8th Year

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

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The International Scene

"Liberation Children" Seek Authorities' Cooperation in Locating Their Fathers

by Hank op de Dyk

"Liberation Children" is a Dutch self-help group formed by individuals fathered by members of the allied forces that liberated The Netherlands after WW II. The group was founded about 12 years ago to assist such individuals in their searches for their fathers in their countries of origin.

In organizing meetings on a regular basis, we try to be a platform for our members to share their emotions and experiences. We also see it as our mission, to carefully guard the interests and privacy of *all* parties involved. We are a non-profit organization, and for our financial resources we only can depend on contributions from our members, and incidental donations from individuals and organizations with sympathy toward our goals.

Many Liberation Children still don't know a significant part of their identity. They do not seek legal status in relation to their fathers, nor do they have any financial claim as a motive for their searches. They also have no intention to hurt the feelings of whoever is involved. Their only claim is their right to information concerning their heritage, based on international human rights. But if there is a mutual emotional basis, they will be open to personal contact with the father with a permanent character.

One of the practical problems that Liberation Children have to face is limited information about the father. There often is no more information to start with than just a name. Through lack of understanding about their motives, and the emotional importance of a contact for the children as well as for the fathers involved, we often find apprehensive authorities in our way.

Our experience (over 800 solved cases) is that a contact between Liberation Children and their fathers, in a majority of the cases, is a positive event in the lives of both of them. Many fathers know, or at least have an idea, about their overseas offspring. Often, a meeting or other contact with the child is experienced as a relief. The thought of the child has always been in the back of their minds, and the subject finally becomes one that can be spoken about. The association also receives and handles requests from veterans to locate their overseas child.

We try to achieve improvement of our position all the time. Due to a dearth of official information, searches often take a lot of time. This means a raw deal for the searcher involved. Not to have to obtain information through all possible and sometimes impossible sources also means an optimal guarantee for a discreet approach and the best representation of the interests of all parties. We, therefore, try to come to negotiations with the governments involved.

A settlement was made in 1990 with the U.S. Government by our British sister-organization "War Babes." This settlement benefits our association and similar organizations as well. The settlement provides that the U.S. government provide information from official military archives, and includes the possibility to have a letter of the searcher forwarded to the veteran by certified mail (restricted delivery).

We also seek the support of other relevant groups, such as veterans associations. Through providing the proper information, we are happy to see an increasing willingness to cooperate. We will continue our efforts to support this positive development.

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The Netherlands

Ende

Hank op de Dyk is married to Ramona, a German-born adoptee whose reunion story was related in issue #21 of GD *("German-Born Dutch Woman Finds Her Roots in Michigan").*

Reunited Mother and Daughter Have Special Friendship

by Melody Zielinski

In 1964, I was a senior in high school and my father was stationed in Germany. I was dating a young man who was also a military dependent still in high school. We were as devoted to each other as any teenagers could be under the circumstances. We conceived a child that was given up for adoption, after my parents decided that was the best decision for all concerned. Roland and his family returned to the states and I was sent to stay with an aunt and uncle who were also stationed in Germany at the time.

Our daughter was born on November 20, 1964 in Bremerhaven, Germany. I was very concerned about her health, since I had the measles when I was three months pregnant. I was told that she was very healthy and had no problems from my having had the measles. I was not allowed to see her or even hear her cry. The only thing I ever saw of her was a footprint.

Roland and I were allowed no contact after her birth. He believed for years that our baby had been a boy and was adopted by a German couple. I was told that she was adopted by an American Air Force couple. When she was six months old, I was required to sign final adoption papers. The names of her adopted parents were on the papers, but my father covered the name with his hand before I had an opportunity to see them very well. For years, all I knew of her was that her adopted parents' last name started with a "W" and was long and difficult to pronounce.

When our daughter was about three years old, my mother told me that they had received a letter telling them that she had a heart condition and had died when she was three years old. I had no reason to doubt the truth of what I was being told, but in my heart I always felt that she had not died.

In July of 1994, I was given the name of Leonie Boehmer as a possible source of help in finding the truth about our daughter. By this time, Roland and I had been in touch again and felt that we both needed to have a closure to this and needed to know the truth for sure. After some discussion with Leonie, she thought that she could help. With very little information (knowing only that it was a girl and her birth date), she was able to obtain a registration of her birth. We now had a name for our daughter, whom we had called baby for so long. Her name was Marishka Katherine Wirhousky and her father's name was Edward.

