

Geborener Deutscher®

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

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FOUND VIA THE INTERNET

Young woman from South Africa is successful after long search in Neu-Ulm

Neu-Ulm (kmd). A young woman undertook a trip half way around the world in order to find her father. The 24-year-old South African traveled around the world, so to speak, a few months ago to find her father again in Neu Ulm—traveling not by plane but on the computer, via the Internet. With the active support of the Ulm/Neu-Ulm Tourist Office (UNT) and the Neu-Ulm Registration Office, she found him.

The employees of the UNT have gradually become used to receiving odd inquiries via the Internet. But they were nevertheless astonished by the call for help they received a few months ago. A young woman from South Africa was searching for her biological father, whom she had never met. The only thing the young woman knew about him was that he had once moved to Neu-Ulm. She ended up inquiring at the UNT because it is the only English-speaking Internet site in this area of the country, and that brought her luck.

Wolfgang Dieterich, the director of the UNT, and his co-workers took courage and contacted the Neu-Ulm Registration Office. With their active support, the lost father was located after a long and laborious investigation. However, the now 57-year-old no longer lived in Neu-Ulm, but rather already for several years in Bielefeld with his family. "We were genuinely happy, after much correspondence back and forth, to be able to provide her with the happy news," says Wolfgang Dieterich, adding that his co-workers at the UNT shared in the feeling of elation.

The father was shocked but happy when his daughter suddenly called him, said the 24-year-old. Except through some old photos, the two still have not seen each other face to face. But that may now change. About 25 years ago, the parents fell in love in South Africa, but shortly after he learned of his the pregnancy, the father had to go back to Germany, where he obviously quickly forgot whom he had left behind. Contact with the mother ended shortly after the birth of the child and so Luciana, who is herself married with a small son, grew up without a father.

Nevertheless, she is not angry, and expects nothing from him. "All I want is his friendship," she says. She also told him as much in her letter and now she hopes for his answer. The first appeal was quite difficult, but she wanted to know something about her roots in order to better understand herself.

"If he should not answer, I would be very hurt," says the young woman, but life would go on, particularly since she is happy with her own little family. She works for a computer firm, and that gave her the idea to make an Internet search, explains the South African via Internet also to NUZ. Luciana doesn't know if it would work out to meet her father. She guesses it might be better to build the contact by phone or letter. After all, both are absolute strangers to each other and they would continue to live their own lives.

Thanks for the Help: Luciana has already thanked the employees of UNT for their helpful support. They are justly proud to have had a hand in bringing together two people who had lost each other with the help of modern technology. ***— Kristal Moir Davidson***

CORRECTION

In our Spring 1997 issue, we provided addresses for groups and individuals who can provide advice or assistance with adoption searches in the U.K., for one of which, NORCAP, we provided an out-of-date address. Their current address is: 112 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxfordshire OX33 1LU, England. We regret the error. ***— WLG***

A Quest

Lady's Search for Her Mother Finally Pays Off

Joan Ogle and Annegret Kostrewa share the same soul, but are altogether different women.

Literally, Ogle and Kostrewa are one the same. Yet, the two are so different that they are a world and a lifetime apart. Adopted four days after her birth, Ogle never knew the complete story of her past until last month.

She would have been a poor German woman named Annegret Kostrewa if she hadn't been adopted by Milton and Daisy Loveday of Sevierville 35 years ago.

These days, Ogle is a factory worker and the mother of two sons. Ogle has a thick mountain accent and laughs when she says she might have been speaking German if not for a twist of fate.

When she was seven years old, Ogle found out through a cousin she was adopted. "I went home and asked my parents," she said. "They sat me down and said it was true." From that point on, Ogle would never rest until she found her roots. "There has always been a piece of me missing," she said. "I wanted to find it."

But the quest was usually put off by other demands—a family and a job. "When things got slow, I'd wonder about it," she said. "I usually thought about it a lot during the summer."

The journey to find her mother led to more startling revelations: Her true birth name and the fact she was born in Sindelfingen, Germany.

Her mother, who was unmarried at the time of Ogle's birth, gave her baby away willingly. "Things were bad in Germany 35 years ago," Ogle said. "The country was undergoing a population explosion of sorts, and economic times were tough."

