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The International Scene

A Child Wih Three First Names

That was proof enough that her Irish mother must have wanted her

by Sibella C. Giorello

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

From the Richmond (VA) *Times-Dispatch*
Sunday, July 7, 1996

At age 8, Maureen McClung discovered her parents didn't die in a car crash.

"My adopted parents had told me there was this horrible crash and my parents died and I flew out the window and landed on the grass," McClung recalled, sitting in her Virginia Beach home.

But all that changed when she found a silver box in her parents' bedroom.

"I was snooping," McClung admitted. "I just wanted to know some things."

The things she found were handwritten letters; typed telegrams—"Baby Marian wanted. Send soon as possible," read one; a receipt for a one-way Pan American plane ticket from Ireland to America; and some newspaper clippings with the words "Irish babies" prominently displayed.

McClung asked her adoptive parents about the information. They didn't reply for several days. Finally, they told her that, no, in fact, her parents hadn't died in a car crash. Maureen's birth mother was a poor, uneducated woman who had given birth out of wedlock in Ireland.

Maureen was, in their words, "an unwanted child," abandoned by her mother.

"So we took you," they said, and raised her in Brooklyn, NY, with an adopted older brother, who was American.

News of willful abandonment stung. But McClung clutched on memory from inside that box: the adoption order, dated December 13, 1961. It decreed that "Marian June Sariena," with an Irish last name, was to become "Maureen Anne," with a new last name belonging to her American parents.

The three original first names rang in McClung's mind for several decades: Marian June Sariena. When McClung gave birth to her first child in 1983, she realized why.

"I had just given birth and was holding my baby girl and thinking, how could this woman, my mother, get up and walk away? She gave me three first names. Why? If I was going to get rid of my baby, it'd be named Sue or Mary or something plain. I thought, this wasn't a woman who gave birth and left. What woman can ever forget her baby? Especially one she gives three names to?"

Last year, after years of ambivalent emotions, McClung decided to search for her Irish mother.

"Everyone told me to leave her alone," said McClung, whose adopted mother died when she was a teenager and who is now the mother of six children ages 2 to 11.

"But you got to go with your gut feeling, and my gut feeling was this woman didn't abandon me. And if she didn't want to be found, I'd let her tell me."

During the 1950s, the world universally condemned unwed motherhood. In America, out-of-wedlock pregnancies shamed families and ruined the lives of young women. Reputations at stake, single,

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Co-Sons and Friends-in-Law

by Keith Clark

In her first syndicated column on gay and lesbian issues, *Detroit News* journalist Deb Price concluded in frustrated good humor that all the terms we have for how people refer to one's "better half"—friend, significant other, lover, spouse, longtime companion, domestic partner, etc.—are unsatisfactory. "Let's face it," Price lamented, "none of the terminology out there fits me—or us. Whatever phrase I use, I end up sounding like a foreigner who hasn't quite gotten the hang of American colloquialisms."

Well, it may be a bit reassuring to find that the English-speaking world isn't alone in this dilemma.

German-speakers, often the envy of the linguistic world because their language allows them to simply take two or three words and cobble them together into a brand new, crisp, succinct expression to hit the lexicographic nail on the semantic head, are finding that even their admirably inventive language can't keep up with contemporary social change.

The number of marriages taking place each year in Germany has been slowly declining for decades, while at the same time the number of "non-marital partnerships" (as the German government statisticians call them) has been steadily growing. At last count, according to the German Federal Bureau of Statistics, some 1.6 million couples had set up households together in the country with an estimated 415,000 of them being same-sex couples.

So imagine the dilemma of fastidious German parents trying to decide how to refer to a son-in-law or daughter-in-law (Schwiegersohn/-Schwiegertochter) who, strictly speaking, isn't.

As far back as 1979, the ever-vigilant Society for German Language launched a campaign to find a suitable term for these *de facto* in-laws. although nothing formal came of that effort, the term "friend-in-law" (Schwiegerfreund/Schwiegerfreundin) did start popping up informally in day-to-day conversations.

