A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



Geborener Deutscher®

Vol. XII, No. 4 *(Issue #45)* *Winter 2000*

"A Little Brown Baby"

An Afro-German Adoptee's Story

by Shirley D. Price

In search of my mother's garden, I found my own.

— Alice Walker

Part One of Two

I've finally stopped waiting for my birth family to come and find me. I finally decided, after all these years, to search for *them.* I'm in my forties now, happily married for 27 years and have raised four wonderful children to adulthood. The time is now.

Let me start off by saying, one of the biggest challenges throughout my life has been trying to convince my little inner child that it's okay that our birth family hasn't found us, because we could always search for *them.* It's been a struggle convincing her. Over the years she has stubbornly held her ground, repeating the same heartbreaking words. "Why don't they come and find *me?!* Don't *they* miss me?! *She* gave *me* away, so let *her* come find *me!"*

And over the years, I've tried to soothe her soul. Birthdays were especially difficult. She would cry and I would discreetly wipe away her tears, stroke her brow, hug and comfort her. I would say to her time and time again, "Come on, let's search for our birth family." She would stomp her feet and defiantly tell me, "No!" So, I became very good at denial. "Oh well," I'd tell myself. "It doesn't matter not knowing who I came from, it's just one of the many unanswered questions in the Universe that I *have* to live with."

Well, the two of us have finally come to a meeting of the minds. We've finally put aside all of our denial, anger, guilt, and fear. From this day forward, with the loving support of my adoptive father, my husband and our children, my little inner child and I ... holding hands ... begin this journey, this search for our beginning ... our birth family.

My birth name is Shirley Daniela Gindler. I was born August 18, 1952 in Nuremberg, (West) Germany, to Eva Ella Gindler. I don't know anything about my birth father except that he was a Black American soldier from Chicago. Eva Ella, my birth mother, moved to Ansbach, Germany, where, at the age of two, I would be given up for adoption.

It seems I've always known I was adopted. How and when I was told, I don't remember. When I asked my adoptive parents how they found out about me, the following story is what I've been told:

It seems a young soldier stationed in Germany knew of a German woman who was considering giving up her youngest child (me) for adoption. The soldier mentioned this to another soldier he knew who was married, but who didn't have any children.

The soldier and his wife visited my birth mother at her home. I'm told the soldier's wife was very appalled at the way the German woman was living. She said the woman was apparently a party girl, who had a number of American soldiers hanging out at her house. As soon as the couple saw me, "a little brown baby," sitting on some soldier's lap, they knew they had to have me.

My birth mother and the couple discussed the possibility of adoption and eventually, it was agreed upon. From what I've been told, the day that I was transferred from my birth mother's custody to my new adoptive family was a highly emotional day. My adoptive parents told me that I was crying and my birth mother was hysterical. They were crying too, concerned that my birth mother would change her mind. Obviously she didn't. And as was stipulated in the adoption contract, I was given to the couple a few months before the adoption became finalized. My name changed to Shirley Rebecca Hall. *Rebecca,* after my adoptive mother's sister.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3, COLUMN 2

My Search for Myself

by Randy Norman

Part Two of Four

The Trip to Walter's House

As the time for my journey to Walter's home neared, I was calling Sylvia about every two days. She told me that I had a brother, but they did not talk. Apparently, there were a lot of hard feelings between them because she had tried to raise him from the age of three. Sylvia did not drink or smoke—which are things most Germans do—and our little brother did both. Sylvia did not like this, but I felt there were other things going on with the two of them—I just did not know what. Somehow, I needed to work this out for them, because I knew that they needed each other, and I needed them.

When the day came to get on the plane to South Carolina, I felt that I should be going to Germany instead. I could not help feeling this and I don't think I wanted to. But I did want to see Walter, to see what he was like, and to hear what had happened 34 years ago.

As the plane left the ground, my senses went wild. I was afraid, thinking about what might happen to me in South Carolina. Would Walter hate me, now that he could see me? Would he not want to talk, or would he love me too much?

