10th Year

Geborener Deutscher®

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

Volume X, Number 3 *(Issue #36)* *Autumn 1997*

How my reunion began and where it stands now

by Prescilla White

1991. Dreams are coming true for me. I have been floating among the clouds ever since the 16th of October. That was the day that I received my first letter from my birth mother, Liesbeth! At first I ignored it, thinking it was a letter from one of my relatives in Germany from my adopted family. When I did pick it up to open it, the return address stared at me. I was shocked. There was her last name with her first initial. Tears welled up in my eyes and I shook for happiness and a little bit of being scared. My husband was next to me in great anticipation of what the letter entailed. I opened it and started to read. It was marvelous. It made my world so complete and full and bright with color, you would have thought it was the Fourth of July, even though we were having rain.

She was happy to receive my two letters and a picture I sent of myself and my two children. Liesbeth said that a great stone had been lifted off of her heart and she was happy to learn that I was alive and well.

For a year I couldn't figure out what was taking her so long to write to me. And the biggest fear of mine was that she was rejecting me. Well, not so. Every time she did try to write to me and about the adoption, tears would roll down her face and she would have to stop and continue another day.

Funny, she lives in the same city (Bayreuth) as where my grandmother lived before she died a few years back. She will be celebrating her 60th birthday, April 1, 1992. I have two half-brothers. They don't know of me yet, but, I'm confident, they will in time. She gave me some medical information that I needed.

The letter was warm and soft and gentle and wonderful. At the end of her letter she had put or signed, "Your mother." I cried then. I figured she would put her name. But when she put the other, I don't know—everything you could possibly feel rushed through my body.

Then, just as I had settled with her letter and that I was not dreaming, this past Sunday, the 17th, I got a phone call from Liesbeth. My god, my mind went out the window and into the heavens. My heart was beating so hard I thought it would just burst any moment. We spoke short, but oh, to hear her voice; I strained to listen and remember and engrave it on my mind for eternity. Liesbeth sounded wonderful, familiar and motherly. She told me another letter is on the way and a sister of hers lives in Florida. I am so overwhelmed and I want to get on the next flight out of here to go see her. But, unfortunately, my family and I are struggling financially, there's no telling when or if I'll ever get to see her. But to have all this already is enough for me. I am truly blessed. My world has exploded into such a huge ball and my family is growing in leaps and bounds, I can't catch my breath. But, I don't want to stop, either.

So for now we will keep writing to each other and calling when we can.

April 19, 1997. Last year I asked Leonie Boehmer for help in finding my brother. I was so excited the day I received the letter with his address and phone number. I called everyone I knew about the news. Once I calmed down, I realized that Karlheinz might not be the one from the pictures I had. Also, it's one thing to have the information but another to act on it. Should you, shouldn't you? That's how it was in my case, as years back, my birth mother Liesbeth had expressed that my brothers were never to know of me. Yes, I have yet another brother. His name is Rainer and he is 22. Karlheinz is 40, and I am 41. I did ask her several times to explain to me why they are not to know of me. She then cut all communications. I fought

CONT. ON PG. 4, COL. 3

Search Journal
by Christopher James

Editor's Note: *Christopher found his birth mother in a nursing home. He knew of a brother who was also adopted for whom he searched with the help of Leonie Boehmer and International Social Services in Frankfurt. An older sister stayed with their mother, who had another girl Christopher did not know about, who also lives in Ohio.*

June 1995

After being scrutinized by Erna's appointed attorney, I was finally given the okay to visit Erna in the nursing home where she was residing in Columbus, Ohio. I went to see her for a short visit in April, and at the same time I met my younger sister, Doris, who, incidentally, only found out about my existence several days prior to my arriving in Columbus. It seems that my birth mother has done a thorough job of keeping all of our existences from her. Needless to say, there was much to talk about, including the whereabouts of her other brother.

My visit with Erna was relaxed but, unfortunately, not very informative. Her mental abilities made conversation about my past very difficult. She was able to tell me a little bit about her early years and how difficult it was for her and also how her sister, who was born in Leipzig, became caught behind the Iron Curtain when the wall was put up in 1961.

