10th Year

Geborener Deutscher®

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

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San Antonian Has New Family Support in Her Time of Need

BY CRYSTAL T. COLEMAN
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

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Lisa Daly's lifelong dream was to be reunited with her biological parents and siblings.

When the reunion finally came in San Antonio, it was bittersweet for her, because her husband, Larry, had been diagnosed with lung cancer.

"I know that one of her fears was dying before being reunited with her family," her husband said during an interview.

On Jan. 12 and 13, Daly met her brothers, Peter Kovacic, 47, and Heinz Plieninger, 36, and her sister, Helga Huer, 42, for the first time as they arrived in San Antonio from Germany.

"After years of searching for Lisa, we can finally be a true family," Plieninger said.

Through a Lutheran Church in Germany, Daly was adopted as a baby by Roland and Anita Smith while Roland was serving in the Air Force.

"From what my parents told me, the family had been poor and lived in a one-room house," she said. "I always thought there were six children all together, from a photo I have."

The Smiths moved soon after the adoption when the Air Force reassigned him. The couple later divorced.



Helga Heur of Germany kisses her long-lost sister, Lisa Daly of San Antonio, while their brothers Peter Kovacic (second from right) and Heinz Plieninger (right) look on. At left is family friend Albin Nebel, and behind are husband Larry Daly and son Larry Jr., 8.

During that same time, her biological parents began looking for Daly after becoming financially able to support all their children.

"The family had moved into a bigger home about four months after the adoption," Helga Huer said. "And throughout the whole time, Mama didn't really want to give Lisa up."

Throughout her life, Daly, 40, thought she was the youngest child born to George and Erna Kovacic. Both died in 1982.

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A Joyous Contact

by Linda Villarreal

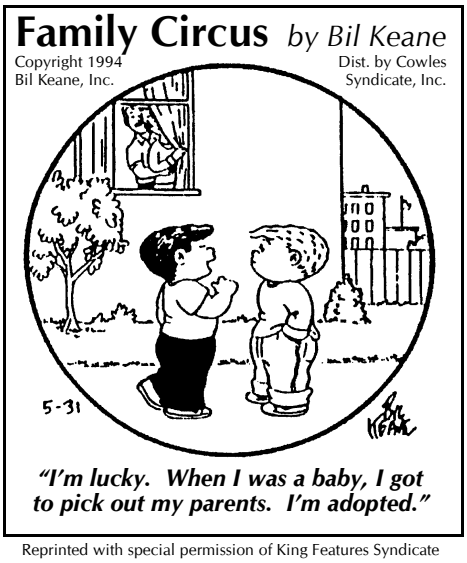
I cannot begin this story without first saying that I am a Christian. As a Christian, I believe in the sovereign and providential workings of God. God has ordered every event in my life from beginning to end and having this belief enables me to have a proper perspective in all that God ordains or allows in my life, including my having been adopted.

My story begins in Tübingen, Germany, where I was born on May 11, 1952. Until recently, all I knew of my mother was that she was unmarried at the time of my birth, but that, by the time she consented to my adoption when I was almost 3 years old, she was married.

My adoptive father was in the military, stationed in Wiesbaden. He and my mother had been unable to have children after 15 years of marriage, so while in Germany, they adopted me when I was almost four years old, and at the same time, they adopted my brother (not by blood).

Both of us grew up knowing we were adopted, but because we were secure and content in our parents' love, questions about our adoption were few and far between. We also never really considered trying to find our birth mothers. That is, not until unexpected events led my brother to find his birth family in Germany.

I had received a letter from my brother in April 1996 telling me how he had found out about a woman, Leonie Boehmer, who specializes in German, Swiss, and Austrian adoption-related search services. Not really expecting anything to come of it, he sent her his adoption information and in a short period of time, she was able to locate his family.



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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

Needless to say, I realized that, for the first time in my life, I was confronted with the very real possibility of finding my birth mother if I chose to do so. I love my parents very much and had always vowed to myself that if I ever *did* try to find my birth mother, I would not do it while they were still living. I understand that everyone has their own feelings about this, but for me, this vow was made out of respect to them for having loved me and raised me. As the Lord would have it, my father died in 1963 and my mother died in 1979.