A few disgruntled Teutonic linguists suggested scrapping the "Schwieger" prefix (meaning "in-law") entirely and use Wahlfreund/Wahlfreundin instead, equivalent to something roughly like "friend-in-choice."

But the "Wahl" idea, according to linguist Friedheim Debus, is too artificial, and in a recently published scholarly article, he argues that a better alternative is suggested by trends in contemporary speech and in Middle High German, the medieval ancestor of today's standard German language: the very common prefix "Mit-" (meaning "with" or "co-").

Debus notes that the Teutonic knights of old ("Ritter") had their

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

A Child With Three First Names

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pregnant women were often shuttled off to have illegal abortions or to give birth far from prying community eyes.

Ireland, ruled by its conservative Catholic doctrine, viewed unwed motherhood even more harshly than most countries. Abortion was not only illegal, but unthinkable. And within this country's firm moral hierarchy, an out-of-wedlock birth was not only a sin, but vaguely criminal.

"Bear in mind, Ireland has always been known as the place of saints and scholars," said Anne Marie Kane, speaking by phone from her home outside Dublin. Kane is the product of an illegitimate Irish union during the 1960s.

"Unwed motherhood was a disgrace in Ireland," Kane said. "It made dirty the story of saintliness."

Of course, moral codes alone can never stop illegitimate births. And during the 1950s and '60s, thousands of young Irish women found themselves with child and without husband.

In 1958, a beautiful, educated Irish woman met a handsome older man. He was Dutch, gainfully employed and age 36. She was 21. They consummated the relationship; she became pregnant. The Dutchman offered to marry his young love, but the Catholic Church forbade it: He'd been divorced, and without an annulment, the church wouldn't allow him to remarry.

The young woman, whom we'll call Oona, did what most unwed mothers in Ireland did at that time. Six months pregnant, she went to one of the many convents called "mother-and-child homes" run by Catholic nuns. The convent was in the town of Castlepollard, outside Dublin.

On June 1, 1959, Oona gave birth to a baby. She named it Marian June Sariena. Marian for the blessed virgin, so that her daughter would be under the protection of Mary, the mother of Jesus, all her life; June for the date of her birth; and Sariena, for a nun who helped deliver the baby.

While the mother-and-child homes sound innocent, even nurturing, details recently have surfaced within the Irish media about life behind the cloistered walls. Oona's experience was positive, in part because the birth father financed her care. But others fared less well.

When they arrived, sometimes by ambulance, the unwed pregnant women were given new names, new clothes and a new life, not necessarily pleasant. Letters were routinely opened, screened for any attempts to make contact with the birth fathers, and even late in their pregnancies, women were forced to do heavy labor—milking cows and scrubbing floors—and spend hours in prayers.

"They were only allowed to wear shoes on Sunday," said Kane, who has heard hundreds of women's stories about the homes. For several years, she's been helping to reunite birth mothers and adopted children.

"After the mothers gave birth, some of them were sold to farmers who were too old to do the work. So these women would have to go do all the farm work, and the money would go to the convent. In all honesty, it was slave labor."

At best, the punitive measures were meant to teach young women a lesson, to remind them of an experience so terrible, it would never be repeated.

Without money, without another place to live with their secret babies, and facing a society that saw them as willful sinners, many unwed mothers chose to stay in the homes, working for the church. The nuns allowed the mothers scheduled visiting hours with their babies, often at night, but mothers weren't allowed to breast feed and were forced to express their milk into containers for the babies.

Most mothers stayed in the convent for one or two years with their children, calling them by chosen names, watching them grow to toddlers, dreaming of a future life.

But inevitably, papers came requiring signatures.

"A lot of them were pressured to give up their children," Kane said. "They were treated harshly in the convent, and when they finally decided to give up the child, they were treated differently."

One unwed mother who lived in such a home gave this account to the *Irish Times*:

"When it came to the signing of the papers, I remember being brought over to the room.

"There were two men and a big, big table. I knew I was signing the baby away, but I was terrified to sign it. I remember my hand was trembling and I think it was the cruelest thing...

