8th Year

Geborener Deutscher®

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

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After four decades, CA woman is reunited with birth parents in Austria

by Theresa Walker

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Catherine Watkins celebrates her 42nd birthday today. But the biggest present she's ever gotten—Christmas or birthday—came a little earlier.

Her husband, an employee of Continental Airlines, sent Watkins from Garden Grove to Austria a month ago so she could be reunited with her birth mother.

Watkins was adopted in 1953 by a U.S. Army lieutenant and his wife who were stationed in Salzburg, Austria. She hadn't seen her birth mother since she was a toddler and learned of her whereabouts only in October.

Until then, Watkins said, "the only thing I knew about my birth mother was that her name was Rosa Bürkelbauer. That she was young when she had me. She didn't speak English, and she was unwed."

Watkins started her search for Rosa Bürkelbauer about six months ago, wanting to know more about her family medical history for her own two children and when she was finally able to deal with the emotions.

Her adoptive parents had both died nine years ago.

Watkins had a scrap of paper with her birth mother's birth date, a copy of the adoption proceedings and a partial address in Linz. And she knew that before she became Catherine, her name had been Sonja.

She tried a half-dozen agencies that help locate birth parents, but none could help with an overseas adoption. Then she was referred to a consultant in New Mexico who specializes in finding birth parents in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The consultant secured Watkins' original birth certificate and arranged for the police in Linz to contact her mother, now Rosa Podrascanin.

It turned out that Podrascanin had been hoping all those years to hear from Sonja: Rosa's stepparents had taken the baby against her will when she was 17 and poor, unwed and struggling to survive.

Over the years, when she married and changed her name or she moved to a new address, Podrascanin always notified the authorities in case, someday, her daughter tried to find her.

Through the consultant, Podrascanin wrote a letter to Watkins and included a picture of Watkins at 14 months. She signed the letter: "With great expectations waiting for an answer, Your Mother."

Watkins didn't hesitate to respond. She phoned Austria.

"I just had to hear her voice," said Watkins, who speaks a little German. "She was just really happy. She kept saying, 'My dearest Sonja.' "

She was happier still when Watkins arrived in Linz with her two children. Over the door to her home, Podrascanin had draped dozens of fresh carnations topped by a sign that read: "My Happy Est Day."

From other family members, Watkins figures she was handed more than 100 bouquets: "I didn't have enough arms for all the flowers."

The trip also brought Watkins to an unexpected bonus: She met her birth father as well, a wealthy horse trainer who was 16 when she was born.

The relationship between Watkins' mother and father, Amon Loschenkohl, had been limited to a few youthful trysts. He gave Watkins a locket and shed tears when he saw her.

"I am so thrilled," Watkins said of that week spent in Austria. "This was the greatest gift my husband ever gave me—for my birthday and for Christmas and for years to come." ***Ende***

Adoptee Searched for—and Found —Three Siblings

by Terri Snow

Part Two of Two

I spoke to a friend from my church, Phil Ackerman, who works for the Red Cross and he gave me the name of a lady in Kalamazoo, Elaine Meints, who helps adoptees in their searches. Elaine told me of a German newsletter published by William Gage and in it was Leonie Boehmer's name. She helps overseas adoptees search for their birth parents.

On March 19, 1994, I called Leonie to see what I could do to find my three siblings. She asked for any information I might have to help in the search in Germany. I was lucky that I had all my adoption papers so it was fairly easy to get started.

On April 6, 1994, we sent a letter to the registration office in Spardorf, County of Erlangen, where my birth mother had lived in 1956, to see if we could get a current address for her. The second letter went to the Adoption Agency in Erlangen to see if they could find the names and birth dates of my siblings.

On May 9, 1994, I received a call from Leonie that they had found my birth mother. I couldn't believe all the information they had on her (married name, address, phone number, and birth date).

On May 18, 1994, I had put together a letter to my birth mother asking for the birth names and birth dates of the other children; and giving her a description of myself and a little of my background along with a couple of pictures.