I'm not sure if I knew my real feelings towards him, because they were colored by the knowledge of what happened 34 years ago. When we talked on the phone, however, he told me that he loved me and that helped soften my feelings for him.

On the plane I felt happy with myself because I was doing one of the hardest things in my life. It was a long flight, with a layover in Atlanta. When I got to Atlanta, I called Sylvia in Germany. I needed her support, and I love to hear her voice. We talked for about 20 minutes.

On the last leg of my flight to meet Walter face to face, I knew that it would be different now. I hoped he would like me, or love me; that I would be equal to his other sons in his eyes, or had lived up to his expectations. That was important to me.

When the plane landed, I was ready. For what I wasn't sure, but I was ready. I walked into the airport and saw Walter standing there. His wife, Caroline, ran up to me and hugged me like I was her own son. Local news people were also there, videotaping it all.

The newsman asked me, "What was it like to be adopted and find your birth father?"

I told him, "I have always known that I was adopted. But I felt like an alien from space because I was never able to hear about my birth or

Geborener Deutscher is published quarterly by William L. Gage, who is solely responsible for its content. Materials submitted for publication herein, as well as subscription requests, should be sent to **805 Alvarado Drive N.E., Albuquerque, N.M. 87108**. E-mail may be sent to **WmLGage@aol.com**. All material submitted for publication becomes the property of *Geborener Deutscher* and cannot be returned except by written request. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Subscriptions are $7 for one year; $12 for two years; or $15 for three years. Please make checks payable to William L. Gage. All opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor nor any other person.

Copyright © 1999 William L. Gage ISSN 1052-3189 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

to know that I was born just like everyone else, or to know just how I got here. It feels great to now know my birth father and his family and to know a part of where I come from."

This sounded so dumb to me after I said it, but you can't get the words back and say them again.

It was a bit strange, being there, seeing in the flesh for the first time a part of me that I had not known for so long and to whom I had only talked on the phone for a few months before meeting him. There was so much to ask him. I wanted to learn all that I could about him and Margit and what had happened in Germany, but I did not want to hurt Caroline by asking my questions in her presence.

On the drive to their house, Walter told me that he had a picture of Margit to give me. He had had more, but his house burned down a long time ago and all the others were lost. He had gotten this picture from an army friend of his. It was the only picture there was of him and Margit together.

I know it must have been hard on the two of them, having me there and seeing the things that Walter had given me, like my hands and the way I stand and some of the structure of my face. I knew, too, that they could also see the things that Margit had given me, and they could see it all before I could. Could they tell what was from Mom and Dad, too? I wished I could look into Walter's mind and discover all that he knew about me, even the things I was afraid to ask.

Their house was a white mobile home, very neat and clean outside, with a big banner in front that said, "Welcome Home Randy." There were people there waiting to see me: Walter's sons and his neighbor. It was fun to meet them all, to see people that could have been a bigger part of my life.

I talked to Steve, Dale and Allen, and asked them, "What do you think about me, finding out that you have a half-brother?"

Allen said, "It's okay and we will get to know you as just another Strickland now."

Steve said, "Nice to see you in person and not just talk to you on the phone."

Dale just said, "Hi." He seemed a little shy and quiet.

Later that day, Walter called me into the house to give me the picture of Margit. I was so happy to have a picture of her to look at. That night and for the rest of the trip, I kept the picture next to my bed so she could watch over me as I slept. Margit was so beautiful in life.

Walter and I talked about life and his feelings about what happened in Germany. He told me that he had loved Margit, but that he was moved by the Army and couldn't find Margit again when he came back to Crailsheim. I felt that, even though he said that he had looked for her then, his heart must not have been in it. If I could search 32 years later and find her, he could have found her then if he had really wanted to.

He said he had intended to marry her and bring us back to South Carolina, but it didn't work out that way. He told me that that was the worst time of his life. He said he couldn't tell me any more about that time, and that was fine with me.

It was now time for me to tell Walter what happened to Margit; to tell him about her suicide. As I spoke, tears started to come from his eyes and he said, "Randy, I am so sorry. I did love her. She was a good person. I knew that I have had a good life and that the best thing in that case was done for all."

