A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



Geborener Deutscher®

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My Search for Myself

by Randy Norman

Part One of Four

I was born Karl-Heinz Drexler on June 13, 1957 in Crailsheim, Germany. I was adopted on December 24, 1957 by an American couple, Richard and Jackie Norman. When I was about one to one-and-a-half years old, Mom and Dad took me to the States for the first time, where Dad was stationed at Missoula, MT. That's where I became an American citizen on June, 14, 1961.

I don't remember much about living in Montana. I recall I had friends and was happy. I was just a regular kid with little awareness of being adopted. I have no memories of wanting Germany at that time.

I knew that I was well cared for by Mom and Dad. They made sure that I knew I was adopted. They didn't want to keep that a secret because they loved me. They have been good parents to me all my life.

While I have always known my birth date, I would not know the time of day that I was born until 35 years later, in 1992, when I began my search for my birth parents and my history. The time of my birth was 4:00 a.m. (Now I know why I don't like mornings!)

Am I the Only One?

As I was growing up, this question would arise in my mind: Was I the only kid adopted out of Germany or were there others? I had never met another German-born adoptee. Of course, I had never looked for one, either. I had met a few adoptees on the road of life, but I never talked to them about being adopted. I don't know why. Maybe I was too young, or too afraid of what I might feel if I did talk about it; I don't really know. I was 39 years old when I met another German-born adoptee (Peter Dodds, the author of *Outer Search, Inner Journey*).

Germany and Me

When I was about 5½ years old, my dad was stationed back to Germany for three years. At first we did not live on the base. We rented an apartment just off-base. There were two German boys who lived downstairs from us. I used to play with them and steal carrots from the neighbor's garden with them. We would jump out of a window down onto an old VW bug soft-top just for fun. The three of us got along well. Although I did not speak German and they did not speak English, we were good friends.

After a few months there we had to move onto the base. I would go to an old Mom-and-Pop store that was run by an older German couple. That's were I discovered Gummy Bears, the candy I still love. There was also an ice cream man who would ride his bicycle ice cream cart to the front of the school and for ten cents, you could get a big chocolate soft cone.

It was at this time in Germany that the recognition of being adopted set in. It was a nice warm summer day. I was alone, playing with a blade of grass, and it occurred to me that I did not have the blood of my parents; that I had a different mother and father. I had known this for some time, but this was the first time it made me look at my life differently. I was adopted.

I started to wonder about my birth parents. What were they like? Did they look like me, act like me? Did they care about me? The more I thought about it, I felt hurt; not on the outside, more like in my heart. Hadn't I been good enough for them?

I did not have answers for these questions, even though Mom and Dad had told me that my birth mother could not keep me; that she and my birth father were not married; and that my birth mother's dad would not take her back home with me, so she put me up for adoption. This was okay with me because I was still in my homeland. There was some comfort in being in Germany.

Our time there was cut short by about six months by my grandmother's passing away in Everett, WA. So, was I coming home or leaving my home? I would not understand why, on the day we boarded the airplane to come back to the U.S., it hurt so much until 26 years later, when I went back to Germany. There was a terrible pain inside. I had told myself that Germany was not my home, that we were going back to the States, to my home where we had our family and where I/we had lived before we had gone to Germany.

It was about six months from the time we got back to the States that Dad was told he had to go to Vietnam. He had about six months left to go in the Army, but they still wanted him to go. This meant that Mom and I had to move to her dad's house in Everett. We were there for six or seven months.

After Dad got back from his tour in Vietnam, we moved to our new house in Marysville, WA. I was 12 years old then. I met new friends and did a lot of growing up there. I met my wife and started my own family there. This was the most stable place in my life because we were there for a long time, until I went out on my own.

The Decision to Search

It was 1991 when I started to search for my birth parents. One day, as I looked in the mirror and deep into my own eyes, I could see no soul, no meaning to my life; only the shell of my body. Inside, there was nothing to me. I could not find my soul, the heart of me. I had every material thing one could want: a nice house, good truck, boat, a great wife and kids. But all this was not my soul. They are a part of my life but not me.

I could see parts of me in my sons, the way they look and in some of the things they do, and I can see my wife in them, too. Still, I could not see where I came from. At 32 I did not know me! At this time in my life, I had nothing of myself to hold on to: no past, no understanding of who I was, and no soul.

I tried to get closer to my wife, to use her strength to get me through this time. It took weeks for me to understand that she could not help me get over this. I could not find myself in her.

