11th Year

Geborener Deutscher®

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

Volume XI, Number 1 *(Issue #38)* *Spring 1998*

German-Born Adoptee One of First to Benefit From Philanthropic Enterprise

Chosen Children's Charities Aids Adoptees and Birth Parents Who Can't Afford to Travel for a Reunion

Following are letters written by Thomas Grant to Paytra Skelly, founder of Chosen Children's Charities (CCC), recounting his reunion experience with his birth mother and her family, which was facilitated by CCC. They originally appeared in the organization's November 1997 newsletter and are reprinted here with the kind permission of both Mr. Grant and CCC.

September 17, 1996

I just received the "Geborener Deutscher" newsletter that contained the article about your "Chosen Children's Charities Inc." Shortly before finding this article I was connected to my birth mother after 36 years.

I was born in Dizenbach, Germany, July 3, 1960. My birth mother, who is German, was 18 years old and had met a Black American serviceman. It was only a brief affair and he soon left, not knowing of her pregnancy. Being the time period and the feelings within the community about interracial children, she was unable to keep me and gave me up for adoption. (She wanted the best for my future.)

I was soon adopted and brought to the U.S at the age of three. I was very lucky to have two wonderful parents who raised me with so much love and compassion and kept me informed of why my birth mother had to give me up and that soon after I had been adopted, she had married an American serviceman and was now possibly in the States.

Well, over the past 30 years I've been wanting to connect, going through the stages of wonder, abandonment and real interest, but then just letting it all pass. Finally, I decided to go for it all. Having all my birth records (with the assistance of Leonie Boehmer) I was able to locate my mother and she had been residing in Ohio since 1965.

I was overwhelmed by this and just two weeks ago I made the one call that has changed my life forever. We have talked several times now, the first one of the calls being very emotional for me and as I could feel from her she was very cautious. Now, after 36 years I've found her but, unfortunately, she is unable to tell her family (her husband who does know I exist and her two daughters who have no idea) about me. At least not right now.

My birth mother will be in Germany next summer visiting her two sisters. I told her that my next venture was to visit my birth place. She said she would meet me there. A full circle of events! I have the opportunity to visit my birth mother and my place of birth during the month in which I was born. At this point I'm trying to save enough money to make this dream come true.

I know during my life that things happen for a reason. Shortly after connecting with my birth mother, the German newsletter arrived and I found you. So I'm taking the time to write and see if it would be possible to get some sort of assistance for my trip next summer. I know I will make the trip some way, but having seen your article, it gives me hope even more so. I just want to say thanks for creating an organization such as yours which enriches people's lives to their fullest.

November 26, 1996

As you have noticed several months have gone by. My father (adoptive) became very ill and was put into the hospital. September 26th he passed away. I have been busy dealing with the death of my adoptive father and being there for my mother (adoptive). I tried going to a support group meeting for adoptees several weeks after my father's death but, unfortunately it was too much to handle at that time. Now I am finishing up your application.

I've been keeping in contact with my birth mother. She told her husband that I have located her and that we have been communicating. His response was that he was surprised that I didn't find her any sooner. I also just received a Thanksgiving card from the both of them telling me that they have opened their house to me at any time!

So now I'm going to try and visit them in Ohio in February, on Valentine weekend of the 14th-17th. Earlier I did say I wanted to visit her at my birth place in Germany, but I would like to see if you can help me with my trip to Ohio in February. I would try any means to be with my birth mother.

Thank you Paytra again for all you do for adoptees and their families. You're one in a MILLION!!

January 30, 1997

Well, my hopes and dreams are coming true in a way that is so bigger than life it's hard to grasp! Thanks to all who have put their efforts towards these dreams of mine!! I called Theresia (my b-mom) at least once or twice a month and our talks have been pretty good. I have talked with one of my sisters and also with Theresia's husband. They are all very excited about this reunion and have accepted me with open arms.

March 20, 1997

My trip was pretty amazing, everyone accepted me with open arms and treated me as one of the family.