With this information, Leonie was able to find that her father had died, and that he was living in South ***(Continued on Next Page)***

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Mother & Daughter's Special Friendship

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Carolina at that time. I was still doubtful as to whether or not our daughter was still alive. I requested a copy of her father's obituary from the local newspaper. Marishka was listed as a survivor and her name was now Gregory and she lived in Wilmington, NC. From this information, Leonie obtained an address and telephone number.

Leonie called me on Friday, October 14, 1995, with the information. I spent the weekend composing a letter to Marishka, but I had misgivings about sending it. I did not know, of course, if she even knew that she was adopted. I was so afraid of causing her major problems if she did not know. Roland shared all of my concerns, but my final decision to mail the letter came from my husband. He said that it was too easy to find her when it should have been very difficult and that the hand of God was leading me toward her for some very definite reason. Because of some hereditary health problems in my family, I truly believed that she needed to know about us. In my letter, I told her of her adoption and told all of the health concerns from both Roland and me. I also gave her telephone numbers and my address, if she wanted to contact me. I wanted Marishka to have all of the information that she needed in case she chose not to contact me. I sent the letter certified so that I would not have to wonder if she received it in case she never contacted me.

She had the letter for a week before she called. Obviously, it was an extremely difficult week for all concerned. As the days went by with no contact, we were all sure that she had not known she was adopted and that it was just too hard for her to deal with the news. When I answered the telephone and she said, "Melody. Hi, it's Marishka," my heart was in my mouth. She said she had always known that she was adopted and, in fact, had the whole adoption file. She had registered at one time but our names had not crossed because we were on different files. We had a long conversation with a promise of pictures to be sent. I immediately called Roland and told him and his wife about our conversation.

After a few weeks of talking, we made plans to visit in December with Roland and I going to Wilmington to meet her and her family. I arrived a day before Roland and it gave Marishka and me some time to get to know each other alone. We spent the day looking at baby pictures and wedding pictures. There are no words to describe the wonder of that day.



(l-r) **Marishka Gregory, Melody Zielinski & Roland**

Greg and Marishka have two of the most wonderful children. Tripp is five years and Sabre is four. They had not been told the story of who we are, only that we are very special friends. They called me Ms. Melody. During the evening of our first day, Sabre called me Grandma several times. At one time, Tripp also called me Grandma. When they were back home, Marishka asked Sabre why she kept calling me Grandma, and she said, "because she just feels like my Grandma." She and Tripp both felt like very, very special grandchildren to me also.

On Friday, Roland arrived late in the evening. That was pretty strange. Not only were we seeing our daughter for the first time, but we were seeing each other also. We spent Saturday and Sunday with Marishka and her family, just getting to know each other. We went to church on Sunday together and to a play that the children were in at church on Sunday evening.

Monday morning, Marishka, Roland and I had breakfast together before we left. It was a special time because we were able to talk about our feelings together. I hope there will be a time when we can all be together and my husband and Roland's wife will have an opportunity to get to know each other and our daughter's family. She is certainly a very special person and had wonderful parents. I am so very thankful that she has had a good life and a normal childhood.

We recently talked about feeling rejected as so many adopted children seem to feel. She has never felt that and we both believe it is because she has such loving and compassionate parents. They must be wonderful people to have raised such a delightful young woman.

We talk often on the telephone and plan to visit during the summer. I feel as though I have gained a very special friend in the daughter that I lost so many years ago. I felt comfortable with her from the first minute I heard her voice and I think that she feels the same way. I am looking forward to many years of a wonderful friendship.

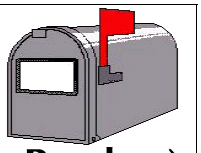
In closing, I want to say that I truly believe the hand of God led us all together for some very important reason. If we had written a script for this series of events, it could not have been any more wonderful or miraculous. There is no way for me to ever tell Leonie how very special I think she is for her help. I believe that God put her on this earth as his special angel of love and hope.

Ende

BONER'S ARK ***by Frank Johnson***

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Briefe

(Letters From Readers)

Editor's Note: *The birth mother I had found was Helene Richter in Braunschweig. She passed away almost a year ago. Jackson and family went to see her and his half-siblings on his father's side who are some of the people this letter is addressed to. The mother did not have any other children. But since Jackson's birth father was the father of his half-siblings, the birth mother had stayed in touch with them.*

*— **Leonie Boehmer***

August 29, 1995

To: Zoli and Erika Hoffmann
Viktor and Pia Hoffmann
Stefan and Kathe Baja
Aurelia Hofmann
Leonie Boehmer

Dear Family and Friends,

Our dear mother's loss was deeply felt in our house. It was made all the worse by the great distance. Jackson had felt that things were not quite right for some time but Helene would not discuss problems as though it would be some kind of burden to us. Zoli, Jackson should probably know exactly what she died of for his own medical history. If you can find out and write to us, it would be much appreciated. I am sorry that I am writing in English, our German we have to make ourselves speak around the house now. It is part of good memories now and even though we do not write much, we think of you all often.