My next step was to go to a psychologist. The psychologist asked me some questions and talked in general about my life. The talking helped me calm down a little, but it did not make me think about searching for my birth parents.

Then one night, as I was sitting in my rocking chair at about 11:00 p.m. with the TV off, a light came in the room. Not car headlights; just a light in front of me. It was a bright light, and a voice said to me, "You are okay son, I love you. I have been with you all of your life. There are others out there for you and they need your help. You must find them. They will give you your history and help take you into the future. I will help you with this too. I am your mother."

Then the light was gone and the voice was stilled. I thought at first, "This is great, now I am hearing voices and really going nuts."

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As I sat there, I thought back and remembered times when it seemed that someone or something was looking out for me. I knew then that it was Margit, my mother at birth.

I slept great that night and had a much better outlook on life now. But I was told to find someone. How do I do that? Where do I look? How do I get the ball rolling? Questions were all that I had.

The first thing I did was to look in the phone book to see if there were people who did searches. I did not know anything at that time about doing a search. I found phone numbers for private investigators.

I called the first number I came to. A man told me about a group that did adoption searches and he gave me their phone number. When I called them, I scheduled a meeting with a representative for the next week. Well, this was a start!

At the meeting we went over the cost. That was high: about $450.00 to start, plus expenses each month after that. I gave her all the information I had: my birth name, birth mother's name, birth father's name, and where I was born.

They had never searched in another country before, so they were not sure of what to do. They did what they could in the States and that took some time—about two months. I was getting impatient at how long this was taking, but I knew that others had searched for a much longer time and still had nothing to show for it. I decided it was time for me to do it on my own.

The search group had given me a list of books to read. The one I did read was *Lost and Found* by Betty Jean Lifton. This book helped me a lot, not just with the search but with my feelings, especially the part of the book that talks about what some people had found.

It was in that part of the book that I read a story about a girl who found that her birth mother had committed suicide. I have always felt that there was something wrong with my birth mother's side of me. This was to be my dark side, the troubled part of me. It was just a feeling that has been there all the time for me. This gave me new strength, this feeling pushed me harder to find. I need to help her, to be there if Margit needed me, and for my sister, too, because I knew in my heart that Mom had given me a sister. I have always wanted a little sister.

Now it was time to find them. After reading about all the hardships that adoptees had gone through, I told myself that none of this can stop me. I will find. I will make this happen. I will have the best.

I took on the search with an intensity that I had never known. I had inside me the belief that this was mine and only mine. The drive was strong. At this I could not fail! This is me. It is time for me to see what I am made of and where it all started!

Birth Father Search

I called Fort Lewis, the Army base in Washington State, to get phone numbers for the base at Crailsheim, Germany, where I was born and adopted. The man I talked to at Fort Lewis would not give me the phone numbers and told me to call a base back east. When I called the people at the base back east, they said they couldn't give out those phone numbers; they were for armed services personnel only. So I called Fort Lewis again and told them I was "Major D.," and that I needed the phone numbers for the base in Crailsheim. This time they gave them to me.

The next day I called McKee Barracks at Crailsheim and asked for the base commander. A Major C. came on the phone. I told him what I was doing and he said he would do all that he could to help. He then transferred me to a Frau B., who told me to send her all the information I had and she would get to work on it. She was so nice to talk to on the phone.

Frau B. was the civilian liaison for the Army. If a person in the Army had a problem with a German off base, she was the one who would work it out between the two of them. She is a German and worked for the U.S. Army.

About a week and a half after I sent my paperwork to Frau B., I called Major C. again. He had given me his personal phone number, so that when I called, I could get through to him very easily.

"Hi, Randy," he said. "Let me get Frau B. for you."

She told me that she had not found too much yet, but that Margit had worked on the base for a Captain as a maid. She told me that, if I could get to Germany, she would take me to the apartment where Margit cleaned. She said she would be getting more information for me as soon as possible.

One avenue that I thought I should try was to ask the government of the town where Margit was born, a town called Melk, in Czechoslovakia. I called the Czech Embassy, but they said they could not help me.