"The night before [the baby] *went his clothes were left out and you were told to be up at 6:30 to bathe him and get him ready for going to America. I didn't sleep that night.*

"I remember getting up and going in to bathe him and dress him. I remember the little beige coat and the little bit of velvet on the collar, brown shoes and beige slacks.

"I carried him over to the door. The nun just said to me, kiss and good-bye now, and she just whipped him away.

"I ran up to the window to try to see him, I was almost getting out the window. But I couldn't see. All I could hear was the engine of the car. I kept listening until I couldn't hear it any longer."

Oona would have preferred to keep her child. But she decided to sign the papers about a year after her baby's birth. Without marrying the birth father, which she didn't want to with or without the church's blessing, she would be raising Marian June Sariena on her own. Forays outside the convent, both in Ireland and even America, to find work had proved to her the world in 1960 was no place for a single working mother.

Reluctantly, Oona gave the convent permission to put baby Marian up for adoption. She left Ireland, found a job in the Bahamas and spent every day wondering where her daughter was. She left an address with the convent, a family contact in Ireland, and a long detailed report on her background, the baby's father's background, and why they couldn't marry.

Age 14 months, Marian June Sariena left Dublin at 3:15 p.m. on August 9, 1961 on Pan American World Airways.

The unaccompanied infant arrived late that evening in New York City's Idlewild airport, where she was called Maureen.

Maureen McClung's search for her birth mother hit many walls.

"I'd write and write and write," she said, sitting in her kitchen as her two youngest children played in a backyard pool, her eyes frequently straying to find them.

"The difficulties were beyond belief. Dead end, dead end, dead end."

She wrote to the New York-based adoption service that had handled her adoption on the American end. They said her mother had blue eyes and brown hair, came from a family of shopkeepers and didn't have much education. Also, they said her birth father did not acknowledge paternity or contribute support.

Undaunted, McClung wrote to an elderly priest in Castlepollard. Though the mother-daughter home had closed, the priest had an address for McClung's birth mother. It was in the Bahamas, but he couldn't elaborate, given Ireland's strict laws about adoption privacy.

But the priest offered to send McClung's letters to the Bahamas address.

Months passed.

"He said, `There's no response. I don't think she wants to be contacted.' I said, 'How do you know she got the letter, that she's still where she was so many years ago?' "

She turned to an Irish adoption service, Barnardos. They didn't tell her anything she hadn't already heard. Except this, written in an offhand manner surrounded by other items: "Your mother came back to inquire about your whereabouts in 1963."

"That's when I went at full force," McClung said. "Because before I thought I might be setting myself up for a second rejection. But when I knew she'd come back, I thought, I'm not going to give up."

Back to the priest. He acknowledged her mother had come back—that's how he got the Bahamas address. But that was all he knew, he said.

McClung went on to the Irish office of emigration, the Irish Adoption Board, the American embassy....

Nothing. Only stunning phone bills.

"I prayed, I fasted," said McClung, a devoted Christian whose husband once worked for the Founders Inn, owned by the Christian Broadcasting Network. She finally chose to pray not for herself, but for her birth mother.

"I prayed for her and her family. I prayed to the Lord and I heard him say, `You don't care about the background, you don't care about the adultery, all you care about is being reconciled to her.' I said, 'Yes, Lord.' And he said, 'That's how I feel about the world.'

"He doesn't care about the sin," McClung said. "He just cares about the person being reconciled to Christ. And all of a sudden, I knew how God saw the world."

Doors started opening.

McClung tracked down the commissioner of the Irish Adoption Board.

"It must have been something in my voice. I said, `Listen, I've got six kids here and there are certain things I need to know, just for medical reasons.'"

The commissioner ***CONT. ON PG. 4, COL. 1***

How We Located Our Adopted Son's Four Siblings and Our Daughter's Birth Mother

by Robert L. Tracy

To start, my wife, Mildred, and I adopted two of the sweetest children in Nürnberg, (West) Germany, in 1953. Our son was six weeks old and our daughter 13 months old. Our lives were fulfilled, and our children have always known that they were adopted. Ours was the usual American-type family. I was in the service and our children grew up to be wonderful adults. For whatever reason, they apparently never wanted to look for their birth families. I was under the most horrible impression that our daughter's mother was dead. It was from this point that my search began.