Now with this most intriguing situation before me and being without parents once again, I pondered over what I should do. After about two weeks, I decided to write Leonie and, on my 44th birthday, I sent her the information she needed. One month later Leonie called me, quite surprised, and said that not only was my mother still living, her address had not changed from the one given on my adoption papers. Also, she was still married to the same man.

For one week, all the questions I ever had in the past came back to me like a flood. I wondered, "What does she look like? Why did she give me up if she was married? Has she wondered about me through the years? Would she want to hear from me? Do I have any brothers or sister?" These are questions common to most adoptees. Perhaps the most common question is, "Will I be opening a can of worms in getting the answers to these question?" I knew I was prepared to accept whatever the outcome would be, whether acceptance or rejection, but I was afraid of the risk of upsetting her life or creating any kind of problems for her. I called Leonie to tell her of these fears and she told me that only about 5% of her contacts have turned out unfavorably.

After praying about the situation, I found myself compelled to begin writing her a letter and gathering pictures of myself from the age of three to the present. I also enclosed pictures of my husband and two beautiful daughters, ages 12 and nine, in my first letter to her. Within ten days of mailing my letter, I received my mother's first reply.

I will never forget that day as long as I live! Thoughts just raced through my mind: Had she responded in a negative or positive way? Were there any pictures? With trembling hands and a pounding heart, I opened the letter, my eyes falling on the first pictures of my mother I had ever seen! I cried with utter joy and amazement! Then I read her letter (translated) and it was filled with words of love and joy over me finding her.

She told me that she longed to take me in her arms and all I could do was cry. Soon after receiving her letter, I called her for her 71st birthday and oh, what a thrill to hear her voice for the first time! We continue to write, and, Lord willing, I hope to fly to Germany this spring to see her, my three brothers, two sisters, and my step-father, who has been equally overjoyed over me finding them.

How thankful I am to my sovereign Lord who has allowed me to experience this most precious reunion. But the circle will not be complete until we can look into each other's eyes and feel each other's loving embrace.

May the Lord grant me the desire of my heart! *— Linda Villarreal*
Floresville, TX

Search Journal
by Toni Costanza

I have known for as long as I can remember that I was adopted. My father was in the service and stationed in Frankfurt, (West) Germany, in 1956. My parents were looking to adopt a second child, having adopted my sister six months earlier.

One day a pregnant woman knocked on my parents' door in the barracks. This woman told them that she had heard they were interested in adopting a child and that she would like to offer her soon-to-be-born child.

I was placed in my parents' care in May of 1956 at just two months of age. In June of 1957, the adoption was final, and in July, we came to the United States by boat.

My family made their home in New Jersey. I grew up knowing I was adopted from Germany. Children in the neighborhood used to tease my sister and me, calling us "Nazis."

I did not understand and I did not really care. I had a happy life. My parents were very loving and caring.

I was always curious about my birth mother. I would imagine how she looked, with long, dark hair and pretty skin. I also wondered if I had sisters or brothers. My adoptive parents did not really discuss any details about my adoption or my birth mother.

For a long time, I thought my mother died when I was born. I do not know if I was told that or if I made it up in my mind. I was grateful to be adopted and have a nice home and family.

When I was in my early twenties, my father gave me my adoption papers. I read through them, looked at my passport and naturalization papers. I saw my birth name and my birth mother's name.

On my birth certificate, I found my birth mother's last name, Sattler; but on the final adoption papers, my birth mother had a married name, Biehler. Not understanding the complete picture at the time I just figured she gave birth to me as a single woman (the papers stated I was an illegitimate child) and one year later, when the adoption was final, she was married.

This hurt me a little and I just figured she did not want me. I did not think much about being adopted anymore until I was 24 or 25 and I was having some health problems, but I did not pursue anything.