So, anyway, I spent several hours with her and then had dinner with my sister and her husband before returning to Denver. Little did I know that a week later I would be back in Ohio to bury Erna. She apparently had fallen out of bed while attempting to get into her wheelchair and broken her hip. Because of the extreme pain she was suffering and the likelihood that she would not survive, it was decided she should go through with the operation, knowing full well that her chances of recovery were poor at best considering her age. She took the gamble but lost. At least there was little suffering and all the anger she had built up in her over the years over her hard and difficult life were finally carried away. I would have really loved getting to know her better and, of course, learning as much as possible about those early years in my life.

I have been in touch with Renate in Aschaffenburg, and she informed me that she can remember visiting Lowell and I when we were in the orphanage. Needless to say, I will be looking forward to our eventual meeting. I have talked with Doris, my younger sister, and Lowell and will be letting Renate know about my making arrangements for a reunion of all of us for the first time in Maryland, where Lowell lives,

CONT. ON PG. 4, COL. 2

Geborener Deutscher is published quarterly by William L. Gage, who is solely responsible for its content. Readers are encouraged to submit articles, letters and/or photographs, for publication herein. Submissions for publication or subscription requestes should be sent to **805 Alvarado Drive N.E., Albuquerque, N.M. 87108 USA**, or via e-mail to **WmLGgage@aol.com**. All material submitted for publication becomes the property of *Geborener Deutscher* and cannot be returned except by written request. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Subscriptions are ***FREE***. All opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor nor any other individual author.

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

The Case Against International Adoption

by Peter F. Dodds

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There is no greater sorrow on Earth
than the loss of one's native land.
— Euripides' *Medea*, 650-651

The following is the text of a workshop presented by Mr. Dodds at the American Adoption Congress's 1997 convention in Dallas, TX. It is published here with his kind permission.

It will probably come as a surprise to many people that between the years 1963 and 1981, United States citizens adopted 6,578 German children. Although I was adopted by American parents from a German orphanage in 1957, before the government began keeping these statistics, I have chronicled my experiences of international adoption in the newly released book, *Outer Search/Inner Journey: An Orphan and Adoptee's Quest*.

Set against the backdrop of the Cold War, the book chronicles my story as a German orphan adopted by American parents and my lifelong quest for belonging. I wrote it in a flowing, narrative-style beginning so the book reads like a novel although it is a true story. I wrote it in this manner to draw readers into the adoptee's unique struggle for identity.

Outer Search/Inner Journey is the search for roots and the parallel inner journey for healing. It is about the loss of family, culture, language and heritage, rejection and abandonment, shame, guilt, rage and betrayal. The book is also a story about triumph, faith, forgiveness and the infinite power of love.

Adoptees who read the book will know they aren't alone in wondering where they come from and have feelings validated about the need to search for biological parents. Birth mothers will learn how a child surrendered for adoption thought and felt about the woman who brought him into the world, and parents who adopt can gain insight on how to effectively deal with their child's trauma stemming from events that occurred prior to their child's adoption.

My book is the first written in the United States to describe international adoption from the foreign-born adoptee's point of view. One reason I wrote *Outer Search/Inner Journey* is to provide insight to all Americans participating in the international adoption process—parents, social workers, mental-health professionals, lawyers, policy-makers—by shedding light on the harm caused by uprooting children from their native cultures and heritages.

I realize by taking this position on international adoption that I am going against current public sentiment. Some may find the subject uncomfortable, but I would like to help educate all those involved about the cultural, ethical, societal and psychological issues inherent in international adoption. Only when all the parties involved have information, both pro and con, are they better able to make a more informed decision. I don't advocate the banning of international adoptions; rather, I would like to introduce the voice of extreme caution before choosing to adopt a child from a foreign country.

Americans are increasingly using international adoption as a method of building a family. International adoptions became prevalent after World War II, when orphaned and abandoned children were sent for adoption from one European country to another and also to the United States. Between 1947 and 1957, fewer than 1,000 intercountry adoptees entered the United States. During wars in Korea and Vietnam, manyorphans and children fathered by Americans in those countries were adopted by families in the United States. Since the mid 1950s, more than 141,000 foreign-born children have been adopted by American families—55,000 in the last six years. In 1996, the Immigration and Naturalization Service reported nearly 11,000 foreign children were adopted, accounting for about one-sixth of all non-relative adoptions in the United States. This trend is expected to increase.