The Lovedays were stationed in Germany at the time and adopted the baby Kostrewa. Shortly after that, they changed Annegret's name to Joan, moved back to the United States and settled in Sevier County.

"After I found out I was adopted, it was just another part of my life," she said. "I wondered about it, but I didn't let it get to me while I was growing up."

Meanwhile, Annegret's mother, Lotte, married a U.S. military man and they moved to Iowa four months after Joan's birth.

Her adoptive parents knew little about her natural parents. But the little information they could provide helped Ogle on her way.

Ogle graduated from Sevier County High School, married and had two sons. Her first husband died in 1982, leaving her with a five-year-old son and an 11-week-old baby to care for.

In 1986, after sending letters to local and state officials, ***CONT. ON PG. 4, COL. 3***

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BOOK REVIEW

Outer Search/Inner Journey: An Orphan and Adoptee's Quest

by Peter F. Dodds

Reviewed by
Mary Anne Cohen

Outer Search/Inner Journey is the best adoption-related book I have read in a long time. Peter F. Dodds was born in Germany in 1955 to a 35-year-old alcoholic mother, placed in an orphanage by his grandparents and adopted when he was almost three by an American serviceman and his wife. He was raised in the U.S., with little knowledge of his German heritage, and virtually no discussion of adoption in his family once he was told that he was adopted. His adoptive family seemed average for the 1950s —neat, clean, non-communicative and cold, despite outward appearances that everything was perfect. When Peter was out of college, he joined the Army, like his adoptive father, and was stationed in Germany, where he searched for and met members of his birth family, including his institutionalized birth mother. The search, which he did on his own at age 22, was incredibly easy because in Germany, records are not sealed.[1]

This is the outer search part of book, which also includes the author's life as a serviceman, attempts to find himself by immersing himself in his German heritage, has a harrowing battle with alcoholism, won with the help of a support group, and returns to spirituality. But what is really striking in this narrative is the "Inner Journey"—which takes many years more than the actual search and reunion, and which does not resolve neatly and happily at the end. Peter's story is an ongoing journey through what B.J. Lifton calls "the ghost kingdom," and what Peter characterizes as his "Inner Castle" —the part of himself in which he learns to hide, first as an abandoned child, and later as a man terrified of any feeling and intimacy that may lead to further loss.

This castle metaphor, used very effectively throughout the book, reminds me of Sting's song, "Fortress Around Your Heart"—"If you built this fortress around your heart, surrounded it with trenches and barbed wire, let me build a bridge, for I cannot swim this chasm, let me set the battlements on fire." It is only by the end of the book that Peter lets anyone even begin to "build the bridge"—and even then it is with fear and trembling at what might ensue.

Subject matter aside, this is a beautifully written book that is joy to read, so well-written that I was drawn in and excited by descriptions of Army Ranger training maneuvers—not a subject I would normally find intriguing. And the parts about the inner journey of a male adoptee not placed immediately at birth gave me a great deal of insight and compassion into the situation of my own son, and his difficulties relating to me and to other women in his life.

It occurred to me that this may the first really "grown-up" adoption story, because of the complexity of emotions and the stubborn lack of easy resolution or instant answers to the damage done by the primal wound of abandonment. Like several other people I know, Peter searched on his own, and did not join the adoption reform movement until recently, years after his reunion. Although in his heart he has forgiven his birth mother, he has not seen or communicated with her for many years—the gap between their lives was too great. And finding her did not cure his drinking problem, or his difficulties with women, or even the original trauma of separation and loss of both family and national heritage. What healing there is came later, after much soul-searching and hard work.

In some strange way I felt validated and comforted by this, since my reunion also did not lead to relationship, and did not transform my life. But Peter and I would agree that knowing one's heritage and blood kin is civil right that cannot in good conscience be denied to adoption-separated families, whether or not it is also instantly therapeutic. For many years, Peter did not even know that American-born adoptees could not get their birth records, and was shocked to hear it.