Again, when I was pregnant, I thought of my birth mother often, and, for the first time, I actually felt very sad for her. Having my own children, I could not imagine giving them up.

I did think about looking for my mother, but I did not think my adoptive parents would understand and I did not want to hurt their feelings. I also had no idea how to go about it, other than hiring a private investigator for, I'm sure, more than I could afford.

When I turned 40, it seemed as if I could not stop thinking about her. I watched a talk show one day about reunions of birth parents and their children. They suggested the Internet for assistance and said there was a lot of information on adoption. I said to myself, "I have waited long enough, I am going to do it."

Soon after, I was talking with Leonie Boehmer. Leonie is wonderful. She really puts her heart and soul into her work. She started with copies of my adoption contract and the last known town that my birth mother had lived in.

We started the search in March 1996. My mother had moved around a bit and it seemed like forever, waiting to hear back from each town, thinking this one would be it.

During the course of the search I was able to find out my grandparents' names and birthplace and that I had a sister 14 years older than me.

I did not realize how much this information would affect me. I felt a belonging just knowing my roots. It was wonderful information.

Leonie continued searching for my birth mother and thought we had hit a stumbling block. It was thought she had moved to the former East Germany. Information, as you may know, was scarce on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

At the same time, Leonie found two Helene Biehlers on her German telephone disk and said she would send them letters in the hope that one was my mother. Well, Bingo, we were lucky. Labor day weekend 1996, Leonie phoned me and said my birth mother wrote back and sent a picture of herself.

My birth mother and I have been writing to each other ever since. We have even talked on the phone a couple of times. She was very glad to hear from me. She does not speak English, but I continue to work hard learning to speak German. My husband and I are planning a family trip to Germany sometime this year. She wants to see her grandchildren too.

I wish it could be now, but I have waited this long I can wait a little more. My life has forever changed because of Leonie, I have found a special friend in Germany. Many, many thanks go out to her. I did not imagine how wonderful this experience would be. I truly hope everyone out there searching will have a happy experience as I have had.

I also want to thank William Gage and his newsletter. I really enjoyed reading about other adoptees' experiences. This newsletter kept my hope alive during my search. I hope everyone can continue to support Leonie Boehmer and Bill in their commitment to help other people's dreams come true. *— Toni Costanza*
Egg Harbor Township, NJ

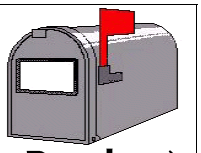
German Adoption Searches
Old German "Schrift" Translations
S.C. Genealogical Research

Margit S. Benton
Independent Search Consultant

2238 Bailey Drive
N. Charleston, SC 29405
803-747-6156
E-mail: Margitb@awod.com

Leonie D. Boehmer
Independent Search Consultant
(505) 268-1310
Specialization: Germany
805 Alvarado Drive N.E.
Albuquerque, N.M. 87108

Briefe (Letters From Readers)



February 24, 1997

Dear Bill,

I am writing to update my address for your mailing list. I also recently realized that I have not received any newsletter for some time. The last issue I received was Issue #32 (Autumn 1996). If I have missed any issues, I would very much like to have them.

I would like to say that I truly appreciate your efforts and devotion to putting out your newsletter. Your newsletter is the only link I have to others who are like me (German-born adoptees). I have met only one or two people in the last few years who were also born in Germany. Until I started receiving your newsletter, I never realized there were so many German-born children in this country. At least I don't feel like such an oddity anymore! I will try to write down my particular story for your newsletter very soon, because my situation remains open-ended and completely unresolved and somewhat mysterious. It would probably make an interesting story.

— Sonja Scheitler
Latrobe, PA

Dear Sonja:

Thank you for taking the time to write, and especially update your address! So many of my readers fail to do so and wind up having to be taken off the mailing list for one reason or another. (I would like to take this opportunity to remind all readers to advise me, if possible, of any changes of address.)