From Seattle I had to fly to North Carolina and while waiting at the airport I had to have a Bloody Mary just to keep my nerves in order. On the plane, I sat next to a woman from Arizona who has a sister in Seattle, so we chatted a bit and I told her my story. She was very happy for me. I was a bundle of nerves, loaded down with a bouquet of roses, a bag of gifts and a carry-on full of photos and clippings of things I've done over the years.

As I came out of the plane, I could see Theresia eagerly waiting and smiling. We hugged and I gave her roses. There was Ramona my sister and her daughter Sarah waiting with tears just streaming down their faces. They had balloons and a teddy bear with "I Love You" on it. I was very overwhelmed. The lady who was sitting next to me on the plane came up next to me and just gave me a big nod of acknowledgment, letting me know how happy she was for me. Boy, what an exciting time that was.

I have you and your Board to thank. You have given me a part of my life that I never knew. Now it's like a new beginning and it's a very happy and positive one. Thanks so much to everyone who was involved.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4, COLUMN 2

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

Letter from a birth mother to her found-again daughter

12. January 1998

Most honored Mrs. Leonie Boehmer!

First, Greetings from Switzerland from Margrit (mother of Lisa). I wish you all the best for the year 1998, especially good health, and I like to thank you very much for your important work and help. I am writing this letter for Lisa. I like to tell her how it happened that she was adopted.

Dear Lisa!

I, as well as many other Austrian women, grew up during WW II. It was a very, very hard time. One really had only the most necessary things to survive. There were many big families in Austria with many children. Since the children could not be fed due to the war, the State took charge. Austria was totally destroyed and the economy hit rock bottom. In May 1945, the war was over; what joy, the land could breath again. But only for a short time. Austria was occupied for 10 years by the four great powers: America, Russia, England and France. Oh, you poor Austria!

Austria consists of nine States. According to the country that occupied the particular State, one had to automatically learn the language of the occupant. Since my State was occupied by the Americans, we had English courses. That's why I still remember a little bit of English.

After I finished my schooling I decided to become a nurse. So I went to nursing school at the State hospital for two years.

Since the economy was still very bad in Austria and one could not make much money, many Austrians (as well as Germans and Hungarians) went to Switzerland at that time to work and build a future. My sister, who is two years younger than I am, also wanted to go to Switzerland, and she persuaded me to come along. She did not want to go by herself. So I cut short my nursing education after two years to go to Switzerland with her.

At the time, she worked in a household (an architect's family). We requested our passports and the necessary papers which took time and was not so easy. One had to wait several weeks and at the same tire search for a job in Switzerland, which was required. As soon as we had a job we got our passports and papers.

Since I already quit the nursing school, I was looking for a job to cover the time until emigration to Switzerland. This job was in the service department of a hotel. I don't remember any longer how long I was there.

During that time they had a big party for all hotel employees, but one could leave when one had had enough. Late in the evening when I was tired, I went to my room to sleep. There I was surprised and caught unawares by the chef of the hotel who was waiting for me at my door, and things happened as they had to. He seduced me and we slept together. A short time later, we traveled to Switzerland to take on our new jobs. We worked as nurse's aides in the Kanton Spital.

I never thought that I would be pregnant due to this encounter (dumb and naive as we were then). Months went by without my period, and first I thought it was the change of climate from Austria to Switzerland and did not mention it to anyone, not even my sister; I simply worked normally like everybody else. After six months without a period, I finally went to the doctor and wanted to know what was going on. When he told me that I was six months pregnant, it hit me like a bombshell. I then worked normally until about two or three weeks before the birth.

For the birth I had to go to a home (where only unmarried women gave birth). Everything was taken care of by Spital. There were many young single mothers in this home. Those mothers who could not keep their children could leave them there to be adopted. I had never even thought of giving my child up for adoption.

After one or two weeks, my sister came to pick me and you up. We took the train with the little bundle in my arms. We also had inquisitive looks from the passengers. We placed you into a baby home, where there were only babies, and I resumed my work. On our days off, my sister and I picked you up, took you to my apartment and we went on strolls with you. You were always a very happy child and laughed a lot.

Months went by and you were about 1½ or two years old when I had to go to the guardian, Mr. F., at the city hall. In Switzerland, every child of a single mother automatically is assigned a guardian. He talked to me and said that an American couple was there who would like to adopt a child. The couple was in the children's home and looked at the children and they liked you the best.