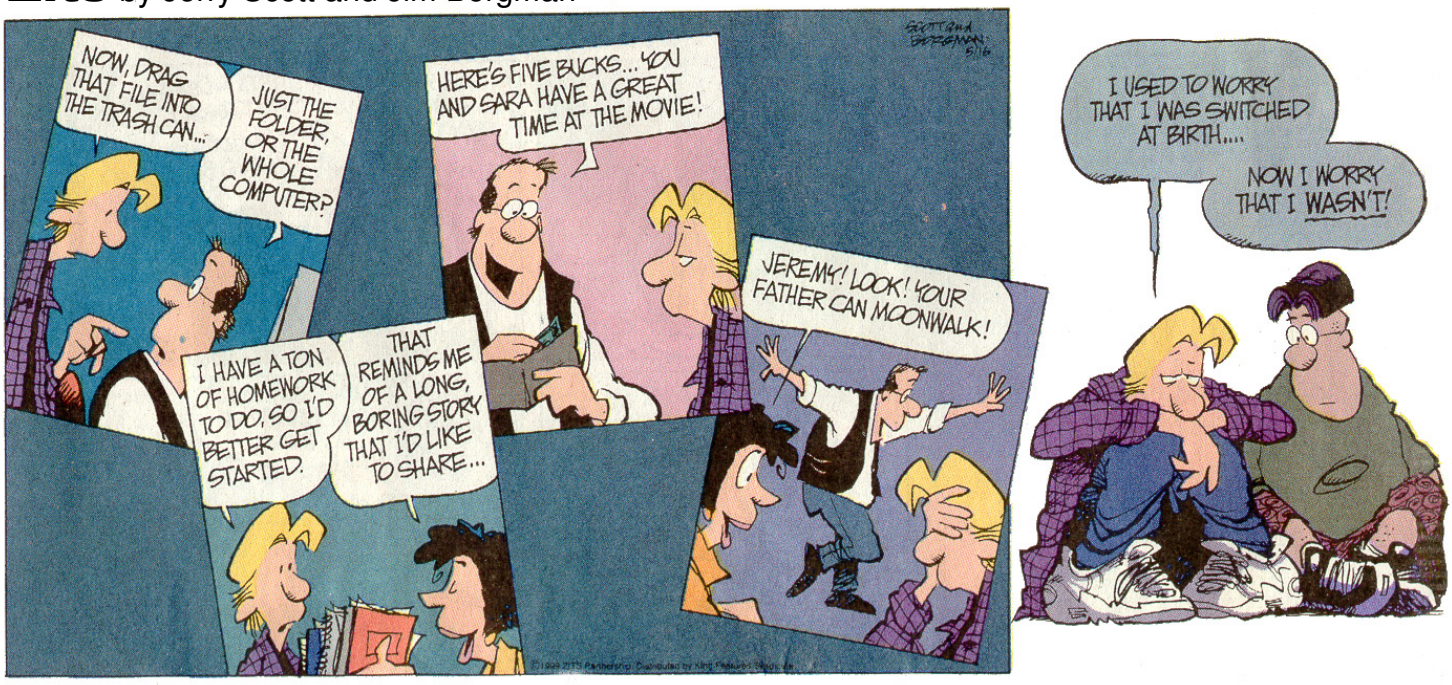
Frau B. then sent a letter to the county in which the town was located, and, three weeks later, they sent her a letter back. It was typed in Czech, so neither she nor I could read it. She asked a friend of hers who was in the German army if he could get it translated for us. He got one of the German Army translators to do it. It said that the town had been burned and there were no records of Germans there, in part because of the war.

Frau B. told me that she needed to talk to, Herr K., the Bürgermeister of Crailsheim. She would send me a letter after she had talked to him. I called her again a week later. She said she had talked to Herr K., and that he had a lot of information. He said he could help, but that he needed to see a passport or some type of identification before he could tell me anything.

Well, I could not go to Germany and I did not have a passport nor any identification that would meet his needs, so I called Mom and Dad. They told me to find Herr W., the man who had helped them adopt me. He had been a good friend of theirs when they were in Germany. He was in his 80s by now, but I hoped he would still be

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Zits by Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman



alive.

I called Frau B. the next morning and told her about Herr W. She said she knew him; that she was doing the same job he did when I was born. Apparently, he was still alive. She gave me his phone number.

When I called him, his wife picked up the phone and, speaking German, asked, "Who do you want?"

I asked for Herr W. and she went to get him. When he got to the phone, I told him that I was Randy Norman, thinking that he would never remember Dad or Mom or me, but he did.

"You're Dick Norman's son," he said. "I helped them adopt you. It's good to talk to you. How are your parents?"