This is a book about ethnic heritage, and a strong indictment of the practice of snatching children out of their Country and culture, whatever it may be. It is also about the enduring and mystic bonds of blood, as exemplified by Peter's vision of the grandfather he never knew, in an old German cemetery:

We left the caretaker to his chores and walked to the grave along a dirt path. I grew quiet and let go Pelli's hand, not wanting to talk while unearthing another fragment of my past. A tombstone, somewhat larger than the rest and made of gray mortar, lay directly ahead. As if mesmerized, I glided towards my destination. Etched in mortar were the words "Peter Friedrich Sander" and beneath the name, another word, "Oberlehrer." I couldn't pull my eyes from the grave marked with my name.

Though numb, a tidal wave of love, more powerful than the feeling of tranquillity at the art museum, washed over me—I couldn't fathom the depth of such love, and closed my eyes in surrender. Pelli faded to a dream and the outside world ceased to exist. Time stopped while I sat alone in a small room deep in the interior of my castle. My secret self slumped in a chair with eyes half-closed. Three white candles dripped wax onto a coarse wooden table. With the sudden gust of warm wind I opened my eyes as the candle flames flickered. Looking ahead what I saw caused me to bolt upright in the chair. My eyes flashed wide open. An intruder stood a few steps in front of me. Someone had penetrated the walls of my castle.

A radiant light surrounded the head and body of the intruder, a light so dazzling I could make out no more than a silhouette. Squinting to make out who had invaded my sanctuary, I cupped a hand over my brow. The brilliance of the light slowly faded to a bluish-white aureole that allowed me to see form. It was a man, tall, distinguished, and handsome. I had seen him before, in a photograph glued to a page in one of Maria Kauer's photo albums. The man was my grandfather, Peter Friedrich Sander, Oberlehrer. He didn't say a word, and the aureole fluctuated in intensity like flames dancing in a campfire. I stared at him until the energy of his aureole increased and radiant light again engulfed his body. Only his silhouette remained visible. The intensity of his love increased, so powerful that my eyes filled with tears of joy. Everything in the castle room faded, the table, the chairs, my troubles, my fears, every physical thing and emotion disappeared except my grandfather, bathed in love's light. His love took root in my soul and seeped outward to my heart before emptying into my mind. I could never conceive of anything so great—pure love, freely given.

Then the vision fades, and Peter and his girlfriend Pelli are alone in the cold cemetery.

This is a profound and beautiful work, one that everyone interested in the mind and soul of an adopted person should read. I hope the passage above gives some feeling of the work, but there is so much more—humor, adventure, courage, and honest insight that goes on until all the truth is told. Buy this book, and tell your friends in adoption to do so as well. Peter presented a workshop, "The Case Against International Adoption," at the AAC Conference in Dallas in April [*See the Autumn 1997 issue of* Geborener Deutscher*, for the text of this address. — **Ed.***], and I hope we will be hearing more from him in the future.

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*Author **Peter F. Dodds** has earned BA and MPA degrees and is a graduate of the International Olympic Academy located in Greece. He has served as an Army officer, directed an international conference for the United States Olympic Committee and served as a member of the staff to the Washington state legislature.*

*Reviewer **Mary Anne Cohen** is a birth mother, editor of Origins' newsletter (in which this review originally appeared), and is active in the New Jersey Coalition for Openness in Adoption. Her review is reprinted here with her kind permission.*

[1] In fact, adoption records in Germany *are* sealed and no information is given to birth parents. Adoptees can view their records at the age of 16. Registration and vital-statistics records are only given to immediate family. Some offices adhere to this rule very strictly and others do not. Vital-statistics information of an adoptee will never be given to a birth parent. I have read Mr. Dodds' book and spoken to him many times. The reason he found so easily is because he talked to people who lived there and remembered his family; not because he approached the official channels. — Leonie D. Boehmer

Mi Ok Song Bruining Finds Her Birth Mother in Korea

Mi Ok Song Bruining was adopted by American parents from an orphanage in Korea in 1965, at the age of five. A poet, writer, artist, and social-work consultant, Mi Ok doubted at times that she would ever meet her birth mother, to whom she had written a poem, "To Omoni, In Korea," that was published in the 1990 anthology about women of color, Making Face, Making Soul. *Mi Ok also wrote articles for two of* Chain of Life*'s early newsletters.*