About the pictures and memorable things, Zoli, if it is not too much trouble, please send them. We have hardly had any time for even a short vacation so I can not say when we can come next.

This is Franji's last year in our High School and then she will go to the University in our state and major in music. She studies hard on her flute and we have bought her a new white gold hand made flute that sounds like an angel is making music. She has fun playing alto saxophone and enjoys jazz music. On the piano, she mostly likes to play Gershwin's music. She has wonderful private teachers and would like to teach music one day. This summer she had her tonsils removed in surgery so she will be feeling better this winter.

Jackson's practice remains very busy despite health care reform. When he is off for a day, he is busy with his machinery. He has a partner, Daryl, and they together have developed software that recycles older machinery (milling machines, lathes, plasma torches) and brings them up to new standards. They are selling all over the United States but their goal is to be involved in the technical schools for the students. Between the practice and the machinery, he spends very little time socially other than church.

I am still working at the office but am trying to take one day off a week. It will be a very busy year for Franji and I getting her ready for the University. She presently is number one in her class so that is a lot of pressure for this upcoming year. My parents came in June during Franji's surgery to help take care of her while Jack and I worked. They stayed one month and then my sister came for two weeks.

We have taken several trips over to the University (350 miles one way) to ask questions and see how we feel about the campus. Franji likes it a lot over there and she can fly home when she wants to. Her friend, Justin, will be also going there to study architecture. They have been dating for 2½ years and have a lot of the same interests. He also plays in the jazz band at school—trumpet. Enclosed I have sent you a picture. Franji has changed so much! Since we cannot make a trip to Germany, I can at least send a picture.

So, time goes by much too fast. We are grayer in our hair and more mellow with our ideas. And in one year our only child will be home only for visits. We have learned to consider each day precious and do the best we can with that one day.

Also in Mutti's memory, we have donated a very wonderful computerized music keyboard to our church. She seemed to love the music that we had in our church and every time Franji plays it, I think about her sitting beside me at church when she was here. She also trimmed one of my dying plants and now it has just grown beautiful and large. She has left a deep loving impression on our hearts and so have you all that opened your homes and memories to us on our occasion to spend time with you.

Much love to all,

— Cindy, Jackson, and Franji

P.S. Leonie, thanks again for five years with one of the most precious women we will ever meet, and also the half brothers' and sister's families. I know many more people will be blessed because of your work.

— Cindy Holland, Centralia, WA

November 20, 1995

Dear Leonie:

Here it is, Thanksgiving again. I have so many things to be thankful for, and you are at the top of my list.

So far, I have had two letters from my birth mother, Ernie Beck, and I am so thankful for each one. The first one was received within a month of my initial letter to her, while the second was received a week or so ago. In her last letter, she said that she was waiting on getting some translation software to make it easier for me. I also have the software. I am hopeful that we will now be able to stay in close contact with each other.

Through the bits and pieces I have learned about Ernie, I have noted several similarities. First, I do resemble her in looks. Second, for many years, I have suffered from bad headaches. It looks as though these are also inherited. She seems very excited about having a grandson, as her son, Andre, is both mentally and physically handicapped. She has even sent presents to Brandon and me.

I want you to know how incredibly lucky I feel to have found Ernie. It would not have been possible without you. Thank you so much for the assistance you gave me, as well as what you do and have done for everyone else. You are truly a blessing. *— Frieda Foresee Ratliff*
Montgomery, AL

The following articles are reprinted with permission from the Oct/Nov 1995 issue of German Life*, a bi-monthly magazine devoted to German culture, travel, history and heritage. A 1-year subscription is $17.95; write to POB 609, Grantsville, MD 21536.*

English or German?

The "Neu-Deutsch" Phenomenon

English speakers who know German or are at least laboring under the illusion that some language school taught them enough to get by may well ask themselves if they have wasted their *Zeit* and *Geld* when they visit Germany these days! English words crop up in the vocabulary of even those Germans intent on sparing their language this particular foreign influence.

Only the playful side of the matter, newspapers and magazines positively teem with personal ads written in Engleutsch, Denglisch, Gerlisch, or Neu-Deutsch, (to mention but a few of the more unfavorable nicknames given this language by those who take occasional offense at it). A *Girl* on the dating scene may choose to go to a *Single-Treff* (singles bar) where she hopes to meet the right *Boy*. The two then *come together* and *share* the *Taste* of a *Cocktail* at *Happy Hour*. For the younger generation, what *Kids* do, *"es muß Fun machen"* because they are the *Fit-For-Fun People*.