He told me that he was now in a wheelchair, that he had had four heart bypass operations and was not in good health. Nevertheless, he said he would go to Crailsheim and talk to Herr K. and try to get him to give me the information I would need to find my birth parents. He said I should call Herr K. the next day, or send him a letter.

"Say 'Hi' to Frau B. for me," he said.

I said I would, thanked him for his help and hung up.

The next morning, I called Herr K. He said to wait just a minute; he needed to go get my records. When he got back, he said he could tell me this just once. I was born June 13, 1957, to Margit Drexler. My name was Karl-Heinz. I was born at 4:00 a.m. My father's name was Walter L. S. and he was born in Lake V., SC, on July 25, 1934.

He also told me stuff that I did not know. He told me that my mother was one of two or three sisters, and that one of them had passed away some years ago; that my mother's married name was Beidermann; and that she last lived in a town called Lichtenau. There was a grandmother still alive there, too, he said. He wished me luck said good-bye. I said, "Thank you," in German.

Now I had the information—the almighty information that I needed to find Margit and Walter. What do I do now?

At this point, I did not know what to do about getting in contact with people in Germany. I had a name and a place, but no way to find a phone number or any other information. Margit could have moved, or she could have been the one who died. I decided to try to contact my birth father first and to think about what to do to get more on Margit.

I now knew that he was born in a little town in South Carolina. I thought to myself, if it were me, I would not have moved away, so I called information for Marion, SC. The operator asked for the name I wanted. I told him, "Walter L. S." The operator told me that he lived in Lake V, not Marion. Did I still like the number? I told him I did.

Now I had it in front of me: the phone number of my birth father! Wow! Now I could call him and talk to someone that was blood to me, part of the start of my life, part of my history, and maybe get a part of my soul.

I am not the type of person to put things off for very long. I know that some adoptees wait months, or even years, before making this call. There is a lot going on in one's mind, such as what this call will do? How will it change your life? To search is one thing; to find can be quite another.

Inside, I wondered if Mom and Dad would still love me after this. Would my wife and kids still want me? Will I be too much like Walter for them? Or would I find that I am more like Margit?

What will Walter say? Will he know about me or has he forgotten me? Will he say, "Go away, I don't want any part of you, you are just a one night stand to me and I have no feeling for you or about you, just go away?"

Like at the start of my search, I knew that I could lose a lot and get hurt, or be told by my parents, "We told you so," but call I must. I felt now like I had never felt before, and just this was good for me. I needed a way to make sure that I was talking to the right person, so I made a list of questions to ask him when we talked.

It was about 5:30 p.m. on a Tuesday when I called his house. Boy, was I nervous! My heart was pumping hard and my hands were a little shaky. Then the phone was ringing and after two rings there was a voice. It was too young-sounding to be him.

"Steve S." I did not hear him say "Hi, this is..."

I asked, "Is your father home?"

"No, he's at work. He'll be back Saturday. He works out of the state and comes home on the weekends."

"Do you have his work phone number?" I asked.

Steve said he didn't know it, but if I called back later, his mother could give it to me. I said thanks and that I would call back.

Then Steve asked me a question. "Who are you?"

Oh no, I thought, what do I say? I needed to think fast, come up with a good answer for him. Then it hit me. I said I was a friend of his dad's when he was stationed in Germany. I thought that this would jog his memory a little if they called him to tell him that someone called asking for him and Steve would not be told that there was another kid of his dad's out there.

Two hours later I called back and Steve answered the phone again. He gave me Walter's number at work. I thanked him again.

Now it was time to call Walter at work. It was 9:00 p.m. his time and 6:00 p.m. for me. Well, this was it, the big call. My heart was pumping hard, I was so nervous that it was hard to push the buttons on the phone. When it rang I almost hung it up, but then there was a voice.

"Hello?"

I said to myself, this can't be him. The voice was harsh and loud.

The man told me to call back. Walt was not there now. He had gone out for dinner.

I asked him to take down my phone number and hung up.

Time went slowly now. I watched the clock for almost an hour until it was time to call.

The same voice answered the phone again and said to wait. Walt was there and he went to get him.

Then a nice voice, not too loud and just a little soft said, "Hi, I am Walter S. What can I do for you?"

I asked him to take down my number. Then I told him that I wasn't trying to sell him anything, but that I had some questions for him, if he had time. He said, "Okay."

I looked at the list of questions I had made that would prove that he was my birth father.

First I said, "My name is Randy Norman." Then I started asking him the questions.