As her following letter relates, the impossible happened in January of this year: Mi Ok met her birth mother and extended family in Korea. I (and others) received the following letter from Mi Ok in February 1997, explaining her sudden change of plans. — Janine Baer

Greetings! I hope everyone and families are well and had a great year! As I am writing this (Feb. 1, 1997), 1 am preparing to return to Korea, after spending 3 months there from October '96 to January '97. Ah, but let me back up a bit. After I moved back to Cambridge in January '96, I worked part-time as a social worker and had every intention of settling here and continuing my life. In late June, I received an invitation from a Korean adoptees' group to go to Korea to search for my birth mother. I accepted the invitation and prepared my apartment, my cat, Fiona Feline, and my '78 VW bus, Lulu, to be taken care of for one year. I arrived in Korea on October 20th and hoped that I would be able to obtain an English teaching contract at a university in Seoul for income. I also hoped to learn Korean, travel around the country, do research on my book and search for my birth mother. I went to Korea with $500—typical of my style of plunging off a cliff ill-prepared for the worst. I was chasing a dream and nothing I had hoped to accomplish was achieved. My $500 was gone by my 3rd week in Korea! Seoul is a huge, daunting, maddening, very expensive city. It makes New York City seem like a quaint suburb by comparison.

I met other Korean adoptees from Europe, Canada and the U.S., as well as other foreigners who were very supportive. I met many Korean and non-Korean people who will be lifelong friends. In late December, after 2 months of struggle, despair, 40 job interviews, frustration, unemployment, illness, exhaustion, horrible living conditions, poverty and heartbreak, I decided to return to the U.S. in late January as a failure. I was unable to search for my birth mother since I had no information. I never expected it to be easy and I knew Korea would be difficult. However, I had no idea how difficult it would be for me. I was discriminated against by Koreans for being Korean, adopted, and not being able to speak Korean.

Then, in late December, I met some Korean feminist women artists, writers and music performers. I agreed to teach them conversational English for a friend who was on vacation. My luck changed and life turned around. These women embraced me, restored my spirit and faith in humanity, saved my life, helped, supported, encouraged, and accepted me with their kindness, generosity, humor, love and respect. 1 also met a Korean journalist for the largest newspaper in Korea and begged him to write an article about me searching for my birth mother. I told him that he was my last hope.

On December 19th, I scheduled my return flight to Boston for January 17th. On January 12th, the article about me appeared in the *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper in Korea. The next day, Monday, I was interviewed by SBS TV news, who were interested in my story of struggle and despair in Korea. That evening a Korean man called me and told me that he might be my cousin. He told me that he thought his aunt might be my birth mother! I agreed to meet them the next morning and on Tuesday, January 14th, at 8 a.m., I met my birth mother, aunt and cousin in Ilsan—the same town where I had lived for the first five years I spent in the orphanage! I spent the entire day with her and my extended family and communicated with them through a Korean friend who spoke Korean and English.

As a result of the newspaper article and TV interview, I received about 40 responses from Korean people who wanted to help me, in addition to obtaining a job interview with the largest art school in Seoul (Hong-ik University) for an English teaching contract. The president of Hong-ik saw me in the TV interview and insisted that I be offered a job. That day, I also met a wealthy Korean woman who offered me a free place to five and free airfare back to Korea.

On Thursday the 16th, I met my birth mother and extended family again and spent the last day in Korea with them. On Friday, January 17th, as planned, I returned to Boston. My birth mother and family were there at the airport saying good-bye to me. Everything I hoped for, worked for, wanted and dreamed of fell into place for me.

Most of these life-altering events occurred the last week I was in Korea but I returned to Boston to give up my apartment, store my stuff, deal with my finances, my car, and my cat, and visit my adoptive parents. More importantly, two Korean women friends (who are sisters) arrived in Boston from Korea on January 19th—my thirty-first anniversary of being adopted—to spend five days with me. They were with me in Rhode Island when I informed my adoptive parents of my birth mother finding me.