Such Anglicisms, however, have led many of the more serious-minded Germans to champion the soon-to-be-implemented spelling reform, which has been the subject of hot debate for decades.

Of course, some believe that it matters little what we say, much less how we spell it, as long as we communicate. But there, sometimes, lies the rub. The language barrier in the world of politics, science, and industry can, at best, pose a very serious problem and, at worst, lead to a communication breakdown. When meaning fails to be transported along with an Anglicism, a German ecologist trying to differentiate between *öko-audit* and *öko-controlling* is in trouble. And everybody may understand *Recyclebarkeit* ("recyclability"), but wouldn't it look better to Germanize the spelling? I.e., *risaikeln* or at least *recykeln*?

It seems that the American watchword "Time is Money," when you get right down to it, also makes the Teutonic timepiece tick. For if the subject is business and money, Anglicisms abound.

In Germany, *Managers* now have *Jobs* and attend *Briefings* and *Workshops*, take *Trips* on *InterCity* trains, having bought a *Ticket* with *Cäsh*, before perhaps attending a *Meeting* on *Total Value Management*. Alternatively, *Base Zero Budgeting* notwithstanding, they may be whisked *Up, Up, and Away, First Class*, of course, because they are taking part in a *Refreshing*(!) *Course* to learn how to run a *Sponsoring Event*.

In some areas, it is far more sensible and practical to use the original English-language terms than to try to find a cumbersome German equivalent. For those who work with computers, the essential bits of silicon with integrated

(Continued on Page 4, Column 1)

circuits used to make a PC work are also known in Germany as *chips*, and continue to keep company with *bytes*, *fonts*, and *motherboards*.

Disregarding terms from today's Age of High Technology, the Neu-Deutsch phenomenon isn't really all that new; it's the name. Nietzsche gave to the language spoken by soldiers in barracks; he called it a "barbaric retrogression," which was arguably the case, though German language and literature seem to have survived its "evil" influence!

Of course, no nation is free of the attraction to lacing one's speech with foreign words, where would the Anglo-Americans be—and the rest of the civilized world for that matter—without *Schadenfreude* and *Weltanschauung*, not to mention the nastier concepts *Lebensraum* or *Blitzkrieg*? (Or is that *Gesellschaft?*)

It is interesting that the influence of German on English seems to be largely restricted to two main areas—war and the mind. At first glance, one wonders if there is nothing between the psyche and the sword that has left its imprint upon Shakespeare's tongue. But one in-between area, the stomach, has been affected. In the culinary realm, *Sauerkraut* is one "German" item that has taken root outside of Germany, as has an Americanized *liverwurst* and a few other comestibles that immigrés couldn't do without.

We still wonder, though, why the enormity of the influence of English on the German language? Are young people eager to show they are as "cool" as the next *Kid?* Are adults showing off in some way, or are they genuinely interested in intercultural issues and conscious of such enrichment in their lives because of the best of Neu-Deutsch? *— Jennifer Becker*

German Spelling in the 21st Century

The old German saying "Rechtschreibung ist Glückssache"—correct spelling is a matter of chance—reflects the haphazard rules that govern German orthography and the orthographies of most other countries. English is an even worse offender (just think of the problems writers have with "their" and "there," or even "through" and "threw"). In Germany we used to say that only schoolteachers and typesetters *really* know how to spell. Yet the very term, "Rechtschreibung" (correct writing) suggests that there is a true norm, an orthographic absolute, from which you should never deviate.

Before German unification of 1871, there were no binding rules to govern spelling for the entire German-speaking area. Regionalism and tradition dictated how a word should be written. Some reformers wanted words to be spelled the way they are pronounced, but that did not eliminate problems. The speech of many Germans would not distinguish, for instance, between "Vorsicht! Wilde Bären" ("Caution! Wild Bears!") and "Vorsicht! Wilde Beeren" ("Caution! Wild Berries!")

Thus some serious-minded members from the various German-speaking countries held a series of congresses on the topic. In 1901 they submitted to their governments final proposals, which became the spelling rules that have been in force—with minor changes—ever since. These rules now make up a book—the bible of German orthography, the *Duden—Rechtschreibung der deutschen Sprache*. To this day, this is the official German spelling guide, named after its compiler, Konrad Duden. Now in its 20th edition, the dictionary is as much an authority for German as Noah Webster's *Spelling Book* and its later *Webster* reincarnations have been for American English.

The agreement of 1901 was, by necessity, an arbitrary codification. Back then, innovations and modifications had a hard time finding acceptance.

