A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



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The Quest of Helga Spengemann Jones Gordon

by Lary Bloom

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HARTFORD, CT (12/14/97) — Here is a true mystery tale that contains foreign intrigue, compelling characters, an illicit affair, racism (blatant and subtle), and the sweep of time. It has the potential of a happy ending that perhaps you can help provide. For such is the wish, anyway, of Helga Gordon.

She talked of this one evening at her condominium in West Hartford, where she has lived the past few years, and which is her source of comfort and pride. The condo is a significant improvement from the place she and her son Geeno had been: Westbrook Village, which is Hartford public housing. The arrangement in the projects had been intended to be temporary, but temporary lasted for more than two decades.

Now, she is in a lovely complex built for former public housing residents who could step up, and who, though lacking the savings for a down payment, could meet the monthly mortgage. Indeed Helga could, having worked 15 years in various capacities for Northeast Utilities. "In this house," she said, as if she hardly believed it, "I have my own laundry room, an enclosed garage, wall-to-wall carpeting, a deck, a self-defrosting fridge, a dishwasher. I died and went to heaven."

The kitchen has on its table a strawberry pie made out of laminated bread, the work of an artist that Helga visits every September at the Big E. The faux strawberries are rich and red, the hue of Helga's shoes when she was a child. It is this color that reminds her of her quest.

At Northeast Utilities last spring, Helga came to know Patricia Mitchell, who worked as a temp and who was fascinated by Helga's personal story.

Helga told Pat of her origin: born in Mannheim, Germany, in 1949, the daughter of a U.S. soldier: Edward Jones, a Hartford native, a career Army man who achieved the rank of captain, a stout and hardy fellow who could fix anything around the house and who died in 1992 at the age of 77, his decline aided by the effects of the traditional Army habits of too much tobacco and drink. Pat also wanted to know about Helga's mother. Yes, Helga replied, that was the point, and that was the source of pain. Pat remembers that when Helga talked about her mother, and how for the first four decades of her life she did not even know her mother's identity, her eyes would get watery. Pat told me she pressed her new friend for more information. "I think of my own mother as gold. There's nothing like a mother, so that's why I persisted in my questioning."

Helga told Pat what she remembered about her early life. She told her that she had been adopted by her own father and by her father's wife, Vera. Why would her father have to go to such a bureaucratic extreme to gain custody of his daughter? He likely had denied paternity. In Germany, in 1949, there was not much sympathy for a baby born of a black U.S. soldier and an Aryan mother. But when the child was 11 months old, and after having suffered pneumonia and the discomforts of life in an apartment with no heat, the baby was given up by the mother, and, saving face all around, the father had to act as an adoptive parent.

The family moved back to America, and settled in Denver, where eventually the child was told she was adopted. The Joneses explained that when they lived in Germany they had hired a nanny to care for Helga's half-sister Edria. The nanny, whose own husband had gone off to war years before and never came home, turned out to be Helga's mother. Ed Jones, however, never revealed the mother's name to Helga.

He often went off to distant duty stations and Vera did well raising Helga and Edria. "She never treated me any differently from her own daughter," Helga said. Vera was the one who kept little Helga in plaid dresses and red shoes. But at age 38, when Helga was 5, Vera died of a heart attack after a game of tennis. Helga was heartbroken. Moreover, she had to live with Vera's mother, who did manage to discriminate between grandchildren, and who maintained a cold relationship with Helga all her life. And yet, when Vera's mother died in 1991, she provided the key information to the personal mystery story. Among her possessions was a box containing documents, including young Helga's green card and her adoption papers. Helga's mother had a name: Emmi Spengemann Hafner. The document said that Emmi had three white children and two "colored" children.

"Are you going to find your mother?" Pat kept asking Helga. Pat bugged Helga to let her help. Perhaps Helga could learn once and for all what happened to her, and if she were still living.

Pat suggested consulting her neighbor in New Britain, Corinna Fabritti, who was born in Germany, and whose mother worked at the American consulate in Frankfurt. Helga finally agreed to the idea. Corinna called her mother, who looked through all the names in the Mannheim phone book and found four listings for a Spengemann or Hafner. Corinna and Helga dialed three of them but the parties to whom they spoke were obviously the wrong ones. There was no answer at the fourth house. Helga said, "That will be the one."

