A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



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Man Finds German Birth Mother

Auschwitz Survivor Never Doubted Adopted Son Would Return

by Johanna Wilson, Knight Ridder

Reprinted with permission from the *Charlotte Observer*

CHARLOTTE, SC (11/19/98) — Trembling, Maria Paramonow dropped her telephone the first time she heard Lee Adams' voice.

Her blood pressure and blood sugar levels shot up to dangerous levels. And her mouth went dry.

She couldn't even speak because of the six words he uttered to her: "Mama, this is your son speaking."

That telephone call on May 13 brought both mother and son peace and ended a mystery that stretched more than four decades.

"The last time I saw her was when she was breast-feeding me, which naturally I don't remember," said Adams, a 47-year-old Conway resident. Since their initial conversation, Adams and his mother have been making new memories.

He visited her in July in Germany and she came to America for the first time Nov. 11.

"I'm glad to be here to see my son," Paramonow, 74, said as she relaxed this past week in a chair in Myrtle Beach International Airport. "I said, 'I'm coming even if I have to come on my hands and knees.' "

As she spoke, Adams, a towering and tan man, stood over her and smiled. He just couldn't stop smiling, and he kept squeezing her slim shoulders.

It was several years after his birth in Germany that Paramonow went to the nunnery where children awaiting adoption lived. She discovered her boy was gone.

Although she didn't know his whereabouts, Paramonow said, she never doubted her son would return to her one day. "I always knew I would find him," Paramonow said. "I knew the day would come."

In late July, after weekend telephone conversations and exchanging pictures via mail, Adams went to Germany to see her.

"She ran and hugged me," he said of their reunion at the airport in Frankfurt. He spent the next two weeks chatting with her late into the night on her front porch. They usually went to bed no earlier than 1 a.m. And they both wept.

"A lot of times I cried when she wasn't around me," said Adams, an appliance salesman in Myrtle Beach.

He learned he was born out of wedlock and why she gave him up for adoption. She told him that his biological father, whom he has never met, was never part of her life.

"I understood why she did it, and I wasn't angry," he said. Adams' search for his birth mother did not begin until after the deaths of his adoptive parents, Dolly and Edward Carl Adams. Adams was an Air Force veteran who was stationed in Germany before finally settling down in Myrtle Beach. He died in 1970.

Adams began looking for Paramonow with the help of international operators soon after his adoptive mother's death in 1993. He said the search was sporadic because he feared being rejected.

"I didn't search consistently but whenever I got the itch," he said.

Still, he called and called until he finally reached her May 13.

"People are entitled to know about their history," Adams said. When they finally met, he said they felt as if they had never been separated.

They smothered each other in instant and unconditional love.

"I waltzed right into her home in Germany, and I felt like I had *CONT'D ON PG. 4, COL. 1*

Letter From Germany Gives Woman a New Family

by Theresa Keegan

Reprinted with permission from the Antioch *Ledger-Dispatch*

ANTIOCH, CA (10/27/98) — Gisela Gladstein knew exactly where she was on Columbus Day 1963. The citizen of Germany had arrived for the first time on U.S. soil, the new bride of a strapping young American soldier.

She was leaving behind the woman who she discovered only after applying for transit papers was not her birth mother. Cleveland, Ohio, was a disappointment to the young woman, but still Gisela, or Gigi, as she likes to be called, was ready to begin her new life.

While her adoptive mother came for more than 15 visits in the next 30 years, she never explained the different names on the birth certificate. Even when Gigi spent a few months visiting her in Germany with her own children, the topic never came up.

Questions Not Answerd. And so, Gisela went on with her life, eventually burying the woman she'd always thought of as Mother, with unanswered questions.

Those questions remained unanswered until a month ago, when she went to her Antioch mailbox and received a business-size envelope from Germany.

On the back was a return address she didn't recognize, but being an optimist, she hoped there was money inside. Little did she know the letter's contents would prove priceless.

"You will be very surprised getting a letter from me," it began. And so it was that Gisela, now 53, discovered she has not only a sister, but also a brother in her native Germany.

"I didn't even finish reading the letter," she recalls. "I went and got my birth certificate to compare everything. There was no mistaking it."

Gisela had a real family.

"My hair stood up more and more and *more*," she says. "I started crying right then and there. I thought, 'My God, here's my missing link.' "

Suddenly a life full of tough times went out the window, replaced with tearful, happy, long-distance phone calls to her newfound brother and sister.