The most publicized reason that United States citizens adopt children from foreign nations is a humanitarian one—the adopting parents will provide a better life for the foreign child than she or he would know in their native land. But what is overlooked in international adoption is the plight of the foreign child who suffers lost identity through the severing of ties to its culture, heritage, history and language.

International adoption isn't the answer to improving the overall plight of children in developing countries. Even the strongest supporters admit the movement of adoptees across international borders represents only a tiny fraction of the neglected, abused and abandoned children in these countries. It is like placing a band-aid on a severed artery. And what happens to the children who are not adopted and left behind?

If parents choosing foreign adoption have as their primary motive a desire to save children, they need not look abroad. A concern associated with the delivery of domestic child welfare services is that "special needs" children available for adoption in the United States are being bypassed in favor of foreign children. Intercountry adoption actually increases the pool of domestic "special needs" children in the United States.

Hundreds of thousands of American children grow up without a permanent home in the fostercare system, live in homes below the poverty line or live on the streets. Why aren't Americans adopting their own neglected and destitute children, children whose lives mirror those of their foreign counterpart living in orphanages or on the streets?

One of the reasons is that today, international adoptions are seen by most Americans as a solution for families needing children rather than children needing families. By the 1970s, the purpose of international adoptions was shifting from the humanitarian one of providing families for abandoned children, and increasingly becoming a way for the childless to satisfy their desire to have children. This shift is important because it signals that the well-being of children has taken second place to the desires of those seeking to adopt.

Parents may choose to adopt children from overseas for several reasons. Abortion and the acceptance of single parenthood have diminished the numbers of adoptable infants and children in the United States. The National Council for Adoption estimates that approximately two million couples wait to adopt a child from an annual pool of some 25,000 healthy children. Competition is fierce and parents unable to adopt domestically may choose the international route.

A second reason is the domestic adoption process is lengthy and prospective parents may be unwilling to endure the long wait. Others choose international adoption because there is a sense of greater security in the permanency of raising a foreign child as compared to one adopted domestically. No parent would want to endure another experience similar to the "Baby Jessica" case. And not all parents are comfortable with the growing policy of "open adoption." At this time, most international adoptions are not "open adoptions." Last, international adoption allows greater choice where adopting parents can often choose their child's sex and age.

Adoption is a sensitive issue that always involves fundamental concerns for the rights and well-being of the child. These concerns are magnified in the case of international adoption, which not only severs the child's ties to biological parents and extended family, but can also entail a loss of social, cultural and national identity.

As I read through international adoption literature in the United States, what strikes me most is that the voice of the foreign-born adoptee has yet to be heard. Literature describes "how to adopt" a foreign child and actions that adopting parents can take to bridge barriers separating them from their child. The word "bridge" indicates there is a chasm. What is this chasm? For internationally adopted children, the chasm represents lost language, heritage, culture, history and country.

What is written about international adoption comes from the perspective of adults, American adults, so it is difficult to piece together a picture of consequences international adoption has on the foreign-born adoptee. But there are pieces, and when put together a disturbing picture begins to emerge:

‣ A June 23, 1996, front-page article of *The New York Times* titled, "When Children Adopted Abroad Come With Too Many Troubles," highlighted problems American parents are experiencing with children they've adopted from eastern Europe and Russia; children unable to adjust emotionally or socially to their new homes.

‣ Leonie D. Boehmer, an Independent Search Consultant who specializes in helping German-born adoptees find their birth parents wrote, "I know many adoptees whose first response after finding their German birth family is to move and live there."

‣ For some decades, children from several non-European countries have been adopted in the Netherlands. Over 20,000 foreign children

from about 70 countries live in that country. In the beginning intercountry adoption was viewed enthusiastically in the Netherlands and seen as a positive experience for adoptive families. In the course of the 1980s, an increasing number of people began pointing out the risks that might be involved in the adoption of foreign children. The numbers of international adoptions are now declining in the Netherlands.

‣ One can look closer to home for signs trouble waits for children who are adopted into a different culture. Read what the National Association of Black Social Workers has to say when opposing the adoption of Black children to non-Black families. And North American Indians have formed organizations to repatriate their children who have been severed from tribes through adoption.