I felt like being hit by lightening and could not move when he told me this. He talked and talked and pushed and pushed, I don't remember how long this went on. Today I only know that it had to be done as fast as possible, almost a quickie process, since the couple needed to return to America. Your adoptive parents also wanted to see me, and so they came to the Spital where I worked. I only found this out much later. After some time Mr. F. convinced me to give you up for adoption.

The whole thing was a shock for me. Only a short time later, when I did not have you any longer I realized the whole thing fully. The sadness and the hurt one lives through cannot be described, and especially the conscience always came bothering me. It took a long time until I overcame the worst time. For a long time I went to the city hall to Mr. F. and asked about you, how you are, and now and then he showed me a picture of you. The one picture where you are holding the little doll Mr. F. gave to me.

So the years went on, time heals wounds, as one says, but the blemish, the shame and the guilt feelings are forever. On one hand you could grow up in a family with love and security in spite of the early death of your adoptive father. But the love of a mother to her child cannot be replaced by anything.

After these painful years I wanted to stay by myself and live my life. My younger sister married after we were in Switzerland for two years. In 1963, I met my husband. We dated for two years and got married in 1965. He was a very lovable, good-natured and capable man. I could not have asked for a better and more loving man. I also told him the story of you, since I wanted to be honest with him.

In 1966 Erika was born. She was exactly two years old when my husband became very ill, operations, radiation and more. Unfortunately he had cancer. It lasted another 3½ years full of suffering and weakness until he was allowed to die. So I was alone with Erika. So my fate repeated itself or was it a test? Now I put my whole love and strength into the upbringing and education of Erika.

You, dear Lisa, also had to experience it when your adoptive father died so early. In this respect you and my other daughter experienced similar fates as children. Well, one cannot run away from one's fate. Therefore, I hope from the bottom of my heart that you have found a loving and good husband and that you are happy with him and that Natascha and Georgie give you much joy and strength.

It was very important to me to write this letter to you so you finally know where your roots are and you can find inner peace. There is one thing I want to tell you *truthfully and honestly*, that I did not give you up to get rid of you. But it satisfies me that you have had a good childhood and now you yourself have a happy family. Another thing I want to *specifically* say, you should not think that I do not want to call you, but I do not know enough English to carry on a conversation with you.

I like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the pretty Christmas wreath that you made for me. It got a place of honor. Erika also liked the pretty snowman very much, and she said to tell you thanks! Also thanks for your dear letters that I received today on 10 January 1998 and the book list.

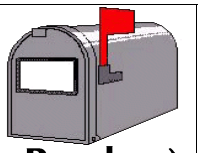
Now, Lisa, I like to ask you for the birth dates of Natasha and Georgie sometime. I am full of joy to be a grandmother and have two such beautiful grandchildren. You can be proud to be the mother of two such pretty and good children, enjoy being their mother, not everyone is so lucky. Well, it turned out to be a long letter, but an important one for you and there were many tears; here there is a book with the title: "Daughter you will be forever!"

With this in mind until the next time I wish you, your dear husband, Natasha and Georgie all my love and the best, especially joy for the year 1998. Erika will write you soon also.

All my love, *—Your Mother*

Translated by Leonie Boehmer.

Briefe (Letters From Readers)



November 19, 1997

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for the newsletters that were sent to me. I had recently acquired a copy of *German Life* and saw your ad in it and decided out of curiosity to ask for a copy. I was very pleased when I read it and amazed at the fact that you publish it for no fee. I must admit that is truly a worthy cause.

After reading the many stories I did notice that most dealt with children who were born after the war. I would like to share my story with you and, if you desire, your readers, as it is quite different from the others.

I was born during WW II of German parents. My father was a member of the German Air Force. During the war and the action on the Eastern Front, he was missing in action and after some time declared "dead" by the German government. My mother was a nurse for the German Red Cross and, after Germany surrendered, the facility where she was working was taken over by the U.S. Army. It was here that she met my step-father. After the war, they were married and we came to the United States in 1947. I was later adopted by my step-father and use his last name rather than my German father's name.