After a couple of months, there was no reply and I began to learn what patience really is. A lady friend here in Kalamazoo who is from Munich, Germany, and who has helped me a great deal in my search, said she would try to call my birth mother. Mrs. Graf called for three weeks off and on until, on August 12, 1994, she reached my birth mother. She had no idea where the other children were but she gave Mrs. Graf the names and birth dates: Renate, born December 9, 1951; Joseph, born june 29, 1953; and Franz, born September 1, 1954.

I had found out that my birth mother's birthday was the end of August, so after Mrs. Graf had spoken with her, I sent off a German-language birthday card and a note of thanks for the information we got. I also tried to encourage her to write.

On September 19, Leonie got a reply from a social worker in Erlangen-Hochstadt which told the name of the adoptive parents of the other children. With further investigation, Leonie had found that the adoptive father had died in June of 1981. I called the historical society in Plant City, FL, where he had died and asked if they had an obituary. They would have to look into

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

the records.

On Tuesday, September 27, 1994, I called the historical society back and they had found the obituary and gave me the information I was looking for. I was a little shocked when the lady read it to me, because it listed only one son, Joseph R., in Tampa.

When I got home from work, I got up enough courage to call Josef (now Joe), who wasn't home, but his fiancee answered and I introduced myself. Fortunately, she knew quite a bit of Joe's past and as I described my situation, I was able to convince her that I was Joe's sister. She told me after the three had been adopted, they ended up getting separated. She gave me the names of the other two and their addresses and phone numbers.

I then phoned my older sister, Renate (now Karen), and the call turned out better than I ever expected. There was no hesitation on her part whatsoever. I can't explain the tremendous feelings that came over me as we chatted for more than a half hour. The next call was to Franz (now John). The reception was just as great with him. I had to wait until Wednesday to talk to Joe and he knew the call was coming, but was still very much excited to hear from me. They hadn't known I existed.

In six very short but long months, I've gone through a journey that will last me a lifetime! The only way this story can get any better is the day I meet my brothers and sister!

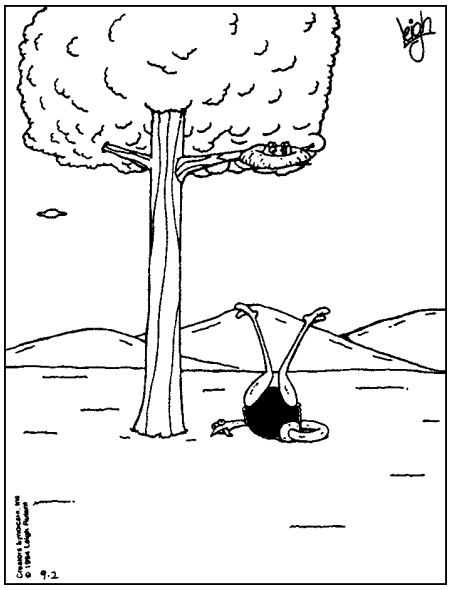
The next day, I got a call from John, who lives in New York and he is coming to visit with his 17-year-old son.

Hopefully, in January, I will be able to go to Florida and meet my sister Karen and brother Joe. She lives in Jacksonville and Joe lives in Tampa. The three of them have had a couple of reunions and when we all get together, after 38 years our circle will be complete.

In our phone conversations, it was mentioned that perhaps the four of us can someday travel to Germany to meet our birth mother, who was recently widowed. ***Ende***

RUBES *by Leigh Rubin*

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"Perhaps we should have told Junior he was adopted *before* he tried to fly."

The following two articles concerning the search and reunion of Terri Snow appeared in the *Kalamazoo Gazette* on the dates indicated, and are reprinted here with the permission of the author. — *WLG*

by Jennifer Maxwell
Gazette Correspondent

From the *Kalamazoo Gazette* editions of 09/2594 and 10/08/94, respectively

Terri Snow has known since she was a toddler that she was adopted as a German orphan. But it wasn't until Snow, 38, discovered a few months ago that she has three siblings that she became interested in her heritage.