We talked a lot more, and as we talked and learned about each other, I knew that we would be good friends; that I could love him and his family as a part of me. In all of them I could see parts of myself and this made me happy. It also made me want to see the things inside of me that Margit had given me.

The Long Trip Home

As I ended my trip to Walter's home and was on my way back to Snohomish and to my family, my thoughts were running off to Germany. Now I had a picture of the woman who gave birth to me. Now I had the sister I had always wanted a phone call away. This was a great feeling and I was overwhelmed by it sometimes. But this was my life and I wouldn't have changed it for anything; well, almost anything. This was—or I should say, is—the way my life was meant to be.

When the plane landed and I saw my wife and sons standing there, waiting for me, I was happy to be home. I felt that I had achieved a big goal in my life, getting a part of me that I had lost and not losing my own family in the process. But I still needed to go to Germany to see my other side.

Before my trip to Walter's home, I had set things up to go to Germany in June of 1992. As time went by and June came closer, I was talking less and less to Sylvia, however, and she stopped calling me.

Two days before I was set to go, my wife and family had a birthday party for me. In the middle of it, I got a phone call form Sylvia's sister-in-law. She told me that Sylvia did not want me to come to Germany and that she never wanted to talk to me again. There was nothing said after that.

My heart was in pain. I couldn't understand why, but I was still determined to go there. Somehow, I knew that I could change her heart, if only I had the chance. I would call Sylvia on and off to see if I could change her mind, but it seemd I couldn't for now. It would be another 2½ years before I would get to see her.

In one of my early phone calls to her, she told me about Marco, her husband's son from his first marriage. Marco was 20 years old then and he had ask her if he could come to the States and stay with me and my family for three weeks. I said yes to that. After Sylvia and I stopped talking, he was worried that he could no longer come here, but I told him that it was still okay.

We had a good time, and he learned a lot about the U.S. I asked him questions about Sylvia, but he would not say too much about her; only that she was crazy and he didn't much care for her. I just let that go, because she was my sister, and he was young.

He spoke English and fit in well. It was a bit hard on our family to give up Carl's bedroom for three weeks, though. After he left, life went back to normal, and the daily routine resumed again.

At Christmas, I sent Sylvia a card, but didn't get one back. I didn't think I would. I just wanted her to know that I still cared for her.

On Mother's Day in 1995, we went to visit Mom and Dad over the weekend. I went out to get the mail. It was mostly just regular junk mail, plus one letter from Germany. Sylvia had sent me a letter. In her letter, she asked me if I could forgive her. She wrote that she would understand if I could not. I just smiled and, when I got back in to the house, I called her.

In her letter there was a new address and phone number. She was separated from her husband and he was in jail. She said that she was trying to start her life over again. She wanted friends and family, and if I could forgive her, I should write her. For me, that was too slow, so I called instead.

We talked for a long time, and my heart was happy and sad at the same time. I desperately wanted to be there, to see her face, to watch her move, to see if we were somehow alike. Did she feel the same about me? Did she understand what joy this was to me, to have a sister? I wanted to go to the airport right then and there, get on a plane and go.

I asked her then if I could come to Germany to see her, and when. She said to come when I could and not to worry about getting to Ansbach. She could get me at the train station in Nuremberg. I got tickets to fly to Frankfurt in November and return two days before Thanksgiving.

Now I had to wait, and that was hard to do. I would call her and we would talk for long periods of time, getting to know each other a little more. After each call I would feel closer to her and to my German identity. I was changing somehow, and I liked it. I was learning more about myself and the people that I came from.

The day I started my trip to Germany, I was not nervous. It felt good to be going home. That is what it felt like: going home. On the plane to Washington, DC, I wrote a letter to my wife and family. This was my thank you to them, and I still thank them.

I love to fly and I was having a good time on the plane. Although it was a bit boring some of the time, my mind was focused on getting to Germany and wondering how I was going to get myself to Nuremberg at the right time. Many different thoughts ran throughout my mind. So much to think about, and old feelings from the past were coming to me.