I can only describe my feelings and this experience in superlative adjectives of being surreal, cosmic, amazing, unbelievable and something I never dreamed would happen so quickly, so easily, if ever! Through translation with Korean friends, I learned about my birth mother's situation at the time I was brought to the orphanage and know now that she suffered more than I ever did in being adopted. She was hoping to find me for 31 years! After three humbling months in Korea, I have come to respect and appreciate my adoptive parents more and regret all the difficulties and resentment I caused them while I was growing up.

Of course, I am saddened to be leaving my family and friends here in the U.S. for one year, but shall be returning for periodic trips. I also realize how difficult it will be for me in Korea when I return. Even though I am slowly learning the Korean language, I know my way around Seoul now, I have many friends in Korea, and, while still difficult, it will be better for me when I return Korean society is very conservative and rigid in many ways. It is sexist, patriarchal, racist and homophobic and I will be forced to act differently than I do here as a Korean American woman. I feet my heart is broken in two pieces—one-half is here in the U.S. and the other half is in Korea.

On February 20th [1997], I will say goodbye to my family and East Coast friends and the next day will be in L.A. for a Korean-American conference. A few days later, I will return to Korea from L.A. As difficult as it was for me in Korea, I do not regret experiencing what I experienced. I learned so much about myself, others, and Korean people and culture. I learned how to survive, how to negotiate around a hostile place, how to ask for and accept help. I learned about humiliation, frustration, confusion, and patience. I learned how to meet other people, reach out to and try to help others, swallow my pride and dignity, yet still maintain my conviction and integrity. Most importantly, I learned about acceptance of things I cannot change and am now committed to helping other Korean adoptees who are arriving in Korea to search for their birth families.

One exciting discovery I made in Korea was e-mail! I call it "e-femail" and my address in Korea is: **fiona@net.co.kr**. If you have the opportunity to e-femail, please feel free to correspond.

I tell my friends that my ship has come in and it is a luxury liner. I always thought it would be a raft without oars! So, if it can happen to me, it can happen to you! All you have to do is BELIEVE.

— Mi Ok Song Bruining

The forgoing originally appeared in Chain of Life*'s Spring/Summer 1997 issue and is reprinted with permission.* Chain of Life*, "A Progressive Adoption Newsletter," has ceased publication. To order back issues, write to: Janine Baer, P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley CA 94707.*

Letter Reunites Woman, Father She Thought Dead

Decades after World War II, an American daughter is reunited with the German father she believed died in the war

BY KELLY GARBUS
Knight-Ridder Newspapers (06/15/97)

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KANSAS CITY, MO—In the midst of a raging world war and under a canopy of evergreens on a German Mountainside, Karl Beinfohr and Ingeborg Mueller found time for love.

Nine months later, in January 1944, a daughter—now Christa Maria Eastburn—was born. Until this spring she believed her father, a German soldier, had died in the war.

Then earlier this year, the Kansas City, Mo., woman resident opened her mail and stood transfixed as she read a letter from the man who was supposed to be 50 years in the grave.

"All these years of quietness," he wrote. "I don't know what you have lived through."

Eastburn had recently written German relatives hoping to find out something about her father for a genealogy study she was doing. "It took a while to register," she said.

The last thing she expected was a letter from the subject of her inquiry.

Tears flowed days later when the realization finally sank in.

"Gee, I have a father," she said. "It was a feeling of connection."

Eastburn lost that connection shortly after Germany fell in 1945 and her father was confined to a prisoner-of-war camp until 1948. Afterward her parents divorced and in May 1949 Eastburn, her mother and a new father—a U.S. soldier—moved to Dupont, Pa.

"I did not really remember my father," Eastburn said, adding that she called her mother's second husband Daddy.

"I really thought that man was my father until I was 13," Eastburn said.

Then as her mother was divorcing that man, the truth came out.

"All of a sudden my mother said, `This is not your real name.' I felt confused, but not upset that I had another father."

The only thing ever said about her biological father was that he was a German soldier. Somehow from that, Eastburn deduced he had died in the war, and she never pressed her mother for details.

"She never acted like she wanted to talk about him," she said.

Eastburn's mother married a third time and moved to the Kansas City area, where her spouse worked for the Ford Motor Co. Eastburn eventually joined them from the East Coast in 1965. In 1976 she married Leland Eastburn.