Snow, of Kalamazoo, was reading through the mother's letters from Germany relating to her adoption when she noticed information relating to her birth mother's three other children. Those three children, apparently all her half-siblings, were adopted by an American family a few months before Snow's birth.

Now Snow is trying to find her older sister and two brothers. She also hopes to someday meet her birth mother, who is a widow still living in Germany. Snow found her birth mother through a woman in New Mexico who specializes in helping German adoptees find their birth families. Warned it could take up to a year to find her mother, the woman tracked her down in only three weeks.

Through her job as a secretary at First of Michigan, Snow knew another woman who spoke German fluently. The woman called her birth mother in Cologne, Germany, about a month ago. Her birth mother told the woman she would have kept her four children, all born illegitimately, if she would have known she was soon to meet her future husband. Once married, she never had another child.

Her birth mother even provided the birth names and birth dates of the older children she gave up for adoption, and said that she, too, would be interested in meeting her youngest daughter.

"(The woman who called her birth mother) said she sounded lost and alone," Snow said. "I never really had a desire to meet her before ... I've had a good life."

Snow's adoptive mother, Edith, said she and her husband, Gene, were on a two-year waiting list for a baby in the U.S. in 1956 when her sister and brother-in-law learned of the availability of German babies.

About four months later, the Snows flew to Germany and brought their 11-month-old baby girl home.

Now they are helping and supporting their daughter in her efforts to find them. Edith Snow is writing letters to the German government requesting adoption papers and searching for anything close to her siblings' last name at birth, Platzer, or their distinctly German first names.

With supportive parents, Snow said she feels compassion for her birth mother. "It was a different life then in Germany," she said. "She may feel guilty now, and my brothers and sister may hate her. I don't."

•

Only a few weeks ago, Terri Snow began searching for three half-siblings who weren't even aware of Snow's existence. Last week, Snow found her siblings through diligent research and pure luck. And now, this weekend, Snow will have her new-found older brother and his teenage son as houseguests at her Comstock home.

Snow tracked down her half-brother last week after learning the last name of the family that had initially adopted him and another brother and sister. The three were adopted by an American couple in 1956, a few months before Snow was born to their mother, an unmarried German woman.

Snow began searching for her family earlier this year. A month ago, she found her birth mother, a widow still living in Germany. The woman provided the birth names and dates of the other three children, and more searching turned up the Florida family who adopted them.

But it turned out that the siblings were split up after the family decided they couldn't keep all three children. The middle child, Joseph, who stayed with the family, was unaware until age 25 that he was adopted or had siblings.

Her brother John, who is visiting from West Point, NY, this weekend, had five different foster families before he was legally adopted.

Snow's sister, Karen, was adopted at age 9, but kept in touch with John.

All three siblings were reunited as adults after Karen tracked down Joseph, Snow said.

Her existence was a surprise to them, Snow said, but they were happy to hear from her and to learn their birth mother is still alive.

Not only have the siblings given her a warm reception, Snow said, but "I got nieces and nephews and the whole ball of wax at once."

Now her brother John and her 17-year-old nephew will be staying with her this weekend, and she may make plans to visit Karen and Joseph in Florida this winter.

"I also would like to let my birth mother know we found each other," she said. ***Ende***



Terri Snow *(left)* and her three siblings: *(from left to right)* Karen, John and Joe

Briefe (Letters From Readers)

From Terry Snow

February 3, 1995

Hi Everyone!

Scott and I made our trip to Florida the week of January 16th. I met my sister Karen and brother Joe for the first time.

We were sitting at Mom and Dad's on Saturday, waiting for them to arrive, when I heard Mom say, "Hi John." I yelled, "It isn't John, it's Joe." Well, did they put one over on me. John had called Thursday, before Scott and I had got in. He didn't want to miss the reunion, so he flew to his parents' in Orlando on Saturday. It really *was* John. His parents came along so we got to meet them also.

A little while later, Joe showed up, and then Karen.

Karen's husband, Erby, and son, Paul, came with her. Scott and I went to Disney on Sunday with them. Paul left Monday to go back to school in Gainesville. Karen and Erby stayed until Tuesday. We followed them back to Jacksonville to see their house.