The following day, they dialed that number and reached Ria Spengemann, who turned out to be Emmi's sister-in-law. Yes, Ria said, Helga's mother was alive, living in a convalescent home. Her mind was clear, but she was in a wheelchair because of problems with arthritis. Ria said she would be happy to go there, and to find her, and to explain that her daughter in America was looking for her.

A week later, Helga and Corinna were on the phone again with Ria, who reported the results of her outing. Emmi said she remembered her children who were now in the United States. There was the clear impression that Emmi had suffered over the matter of bearing biracial children. Emmi had mixed emotions about being found, and she needed some time to let it sink in. Ria reported this back to Corinna and Helga. Helga then wrote a letter to her mother. She thanked her mother for granting her life on December 21, 1949, and said she had always wondered about her welfare, and that she was not angry with her for giving her child up. Helga, in fact, wrote that she thought her mother was brave to give her daughter a chance for a life in America. She also said she would like to visit. In this letter, Helga inserted snapshots of her and of 27-year-old Geeno, a customer representative at Cigna (whose father Helga divorced long ago).

It was during the third phone call to Ria that Helga learned about Emmi's other "colored" child, whom she had always assumed was her half-brother. No, Emmi had said, the boy whose name was Karl was also fathered by Edward

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

Jones. Helga was not the product of a one-night stand but of a very long affair. She didn't have a half-brother but a whole one, somewhere in the United States. She learned this when Ria reported that Karl had come to Germany a few years ago to try to find his mother, but was turned away by the family. Karl is still out there, presumably, and doesn't know that he has a sister. This, then, is Helga's quest, to find Karl, and then go with him to visit, for the first time, the woman who brought them into the world.

But together or apart they continue to face considerable obstacles. Helga is beginning to experience something of what Karl faced. Ria, it turns out, was no longer welcoming in her inquiries. Ria changed her tone entirely, and said that Emmi no longer wanted Helga to contact her, that it was "too painful." Emmi has in recent months been unreachable. For one thing, her arthritis prevents her from writing, the language barrier from calling. And she is protected now by her three other daughters, all of them considerably older than Helga and who have spent their lifetimes hushing up their mother's affair. This is a part of the letter that Helga received on July 15 from Renate, Christa, and Doris:

> We ask you to please leave everything like it was. Our youngest sister, grandchildren and great grandchildren do not know anything about you. Why should you, after all these years, bring it all up again? We hope you will understand. ...

What Helga understands is the racism that lingers, the penchant of her half-sisters to obliterate their mother's past, for it would be a Mannheim scandal even now to know that Emmi Spengemann Hafner had a black lover. And so Emmi sits alone in Germany thinking about Helga and Karl. Helga and Karl sit alone across the ocean, thinking about their mother. And Helga desperately wants to find Karl and is hoping someone who reads this will have heard the story of the son of an American soldier on a similar quest, and will contact Helga.

Perhaps I overstate it. Helga is not alone in her quest. She has help. In August, Ria Spengemann's daughter Petra came to Boston on a visit, and Helga went to meet her. During their dinner together, Petra told Helga that she was overwhelmed to learn that she had a cousin in America. It was, according to Petra, a "wonderful and happy evening." During this night, Petra offered to help Helga by researching adoption papers to try to find Karl's identity.

By the time of my visit to Helga's condo in early November, Helga had heard nothing. And so I sent an e-mail message to Petra in Berlin, and a few days later received a long reply in German, which I had translated by a *Courant* librarian and a Trinity College language professor.

Petra wrote about the circumstances of her own father's very large family her father being Emmi's half-brother. She called the family dysfunctional. As for Petra's mother, Ria, she had decided that she could no longer participate in the family intrigue. "My mother didn't want to know about the whole situation. It's too heartbreaking. She said that if I wanted to do anything I would have to do the running around myself."

Petra said that she went to visit Emmi, and told her about her visit with Helga. "She could remember very well about that time. I had a feeling it was hard giving up her children. Her heart was heavy. I could see the black veil that has dragged her down during life. Naturally, I wanted to know who had adopted the other child, Karl, if she could remember and say the name. Either she couldn't, or wouldn't. I'm not sure.