One was the feeling that I had when I was a kid and we came here from Germany. I told myself that when I went back home this time, I would not have those feelings because I had my wife and kids there, and I would know my sister in Germany and that I could live better with having her in my life and just talking on the phone.

My mom and dad were near me in Washington, as were all the people who were so much a part of my life. That would make me feel good about coming home after this trip was over. However, I was to learn a new lesson about life with this trip, and it was not going to be easy.

When the plane landed in Frankfurt and the door was opened, the scent of the land rushed through the plane; it smelled wonderful. I knew that I was home, that this was home; this is where it all began for me. I knew this place. There was nothing that I couldn't do here, least of all getting to Nuremberg.

As I walked to the baggage claim, I looked at the other people in line—the tourists—and I felt I was not one of them. I was coming home, not just sight-seeing. This land is a part of me, a part of who I am. I could now define myself as German, and that felt good.

It was a 2½-hour train ride from Frankfurt to

Nuremberg. I looked out the window and watched the German countryside go by. As I got closer to home, I could feel a sense of loneliness come over me. I thought about going back to the States and how I would miss this land—my land.

I thought about visiting Margit's grave. I still could not believe she was dead. I still had hope that they were all wrong. The fantasy was still alive.

I thought about what Sylvia would be like. I knew that she would be different in person than talking on the phone. Could we get along? Would we be able to be family?

It's funny how things work in life. I was not missing my family here and I liked being on my own. This land felt so much like home to me that, even though I had only been here for two hours, just getting here was putting back some of my soul.

I had time to think about life: where I fit in and how things change in time. Just being on a train, getting closer to home, was a different thing to think about. I thought, I have two homes: the one that I have had for most of my life and the one in my mind, where I was now going.

I hoped to see Sylvia standing there, waiting for me, when I got to Nuremberg. She wasn't, so I walked down to the underground pathway and headed for the front door of the station. Then I saw her coming towards me. She was smiling and started walking faster. We hugged, and it felt great.

She said to me, "It's been a long time since we saw each other last."

I said, "This is the first time we have met."

Then she said, "No, it's not. We were in Margit and I know you from there and we talked a lot at that time."

All I could do was smile, and realize that we did know each other. It felt like we had known each other for a much longer time.

Sylvia's friend, Klaus Dieter, had driven her to the train station. I sat in the back of the car and Sylvia and I talked a little. She told me about the weather and a little bit about Patricia.

Sylvia and Klaus talked back and forth in German, but I couldn't understand much of it. This was the most awkward time I had there, and I know it was the same for Sylvia, too.

When we got to Ansbach, Sylvia asked me if I wanted some coffee. We went to a small coffee house. When Klaus got up to go to the bathroom, Sylvia said to me:

"I don't know what you think of me, but I am who I am. Some people like me and some don't. I can't ask you to love me or to want me as your sister. You will need to see if you can live with me just the way I am."

I told her, "The same goes for me."

She ordered me a cappuccino and asked me questions about my trip. Klaus came back and ordered his coffee. After about an hour, we went to the place where I would be staying.

Klaus owned a restaurant and had four rooms to rent out in a small building in downtown Ansbach. The room I had was small. The bathroom was just outside my door. It had only a very small shower, toilet and sink. In the room, I laid my suitcase on the bed. Sylvia picked it up, laid it on the suitcase stand and opened it. She started putting my clothes in the closet. I told her not to, but she ignored me.

When she got to the stuff I had brought for her and Patricia, she looked at me. I told her to open hers. It was a necklace. She came over to me and gave me another hug. I could feel that we were getting closer.

After that, Sylvia went downstairs to the restaurant. I got cleaned up, changed and went downstairs, too. Sylvia then took me to her home: a nice, very clean apartment. From there I called Paulette and the boys.

It was a strange call in a way. I was so far from them but in a place that I wanted to be. The coffee had taken its toll on me. I was talking very fast. Sylvia smiled at me. She knew that the coffee was working. Paulette could tell, too.