‣ Three Korean women who had been adopted by Americans spoke at an adoption conference hosted by the Council for Equal Rights in Adoption and expressed their pain, sorrow and anger in having lost their Korean identity.

‣ I once worked with a woman named Tong who had emigrated to the U.S. from the People's Republic of China. She shared a story of meeting a child from China who had been adopted by friends of hers, a Caucasian couple. The Chinese girl had been in the United States for six months and since her arrival was withdrawn, ate little and unresponsive to all offers of "help." Tong met the child and was able to communicate with the girl in her native tongue while reflecting a similar racial face. When she left her friends' home, the adopted Chinese girl clung to Tong's legs and cried, pleading that she not leave.

All children adopted internationally face physical and emotional upheaval. First there is the trauma of departure accompanied by separation and loss. Mr. Sook Wilkerson reports the process in an article appearing in the Summer, 1995 edition of *The American Journal of Family Therapy*. He writes, "In the 1980s, I escorted infants and older children from South Korea to the United States. The children, dressed in their best outfits, were brought to their sponsoring adoption agency by their foster parents or orphanage personnel, who were eager to give the children one last dose of affection and advice. The older children were often told by their care-givers to be good, not to make problems, to be cooperative with their adoptive parents, to study hard and to return to Korea as successful adults. The children were expected to take in these words of wisdom while fighting back tears."

What about the change of language faced by the international adoptee? Language plays a critical role in the beginning period of adjustment. Initially, most children have little proficiency in English and the majority of the adoptive parents do not have language capabilities to converse with their children. Communication becomes very challenging to say the least. It also happens during one of the most intense periods of grief reaction on the part of some children. They have left behind everything familiar, and encounter everything new and different but their expression of grief is not understood by anyone! It is only natural for them to resort to physical expression of their grief and anger—like self-hurting behaviors, aggressive and hostile behaviors, and crying.

Most children learn English fast enough to facilitate communication. However, the more proficient in English the child becomes, the more they lose their native language. This loss is significant, since language is a crucial part of culture. As these children lose their attachment to their culture-of-origin, it may disturb their identity formation.

Later in life, the greatest obstacle for transition to emotional well-being for the international adoptee will be the process of identity formation. International adoptees report a heightened interest in their native culture during adolescence as they struggle with the most important development task at that age—identity. For me, the question of, "Am I German or American?" haunted me into adulthood.

Child-welfare experts from Great Britain, the Netherlands and Australia often refer to the intercountry adoptee as a special-needs child, although the profile of intercountry adoptees does not fit Nelson's operational definition of "special needs" children—that is, those with physical, emotional or development handicaps, older children, and sibling groups. However, special problems are associated with foreign children traumatized by war, hunger, extreme poverty and institutionalization. A common developmental handicap affecting older intercountry adoptees involves learning a new language and culture. Thus, from the perspective of developmental issues, the 35 percent of immigrant adoptees over the age of one who enter the United States could be defined more properly as a type of "special needs" placement.

Another reason for caution is the concerns expressed by countries that surrender their children for adoption to foreigners. African countries generally view intercountry adoption as a form of neocolonialism and do not, for the most part, sanction the adoption overseas of native children. The policy sanction of African countries reflects concern about exploitation of human resources and many view international adoption as a form of cultural genocide. There is a widespread view in Latin America that international adoption takes the most desirable adoptees in terms of age, health and race, and leaves hard-to-place children in their country of origin.

There is little evidence that intercountry adoption significantly enhances development of child-welfare services in surrendering nations. Intercountry adoption does nothing to solve the problems of poverty or high birth rates in under developed or developing nations, two of the root causes of international adoption.

International adoption has become an increasingly competitive and lucrative enterprise, with intermediaries charging between $5,000 to $30,000 and more for their services. It is now a multi-million-dollar-a-year business. Secondary businesses have mushroomed—look at any adoption magazine and you will see advertisements not only for agencies that place children, but also attorneys specializing in international adoption, travel agencies, and vendors who sell the latest ethnic books and toys.