"Then I tried to find out the name of Karl's adoptive parents through the office in charge of adoption (Youth Welfare Department of the City of Mannheim). The official in charge was also kind and gave me reason to be hopeful when she said that adoption files are kept for a very long time and that she would give me the name if the files from that time would still be available. Unfortunately, this was not the case. In the chaotic years after the war, many things didn't go as they should. The files were probably destroyed inadvertently. Now there is but one chance to find out Karl's last name through the German authorities, and that is through the international social service. My next step will be to contact this authority."

And so Helga waits for news of Karl and hopes that she can visit her mother before it's too late. She pictures her mother, feeble and helpless against the power and influence of Helga's half-sisters. I asked Helga if she was tempted to simply get on a plane bound for Mannheim. But she isn't up to the fight with Emmi's other daughters, not yet.

She hopes that one day soon, she and Karl will arrive in Germany and be welcomed for who they are, a daughter and a son, in search of the most natural thing in the world, coming to collect a mother's love.

Patricia Mitchell, meanwhile, the woman who had urged the search in the first place, is hopeful that Emmi's daughters will capitulate, that "somehow God will touch them." She also thinks that Helga will find her brother. But that in any case, "In her heart, Helga is happy. She knows her mother still lives."

Helga & Tommy

by Lary Bloom

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HARTFORD, CT (6/27/99) — Of all the people waiting at Gate B10, Helga Gordon seemed the only one without a stream of tears running down her cheeks. Friends and family around her were openly bawling already, though nothing had yet happened. Strangers—folks on their way to other gates at Bradley International saw the commotion, inquired, and joined the crowd. A man heading for North Carolina, but temporarily captivated along the way, told me, "This is a beautiful story."

And yet he didn't really know the particulars, not by any means. Travelers heard that momentarily there would be a reunion of brother and sister, that it had been 50 years since they had seen each other. But the truth, as always, is more complex.

In some sense, this would be no reunion at all. Helga and her brother had never seen each other, never spoken until phone calls just previous to this day. In fact, Helga, until two years ago, had no idea that she had a full-blooded brother, and even then she thought Tommy's name was Karl, even though his real name was Jesse. But then, I am ahead of the story.

If you have been a regular reader of this space, you may recall meeting Helga Gordon before. In December 1997 I wrote about her quest to uncover family roots, to find her brother, to get her mother in Germany to acknowledge her, and to overcome the difficulties that racial prejudice contributed to her fortunes.

Now, you can see Helga again, waiting for an Air Tran flight from Atlanta, and too excited to cry. The plane was on time, would arrive in minutes.

Helga's cousin, Ray Jones, who had flown in from his home in Seattle, sat next to Edria Johnson, Helga's half-sister, who had come in from Tucson. Helga's son, Geeno, was there, too, with his girlfriend, Llonia Jackson. All had come from Helga's house in West Hartford via Ambassador Limo. There was champagne waiting in the vehicle, aged for this occasion. If you can't spring for a limo and libations after 50 years of deprivation, then when can you?

Helga's brother, Tommy, left his house in Baton Rouge at 4:30 a.m. and began his drive to the New Orleans airport. He departed with a headful of good wishes from his regular customers at Tommy's Personal Touch, his hair salon; they knew this would be an emotional day.

Over the years, as he worked on their various 'dos, customers knew something of him. That he grew up in Louisiana. Some knew that, as a light brown baby wheeled through the streets of the South by much darker step-grandparents, he and the family were targets of mean-spirited stares from other members of the African American community. By looking at Tommy they could see he was different—the child, perhaps, of something unsavory. Likely it was the kind of relationship made famous by white slave-owners and oppressed females.

As Tommy got older he appreciated very much the courage of his family, even as he knew, from age 6, that he was adopted.

Tommy also grew up knowing something that his sister Helga didn't know. He knew he had, somewhere in this world, a full-blooded sibling; the word had come to him through family channels.

In those days, Tommy didn't know what to think of all of this. It was all so damned confusing. Even his own name was cause for being dumbfounded. He had been born Jesse. But, as his adoptive father's last name was James, this wouldn't do. The little boy had begun life with one strike against him the son of a black Army officer stationed in Germany and the family's nanny, a white woman, who had disowned him. To carry the name of a notorious outlaw would surely have been the second strike. So his new parents in the American South named him Tommy.

As for finding his sister, well, "men aren't very good at such things." He didn't know, of course, that Helga would eventually look for someone named Karl.