That being said, the reason it sometimes seems as if the newsletters are few and far between is that, as a cost-cutting measure, I send the newsletters out two at a time, because the cost to mail two newsletters is the same as to mail one. Postage is my single largest expense, and any way to reduce it is employed. (I would also like to remind my readers that, while not tax-deductible, all contributions to help defray costs, however small, are gratefully accepted.)

That there are many German-born adoptees in the U.S. should not be too surprising, however. In the years and decades immediately following World War II, Germany was not a very pleasant place to live; and many women, eager to get out of the devastated country, would employ pregnancy as a means of securing a relationship with an Occupation soldier from one of the victor countries. Unfortunately, this ploy did not always work, and so many children were born to poor women who were either unwilling or unable to care for them alone. And, of course, there were many children whose families were lost in the war and its aftermath. The export of children from Germany through adoption by foreigners ceased many years ago. Nowadays, the numbers of would-be adoptive parents in Germany exceeds the number of adoptable children, as it does here in the U.S.

I will look forward to sharing your story with my readers. ***— WLG***

March 21, 1997

Dear Mr. Gage:

The initial purpose of this letter was to express to you how I have enjoyed receiving your newsletters, and to offer a small donation "to the cause." However, before I had taken the time to sit down and actually write this letter, my brother succeeded in locating my birth mother, who is German. Please allow me to share my story with you.

I was born in Bad Mergantheim, Germany, in August, 1946, and adopted by an American military family in 1948. My birth mother could not care for me and had another child prior to me who was four years old when I was born. My birth father was a military man who returned to the U.S. leaving us with promises, never kept, to send for us.

When I was seven years old, my parents told me that I was adopted and, since that time, I have been determined to either know, or know about, my birth mother. I am, of course, no 50 years old and have been blessed with the good fortune of having a brother who is as determined as I to find the "missing link" in order to make me feel complete as a person.

This search began after the passing of my adoptive father in December of 1995. Losing him was an especially painful experience for me. We were very close; that is, especially in his later years after my mother's death in 1993. He almost never allowed a day to pass without telling me how much he cared about me and would say, "God sure knew what He was doing when He made you my daughter." He always told me I was his chosen child, not adopted child.

Ms. Margit Benton was instrumental in aiding my brother with his search in Germany. Through the Internet, information regarding my birth mother began to flow and things started coming together within the last three weeks. Just Wednesday of this week, March 19, 1997 —a date I shall always remember—my birth mother was located in Prescott, Arizona. Ms. Benton served as intermediary and made the initial telephone call to her. After making sure she was speaking with the correct person, she told her that I was searching for her. I think that initially she was reluctant to talk to me on the phone, but after a short period of time, reconsidered, and I was given the phone number to call.

It is still very difficult for me to express the feelings I experienced. The first word that comes to mind is numb. All these years I have dreamed of what my birth mother might be like, look like and feel about me and the years of separation and suddenly I was faced with a personal conversation with her! What would I and should I say!?

I think the conversation went very well. She offered explanations for why she had chosen that path for me. I assured her none were necessary; however, she continued to explain and I listened, feeling this explanation was of the utmost importance to her. She learned that she has two grandsons and three great-grandchildren and seemed to be beside herself with excitement. We agreed to write and send pictures. I could not end the conversation without asking her permission to see her. She graciously agreed; the trip is planned for April 10, 1997.

My feelings with respect to this "reunion" are so overwhelming, they almost possess me. I am so happy; yet, I am very scared and nervous. I am sure my birth mother must feel very much the same. It is probably harder for her than for me. Pray for us to do well together. She is 75 years old and does not have a good relationship with her older daughter, nor does she have any grandchildren from her. Her husband passed away 2½ years ago and she is very much alone. Perhaps the timing for this reunion was exactly right.

I shall write after I return from my trip and share my experiences with you, and hopefully a reunion photograph, as well. For now, I am grateful that so many people who have in some way, either large or small, helped me reach this point in my life. It has certainly taken a collective effort. In years past, I even wrote letters searching for my birth parents, and many of those who received them responded and were very kind in their wishes of good luck for me to find the happiness I so diligently sought.