In the fall of 1994, our son, Tom, asked out of a clear blue sky if I would try to locate his brother. We knew he had a brother because we had seen him at the time of our son's adoption. I set out not knowing where or to whom to turn, but it was for Tom's sake that I was determined to find his brother. I wrote to *Unsolved Mysteries*, to no avail; then to our local Channel 4, who replied with some suggestions, a few commercials; and to Leonie Boehmer, whom I also called, and who gave me the same information: we have to get the names of the people who adopted Tom's brother, and his presumed new name.

I got out Tom's adoption papers and wrote to the social worker in Erlangen, Frau Gellenbeck, who had arranged Tom's adoption. Weeks went by and a letter finally came in the mail. She said that she had gotten permission from the adoptive parents to tell us their whereabouts. Initially, we searched for just a brother, and were surprised to learn there was also a sister, whose name is Audrey and who was the oldest child. Many letters passed between Tom and his new-found family.

In September of 1995, Tom's brother, Christian, visited us here in Tacoma. Before his arrival, he told Tom there were two younger sisters, both of whom were adopted by American families. Both Christian and Tom wanted to located these siblings, and asked my help. It was a good thing I'm retired and so have plenty of time!

By this time, I had the girls' names (at birth) and the last names of the adoptive parents. I thought it would be a cakewalk, but I was wrong.

I tried to locate them using the Select Disk computerized telephone list. I wrote to the German Embassy, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and any other agencies I could think of. Everyone said that I need to have the adoptive parents' complete names, otherwise nothing could be done. Leonie had done her best, but her hands were tied like everyone else's, including Frau Gellenbeck in Erlangen: she could have told me what I needed to know, but kept refusing to do so based upon confidentiality. I wrote her several times, but she always said the same. Eventually, Christian was the one who came up with the names through the use of a private investigator.

With the names in hand, I turned back to the Select Phone disk, by which means I found about 30 people with the same last name. I wrote to all of them and got my first reply from Jackie's adoptive step-mother. She said that Jackie's adoptive parents were no longer living and that she had very little to do with her and only knew her name by her first marriage. Then, out of the blue, a wonderful lady from Houston, TX, appeared who was interested in what I was trying to do. With her help, I located an address where Jackie had once lived. I got the name of the apartment complex from the computer and made the call. The manager said Jackie no longer lived there. I asked for a forwarding address, but I might just as well have been asking for her left arm. Again, confidentiality came to the fore. I told her, I had been looking for a long time, and what I thought of confidentiality. Lo and behold, she said she would get in touch with her and ask her to call me.

There are two Bob Tracys in the Tacoma area, and so when the call came, I asked the gentleman on the other end of the line if he was looking for the one who flies pigeons or the big, fat one. He replied, "the one who is trying to locate my wife." When I explained why I wanted to find her, he said, "You're kidding!" or words to that effect. He then put his wife on the phone. She was shocked, to say the least, but also thrilled beyond belief. I told her about Tom and his life as our son. The following Tuesday, Tom called her from our house, and a an immediate bond was formed. That was four months ago, and every Tuesday, Tom and Jackie chat and talk about a reunion in Germany in 1997. Now I was only wishing I could find the other sister, Marie.

Back to the computer I went, but there were literally thousands of people with Marie's last name, Haines; it might as well have been Smith or Jones! I tried writing to all the old agencies, begging for the first name of Mr. Haines, but to no avail. I was at my wits' end; I couldn't believe that the INS couldn't located a record of a girl named Haines who was born on May 13, 1954 who entered the U.S. under that name and who was subsequently naturalized.

I wrote to Christian and included it in one of Tom's many letters that I needed to know Mr. Haines's first name. He replied that Frau Gellenbeck had given him the same response. He hired a private investigator and sent me a fax with the name on it in the last week of June. Within 20 minutes I had Marie's mother on the telephone. She said it was up to Nancy (Marie's new name) to decide if she wanted to get in touch with us. She told her about my call, but didn't give her my telephone number. I later learned that Nancy had called her mother and gotten the number. She called me on the 4th of July.