In the 20th century, however, language has exploded beyond traditional boundaries. Grandfather's spelling rules no longer reflect today's realities. Two world wars and political, commercial, technical, and media-related progress have deeply affected contemporary speech as well as writing.

In 1994 the Germans again convened to discuss the matter, after which the participants issued a proposal for a "modest" German spelling reform. Following trial periods, one hopes, the reforms will be adopted by all German-speaking countries no later than 2001. The 20th edition of *Duden—Die deutsche Rechtschreibung* already contains a special appendix, listing the major innovations and recommendations.

Of course, in many ways, these "modest" proposals simply follow common sense. One can see that the reformers are seeking at least a sense of order. For example, there is a "vorsichtige Anpassung" (cautious adaptation) of the spelling of foreign loan words ("Asfalt" instead of "Asphalt"); and for the verbal form of "Nummer" (number), we now have the spelling "nummerieren" (in place of the old "numerieren"). The "ß"—a bane for many writers of German—has not been eliminated (as has been the practice in Switzerland for some time), but its use has been further regularized: it can be used only if preceded by a long vowel. Thus, it will be retained in "Fuß," but eliminated in "Fluss." The statistically greatest trouble maker in German spelling, the conjunction "daß," will now be spelled "dass," even though this doesn't solve the problem of its confusion with "das."

New rules on capitalization and word separation establish greater consistency. In the past, for example, separating "st" in words like "Fenster" (window) was not allowed. But now we have "Fen-ster." And with compound nouns, writers may now hyphenate for greater clarity. In comes "Sauerstoff-Flasche" rather than "Sauerstofflasche" (oxygen tank). This rule may be optional, but it sure will help defuse complaints like Mark Twain's about the awful German language and its elephantine words. Writers of correspondence can also relax, at least a little. Formerly an honorific form, the "Du" or "Sie" (both meaning "you") had to be spelled with capital letters. In the future, the "du" forms and their derivatives will remain small (it is, after all, the "familiar" form), while the "Sie" continues on capitalized—increasing its value as a form of respect.

The recommendations of the Vienna Conference of 1994 resulted, as spelling rules always have, from negotiations. "Behutsam" (cautious) is used constantly by the 1994 Vienna commission, apparently with good reason. The reception for their proposals has so far not been enthusiastic: Critics have greeted the "Neuregelung der deutschen Rechtschreibung" (restructuring of German spelling) caustically. Journals have parodied texts in "new spell." Bookstore owners display the *Information zur neuen deutschen Rechtschreibung*, published by Duden, as a curiosity.

Yet, the time is ripe for bringing German orthography into modern times. Revising spelling rules every ninety years or so is not quite revolutionary. What is really proposed here is an adjustment, not radical change. It is, all things considered, yet another "Kompromiß"—oops, pardon me "Kompromiss." *— Gerhard Weiss*

Book Review

Brains for Breakfast

by Susan Baumgartner

Here's a quick test: does the thought of breaking the seal on an envelope without a letter opener make you wince?This sensitivity, according to Susan Baumgartner, shows you've got at least a bit of German blood in your veins—or at least a sympathetic gene or two. The envelope is one of five test questions in *Brains for Breakfast* that the author suggests as measures of your own "German aptitude." (The others comprise a fondness for sauerkraut, liver sausage, perfectionism, and the morning meal of the title.)

Baumgartner, who was born in 1951, is a fifth-generation German Catholic and grew up on an Idaho farm. She teaches at the University of Idaho's Creative Writing Program. Don't worry: despite her academic credentials, her approach to the topic of Germans in America is cheerfully personal. The feeling is anecdotal rather than scholarly, as though you were sitting over a nice long cup of *kaffee* in a cozy kitchen. You'll either get a big kick out of the cuteness, or it will drive you crazy: this is not a book about which you can feel lukewarm.

Baumgartner alternates between present-day scenes of her own family and a history of her relatives—and, by extension, many other German immigrant families—in this country. Her tone is conversational, even jocular, as she traces the history of such traditions as holiday celebrations, cooking, and music. She makes a journey of discovery within her book, uncovering her roots, revealing aspects of her childhood that persist to this day—such as an apparently deep knowledge of the proper dusting and vacuuming—and her interest in preserving the simple pleasures of hard work and cooperation, the influence of the old country, that marked her childhood.

Though Baumgartner clearly spent time going through archival material, this is not a definitive tome on the Teutonic contributions to this country. But neither is it a literary memoir. It's mildly self-congratulatory in the manner of a family genealogy: *Brains for Breakfast*'s gently naught stories of the Baumgartners and harmful to none, its feeling homespun and wholesome. *— Megan Ratner*