They compare notes about nieces and nephews, and the two sisters trade descriptions about hairstyles, clothing sizes and favorite foods.

The calls have been draining, financially and emotionally, but she wouldn't miss them for the world. *CONTINUED ON PAGE 3, COLUMN 3*

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

God's Timing Is Perfect

The remarkable story of a daughter and mother reunited after 42 years

by Kim Foreman
Hyannis, Nebraska

"God's timing is always perfect," exclaims a gleeful Karin Schreurs, an exuberant Christian, wife, mother of two grown boys, Ethan and Peter, and elementary school teacher. She is nearly beside herself with thanks for what God has done. Karin and husband Les wanted to share the story of the 13-year search that found her birth mother because, "God is the one who led me to my mother and deserves the glory," Karin said.

Karin Roswitha Schiefke was born on April 2, 1954 at the University Women's Clinic in Göttingen, (West) Germany. Her mother, Iris-Inge Schiefke was unmarried and, according to Karin's birth certificate, her father denied the child.

Iris tried to raise the little girl but was too poor to provide for her, so she made the ultimate sacrifice; she gave her 2½ year old daughter up for adoption, knowing she would have a better life. Iris already had another daughter who was five at the time of the adoption, and was being raised by Iris's parents.

Karin lived in an orphanage for a short time until she was taken to Salt Lake City, Utah, to live with a new family as a foster child while awaiting the finalization of the adoption. Karin kept her first name but was given the middle name Elizabeth, after her mother here in the States. She became Karin Elizabeth Peterson. (Karin has since learned that her maternal German grandmother was also named Elizabeth.)

Six months after Karin arrived in the United States, before the adoption was final, her adoptive father died. Utah law was strictly against single-parent adoptions. A family lawyer in Seward told the adoptive mother that Nebraska would allow it and they moved to Seward, where Karin's maternal grandmother and aunt lived. Her American mother died when Karin was 16, and her Aunt Helene spent nights in Karin's home during her last two years of high school.

Karin and Les's search began in Bountiful, Utah, where all the birth records from the United States are kept. They found none for her. They contacted the Children's Agency that brought her from Europe and they could give her no information.

When Internet access became available in this area, Karin and Les began using it to search for leads. Les posted some information on a few Internet bulletin boards established for genealogical searches for people in Germany. Les put the information in Karin's name and listed her birth mother's name. They received several lists of Schiefkes in northern Germany but none was related.

Germany is densely populated, yet there were less than 200 Schiefkes listed in the entire country. Les contacted a Schiefke who was a policeman and one who was a legal secretary but they didn't know of an Iris Schiefke. Karin contacted the church that assisted her mother with the adoption and they had no record. It became so frustrating they would set their search aside for a few months, then start again.

Karin received a call from her Aunt Helene in Seward earlier this summer saying that an Oscar Ethan Peterson, from California, was trying to find her. Karin hadn't known she had a brother (or that her adoptive father had a former marriage) yet she had named one of her sons, Ethan. They talked to Oscar on the phone and found that he had searched for three years. Karin tells what a great inspiration her brother was in reigniting the desire to find her biological mother.

After talking to Karin's brother Les got out his big three-ring notebook, a guide on locating people, and according to Karin, the book literally fell open to a page Les had missed before, listing a New Mexico woman, Leonie Boehmer. Leonie is a birth mother from Germany and, as a hobby, searches for families in Germany. She has successfully produced between 50 to 70 family match-ups each year. She charged the Schreurs $25 for postage.

By early August, Boehmer had located Karin's mother, who had moved only three times in her 70 years. Karin was instructed to send a letter about herself, no more than two pages, to her mother. She was to keep it on a positive note and tell her the adoption was good. She could also send two photos.

The letter was mailed August 13, 1998. That weekend Karin met her brother, Ethan, and his wife in Lincoln. Remarkably they also had a son Peter. A week later, on August 24, 1998, Karin was amazed to hear her mother's voice on her answering machine; "Greetings from Germany. Much grace to you and your family on this phone message." Karin and Les made about 40 phone calls that night spreading the news. Their two sons were first stunned, then very excited.

Karin's first letter from her mother, half in German, half in English, said "... I know it is God that has brought us together. I signed the adoption for you in 1956 and prayed Great God give me back my child again."