I once vowed not to shave or get a haircut until I found her. My hair grew long and my beard was grey. After a few months, I shaved and got a haircut, and started getting a good feeling, knowing that someday I would find her. Now when Tom comes to our house, he has two sisters to talk to. After talking to Nancy, the pressure was off and I felt so relieved I sat and cried with the joy of knowing that Tom's siblings now all knew there were five of them.

About two months before, I called an old army buddy living in Alabama who was close to dying (he has since passed). He said he had wanted to talk to me for 44 years to set the record straight. He wanted to tell me that I wasn't the birth father of my daughter, and regretted the lie they told me to keep me with my wife.

I immediately wrote to Frau Gellenbeck in the first part of May, 1996. I requested any information that she could give me regarding Pat's mother. She wrote back that the person who could give me this information was on vacation and would not be back until the end of June. In the middle of July, I received a letter with a copy of Pat's birth certificate and the name and address of her mother, who was now living in Berlin. Weber was the name she gave us. Not knowing how much the family knew of this daughter, I called and got an answering machine, thereby learning that she was on vacation until the 10th of August.

My family's life has changed, and for the better. Our daughter was in shock, crying, but nonetheless understood my efforts to bring my life full circle and clear my mind of any feelings of guilt I may have carried in my heart for 44 years.

My wife and I will be married 50 years on the 14th of March, 1998. God has blessed us with a wonderful family, and isn't that what it's all about? *— July 28, 1996*

Co-Sons ... *cont. fr. pg. 1*

collegial associates, known as "Mitritter" just as school kids today ("Schüler") have their fellow students, or "Mitschüler." So why shouldn't a doting Deutsche mom use "Mitsohn" or "Mittochter" to refer to the domestic partners of her offspring?

Well, no particular reason, German language scholars say, except that Schwiegerfreund ("friend-in-law") has already gained some popular usage in the country. And oh, yes, Mitsohn/Mittochter are semantically equivalent to using an English construction something along the lines of "co-son" or "co-daughter."

Not exactly the most endearing terms one could think of. *Ende*

The foregoing originally appeared in the March '96 issue of Out!*, "New Mexico's Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual News Magazine." Copyright 1996 Out! Magazine; reprinted with permission.*

paused. He said, "Call Anne Marie Kane. She does searches."

Earlier this year, a bureaucrat in the Irish government's Foreign Affairs Office stumbled upon 1,500 "lost" files.

Inside each was information concerning the adoption of Irish babies in the United States. Because the children were leaving Ireland, visa information had to be filled out, including background details about the birth mothers of the babies.

News of the files shocked Ireland. The adoptions were a surreptitious affair in the country's history and one that many wanted to keep that way.

But for people like McClung, the files represented hope. She and other adoptees had discovered that Ireland's official and religious orders offer little help for searches.

In fact, McClung believes they purposefully hindered her search.

"Why didn't they tell me she'd come back for me? The priest knew that but wouldn't tell me."

Six months after McClung wrote to her, Anne Marie Kane called back.

While she couldn't get the files from the Foreign Affairs Office—the "lost" files—she had dug out information from the old priest in Castlepollard. He had a contact name for McClung's birth mother's family. From Barnardos, the Irish adoption service, Kane found out the name of the mother's husband, and that they lived in America.

"I don't know why they didn't give the information to Maureen," Kane said. "It would have saved her a lot of time and heartache."

But obfuscation has been typical for these searches in Ireland, Kane said.

In part, it's cultural.

"You have two sets in Ireland since the files were discovered. You have the Catholics who support the nuns and priests and say all this talk of slave labor and babies being taken from their mothers is a figment of your imagination.

"And you have those who believe it, and will bend over backwards to help you."

The Irish government finds itself in an awkward position. Requests come in daily from adoptees and birth mothers, both Irish and American, asking for information from the Foreign Affairs' files. But adoption is a sensitive matter—not everyone wants to be found, to have a secret life revealed.