Organizations and people involved with international adoption have enormous sums at stake. Big money can open the door to trafficking children. Although it is estimated that 75 percent of international adoptions are completed in good faith, a major concern is the increasing commercialization and lack of adequate safeguards, resulting in criminal abuses, abduction and sale of children.

The United States can be criticized for its participation in international adoption due to its lack of control over legal and social procedures through which such placements are financed and arranged. Given the preferential demand for healthy infants in the United States adoption market, an important policy issue is the extent to which the practice of international adoption results in pregnancies-for-profit, coercion of birth parents, and the corruption of child-welfare services.

Those who desire to help children in economically deprived or war-torn countries have alternatives to international adoption. The United Nations Children's Fund is an organization that serves to provide resources so that countries can gain the means to care for their own children. Another organization is World Vision, an international partnership of Christians that has grown to be the largest privately funded Christian relief and development organization in the world. It helps children and families in more than 100 countries. World Vision is not an adoption agency and does not facilitate adoptions. It works to help children become productive citizens in their own countries through child sponsorship to promote positive and lasting change by using sound community-development principles, with programs in nutrition, education, health care, agriculture, and vocational-skills training for children, parents and their communities.

It would be unfair for me to criticize international adoption without offering suggestions for improvement. What follows are recommendations for improving the system of international adoption in the United States:

1. At the present time, the United States does not abide by any existing international agreements that provide guidelines on international adoption. The United States should ratify the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. This would require the establishment of a central authority in the United States to regulate adoption practice, curtail the trafficking and sale of children, and negotiate uniform adoption policies in each of the 50 states.

2. Designate international adoptees as "special needs" children. With 35 percent of international adoptions in the United States involving children over the age of one year old, coupled in many cases with little information on the child's pre-placement history and probable abuse, neglect and exposure to conditions of extreme poverty, child-welfare workers are well-advised to view international adoptees as special-needs children. This would signal foreign-born adoptees need additional resources to develop in a positive manner.

3. Revise the domestic welfare system so that bureaucratic hurdles and time delays are reduced in finding permanent homes for American children. Recent moves in the Clinton Administration along these lines are encouraging.

4. From a public-policy standpoint, government should create incentives for Americans to adopt American children and at the same time create disincentives for international adoption. For example, amend the Adoption Tax Credit so that it eliminates deductions for international adoption. **CONT. ON PG. 4, COL. 2**

How my reunion began and where it is now

continued from page 1

with myself of what was the right thing to do. This is like putting candy in front of a child and then saying: NO, you cannot have it... At first I felt like I was betraying Liesbeth by letting Karlheinz know of me. But, the more I thought about it, the more I felt that he had the right to know of me and I had the right to tell him. After all, she never explained to me why they were not to know. The battle I fought within myself was very stressful and agonizing. But, I took a deep breath and plunged forward. I spent many hours writing and rewriting a letter that would change so many lives forever. I then sent pictures to Karlheinz that were of himself, of Liesbeth, Rainer and a picture of Karlheinz's car. Also, I sent a copy of my adoption paperwork. It was crucial that I give him everything so that there would be no doubt in his mind of who I was. I then sent everything in a large, red envelope. Now, I ask you, how many people get large red envelopes in their mailbox? (Smile) Days, weeks went by without a word. I was starting to think that he was not the one I was looking for. Then on a dreary Saturday morning, on August 3, 1996, as I sat on my couch, drinking coffee and fighting off a migraine, the phone rings. Two minutes before that I had thought to myself, wouldn't it be cool if your brother called? It was 9:05 am. I answered the phone and heard a deep, soft, warm and strong voice saying: "Hello, this is your brother, Karlheinz." The clouds split open, the sun beamed, angels sang, birds flew in happy flight and the world enveloped me in elation. My heart was beating so fast I couldn't breath. For me, this was like being told I had won the largest lottery ever. We spoke for about 10 minutes and then hung up. I was bouncing off the walls—as I always do when I get this excited. Twenty minutes later the phone rang once more. It was Karlheinz. He said he had just gotten done taking a shower and just couldn't believe he had talked to me. So he had to call once more to make doubly sure he did. For him and me, this is astounding, unbelievable. We called back and forth to each other several times and the next thing I knew he was making plans to come out here to meet me. The day was set: October 4, 1996. He was moving faster than what I thought he would. Everything sounds great, right? Wrong! A week before he came, my birth mother called and was terribly upset with me. I knew and expected him to go to her to tell her of me, and what I had done. But nothing prepared me for the onslaught of her wrath. I was devastated. I nearly made Karlheinz cancel his trip. But, he was elated and so was I. We do not care why Liesbeth did what she did when we were younger. All that matters now is our future together. Anyway... Karlheinz arrived in Portland, OR, and we spent four wonderful days together. What sounds funny to me is when I hear myself say, "my brother." What so many people take for granted, I cherish. He is wonderful. I wish all brothers and sisters could be like us. Some people may feel I did wrong. I don't.