"Is your birthday July 25, 1934 and were you born in M., SC?"

He said, "Yes."

"Were you in the army, stationed at McKee Barracks in Crailsheim, Germany, in about 1955 to 1958?"

He said, "Yes." He said he had come home in June of 1958.

Now the big question, the one he would know, the one that would change my life and his.

"Do you remember Margit Drexler?" I didn't give him time to answer, I just kept talking.

"I am her son and you are my father."

He said, "Yes." Then he said, "I love you and have been worried about you for all these years."

From what I had read in the book *Lost and Found*, I was thinking that he would hang up on me, but no, not Walter. He just keep talking and I was the one who needed to hang up.

I asked him if I could call back a little later and he said, "Yes. I am glad you found me, Son." I told him to take care and hung up.

My mind was spinning too fast and I was in shock and shaking, but happy. It took me ten minutes to settle down enough to call him back.

Now that the first shock was over and I could think straight again, I called Walter back. He answered the phone and said, "Hi."

He asked all about me: what I did for work, how my life was, if I had kids, and where I lived. I asked him the same.

I told him that I had not found Margit yet but was close to it.

We made small talk for about an hour, then he said, "Boy, when I get home on Friday, I will need to tell my wife about you."

"Wait, not so fast," I said. "You need to tell her in a way that she won't shoot you."

He said, "Oh, that's okay, she will understand."

I thought he was nuts just to walk in the door and say, "Dear, guess what? I have another son and he was from that German girl I might have told you about."

I found out in the next phone call that his wife knew who I was when I called their house the first time. Walter did not have but two friends when he was in Germany, and she knew both of them. Walter had told her about Margit and me before they got married. She had thought that it was me calling, but she could not get a call through to Walter beforehand to tell him that I was going to call him.

During this time, I was still working on how to contact my people in Germany. On January 20, 1992, I received a letter from Frau B. that helped me:

Dear Mr. Norman.

I have just now received a call from Herr K., he had come up with some answers to your questions concerning Ms. Drexler, your birth mother. I have promised Herr K. to write you immediately on his behalf.

Your birth mother's parents are: Josef & Frieda Drexler, the father passed away some time ago, Frieda Drexler moved from Lichtenau, Badstrasse 27, on 20 Dec. 91, to a convalescent home in 8802 Wolframeschenbach, Obere Vorstadt. Your birth mother lived in Lichtenau; she passed away in 1974. She had married some Ger-

man judging by the name. Her married name was Beidermann. Sorry to be unable to send a more positive note on your birth mother. Seems like your only relations left is Frieda Drexler.

Hope this will help you a bit at least in the sense that you know where you stand. Should you have other questions and I could be of help, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely, Frau B.

Well, after getting this letter, my feelings soared to new heights. I knew for sure that there was at least one Drexler out there for me, and I knew where she was.

I felt sad that Margit was dead, but as far as I was concerned, this may not be true. How could he know that? I could still keep my fantasy about her alive. But, deep inside of myself, I knew it was true. I just did not want to face it.

I even knew inside that she took her own life, and my soul with it. This was my greatest fear in life: that I would not be able to get my soul back or to see her again 34 years away and no picture of her in my brain. No memories of her. I just did not want to face that.

I was calling Walter each week and he would call me, too. We made plans to meet. I was going to fly to South Carolina and meet his family and stay with him and his wife.

We would talk about the weather and my sons and his boys, my half-brothers. He was giving me my history on that side and that was good.

I had not told him about Margit yet, as I did not feel I knew for sure she was gone and the fantasy was still strong. This was information that might hurt his feelings, too, so I could wait until I knew more.

Birth Mother Search

Now it was time to call international information to get phone numbers to call my birth mother in Germany. If Herr K. was wrong about Margit, I knew that I would need to find a Beidermann to see if she was alive, or if there were others from her brothers or sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents.

I called AT&T information and told the operator I needed numbers in Germany. He asked me if I needed a German translator for the German operator, and I said I did. He transferred me to the next operator and I asked him for all the phone numbers for Beidermanns in the town of Lichtenau.

He said the numbers are $3.00 each. "Are you sure you want all of them?"

I said, "Yes, all of them please."

There were four. Twelve dollars' worth. Worth it to me, I thought to myself.

After talking to Walter for the first time, I was not very nervous when I started to call the first Beidermann on the list, but no one answered the phone. So I called the second number and there was an answer, a lady who could not speak English.