Beyond that dilemma, the government, and Ireland as a whole, are confronting a philosophical question: What do systematic, forcible adoptions say about Ireland?

"The issues raised in that debate [over opening the files] go to the core of our values and raise questions about our sense of community," said the minister of state at the Department of Communications before Irish Parliament in March.

"We have measured ourselves by references to our treatment of the most vulnerable among us and found that our attitudes have fallen far short or our ideals."

Ireland, Kane said, had always seen itself as a country that valued children—all children—above all others.

The files detailing forcible adoptions, the minister of state noted, prove otherwise.

"Our treatment of children born outside of what was the conventional relationship is difficult to reconcile with a State founded on the principle of cherishing all children of the nation equally. It is also hard to reconcile with our image of ourselves as a caring and compassionate society."

A week before Christmas, Maureen McClung met the woman who named her Marian June Sariena.

As is the way with the great mysteries of genetics, Maureen and Oona found their ebullient personalities, personal interests and life experiences coincided eerily.

They liked each other immediately.

"It was a miracle she found me," said Oona, speaking by phone from her home in a Southern state. She does not want to reveal her real name or pinpoint her location. She's a prominent member of her local Irish-American community, and has told few people of her first daughter.

But she is dismayed by the difficulties presented to those who are searching.

"All those children in their 30s and 40s now," she said. "And I think they're [the Irish government] hoping that eventually these Irish mothers will die and the children will just give up the search."

Her experience in the mother-daughter home was positive, she said, because she had money from the birth father, and went to the convent by choice. But she recalls feeling pressure to make a decision about keeping her baby.

"All my decisions were my decisions," Oona said firmly, an Irish brogue still lacing her voice. "But I was under the impression that whoever adopted her would keep me informed of her progress. That was all I asked. I wrote a letter to her adoptive parents, gave them a whole history of the father, the mother, my family, the reason we couldn't get married, and why we separated."

She received some pictures the first year, but nothing more, and has since learned of the fiction McClung's parents told her.

Her regret concerns the timing: Had she delayed giving up the baby a few months longer, she would have been able to provide a stable family environment. In the Bahamas, she met her future husband and married him soon after. They now have four children and celebrated their 35th anniversary this year.

"Early on, I told my husband about her," Oona said. "It was causing me more trauma not to. He said, `It's a pity, we could have adopted her.'

"But that wasn't meant to be, was it?"

Over the years, Oona had tried to find her baby Marian. But adoption laws are set up to make it even more difficult for birth mothers to reach children. What Oona doesn't understand, given her stated desire to be found, is that no information was given to her daughter.

"I wrote many, many letters to the Mother Superior where she was adopted from, but never got a reply," Oona said. "It was a total closed door there."

With at least 1,500 Irish children in America (perhaps more that were handled privately), Oona said the current system cannot survive.

"This present system of privacy is wrong. It's wrong for the children and wrong for the mother. There should be a better process of mediation, especially in relation to medical histories."

Anne Marie Kane agrees. After years of looking, she found the sibling her unwed mother was forced to send to America. Kane discovered her American sister had only one child; the girl was born with cerebral palsy.

"They didn't know if it was hereditary, genetic or just an accident," Kane said. "But then they saw I had five healthy babies and found out it's not genetic; not inherited. They went on to have two healthy boys, and that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't made contact with each other."

McClung not only has access to her medical history, she also has four new half-siblings.

Perhaps most importantly, she's discovered a positive personal history.

"All my life I grew up thinking I was abandoned. And when I sat across from this woman and heard her say she wanted me, wanted to keep me, it was like someone handing you a bouquet of flowers, inside of you. Like they put the flowers inside of you."

McClung also made contact with her birth father, who lives in South Africa.

"It's you," he said. "It's really you."

McClung said, "He went back to the home and the nuns wouldn't let him see me."

Her reconciliation continues.

In September, McClung will travel to Ireland with Oona and her family.

"Yes, we're going as a family to Ireland," Oona said.

"I'm going to take my daughter to where she was born." *Ende*

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