Helga's stepmother Vera, whom she loved and who treated her as if she were her own, died when Helga was 5. It was a devastating loss. And it seemed to put an end to any possibility that Helga would learn about her roots. Her father was quiet about it. Ashamed? Quite possibly. He died before giving Helga any details.

After all, there he was carrying on in Germany, under his and Vera's roof, for more than two years, with the nanny. Carrying on enough to have two children with her, first Jesse, then Helga. And to give away the boy and, for practical reasons, to adopt his own daughter to save face all around in a society that, in 1949, still showed its intolerance for anything that wasn't Aryan.

None of the particulars of this would have come Helga's way if not for the death of Vera's mother, who left a box of papers. These included her mother's identity she was a woman named Emmi Spengemann adoption forms, a green card, a reference to a boy, and something about "Karl," who Helga assumed was a half-brother, until she learned otherwise during her search.

On his way to Hartford, Tommy changed planes in Atlanta, and he thought about the four-hour phone call he'd had with Helga just a few days before. The call was placed not long after he had received the letter from a social service agency in Germany.

Finally, Helga's efforts and those of many near and far, finally paid off. Maria Hierlinger-Gudat, of the German Branch of International Social Service which has been bombarded with similar requests in the last few years spent a year examining files and writing letters, finally tracking down the James family in Louisiana.

"Karl," it turned out, was a red herring—a relative of her mother's. When the authorities in Germany finally figured it out, they traced the adoption to Louisiana.

Then came the phone call from Baton Rouge to West Hartford. In four hours, much was discussed. Helga told Tommy about 28-year-old Geeno, of whom she is very proud and who works in the personnel department at Hartford city hall, and of her well-appointed new condo in the suburbs after living for nearly two decades in Hartford's projects. She told him of her work at Northeast Utilities, where she has served in a variety of rewarding jobs including soothing worried customers during storms.

She told Tommy about the maddening stuff, too. She mentioned the stupefying letter she had gotten from two of their half-sisters in Germany after she had tried to go through them to get to Emmi, who lived in a nursing home and suffered from chronic illnesses. Even after all these decades, it represented in spirit, if not in black and white, the essence of racism. It read, in part:

> We ask you to please leave everything as it was. Our youngest sister, grandchildren and great grandchildren do not know anything about you. Why should you, after all these years, bring it all up again? We hope you will understand.

Helga didn't understand, and she kept pressing, until she learned the location of her mother's nursing home and, two days after last Christmas, called. Emmi spoke to her, remembered her, and, in the end, left Helga with the impression that, indeed, her mother was still alive in every way, and that one day there would be a mother/-daughter reunion.

But first there were more immediate matters to attend to. And when the door opened at Gate B10, Helga waited with her hands pressed together in anticipation.

"No, that's not him," she said of a man emerging from the plane. Tommy and Helga had exchanged pictures a few days before. She knew the face she was looking for.

And, in a few minutes, there he was. She ran to Tommy, and jumped up, wrapping her legs about him. The crowd now was cheering, trying to figure how to applaud and at the same time wipe away tears that obliterated the view.

I wondered how the photographer could even do her job at such a moment. How could she focus?

In a few moments, Helga and Tommy turned to face the crowd. She introduced Tommy to everyone. Ray Jones, the cousin who had come from Seattle, said to the man from Louisiana, "Now, you can take over and be the big brother I've been all these years."

Helga couldn't stop hugging Tommy.

"They look like twins," people said.

Helga said to Tommy, "I'll be a real pain in the butt, like a little sister should."

That afternoon, all of us repaired to Helga's condo in West Hartford, where she served one and all pasta and chicken, and where we explored every irony of this amazing story.

One of them regards Helga's Seattle cousin, Ray Jones. Jones grew up in Hartford, is an expert on race relations and does human relations work on the West Coast in the areas of race and diversity. He also knows the subject in his private life. His wife, a medical student, is white.

It is one thing, he says, to rail about conditions in Germany at the end of the war, savage though they may have been. It is quite another to understand that "we still have many issues in America today."

He said that, if Helga's story got out, "it will help people with mixed race children."

There was talk that afternoon about the two siblings finally going back to Germany to see, at long last, their mother. Edria Johnson thought she might be able to arrange it. As an employee of American Airlines for 20 years, she figured she could convince the company to help arrange the reunion. It would be good PR, wouldn't it?