Now I had a problem. What could I say that would make sense to her? I figured that Margit would have known English, since she dated Walter and he did not speak German. This lady wasn't Margit.

All I could think to say to her was, "Margit Drexler/Beidermann," with a questioning sound to it.

She then said, in English, that she could only speak a little English. She told me that Margit was dead and that I had a sister, but she would not tell me my sister's phone number.

She asked me, "You are Karl-Heinz, ja?"

I said, "Yes." I asked her to please give me my sister's phone number.

She also told me stuff in German. I guess she thought I should know German. I didn't understand a word of it, but it was about how Margit died. I did not understand that part. She said that Margit had been a bad person. That I did understand. Then she hung up.

There was so much going on at this time for me. My head was almost spinning, but I still wanted more. I needed more. I was feeling a power that I had never felt before. I was closer to home than I had ever been. I was still not disheartened by Margit's passing yet, but soon I would be.

I now needed to call international information again. I knew that I could get my sister's phone number from the nursing home in Lichtenau. I talked to the same operator and told him again that I need all the phone numbers for the nursing homes in the town of Lichtenau. There was only one. I thanked him and hung up.

Now I was dialing the number to the nursing home to see if I could get my sister's number. It seemed that, the closer I got to calling her, the stronger I was getting, the bolder I was becoming. I knew that she would know if my mother was alive or dead and she would tell me.

The phone at the nursing home rang twice and then I heard a male voice say, "Hallo."

I said hello and told the young man that I was calling from the U.S. to find my sister.

He laughed and said that he did not understand English.

What do I say to him now? How was I to get around this roadblock?

Just then I said, "Drexler, Frieda Drexler." It was the only thing I could think to say.

He stopped laughing and said "Ein Moment." I could hear him running down a hall, calling out a name.

After a minute, a woman came on the line. In English, she asked me what I needed.

I told her that I had lost my sister's phone number and could she give it to me?

She said there was no relative in the States listed for Frieda Drexler, "and you are...?"

I told her that I was Frieda's grandson and that I had been in the States for a long time. Since I had lost my sister's phone number, I was not sure where our grandmother was.

Then she said, "Okay, here is Sylvia Gundel's number."

Now I knew my sister's name and her phone number.

It was a Friday night when I made the call to the nursing home and to Frau Beidermann. Because it was getting late for me, I decided to try to call Sylvia in the morning.

Just as I thought this, the phone rang. I picked it up. I could hear the "long distance" sound in the line, but no one spoke. I knew it was my sister, so I said, "Hello, Sylvia how—"

Then the line went dead. That told me for sure it was her. I waited ten minutes and then called her back.

She answered the phone and said, "Hi." Then we started to talk.

She asked me how old I was, how tall and the color of my eyes. I asked her the same.

She was 29 then, and had been married for two years. She had a daughter who was two. I then ask her why she had hung up on me.

"I just wanted to hear your voice."

We talked for two hours. My phone bill was getting bigger and bigger, but I was not worried about it, because I was talking to my sister, my only sister. The start of our reunion was going very well.

When I asked her about Margit, Sylvia spoke bluntly.

"I hate her. She was a bad mother and person. I just hate her. I was glad when she died and I don't feel bad about that."

Sylvia then told me that our mother had jumped out of a third-story window, that she had wanted to die. She drank too much and was never home to take care of her own kids.

Hearing this hurt. I was in pain and shock, for now the fantasy I had held onto was dying, too, and I could not save it.

That night, I told my wife about Margit and her death, but I could not tell her the way I felt. I just wanted to go back inside myself and stop the hurt. The one person that meant so much to me all of my life was gone. I could not fix this.

The next day, I went to work as if I had heard none of it. But I started to cry and told my boss that I needed to go home.

I went to a flower shop and got a small pot of flowers. I took them to the Catholic church and put them on the alter. This was as close to her as I could get. I could not stop my tears from coming and wondered what to do. I needed someone to comfort me. I drove to where my adoptive mother worked.

I cried when I told her what Sylvia had said about Margit. I was crying and telling my adoptive mother about my birth mother. I knew that she would understand. She held me and talked me through this time. I love her for that.

I know that it must have been hard for her to feel a lot for Margit at that time. Her son had searched for "the other mother" and now she had to console him.

It took me a few days to work out much of Margit's suicide in my head. I would learn later on that I would be facing it again. Even today it still haunts me.

Continued in the Next Issue

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