In 1953, my mother returned to Germany for a visit and was told by some family members that they were sure that my father was, in fact, alive and well. She relayed that information to me, but I was unable to do anything about it and Mother had no desire to follow up with the information. After all, she had remarried.

I joined the U.S. Air Force in 1960 and, after about a year in the service while stationed at Laredo, Texas, I decided to act on the information. Like so many people, I had no idea of where to turn for help. I wrote a letter to the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. That office referred me to the German Consulate in Houston. I re-wrote my letter, giving them all the information I had and indeed it was sparse. I had a name, date of birth, and branch of service and nothing else. I was not even sure of his place of birth. Remember, I was leery of asking my mother for help due to her remarriage. After about a month, I received a letter that they were looking and they asked a few more questions that I was able to answer. Every few months I would get a letter to tell me they had checked various archives with no results.

After a year, they finally sent me a notice that they had found a person fitting the description of my father. It was now up to him to write me if he so desired. My first letter was from a German attorney that asked me numerous questions about my family which I was able to answer. The search was over. I had, in fact, found my father, and we have corresponded since that time. I was fortunate enough to be stationed in Germany for six years with the Air Force and we met several times. I have met one half-brother, and it is amazing how we have so many similar interests. I still have not met nor written to the other half-brothers or half-sister, since my father seems to avoid that topic of conversation as we approach it. My command of the German language is poor at best, so any conversation with my father is short and to the point most of the time.

We keep in touch through letters and pictures and he is very proud of the fact that he has a great-grandson, although they have never met. Perhaps someday in the future.

Some time ago, I was a member of the local German Club, but since I was unable to attend most meetings due to my work schedule, my wife and I dropped out. One thing that always interested me was the reaction that many of the ex-Germans when they arrived in America. I was always amused at some of the stories of the war brides and their reaction to the U.S.A. Remember, we left a land destroyed by war and were coming to a land with streets paved with gold. Our first stop was in Arkansas, where my step-father had family. There was no running water and no electricity at the farmhouse where we stayed with his mother. When I went to the bathroom after dark, my mother had to light a lantern to escort me to an outhouse. It was then and there I told Mom that I wanted to go back "home." This America was worse off than our war-torn land.

I would like to comment on the article concerning International Adoption. If a child in Russia or some other country is starving, ill, or has some other problem and that child is wanted by a family in another country, I see no problem. Yes, I lost my total heritage when I left Germany. Yet I know I am German and I can take what I want from that heritage and use what I have learned in the U.S. I have lived in Germany and no, I do not "fit in" totally. I am aware of the differences in culture, I respect the culture and many times I helped in celebrating that culture when I lived there. Could I live in Germany again. The answer is yes, but with difficulty. Aside from language, there are the laws, and other regional differences. In my outward appearance I am an American and in my service to country I am American, but in my heart I am German even though in Germany I would not totally "fit in." So, as far as adopting a child from another country, I for one am in favor of it. Remember to tell the child of the adoption and I would recommend that at an early age. Help the child understand the heritage from the native country, celebrate the holidays from the adopted land. Let the child understand why they were adopted from their country and why they came to the U.S.

I have heard from time to time that these adoptions are wrong, but I for one would never hesitate to adopt from another country, even if that would mean adopting a child from a different race. If one handles the adoption right, the child will be the better for having the best of two cultures. I guess that those people against these adoptions have good reason for their views and their Ph.D.s in whatever makes them smarter than me, but I have lived it and know others that have lived it and we think we are better off with the experience.

If possible I would like to hear more stories similar to mine. One thing I have heard from a few folks was that many American soldiers were happy to marry a German woman, but if they had children they wanted the mother to leave them behind. Thank goodness my mother would not hear of such a thing.

Thank you for listening and keep up the good work. I am enclosing a small check to help defray the cost of the newsletter.