That weekend, brother and sister had a good old time exploring Connecticut and getting to know each other. She took him to a welcoming party hosted by Denise Napier, the state treasurer, her sister Diane, and their mother Barbara; to Water's Edge for brunch; and to a celebration prepared by Rosie Jones, Helga's friend. On Sunday, Helga was asked to speak at her church, Liberty Christian Center, about the reunion. It was during the speech where she found herself overcome by emotion. Finally, it became her turn to cry.

On their final day together, Helga and Tommy called their mother, Emmi, in Germany. This conversation, I am sorry to report, was not all they had hoped for. Helga introduced the brother she had never known, Emmi seemed somehow detached, in the way she had been portrayed by their half-sisters in Germany.

However, Helga and Tommy are still on the case. Tommy intends to write to Emmi to attest that her children in America have had a good life, and that Emmi has nothing to be ashamed of, and that her children are certainly not ashamed to say they have a German mother or three white half-sisters.

Helga finds great comfort in the recent reunion in Hartford. After all, she has found her brother, and she will stay busy for the foreseeable future doing everything she can to find out what it is like to be his little sister.

"Hitler's Children" Seek Out Their Roots

by Carol J. Williams

THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

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KOHREN-SAHLIS, Germany (1/21/00) — In the destitute months before and after the defeat of Nazi Germany, the blond, blue-eyed toddlers from the orphanage in this Saxon village walked along the rubble-strewn roadside each day, holding fast to a rope trailed by a matron to keep them together.

The skinny foundlings caught the eye of a lonely war widow who eventually took one of the girls, Aud Rigmor Harzendorf, then 3 years old, into her home and her heart.

"I must have been a pretty little one, with all those blond curls," recalls Harzendorf, now a 58-year-old grandmother, whose classic Nordic looks proved to be her life's heaviest trial as well as her salvation.

Harzendorf was never really an orphan. She was the product of a Nazi breeding campaign to create an Aryan elite, a 10-year experiment that researchers estimate gave birth to 11,000 children.

Her journey of discovery has acquainted her with her natural mother and long-lost brother, and offers a glimpse into the thousands of lives that were conceived in the minds of racist madmen.

"Lebensborn" ("Fountain of Life") was begun in 1935 under the direction of SS chief Heinrich Himmler as a bulwark against a future dominated by what the Nazis viewed as "inferior races." Women who had the desirable physical qualities

of blond hair and blue eyes were urged to have sexual relations with tall, fit officers of Adolf Hitler's elite SS troops to produce a master race for the Führer.

The personal histories of the children of Lebensborn who ended up in East Germany were hidden for decades by the authorities of that post-war Communist state. Not only did the presence of "Hitler's children" provide an uncomfortable reminder of the Nazi past of East Germany, but the identities listed in the secret registry of births offered convenient camouflage for spies that the Soviet-allied state planted abroad.

Those records that survived in West Germany were kept for years in a repository in Heidelberg, ostensibly open to those born under the Lebensborn program—if they knew to ask. In November, the newly consolidated Federal Archives announced that the records from the two Germanys, though grossly incomplete, would now be available at the Berlin headquarters.

"They are only available to those involved in the program, to help explain their fate," says Wilhelm Lenz, head of the department for documents from the Third Reich. "Until recently, many didn't know or suspect they were Lebensborn children."

Only about 1,000 files have survived intact and with the names of the natural parents included, as those who took part in the breeding program had the option of keeping their identities secret. Harzendorf's case was somewhat unusual in that both natural parents allowed their names to be recorded.

Harzendorf is typical of a generation of Germans who came of age in a time when it was unwise to ask too many questions and in a place where answers couldn't always be trusted. Children born before and during the Nazi era were seldom told of their parents' roles in the Third Reich. Also kept in the dark were untold thousands who were born during the four-year Soviet occupation as a consequence of rapes, which historians estimate were committed against more than 1 million East German women and girls.

Silencing the Past

"Before the change (in 1989), no one ever talked about the past," says Harzendorf, who still lives barely half a mile from the orphanage. "All my foster mother ever told me was that I didn't have any parents anymore and I was coming to live with her. She was a good person and would never have imagined such things (as Lebensborn) ever existed."

Both of her natural parents were still living at the end of the war, but that was something she would learn only decades later.