Everything that has happened in the past seven years and what I have found out is coming from a much higher source. If the good Lord above did not want me to have this, it would never have happened. So, I continue my quest. Now, I have decided it is time for me to meet Liesbeth and Rainer. I am leaving July 11th for Germany. You ask yourself why I did not do this sooner. Finances! Work! Family! But, once again, angels have felt my pain and seen my tears. I need to do this and have closure. I need to see Liesbeth and touch her. Hopefully, she can or will answer some or all of my questions. I am prepared to accept whatever may come up. Rejection and heartache are friends of mine. Life is too short and too precious and sometimes time can be our enemy. We must act quickly; otherwise we will just wonder "What If...?" — *Prescilla White*
Lebanon, OR

Search Journal *by Christopher James*

cont. fr. pg. 1

at the end of June next year. This is absolutely overwhelming and yet it is such a thrill to see your real brother and sisters for the first time in over forty years, not to mention all the offspring and relatives that have accumulated over the years.

June 1997

I arrived in Maryland in late June of last year to meet my brother and his family. It was a very moving moment for me. I think we hit it off instantly. It was very unusual how our lives paralleled each other during our early years.



(l-r) **Renate, Lowell, Doris & Chris**

We prepared for the rest of the clan, who would be coming over the next few days. I picked up my sister Renate from Dulles Airport, and with the help of Lothar Schuettler, the brother of a friend of Renate's who resides in Maryland to translate, began our renewed relationship. It had been forty seven years and times had changed greatly. I will never forget Renate's face as she stepped through the doors. All my fears and apprehensions melted away in that moment, and I new that this would be a good week.

Just after the Fourth of July, the final member arrived from Columbus, Ohio. Because of the relatively short distance, Doris and her family chose to drive out.

For the next week Renate, Lowell, Doris and I recounted our pasts. We had such a great time. Lowell works at a marina and the restaurant held a special buffet for us. One of the owners commented on how it was hard to believe that we had all met for the first time. It seemed we were getting along so well that it appeared that we had known each other for years.

This October I will be heading to Germany for a two-week stay with Renate. I am looking forward to it with great excitement. It has been thirty-five years since living there as a teenager. I am sure it has changed a lot over those many years.

All of this was made possible through Leonie Boehmer and her connections. For this I am very grateful. A picture of all four of us is enclosed. — *Christopher James*
Denver, CO

The Case Against International Adoption

cont. fr. pg. 3

5. Education for all parties concerned that international adoption creates upheaval for the foreign-born adoptee, adds another layer of loss and is an impediment in the process of identity formation.

In summary, international adoption is complex and filled with inherent problems and difficulties. For the foreign-born adoptee, loss of their native country adds another layer of loss to their life's experience and impedes identity formation. Domestic child welfare professionals argue that "special needs" children available for adoption in the United States are being bypassed in favor of foreign children. International adoption does nothing to eliminate problems of poverty and high birth rates in countries where children are adopted by foreigners. Countries that surrender their children for international adoption have concerns. Corruption has been associated with international adoption. The United States does not abide by existing international policies regarding international adoption. And I have offered suggestions to improve international adoption in the United States.

I returned to Germany in my 20s and lived there for three years. Despite my best efforts I could not once again become German because, being raised in the United States, I had an American mentality. It is only conjecture to guess how my life might have turned out under different circumstances, but there is one certainty: if I had remained in the orphanage or had been adopted by German parents, I never would have suffered the loss of my national identity. If I had to be adopted by Americans, then they should have been of German descent.

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