After that, Sylvia and I went to get Patricia from daycare. As we walked, we made small talk, and I looked at everything around us. Germany is different from the U.S., but not by much. People do and want the same things.

We got to the daycare and went in to Patricia's class. The kids looked just like kids here. Pictures they had drawn were tacked on the walls. When she came over to her mom, Patricia was a bit shy to me, but it didn't take her long to warm up. She would ask me questions in German, but I did not have the answers—at least not in her language.

One evening, as I came into the restaurant to go to my room, a man who was sitting alone at a table asked me to sit with him. Klaus had to tell me what he was saying. He wanted someone to talk to while he was having dinner. I sat down at his table and said, "Hi."

He said his name was Wolfgang and he wanted to share his dinner with me. He did not speak English, but we communicated with each other nonetheless, through gestures, what little German I knew and just a bit of English on his part.

He was a teacher, staying in Ansbach for a few weeks to teach a class there. When his soup came, he asked for another spoon, gave it to me and told me to please have some. We talked for 2½ hours and, at the end, he said to me, "You seem more German than American to me." He thanked me for spending time with him.

I thanked him for the dinner and said I very much liked talking to him. We had dinner together and talked twice more after that. That made me feel like I was German, too; like I fit in here okay.

Continued in the Next Issue

"A Little Brown Baby"

Continued from page 1

My formative years were spent on army bases across the United States, and we spent a total of 13 years (pre-adoption years included) in Germany. When we lived in Germany, the "army base" was my world. My parents kept me very close and I had little contact with German people or the German culture. I never met or heard from anyone in my birth family during those times.

I remember, years later, asking my father if they ever had contact with my birth mother when we went back and forth to Germany. He told me no, but he did recall when we went back to Germany, the first time after my adoption, seeing the German woman who was my adoptive mother's housekeeper during the time of the adoption proceedings.

To my surprise, he said this woman, Maria, was my birth mother's best friend. He told me she just happened to be at the NCO club where he and I were having lunch. She approached him, very surprised to see him again, and asked how I was doing. He pointed me out to her and said I was doing fine. He said she became very excited about seeing me and began to walk over to me. He stopped her and told her he didn't want her to upset me. He told her, "As you can see, she is doing well, so don't bother her."

She agreed and that was that. Now I have someone else's memory. A memory that I hold dear to my heart as if it were my own. A memory that tells me someone from my baby years cared that I existed. Someone from my past was apparently excited to see me ... wanted to talk to me ... hadn't forgotten me.

As a child I was not allowed to speak German. My mother told me it was important for me to learn to speak English quickly, not only to show the authorities that I was adapting well to my new environment, but also because neither she nor my father could speak German.

My mother, while a loving woman in her own way, was a woman who ruled with a strong hand. I remember times when she would lose her patience with me, and pluck me in the mouth with her fingers whenever I spoke German. To say the least, I imagine it was to *all* our benefit that I learned to speak English quickly.

I have been told I may have at least four siblings. I have no information about them at all. When I asked my mother about brothers and sisters, she shared the following story with me:

It seems her housekeeper, Maria, would allow a group of children to come over to the house to play with me whenever my mother would go out. When she found out about this, she was very angry with Maria. She instructed her not to allow the children to come into the house again. Well, it seems Maria was determined to let us play with each other, and after that, she would let me go *outside* to play with the children. That didn't last long. One day my mother came home early and caught us all playing outside. She yelled at all the children and told them never to come back again, then fired Maria. Although I have no memory of this, it may explain one of the reasons I've felt a profound sense of loneliness at times.

My mother told me that, on one other occasion, two of the children, a little boy and girl, braved their way back to her door again to ask if they could play with me. She told them no and never to come back again. I was told they never did. My mother justified this heartless behavior as necessary because, as long as *those* children (possible siblings ... she said she wasn't sure and never asked) kept coming around, I would never stop speaking German.

Well, her tactics worked! I've forgotten all of my German with the exception of a few words. I've taken German language courses a number of times over the years, but to no avail. I haven't given up. Since I have decided to search for my birth family, I will be taking a conversational German course again, I hope with better results.