The mother kept Karin's existence secret from her older daughter, Angelika, for 42 years. Breaking the news, she called Angelika, a medical office receptionist, at work to say, "I need to tell you something I have been keeping a secret. ... you have a sister." Angelika is also a professional dancer and ***CONT'D ON PG. 4, COL. 1***

Karin Schreurs' sister, Angelika* (left) *and her birth mother, Iris Schiefke, at the grave of Iris's mother, Elisabeth, who on died January 14, 1996



Karin Schreurs finds birth mother after 13-year search

by Laura Dahlke

Karin Schreurs began life as Karin Roswitha Schiefke on April 2, 1954, in Hannover, Germany.

Schreurs, who grew up in Seward, now lives in Hyannis with her husband, Les. She is the mother of two boys, Ethan and Peter, and an elementary school teacher.

The life she lives now is probably much different than what was expected the day she was born.

"We had been searching for my birth mother for 13 years," said Schreurs.

She was given up for adoption at age 2½, first living in an orphanage in Germany until she was taken to Salt Lake City, Utah, to begin her new life in the United States.



Les & Karin Schreurs

Her adoptive parents, Dr. Ethan and Elizabeth Peterson, lived in Utah, and he worked as a dentist.

"Just six months after I arrived, and before the adoption was final, my adoptive father died suddenly," Schreurs said.

The death led the mother and child to Seward.

"At that time, Utah law was against single-parent adoptions. My adoptive mother had family in Seward, and the adoption was made legal by a lawyer in town (Seward)," she said.

Schreurs spent her young years in Seward, attending St. John Lutheran School and graduating in 1972 from Seward High School.

But, two years before her high school graduation, her mother, Elizabeth Peterson, died.

"I stayed in the house where my mother and I lived after her death, and my Aunt, Helene Korn, came over in the evenings," Schreurs said.

"I nearly burnt that house down," Schreurs said smiling, "and I didn't even know how to drive the car that sat in the garage."

Years later, in 1985, Schreurs began her search for her birth mother in Germany.

"I was always aware of my adoption and that I came from Germany. I had the papers and knew that my mother's name was Iris Schiefke," she said.

Schreurs and her husband began searching in Bountiful, Utah, where all birth records from the United States are kept. They found no record for Schreurs.

"We hit several dead ends and sometimes our search would stop for months, even years," Schreurs said. When the Internet became available, the couple posted information on web sites for genealogical searches in Germany. But, nothing was uncovered.

While setting the search aside, Schreurs received a call from her aunt, Helene Korn, in Seward, who said an Oscar Ethan Peterson from California was trying to find her.

"It turned out to be my half-brother from my adoptive father's first marriage," said Schreurs.

Peterson had been searching three years to find Schreurs.

"After talking with him (Peterson), my husband and I were inspired to try our search for my mother again," she said.

Schreurs' husband got out a three-ring notebook, a guide to locating people, and opened to a page they had missed before.

"He opened it up and we saw a listing that a woman from New Mexico, Leonie Boehmer, helped others search for families.

"We wrote to her and for $25 (postage costs) she began the search," Schreurs said.

The search began in June, and two months later Boehmer had found Iris Schiefke in Ludwigsburg, Germany.

Boehmer had discovered that Schreurs' birth mother had only moved three times in 70 years, making it easier for her to be located quickly.

"I was then instructed to write a two-page letter to my mother. It took a couple of days to word it just right," Schreurs said. "I told her my life story in a nutshell."

The letter was mailed Aug. 13 to Germany, and on Aug. 24 Schreurs received a phone message from her mother.

Schiefke said, "Greetings from Germany. Much grace to you and your family on this phone message."

Schreurs was overwhelmed by the message.

"I was overjoyed and exuberant. It was hard to believe this had come true after a total of 44 years separation," she said.

"She sounded like a stranger, and yet it was my mother," Schreurs said.

Little did Schreurs know that when she found her mother, she would also find a sister.

"I have an older sister, Angelika," Schreurs said. "My existence was a secret for all of these years."

Schreurs talks with her mother and sister on the phone often, and they also correspond by writing letters.

"My mother sounds very excited, crying and laughing on the telephone," Schreurs said. "I think this is an emotional healing time for her."

The family plans to reunite in mid-June of 1999.

"We might meet in Omaha," Schreurs said.

Schreurs and her husband also plan to travel to Germany.

New Family *cont. fr. pg. 1*

Five Children Abandoned. Gisela discovered that her birth mother took her children to the East German Border and abandoned them to seek her own freedom, in another country and without children.