When Karen said they were going to come for four days, I thought maybe that would be too much at first. Boy was I wrong. We weren't out of the driveway and I was in tears. I had poor Scott choked up. I just can't put into words all the emotions that ran through me. Karen and I had an instant bonding. It may sound silly but be both felt it and it is the most wonderful feeling I have ever had come over me!

Karen Erby and Paul are already planning to come to Kalamazoo for Christmas in '96. Erby and Paul have never seen snow!

— Terri Snow, Kalamazoo, MI

From Irmgard Delaney to Leonie Boehmer

November 15, 1994

Dear Leonie,

I don't know where to start, but I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the wonderful work you are doing for German-born adoptees.

Thirty years ago, driven by some very sad and unfortunate circumstances, I had to give up a beautiful baby girl for adoption.

I was a divorced mother (living in Germany) with 5-year-old twins (a boy and a girl) and another 6-year-old daughter. I had just finished my college education and was working as a translator at an American hospital. My parents were very prominent in the community and it was just impossible for me to keep this baby.

After a lot of heartache and pain, I decided to give the baby up for adoption. I was very fortunate to meet the lovely couple who would be her parents—an Air Force Major and his wife. We only met briefly as they came to pick her up. I remember as they walked away with their hearts full of joy as mine was breaking.

A few months later I met a wonderful man, an officer in the United States Army. We got married that same year, and he adopted my three children. He has been a great father to them and we had a wonderful life so far.

However, on August 1st of every year, I felt this insurmountable amount of sadness, because that was the day my little baby girl was born. I did not tell my husband of her existence until many years later. He then encouraged me to look for her, which I tried to do, but to no avail. After telling my daughters about her, they also encouraged me to search for her. You cannot imagine the feeling when I got a letter on January 24th from the Social Security Office saying that a certain Nicole Watson was trying to get in touch with me! I called immediately and this incredibly sweet voice answered the phone. I knew immediately that this was my daughter! She was searching for me too! We talked for over an hour and after telling my other daughters about "Nikki," her phone was busy all night.

A week later, I flew to Colorado to meet her and her family. She has a wonderful husband named Jim and two adorable little girls named Ashley and Chelsey. I stayed for a couple of days and was introduced to all her great friends. Nikki flew to California in February to meet the rest of the family and to help me celebrate my birthday. Nikki's parents—Mary and Jim—also joined us, and we had a great time together. In March, Nikki, her husband and the girls came to visit us again; and on her 30th birthday her sister, brother and I surprised her in Colorado.

We talk to each other often and we also have a great relationship with Nikki's parents.

Leonie, you are doing such a great job and mere words cannot describe the joy and happiness you have brought us. I know that some day your reward will come too.

— Irmgard Delaney, Saratoga, CA

From Nikki Watson to Irmgard Delaney

February 10, 1994

Dear Omi,

It is difficult to find the words to express to you how I feel and how much you mean to me. But here it goes. You are such a remarkable human being, I have always felt your love for me. I always knew your decision to give me up was made out of love. Did you ever feel like you had a choice to keep me or not? In my mind you had no choice. I have always felt so loved—by my Mom and Dad and by you, my birth mother.

As I grew up, I thought of you often, and I always hoped that one day I would have the chance to thank you. I always thought that, if you wanted to find me, you could. I thought you had the same amount of information about me as I had about you. I always felt that if I was the one to find you, I might be an unwelcome intrusion in your life. The last thing in the world I wanted to do was to cause you any pain. If I had known that our reunion was something you were also desiring, I would have started looking for you sooner!

After I had Ashley and Chelsey and knew what it felt like to be a mom, I realized, to an even greater extent, what giving a baby up means. The more I thought about you, the greater my motivation became to find you, and let you know I was okay, and very happy, and to say thank you. That motivation eventually overshadowed my fears of "ruining" your life.

I have always loved you. The decision you made to give me life is something I thank God for all the time, and I have always loved you for making that life-giving decision. Now that I know the circumstances of my conception, it is truly a miracle that I am here. I am eternally grateful to you. What you endured to give me my life, goes beyond anything I have ever known. When I was born, you were so alone, without your family, when you probably needed someone with you more than ever before. You are truly a courageous person.