I had a decent childhood. At times, I felt like I was under a microscope when I was with my extended adoptive family members. Although they are dear to my heart,

there were times when I felt like *we all* pretended I was a "real" family member. It probably could have worked too, but someone would always treat me like a guest or something like a "good friend" of the family.

One of my adoptive uncles was apparently quite fond of me. Whenever we had family gatherings, he would have "just a little too much to drink" and announce to the *entire* family that *he* was my natural father. Everyone would get in such a tizzy, and tell him to go sit down and shut up. That was so funny! I still smile when I think about it. I do have to admit however, for a split second, I would wonder .... *could he be?* Then I'd tell myself, "Don't even *think* about it."

I remember while visiting my parents home town, the neighborhood children (and some adults) would question me as to why I was so light and my parents were so dark. (Funny, they never posed that question to my parents.) I would proudly tell them that I was born in Germany and adopted.

I still remember the day a mean-spirited kid said, "That ain't nothing to be proud of you *half-breed Nazi*. Everyone *hates* Germans. Now get on away from us before you give us *German* measles." I was stunned. Who knew of *Nazis*?! I was a walking *disease*?! *Everybody* hated Germans?!

Although I did get up the nerve to say, *"At least my parents chose me, your parents didn't have a choice*"—something my mother taught me to say and it's a story my father *still* likes to tell—I learned, *from that moment on,* to keep my German heritage to myself.

My father was injured in Vietnam (not too seriously, thank God) and retired from the military. We settled in his and my mother's home town of Philadelphia. Civilian life was *so* different. There was no structure to our lives anymore. I no longer lived in a totally multi-cultural environment. I felt exposed, unprotected, kind of "out there." Growing up in Black America was not easy. Because of my looks, I was readily accepted by (most) African Americans. But my life experiences were different, and I found it difficult to fit in. I spent a lot of time alone.

My father, Sarge (as he likes to be called), is a loving, kind, and gentle man. I've always felt his love. He and my mother are divorced now. My mother loved me as well, but I always felt a little distance between us. From some of the statements she made over the years, I got the impression she didn't care for German women too much. I imagine she had her reasons. I just tried really hard not to give her any reason to dislike *me.*

At one point, she told me she wouldn't have been surprised if my adoptive father really were my *natural* father. "After all," she said, "He was in Germany two years before I arrived." She would never know that deep inside of me, I longed for that to be true. After she made that statement, for a long time, I would watch my father very closely, looking for something, *anything,* that could be construed as a "blood connector." I didn't see any.

I've always been able to discuss my adoption with my father rather freely. He loves to talk about his military years, and since adopting me was a part of that time, it was always an easy discussion. Having said that, it became pretty clear to me over the years that he wasn't my biological father. As much as I wished it were true, I knew he wasn't. I never mentioned to him the statement my mother made. I never will.

My mother asked me a couple of times when I was younger if I ever wanted to find my birth mother. I always told her no, and she always seemed pleased with that answer. It wouldn't be until years later I would come to regret not being honest.

I've always had conflicting emotions about searching for my birth family. Sometimes the "need to know" is very strong (especially after watching talk shows about families reuniting, which I *always* make a point of watching). Sometimes, the "need to know'" is barely there at all. Either way, *it's always there.*

While visiting with my mother not too long ago, I told her that I'd been *thinking* about searching for my birth family. I had a feeling she would not be pleased to hear that, and I could tell by her expression she wasn't, but I hadn't anticipated the outburst that would follow.

She angrily informed me that one of the reasons she asked me as a child if I wanted to find my birth mother was because she had heard from her a couple of times. She said, because I told her I wasn't interested in finding her, she didn't think it was necessary to tell me about the postcards, and now she didn't know where they were. Needless to say, I was shocked. Post cards?! From my birth mother?! I wanted ... needed ... tried ... to get more information from her. She said she couldn't remember any details. I didn't want a big blow-up, so I just slowly shook my head and very *guardedly* told her, "Mom, perhaps if you had told me you actually heard from her or showed me the postcards, I may have responded differently." My mother just *looked at* me ... but ... *Ohhh, if looks could kill*...