She crossed to West Germany leaving five children behind. Gisela was the youngest, only 7 months old.

In a recent phone conversation, her older brother, Joachim, shared the memory of that tragic day.

"He said he held me in his arms when our mother abandoned us. And now, he says every Saturday night he will call me at midnight to put me to bed, because I am his little sister," says Gisela, tears filling her eyes.

No stranger to pain, Gisela grew up in Germany during the war. She never understood why the woman she thought of as her mother was so distant and mean. Only now, discovering that the woman took her as a baby orphan from the hospital to raise alone, does Gisela realize how complicated it really was.

Siblings Also Suffered. Gisela's sister, Renate, and three brothers did not fare much better.

The children were separated and went from home to home. One brother committed suicide. Now Renate, 54, and Joachim, 57, live near each other. Another brother has never been found.

"They have looked all these years, but nothing. Everything's a dead end," says Gisela.

In fact, the only reason they were able to find Gisela was because a cousin of her adopted mother let on that she was in the United States. Prior to that, Renate had always been told Gisela was taken to Canada as an infant.

"Now I'm getting a little angry," Gisela says of the efforts to keep her away from her natural family. "There were so many lies."

Reunion In Antioch. But she is thrilled at the opportunity to finally sort through it all. "It is so much joy, but also so much hurt," Gisela says.

The siblings are already planning a get-together for this spring in Antioch, and if plans could replace time, there would be no shortfall for this reunion.

"If it's the last thing I do, we are going to meet," Gisela says. "It's as if there was always something missing in my life, and now it's here. It fits. I'm telling you, no money could pay for this kind of feeling."

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God's Timing *cont. fr. pg. 2*

has performed with an international championship team.

Angelika wrote Karin how distraught their mother became when giving up her little girl; in fact, they had to sedate her because of her agonizing grief. When Iris handed Karin over she prayed, "Dear God, if there is any justice, do give me back my child!" She saw Karin's life as a masterpiece and told herself she would stay positive.

Sharing with Karin how their grandparents were wealthy before World War II, then lost it all, Angelika told how good they had been to her when raising her. She explained how their mother gave up her children so they could have a better life. She never understood why every April her mother would feel so bad, particularly on April 21st. She now understands.

Karin's mother, afraid of flying, wanted to take a fast boat to the United States, then a fast train to Nebraska. The latest plans are for mother and sister to fly to Toronto, Canada, next June, where Iris's sister lives. They will visit Karin and Les, who will fly to Canada with them to meet the aunt and six cousins, and then to Germany for a time. In the meantime, Karin and Les will study German with a lady in Alliance who speaks it fluently.

God's timing is perfect says Les, "Because when it is God's timing there is no effort."

Reprinted from *The Hills*, "a monthly magazine with a Christian point of view " (October 1998)

Birth Mother *cont. fr. pg. 1*

been there all my life," he said.

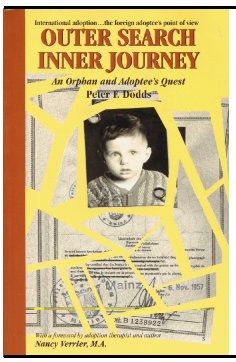
His trip to Germany allowed him to discover the many layers of the woman he lovingly calls "Mama." He has discovered that his mother is an Auschwitz survivor, a fantastic cook, very protective, a sassy senior and most of all, a loving parent.

Plus, he learned they share some of the same characteristics. "Germans are very hardheaded and stubborn," Adams said and laughed.

She is also a fighter. Although Paramonow has diabetes and leukemia, her spirit is not downtrodden.

During his two-week stay in Germany, she wouldn't allow him to do anything except enjoy her company.

"Mama spoiled me left and right," Adams said. "She would run a bubble bath every night. She would massage my feet with cream. She would bring me champagne on the porch. And everywhere we went, she held onto me and said, 'This is my son from the United States.' "



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It's Good To Know I'm Not Alone

"I'm a bastard." I couldn't get the words out fast enough as I told my best friend, Bea.

"Tell me something I don't know," she answered.

"No, I mean it. I'm really a bastard. I was adopted. I found the papers. My real name is Helene Marcella Marhofer," I said.

"Really? You're sure?" she asked.

"I've got the papers here in front of me. I found them in Rose's desk. I'm not one of them. Thank God, I'm not one of them." Relief spread through me. How many times had I heard those people who said they were my parents ask, "What's wrong with you?"

