this change was caused by research results about birth mothers who cannot forget their children, regret their decision to relinquish them for adoption, and feel a strong urge to know whether they are happy in their adoptive family (e.g., Deykin *et al.*, 1984; Swientek, 1986). On the other hand, many studies have been published about the identity conflicts of adopted children and the needs of searching adoptees (e.g., Triseliotis, 1973; Sobol and Cardiff, 1983; Aumend and Barrett, 1984). It was shown that the birth family is very important to adopted children who want to have detailed information about it and often wish to meet their biological relatives.

In Table 3, the views of Bavarian social workers with respect to closed, half-open (some contact, but not in person), and open adoptions (personal contact between both sides) are presented. It is evident that closed as well as open adoptions were seen positively by only a small number of respondents; most favored half-open forms. These attitudes were mirrored in the practical work. Thus, the respondents reported 312 adoptions with a regular exchange of information between birth parents and adoptive family via the social worker; 121 adoptions with an exchange of letters, presents, etc., via the social worker; 46 adoptions with a direct exchange of letters, etc.; 56 adoptions with a one-off meeting during which both sides remained anonymous; and 63 open adoptions. It is not surpris-

TABLE 3. *Attitudes towards different forms of adoption*
Question: Generally I consider the following forms of adoption to be...

	N	*Very Positive*	*Positive*	*Partly*	*Negative*	*Very Negative*
Closed adoptions with no information whatsoever about the development of the other side	114	2.6%	13.2%	21.9%	31.6%	30.7%
Half-open adoption with continuous information about the development of the other side by the social worker	111	20.7%	47.7%	28.8%	2.7%	0%
Half-open adoption with an exchange of letters, gifts, etc., via the social worker	112	23.2%	33.9%	29.5%	9.8%	3.6%
One-time meeting of birth parents and adoptive parents while keeping their anonymity	111	17.1%	32.4%	36.0%	6.3%	8.1%
Continuous exchange of letters or phone calls between both sides (no anonymity)	110	7.3%	18.2%	53.6%	13.6%	7.3%
Continuous personal contacts between both sides	109	2.8%	15.6%	53.2%	21.1%	7.3%

ing that adoptions of infants were overrepresented among the forms of adoption named first, while adoptions of older children and foster children were overrepresented among the latter.

A few social workers gave very high figures for these forms of adoption. Thus, while the modal answer was "1 case" in all five categories, the highest numbers given by individual respondents were 40 adoptions with a regular exchange of information via the social worker; 15 adoptions with an exchange of letters, presents, etc., via the social worker; nine adoptions with a direct exchange; five adoptions with a one-off meeting; and nine open adoptions. This indicates that some social workers who have started with more open forms of adoption were using them more and more—a result similar to the one found by Fratter (1989) for Great Britain.

At the moment, it is not possible to indicate how may adoptions per year are more or less open. Only when the results of the second part of this study are available in 1993 will we be able to give some figures. Thus, we can only present the figures above, which were not given for any specified period. To put them into perspective, it should be noted that about 500 unrelated adoptions are carried out in Bavaria each year.

DISCUSSION

The research results mentioned in the last paragraphs indicate that there is a relationship between the attitudes of social workers and their practice. As the view of half-open forms of adoption became more positive, a large number of these adoptions were finalized. This shows that it is very important to explore the attitudes of professionals in the field of adoption. On the one hand, one can detect behavioral changes in practice. On the other hand, supervisors and other individuals who want to improve the work of social workers need to have information about their attitudes.

Moreover, it could be shown that the attitudes of social workers changed during the last 20 years. The respondents espoused a more positive view of birth mothers and searching adoptees, considered uncommon groups of applicants (e.g., singles, remarried couples) and children (e.g. handicapped or older children) for adoption, and took a more positive stance towards half-open and open forms of adoption. Their attitudes supported administrators and politicians who do not see adoption as an alternative to abortion, are against private adoptions, and strive for more open forms of adoption.

A very interesting result of this study is that social workers who are responsible for adoptions hold very heterogeneous attitudes. Only with respect to a few questions were these variations correlated with the sex of the respondents, their age, the time spent working in the field of adoption, and the amount of time per year spent on tasks unrelated to adoptions. This great variety indicates that Bavarian social workers in the field of adoption have not yet found a uniformly accepted position towards relevant adoption-related issues. It has to be assumed that their behavior will vary greatly with practice. This is indicated by the research results showing that more positive views towards half-open forms of adoption lead to a large number of such adoptions.

If one wants to increase the professionalism of German social workers who are active in the field of adoption, it seems necessary to develop clear-cut criteria for their practical work. So far, there is no handbook for social workers which gives them guidelines for evaluating applicants, for counseling birth parents, for choosing between different forms of adoption (and fostering), for evaluating the integration of children in their new families before the adoption is finalized, for helping searching adoptees, etc. Moreover, it is necessary to offer social workers more opportunities to discuss their attitudes and practice. Open and confidential exchanges in small groups may lead to greater consistency of attitudes and behavior. Finally, supervision should be offered to more social workers. At the moment, only 3/4 of the respondents regularly receive continuing education about adoption (usually a one-day course each year); 1/4 were members of a group of social workers responsible for adoptions; and 1/4 received supervision or had received it during the last three years. ***Ende***

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Adoptee Found Three Siblings

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hospital bed for the next four months—if you want her. The next four months are important in her well-being, I think.

"Starting Monday you will get some bills for baby care. The sitting fee—food and clothing you provide. This baby was born Edeltraud Platzer, March 6, 1956, 6½ to 7 lbs. She is at the moment in the house with me sleeping her head off. She is slightly bashful with people right now. It is a great big change from the home where she never saw but the one nurse from one week to the next. Yesterday we had 25 people in here to see her and with the visit to the doctor, etc., it was just too much for one little soul. You know we are already getting attached to her. The more I see her the cuter I think she is."

January 18, 1957. I reached the United States to being my life with Eugene and Edythe Snow. I was named Terri Lee Snow.

After my third birthday, on May 18, 1959, I became a U.S. citizen. My dad tells me I slept on his lap through the whole procedure.

We adopted my brother, Scott, in 1961 and the two of us grew up in a happy, nurturing family.

On February 26, 1994, while visiting my aunt Clem Farrell in Georgia, I asked her if Frau Barth had known the lady that brought me into this world. My aunt told me that Frau Barth was good friends with the grandmother. I had never asked many questions about the adoption. It's too bad I didn't, because Frau Barth would have known everything and she died several years ago. My aunt still kept in touch with her after leaving Germany. I've been told some pictures of me were sent back to Germany to be given to my birth grandmother. My aunt told me that there were three children born before me. This I had never known before. I decided I'd like to try and find them.

(To Be Concluded in the Next Issue)