— Kurt R. Hartzog
Fort Worth, TX

Subj: Geborener Deutscher Newsletter
Date: 97-12-09 21:11:25 EST
From: nfboyd@worldnet.att.net
To: WmLGage@aol.com

Dear Mr. Gage:

A few months ago I found out that I was a German-born adoptee (I'm 40 years old). I've suspected it for quite some time, but only after my mother died last Christmas did my dad disclose this to me. I was led to Leonie Boehmer who, in turn, sent me your past six newsletters. I sat and read them all one evening and cried over several of the stories. I just couldn't believe there were so many people in the same shoes and that there was a newsletter to relate their stories. Thank you very much for the time and effort you put into this. I know how much time this must take and wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed reading the back issues. I'm looking forward to receiving your next issue, and of course, locating my birth mother.

I especially enjoyed reading the Summer 1997 article by Linda Villarreal. I'm a Christian, too, and I believe in God's perfect timing in our lives. Thank you again.

God bless you. *— Nancy F. Boyd*
Gilbert, AZ

Subj: Berlin gruesst Leonie
Date: 97-12-18 09:16:24 EST
From: Schwellnus@t-online.de
To: BoehmerL@Aol.com

Dear Leonie:

I would like to wish you and yours a merry Christmas and a healthy New Year. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your help and support over the years. My contact with my brother seems now to have become firm through e-mail. I have learned that I have many relatives in the U.S., since my father had six siblings, four of whom are still alive. Perhaps I will write to one or another of them, since my brother knows as good as nothing about my grandparents, who died in the 1970s.

Just yesterday I received the latest two issues of *Geborener Deutscher*. My English has lately become good enough that I can read all of the articles without difficulty. This has inspired me to write my story in English for publication in the newsletter:

I am the daughter of an American military man and a German woman. My father was stationed in Germany in Berlin in the 1950s, but his division left Germany in 1955. He was in La Rochelle, France, for a short while. My mother and I visited him there.

My father wanted to marry my mother and tried to take us with him to the United States, but my mother was afraid of living in a foreign land. Also, at that time, she already had another boyfriend. My father's mother tried to adopt me, but my mother wouldn't consent, so he went back to the U.S. and we returned to Berlin. After this, I never saw him again.

My mother always told me that I was a child of love and gave me a photo of my father. It shows him as a young man in a military uniform. On the back I wrote down his name, his birth date and birth place. These were all the facts I ever had. All through the years, I kept it very carefully, like a valuable treasure. Later, I got some more photos. They all show my father with me in the years 1953 to 1955.

As a small child, I spoke English before German. As I recall, my father didn't speak a word of German. Later, in school, it was therefore very easy for me to learn English again. It was my favorite subject and I always had the best marks. However, my knowledge of English has only fallen into oblivion through disuse.



Anne Schwellnus

A short time after we came back from France, my mother placed me with a foster family. They were very busy with work and didn't have the time to devote to a small child's needs. Occasionally, my mother visited me there, and, in 1965, she consented to my adoption by my foster parents. Again and again, I had said I would like best to live with my mother, but they ignored my desires. At the time, I wrote to the youth welfare department thinking it would be better to live in a hostel, but I never got an answer.

I never loved my adoptive parents in the way you are supposed to love your parents. I had a very strict upbringing. I always had order, drink, food and clothes, but I often got a thrashing. I was not allowed to play with other kids or to bring friends home. I missed the loving care a child needs. In 1965, my adoptive mother passed away. In 1970, my adoptive father got to know a new woman and they married, but his new wife didn't like me, so I had to leave my home only with a suitcase. At first, I stayed with friends. Then I got in touch with my mother again. She had married for a second time and lived with her husband and stepdaughter. I was always jealous and envious of this girl.

In all this time, I tried to find a way to search for my father. This dream slumbered deep in my heart and awoke in 1991. For a while it appeared to me not realizable, but I began to write to the different authorities: the U.S. Embassy in Berlin; the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri; the U.S. Consulate General in Berlin; and so on.

I went to the youth welfare department to get more information about my father and to inspect their records, and I found some interesting things: his military service number, a declaration about the paternity and a letter from my father from 1965. In this letter he talked about his family and that he never knew that my mother put me up for adoption. He seemed interested in my life, but he also said that his family knew nothing about my existence and he desired to keep it from them.