I feel like my Mom and Dad are such a blessed gift to me. They are wonderful parents. They have always loved me so unconditionally. I always knew, and still know, that no matter what, they always love me. The only thing they want for me is my happiness. From the two times that you and they met, almost 30 years ago, they knew and let me know what a very good person you are. I love them very much, and I feel we are all very blessed to be a part of one another's lives. They, too, have a lot of courage.

I will never forget the sound of your voice on Monday, January 24th. When you said you were very happy to be talking with me, I was so relieved. I always hoped and prayed that you were happy in life. To finally know that you were happy; and that you were happy to be reunited with me is a joy I will never ever forget.

I want to thank you again for coming to Colorado to see me. I will always cherish the memory of the first time I saw you, on January 31st, 1994. The feelings of excitement, nervousness, happiness, and overwhelming joy that I felt were so unique to that moment—I shall never forget it. Watching the video just brings it all back so fresh and clear. It is simply wonderful.

The special time alone we had to talk was so nice. I know it must have been so difficult to say what you had to say, and I thank you so much for telling me the truth. It is still uncomfortable for me to think of what my biological father did—the worst part of it is just all the pain it caused you. It was a lot to digest, but with Jim's ever-loving ears and arms, I'm doing just fine. I still don't feel a need or desire to search for my father. I thank you, though, for your offer of searching for him together—you truly amaze me!

Omi, I thank you, too, for the warmth I have felt from Opi, Stella, Moni, René, and Lisa. Their perception of me comes from you, and it just proves to me again that you really did and do care about me. I can't wait to meet and talk with all of them this Thursday.

I want to thank you for my painting. It is so beautiful, peaceful, and happy. It makes me feel warm every time I look at it (which is often!). It's so much fun showing it off, too! Thank you for the precious bunnies you made for Ashley and Chelsey. They love them. They are very much looking forward to seeing you again in March and meeting the rest of their new family.

I feel like I've had so may questions about myself answered for me now. Thank you so much for your openness and for sharing so much of yourself with me. I am so proud to say that you are my birth mother! Omi, you are such a beautiful person inside and out.

— Nikki Watson, Ft. Collins, CO

The Roos Family

Three of four children, separated by poverty and adoption in Germany in the 1960s, are reunited in the U.S. almost 30 years later

by Karin Roos Brown

This is the story of the Roos family, from Amberg, Germany. It begins back in the 1960s. My parents had four children: me (Karin), the oldest, born on December 31, 1959; Kerstin, born on December 10, 1961; Albert, whose name now is Kevin Barnett, born on December 15, 1962; and Silvia, born on July 11, 1965.

It was financially impossible for my parents to raise all four children. My father was an alcoholic and my mother had emotional problems at the time. Very young and struggling, they came up with the only solution they thought was best: they gave up the two youngest children for adoption. Silvia went to a German family, and Albert was placed with an American family from Kansas.

I first found out that I had another sister and a brother in 1978 when I was so informed by my grandfather shortly before he died. My parents chose not to tell us about our siblings because they believed we might hate them for what they had done. I can imagine how painful it must have been for my parents, not knowing where their other children were or what had become of them, and I know there were many nights when they cried over the loss. It was very painful for all of us when I confronted them with the truth.



Karin Brown *(r)*, Kevin & Kerstin

At the time, I decided to search for my brother and sister. As you may well imagine, finding my sister proved easier. I found her within six months, living with her adoptive parents in another town only ten miles away called Sulzbach-Rosenberg. (Imagine! Only ten miles away!) Her adoptive parents were friendly and allowed us to visit Silvia. Sixteen years later, we both live in the U.S. (having both married American servicemen) and still keep in touch on a regular basis.

Finding my brother was not as simple, however, being that he was adopted by Americans. Looking back, it seems almost a miracle that I found him at all, especially considering that my family has moved back and forth between the U.S. and Germany over the last 14 years.