"When my mother died in 1989 I became more interested in her relatives and as I went on I thought I would like some information on my father," she said.

First she found his name on her birth certificate. Then she bought a German phone book for Dortmund, the town in which her father once lived. In February she wrote the three Beinfohrs listed, hoping they might be related to her father and could shed some light on the type of man he was.

"It turned out they were all related," Eastburn said. The surprise, in fact, was on them, for none knew that Karl Beinfohr had a daughter in America.

"They were all shocked," Eastburn said, adding that her letter brought them together to discuss the "surprising news."

The German relatives notified Eastburn's father, who was living in Mainz on the Rhine River. They told him his American daughter was looking for him.

A couple of weeks later, in March, it was Eastburn's turn for astonishment when a letter from her father showed up in the mail.

Soon a correspondence developed and in follow-up letters Beinfohr recounted the love he once had for Eastburn's mother and offered an explanation as to why things didn't work out.

"Unfortunately I was a young soldier fighting on Russian, Italian and French front lines," he wrote, "Through the war, all connections with mother broke off, no one knows who was dead or alive."

Eastburn said, "It really was a difficult time," adding that her mother used to share stories about mad dashes to bomb shelters and making baby clothes out of parachutes and army blankets.

Eastburn said she understands now that the circumstances of her birth probably made her mother reluctant to talk about it. The couple married in October 1943 and Eastburn was born three months later.

"Things like this were not talked about years ago," Eastburn said.

She said her father's recent letter was an attempt to smooth over the past.

"Your mother and I were a real loving couple and you are a child of real love," he wrote.

Eastburn, who is 53, said, "I just cried when I read this."

By mid-May Eastburn was on a plane to Germany.

"It was awkward," she said. "I think stumbling through the German language is what kept me together."

She said one question that haunted her father during the years of separation was, "Did America make you happy?"

But Eastburn didn't know how to answer that.

"I don't know what would have been better," she concluded. "I just know what is."

This year when Eastburn sent out Father's Day cards, she added a name to the list.

"I have a real father to send it to this time," she said, "but I still don't have everything that goes with it like the memories."

Quest cont. fr. pg. 1

Ogle received a letter from Germany and the place where she was born. It said her mother had moved to Everly, Iowa, when she left Germany 31 years earlier.

After immigration officials told Ogle they had no records of a Kostrewa lady arriving in Iowa in 1955, Ogle said she had hit a brick wall.

"I was devastated," she said.

For two years, Ogle kept calling a census worker in Iowa who might have come across her natural mother in 1955. The worker didn't have any recollection.

The census worker's brother became interested In the case too. He was once the owner of a feed store in a small Iowa town, and remembered a German customer who frequented his store In the 1950s.

He called Ogle with her natural mother's phone number on Oct. 8. "I couldn't believe it," Ogle said.

Instead of calling, Ogle asked the man if he'd contact her natural mother and tell her of this development. He did, and Ogle received a phone call the next day.

"It was my (natural) mother," she said. "She started crying and saying she was sorry. I told her she had nothing to be sorry for. I understood."

Mother, daughter set up first meeting at Christmas

Joan Ogle's search for her natural mother ends Christmas Day when they'll see each other for the first time.

After talking to one another on the telephone last month, the two decided to meet on Christmas. Ogle is going to Iowa for the reunion.

How does Ogle's adoptive mother, Daisy Loveday, feel about this?

"She is supportive. She feels good about it. I think she's 99 percent sure of this. There is that 1 percent that is fearful I think," Ogle said.

"She still sees me as her little girl and that won't change. She is my real mother. The woman I found could turn out to be a good friend, but she won't be my mother.

Her adoptive father died a few years back.

Ogle grew up an only child. With the discovery of her birth mother, Ogler has found she has at least nine siblings. One living in New York is still unaware he has a half-sister somewhere.

Six of her siblings likely live in Europe and do not know of her either. Ogle's natural dad was the father of at least six children, Ogle said.

"I would like to meet my father, but I am satisfied now with just having found my mother," she said.

The foregoing appeared in the Sevierville, TN, Mountain Press *on November 20, 1989, and is reprint here with permission.*