Well, at least that "discussion" opened the door for me to *eventually* ask for my adoption papers. Asking to see my adoption papers had never occurred to me while I was growing up.

Anyway, talk about *difficult.* That was *very* difficult. Just the *thought* of asking my mother for my adoption papers filled me with dread. But I did. My stomach ached. I felt nauseated. I felt like I was asking about something that was none of my business, something that I didn't have a right to see.

I held my breath and politely asked her if she knew where the adoption papers were. I felt horrible. My mother didn't make it easy for me either, reminding me *again* that I told her I didn't want to know anything about my German heritage. Bracing myself and hiding my humiliation, I chose my words very carefully. I told her, "Mom, at the time, perhaps I didn't want to know, but I have a need to know now, okay?" She very sarcastically said, "Yeah, I guess so. But I don't know *what* you expect to find out."

From that statement, it became quite clear to me I had to protect my "self." Sadly, I realized I would not be able to share this experience with her. I tried to assure her that nothing would or could change the love that I have for her or my father. That nothing could or would diminish the importance of either one of them in my life or my children's lives. She didn't respond, but reluctantly told me where the adoption papers were, and along with that gave me very firm instructions to make copies and give the originals back to her. So far, I haven't given them back. I may, or I may not.

I didn't really read the adoption papers while I was at my mother's. As a matter of fact, I tried to act very nonchalant about them. I didn't want her to think I was excited about having them in my possession. I glanced over all of the documents. They all seemed rather formal to me, until I saw the "Letter of Recommendation" to the Adoption Board from the military Chaplain. That one, for some reason, I took the time to read:

> *... Shirley is a very alert and happy child. This couple have provided pleasant surroundings for her. She is given a great deal of attention by both Sgt. Hall and Mrs. Hall and she seeks the affection of each. While visiting in the home I found evidence of a great deal of time spent with the child. She already speaks English very well and knows the English names of all the animals in her story books.*

While reading this I thought to myself, "Oh my God, he's talking about *me."* I pictured myself as a child, a little brown baby, trying to adapt to new people, a whole new environment. My heart ached and my eyes filled with tears. My mother pretended not to notice ... and so did I.

As I drove home with the documents in hand, I was so excited I could have screamed. I felt very anxious. I had, in my possession, my adoption papers! My history! I prayed I didn't have an accident on the way home so they wouldn't get destroyed (silly me). As soon as I entered my home, I made a cup of coffee, grabbed a pack of cigarettes, sat down at the dining room table and gently unfolded the fragile, aged, brown documents.

One by one, I slowly began to read them. I didn't have a clue as to what the German papers stated but I read them anyway. Fortunately for me, each document had an English translation. The documents stated my birth mother's name as Eva Ella Gindler. I only knew of the name *Eva Gindler.* I repeated the name out loud, *"Eva Ella Gindler,"* and suddenly feeling quite giddy I said, "Eva ELLA...Hey!..like *ELLA* Fitzgerald ... the late, great jazz singer." I chuckled out loud, and thought to myself, "Shirley, you are truly losing it now."

While reading the "Consent to Adopt" document, I was disappointed it didn't have my birth mother's personal signature. I wanted to see her handwriting. I wanted to see "something" that would give me a little insight into her personality. But it wasn't there.

The document did state her occupation as a "Kindergärtnerin," the English translation stated "Nursery-governess." For some reason I took that to mean a "nanny." The thought of my birth mother "taking care" of someone else's children, after giving her own up for adoption, made me feel sad. Later on, I would learn "Kindergärtnerin" meant "nursery school teacher."

Her address was also listed. I immediately imagined a cute little European cottage, and myself, a little brown baby, with her family, happily playing inside. My soul wept and I began to cry.

For days, I would read each document over and over. At that point, I still wasn't sure if I was going to search, so after showing the documents to my husband and children, I put them away in our personal safe. There they would remain for almost a year.

Concluded in the Next Issue