In the course of my search, I got into contact with Leonie Boehmer, who lives in Albuquerque, NM. She, in turn, put me in touch with Maria Hierlinger, who works for International Social Services in Frankfurt, Germany. Unfortunately, neither was able to help me, despite their best efforts on my behalf.

In August 1994, I got a promotion at work; and in September, my parents came to visit us from Germany after five years of not having seen one another. It seemed as if we spent the whole month of September talking about Albert, wondering how he was. If only he knew his parents were here in the U.S. now! My parents returned sadly to Germany in October, and I vowed to continue the search.

I was beginning to feel that I might have no choice but to give up on the search when I received a telephone call from Albert himself. Unbeknownst to all of us, Albert had been searching for us, too. Surprisingly, he found out all he needed to know to find us from Catholic Charities in Salina, Kansas. On November 6, 1994, the telephone rang and the voice on the other end asked if my name was Karin, and if I had a sister named Kerstin. It took my breath away when the man said that his name was Kevin Barnett, and that he was my brother, "Albert Roos."

I replied, "Do you know I had been looking for you since 1978?" Excited to have become reunited, we talked on the telephone for hours at a time for the next two weeks. I learned that he now lives in Colorado Springs, CO. I live in El Paso, TX, and my sister Kerstin lives in North Carolina, so we decided for me and Kerstin to visit Kevin in Colorado. On November 20, 1994, I flew from El Paso to Denver. Kerstin flew in from North Carolina the following day. Our reunion was covered by the television news (both the Colorado Springs ABC affiliate and Headline News covered the story), and Kevin's boss sent us flowers.

I stayed with Kevin for three days, which were three of the happiest days of my life. It was very painful to say goodbye. We made plans to visit one another again, this time in El Paso, when the whole family—kids and all—would be reunited. We hope one day to have everyone together again, including our parents and sister who still live in Germany. **Ende**

EDITORIAL *ON DISUNITY*

I recently read a two-page diatribe against the American Adoption Congress (AAC) that was mailed from somewhere in Michigan, apparently to various people within the adoption reform movement (if you've received a copy, you know what I'm talking about). Briefly, the anonymous author suggests, among other things, that the AAC has been hijacked by a small cadre of its officers, and that the recently established Task Force on Reorganization has failed in the mandate implicit in its name.

I have been an active participant in the adoption reform movement since joining ALMA's New York City chapter in 1986, and if I had the writer of this document in front of me, I would ask him or her, "Why are you so surprised?" As an observer of the adoption reform movement for almost a decade now, I have seen nothing so often as I have seen internecine conflict born of excessive egoism and shameless self-aggrandizement.

There used to be only one search support group in New York City (ALMA); now there are three (not counting smaller offshoots), but none of them even talks or interacts with any of the others. (ALMA is well-known for its insularity, but the situation in New York results from multilateral animosity.) Over the course of several years, each existing group gave rise to each successive group through conflicts within the "mother" group. I have seen evidence that a similar situation exists in British Columbia in Canada; and, based upon my observations to date, I have no reason to believe that such circumstances do not exist in many other places around the country as well.

Even computer-based communication is not immune. Within the FidoNet computer BBS network, there is a conference for searching adoptees and birth parents. It used to be a pretty laid-back forum, where the conference moderator was conspicuous by his absence. Lately, however, a megalomaniacal ego has taken over the active conference moderatorship, making it virtually impossible to engage in free and open discussion or debate.

In short, it seems to me that if unity is a prerequisite to success in the adoption reform movement, then we are necessarily doomed to failure. Indeed, the very nature of the task of "adoption reform"—i.e., changing four dozen or so different laws in four dozen or so different jurisdictions, each with its own peculiar circumstances and history which may work either for or against us—seems to me to make the process that much more prone to fragmentation and discord. This situation also means that our resources, both in terms of personnel and money, are necessarily spread out very thinly.

I don't pretend to know what the answer is to the problems posed by our movement and its goals. I only know that it is a waste of time to bemoan circumstances which are inherent in the nature of all human endeavors, and about which little, if anything, can be done. — ***WLG***