Now I knew. All those years of thinking I'd been born in the wrong time, the wrong place, and to the wrong people, now I knew there was an explanation. I was sixteen years old and my world had just been turned upside down. Everything I knew was a lie, even my name.

That night I prepared a perfect martini for the man who pretended to be my father. By age 13, I'd become quite the bartender. It's not hard when one section of the kitchen is devoted to alcohol. While some kids had homes with gallons of milk or juice I could open cupboards and show them gallons of whiskey or vodka.

I handed him the drink in the chilled glass. And I remember wanting to scream out the word, "Liar!" But of course it didn't come. That's not what you say to a man with the perfect martini in his hand.

Then there was her, the woman who dared to have me call her mother. Rage exploded through me like an unloosened swarm of hornets. I wanted to hurt her the way she had hurt me.

"So tell me, mother," I began, emphasizing the word mother, "what time of day was I born."

I listened to her lie and vowed revenge.

But of course, the only revenge I took was on myself.

The night of my high school graduation I climbed on a plane, leaving behind Northern Virginia, my friends and fake family to go become a hippie in California.

The plane ride gave me time to think. When I had finally confronted the Griffins, they explained that I had been adopted out of an orphanage in Wiesbaden, Germany. Rose, my adoptive mother, in her always gracious way, said, "I really wanted a girl with brown eyes and hair so she'd look more like us, but you were so cute and the nuns wanted us to take you. They wanted us to take a little boy too, but he was sickly."

You don't forget words like that.

And I remembered a lot of other times. Times when I screamed to the world, "I don't belong here." I begged God to kill me. Age nine was the first attempt (of many) at suicide. I didn't really want to die, I just wanted to be someplace else. There were times when I would cut my wrists and sit at the dinner table and wait for someone to notice. Would you like to know how many times anyone did?

My escape didn't last long. Guilt, the gift that keeps on giving, drove me back to them by the end of the summer. Soon after my return, I went off to college and majored in sex, drugs, and rock & roll. By 18, I was married. By 19, I gave birth. By 20, I was divorced.

This time I had to go back and stay with the Griffins, but this time things were different. The cards were on the table. The adoption issue was out there. More importantly, I had my son to care for. I vowed never, never, never would my needs come before his. Also, my adoptive parents sent me to a psychiatrist who told them I was extremely fragile and suicidal. They made an effort to be gentle to me.

When my son was 16 months I knew I had to leave again. I went down to Richmond, Virginia, and enrolled at Virginia Commonwealth University. I majored in criminal justice. I wanted to help delinquents. Here, my life began to change. Here I met Professor S., who spoke with a thick German accent. I told him I wasn't really this Kitty Gorman (married name); I was Helene Marcella Marhofer.

"Get me a copy of your papers. I will find your mother," he said, completely confident. And he was right. His old contacts in Germany —men from Hitler's army now in positions of authority—tracked her down and in three weeks time I found out where she lived.

Stunning news. Unbelievable news. She really existed.

He wrote to her and told her all about me. It would be a long time before I heard from her, but eventually I did.

More importantly, I met with another teacher. My child psychology teacher. He was so fantastic in class that I begged him to take me on as a patient. He did, but only for ten sessions. "If I can't help you in that amount of time, I can't help you," he said.

By the second session he made me stop talking and listen to him, "I'm going to tell you something. It isn't meant as a criticism. Positive things happen to positive people. Negative things happen to negative people. You are one of the most negative people I've ever met."

Those words made me turn inward like nothing had ever done before. I had thought of myself as f—ked up, but weren't those other people to blame? Wasn't it their fault?

Nothing in my life has changed me like those few words. Not even the tragic death of my son. Not the birth of my precious daughters. Not the deaths of my adoptive parents, nor the discovery of my half-sister.

I have been back to Germany and I mourn her loss. Like Peter Dodds, I too have a castle inside, an ice castle. Inside the castle is a little girl who sleeps. She's the little girl who might have been. She's the little girl who grew up without sorrow, pain, and anguish. But you know what, we'll leave her sleep. She's imaginary.

And I'm real. I have found my voice through writing and art. I have two daughters who mean the absolute world to me.

I have survived cancer.

Now, with the help of God's grace, I will continue to survive.

Now I want to find a way to help others. This is a place to start. It's good to know I'm not alone.

— Kitty Lagorio
Venetia, PA