My largest thanks go to my brother, John Stachura. He has been dedicated to this cause since its inception, periodically keeping me informed with telephone calls reporting his progress. He, too, suffered deep sorrow at the loss of both of our parents. Much of his pain manifested itself in his inability to sleep, and so he spent many hours on the Internet searching for my roots. He regarded his efforts as something of a "therapy" to aid in his mourning process.

Not only did he help us both, but he proved to me that God puts us all on this earth with a purpose. He and I came from different backgrounds, but were raised by the same parents. Even though we are very different, our common denominator has always been the love we feel for our parents. In some way, we have managed to help each other deal with feelings and emotions too burdensome for just one. He has been a one-man cheering squad, always encouraging me to seek and find and never give up.

Since locating my birth mother, he has been on what he refers to as "Cloud Nine." He is so excited about the fact that he has made a difference in my life and been instrumental in seeing to it that my life-ling dream has come true. This is true love from a brother to his sister. This man is blessed with one of the biggest hearts God has seen fit to bestow on one individual. He has a beautiful wife, Susie, who has been right there, cheering him on in his efforts to help me; and three wonderful children, Neal, Kristin and Ryan, who are all part of the "pep squad."

They were all there when I made the first phone call, with tears of joy to share, and hugs of happiness to follow. I guess God did, in fact, know what He was doing when He made me part of Walter Stachura's family.

Thank you for allowing me to share my excitement with you. I shall follow up at the end of April with my reunion news.

P.S. Enclosed is a small donation. Keep up the good work The newsletter is wonderful.

— Kathleen Stachura DeFrank
Biloxi, MS

April 1, 1997

Dear Bill,

Today I received the Winter issue of ☞

Geborener Deutscher and am writing to thank you for printing the chapter excerpt from my book *Outer Search/Inner Journey: An Orphan and Adoptee's Quest*. I like the way you laid out the text within the newsletter—very professional!

I hope the chapter, and book, are valuable to German-born adoptees. One question that I have yet to answer is the impact of the loss of German culture, heritage, language and history on children taken from Germany. I would welcome your experience and thoughts on this subject.

At the AAC Convention in Dallas later this week, I am giving a workshop on, "The Case Against International Adoption." I did extensive research while putting my remarks together and would be happy to send you the text. Basically, I have found solid arguments against the practice of foreigners adopting children out of their native land. I know this will be a tough sell as international adoption is becoming more and more popular, but if I can at a minimum introduce the voice of caution, then I will be satisfied.

Thank you again for printing the excerpt and please think of me as a resource if I can ever be of assistance to you in the future.

— Peter F. Dodds
Puyallup, WA

Dear Peter:

I do try to put out a product of which I can feel proud. The advent of desk-top publishing—laser printers and high-end word processors—has made all the difference.

I have always been of the opinion that the effect of being adopted by "foreigners"—if any—is less for those of us who look like our "foreign" compatriots. That is, for our brother foreign-born adoptees from countries like Korea, the effect is greater and more pervasive. Witness, e.g., the title of one book aimed at adoptive parents of foreign-born adoptees: "Are Those Kids Yours?": American Families With Children Adopted From Other Countries. *The clear operative assumption there is that adopting from "another country" means adopting a foreign-looking child. I have spent enough time in Germany (collectively almost a full year, the longest continuous period being 10 months) to know that I don't feel "at home" there; but I* do *nonetheless feel somewhat like a "foreigner" here in the U.S.—but much less so. I am definitely more "American" than I am "German."*

I would be interested to read your remarks, especially since I am not going to be able to attend the conference this year. ***— WLG***

April 3, 1997

Dear Mr. Gage:

This is just a short note to thank you for your generous and diligent efforts on behalf of German-born adoptees. I hope the enclosed check will help in defraying your costs.

Although I had always had some suspicions, I first learned of my adoption four years ago at the age of 38. Naturally, this disclosure brought about a great deal of emotional turmoil. Apart from the acknowledgment of the fact and some limited information, to this day my adopted) parents refuse to discuss it.