All my letters to the different authorities were answered, but no one could help. I came very close to giving up. But, as luck would have it, I got hold of a magazine in which I read the story of an adopted German who found his brother in America with help of the International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR). That same day, I sent a letter to him to learn more about the ISRR. A few days later, I got the ISRR's address and a long questionnaire. I answered the questions as quickly and carefully as possible and sent it back the same day to Leonie Boehmer. This was on May 22, 1991. I was prepared for a long wait. Every day, I laid in wait for the mailman. But Leonie answered me after a short time, on June 6, 1991. My dreams were coming true. She wrote: "I found your father in South Carolina," and she gave me his address. At that moment, my heart was beating so hard I couldn't breath. I was overwhelmed, you can believe that.

Ten days later, I sent my first letter to my father, but I got no answer, so I wrote again in August. It was a very long letter and I also sent photos, but there was still no reaction. Certainly, I had needed a relatively short time from the beginning of my actual search until I found him, but now I didn't find a way to get in touch with him. It seemed like a hopeless situation. I never thought that this could happen.

I asked Leonie for advice. On her recommendation, I got to know Karen Connor. She was head of a self-help group in Columbia, SC. At once, I sent her a letter and gave a detailed account of my problem. Some months later, I got a wonderful answer. She told me that my father had received and saved my letters and photos. His wife knew about them and me, but didn't like the fact that I wanted to know him. He told his children about me, and one of his sons wrote to me. Nobody can imagine this indescribably wonderful feeling. You've got to see it to believe it. For now and ever I can say: *I have a brother*.

I wrote a letter as fast as possible and I actually got an answer; but then, the contact broke off again for five years. Still, I never forgot him; he always slumbered in my heart.

Some weeks ago, I tried again to get in touch with my brother, but my letter was returned because he had moved. In the meantime, I got myself a computer and found his new address via the Internet in the US-phone book. I sent the letter off again and also told him about my e-mail address. One week later, I found a message in my e-mail. Since then, we have a lot to tell one another and our e-mails go back and forth every day. But my father still doesn't want to get to know me.

Through my brother, I have learned a lot about my family. Because my father is the oldest of seven children, I have a lot of relatives, most around the Chicago area, as well as one in Indiana and one aunt in Miami.

I hope my contact with my brother will never break off again. And I continue to hope that my father will change his mind about me. My greatest wish continues to be to get in touch with him. You know what they say: Never say die. Let's wait and see what the future has in store. Maybe I'll fly over the pond. For this dream of my life, I will work hard and hope to reach it someday. *— Anne Schwellnus*
Berlin, Germany

Chosen Children's Charities *continued from page 1*

July 8, 1997

Well, my hopes and dreams have come true with the arrival of Theresia to my home in Seattle. She was able to visit me last week for my birthday on July 3rd through July 6th. It was so exciting to have her to see me in my own environment. My roommate threw a birthday party for me and Theresia was able to meet all of my friends.

The most emotional time for Theresia was when she was reunited with my mom (adoptive) whom she met 35 years ago in Germany shortly after my adoption. They had their time together, talking and sharing the past and the present, that brought lots of emotions, part of the healing process.

I can't imagine how hard it must have been for Theresia to give me up and not because she didn't want me, she did. It was the pressures during the time in Germany in the '60s, being an unwed mother at the age of 18, the pressures of the community, family and friends, plus the fact of me being a mixed-race child. All that made the decision a hard one, but one she couldn't ignore. However, with the sorrows comes plenty of joy. Our relationship is building into something wonderful to cherish.

When the trip came to an end and I took her to the airport, I had no idea that my emotions would be so filled with sorrow of having to see her leave. The whole day was very depressing and hard for me. It was as if I was being torn apart from her once again. But I hold on to what is to come in the future. I will look forward to meeting her in Germany to see my birth place and to meet her family, two sisters and some cousins, none of whom speaks English. I know that there will be a connection for the most part, with Theresia translating for us.

All in all, I feel that this process has been the most beneficial for myself and all others involved, All I can say, over and over again for the rest of my life is, Leonie Boehmer and Paytra Skelly of Chosen Children's Charities, thank you so very much. *— Thomas A. Grant*
Seattle, WA

Chosen Children's Charities, Inc. is a non-profit organization. Requests for assistance or tax-deductible contributions may be sent to P.O. Box 126, Whiting, NJ 08759.