To search or not to search has been a difficult question for me, and I have so far chosen not to do so. No doubt many adoptees feel some ambivalence about visiting these old and possibly painful circumstances, not only in their own lives, but in the lives of others. If and when I decide to search, I want to be able to do so more wholeheartedly. In the meantime, I appreciate and enjoy hearing the stories of those similarly situated, and it is good to know that people such as yourself and Ms. Boehmer are available to provide assistance and encouragement.

— Daniel R. Webster
St. Petersburg, FL
dwebster@mindspring.com

April 2, 1997

Dear William:

Although neither I nor anybody in my large family has ever had any connection with adoptees or adoptions, I always read your excellent newsletter with great interest. I think you are doing a fantastic job with a discernible typical German thoroughness.

In your last issue I couldn't help but read the plaintive letter by Jessie Whitney. It is certainly regrettable that her quest for contact with her birth mother didn't succeed, but considering the many circumstances why a young woman or girl may be forced to give up her baby do entail the risk of failure, something Jessie Whitney ought to have realized. I would also surmise that at the time of Ms. Whitney's birth abortions were not as common in Germany as they are now, and certainly less legal than adoptions.

Personally I have long held that our parents are merely transmitters of genes (and thereby of talents, characteristics and even looks). As I view my five siblings, I see much more of my grandparents in them, than of our parents. Therefore it happens frequently that one can get along much better with cousins (even those second or third removed) than with one's own brothers and sisters. In the light of this I would advise Jessie Whitney to try to discover more distant relatives in Germany (preferably people that do not know the birth mother at all) so that she discovers more of herself also. Nowadays, with computers, this can be done.

To write "any connection I have or ever had with Germany is long gone," is like *"das Kind mit dem Badewasser ausschlitten."* No matter what, there are still the genes...

P.S.: I noticed that your issue No. 33 is dated "Winter 1997." Am I wrong in assuming that the winter we just finished was the Winter of '96? Are you that far ahead?

— Hans Schmidt
Pensacola, FL

Dear Hans:

Thank you for taking the time to write.

I agree that Ms. Whitney's position regarding her connection to Germany is unfounded. The result of my own birth-mother search was to find that she had died long before I had ever begun to look for her; but that in no way diminishes my "connection" to Germany through her.

As for the last issue being denominated as "Winter 1997," I believe that, because the winter season is mostly situated in the first three months of any given year, it takes on that year's numeric designation. Thus, the winter just passed is, in fact, the "Winter of '97."

— WLG

San Antonian *cont. fr. pg. 1*

She also thought she had five siblings—instead Daly has five brothers and two sisters who can help her cope with her husband's illness.

Larry Daly was diagnosed with lung cancer Aug. 8.

The ex-Marine is glad that his wife has more family support after he dies.

"My fear was that she wouldn't find them and have them comfort her and our son," her husband said. "Now I don't have that fear anymore, and maybe the two of them could move to Germany to live near them."

Two weeks after he husband was diagnosed, Daly received a letter from Leonie D. Boehmer of Albuquerque, N.M., an independent search consultant who specializes in adoptions in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. He was searching for a lost sibling born in Germany in 1956.

"I felt like my life was a roller coaster ride, and having them find me couldn't have come at a better time," Daly said. "I paced up and down in our apartment while waiting on Larry to get home from the hospital (from treatment) because I didn't know what to do."

In the letter, Boehmer asked Daly to contact her when possible if she had been born in Giggenhausen, Germany, on May 9, 1956, and named Lisa Marie Kovacic.

Boehmer asked Daly several questions and realized that Lisa Daly was the long-lost sister the seven German siblings had been looking for.

Since Sept. 4, the siblings have been in constant contact with each other either by phone or letters with photos.

Despite the language barrier, the siblings have spent the last two weeks getting to know their lost sister and sightseeing around San Antonio before leaving today.

"It was kind of strange eating breakfast and then having three sets of eyes staring at you, because I had some mannerism like our mother," Daly said. "But I'm glad I've been reunited with them to help me deal with Larry's illness."

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