Harzendorf was born in Norway—as were nearly half of the Lebensborn children—the product of an SS aviator from Dresden by the name of Georg Rudi Graefe and a Norwegian mother, Karin Edgren. Her mother worked as a bookkeeper for the Nazi army that was welcomed by the collaborationist wartime regime of Premier Vidkun Quisling.

Edgren gave the daughter born June 28, 1941, to an Oslo nursery that cared for Lebensborn offspring until the wards were evacuated to Germany in late 1943.

Hundreds of Lebensborn children from Norway were shuttled in and out of the children's home here in the chaotic months before and after the war's end, Harzendorf was told by one of the matrons who still lives in Kohren-Sahlis.

Harzendorf was one of at least six Lebensborn children from the home taken in by villagers. Her foster mother, Adelheid Helbig, who died in 1966, was never allowed to formally adopt her —for reasons never disclosed to Harzendorf.

Ignorance is Bliss

"She loved me as much as any mother loves her child—I know that," says Harzendorf, who describes her early life as one of blissful ignorance and good fortune.

When Harzendorf was registering to marry at age 21, she discovered that she was officially stateless: Her birth certificate and document of citizenship both had disappeared from the home. It was an administrative nightmare that was also to befall at least two other contemporaries from the orphanage whose identities were later used by agents of the Ministry for State Security—the dreaded Stasi—to pose as displaced Norwegians returning to their homeland, a member of NATO.

Harzendorf, a weaver by profession, had a daughter she named Karin Adelheid after her natural and foster mothers, the former name taken from a document provided by the orphanage that told all she knew at the time about the woman who had given her life.

When East Germans revolted against the Communist regime in 1989, a friend of Harzendorf who knew he too had been born in Norway approached a Norwegian television crew covering the demonstrations to ask for help in uncovering his past. The friend, a Leipzig musician named Arno Kaube, encouraged Harzendorf to join in the search for their roots.

Unhappy Ending

The effort ended unhappily for Kaube, whose natural mother refused to see him. With the help of Oslo journalists, Harzendorf was able to trace her own birth mother and discovered her ailing and haunted by a guilty conscience.

"It wasn't an easy life for her. Women who had had relations with German soldiers were tortured after the war," Harzendorf says by way of excusing her natural mother's half a century of silence. "They were beaten and had their hair cut off or set on fire, the others hated them so much. So I can understand why she never tried to get me back.

"Still, I think she didn't want to take this secret to the grave with her. She wanted some inner peace at the end of her life."

They had only one meeting before Edgren's death in 1995—a visit in Oslo three years earlier during which Harzendorf learned that she has a half-brother three years her senior named Gunnar Edgren, who was raised by his natural mother.

Harzendorf also traced the life story of her natural father a few years ago, learning from his widow that he had four sons before he died in 1967 and often boasted during bouts of heavy drinking of having fathered a daughter in Norway.

Unlike the warm relationship she has fostered with her Norwegian half-brother, who paid a visit with his wife and daughters in November, Harzendorf says she was dissuaded from getting to know her other half-brothers by the brooding and drunken atmosphere of the one Graefe family reunion she attended.

Mountain of Material

One mountain of material involving Lebensborn children still being sorted by the victims is the files of the notorious Stasi, East Germany's secret police agency, which played its own role in the lives of "Hitler's children."

When the Stasi records became accessible to the public in the early 1990s, Germans from the east learned not just of the existence of the Lebensborn program but that its offspring also had been used as espionage cover.

Files discovered in the Stasi archives show that a woman agent used Harzendorf's identity in the 1960s and 1970s to procure Norwegian documents she used while spying in Brussels, Belgium. She is still being sought by unified Germany's intelligence service, Harzendorf says she was told by authorities in Berlin.

A photo of her *doppelgänger*—her double—is fixed neatly in a scrapbook Harzendorf has assembled to pull together the bits and pieces of a life formed in the shadows from the moment of its inception.

"I've found out all that I wanted to know," she says, patting the plastic-sheathed pages that recount her life's story. "I've written it all down so I won't forget the details."

Aud Rigmor Harzendorf stands near the former Kohren-Sahlis orphanage in Germany. Harzendorf was the product of a Nazi breeding campaign to create an Aryan elite, a 10-year experiment that researchers estimate gave birth to 11,000 children.

"Lebensborn Program"

Germany's records concerning the Lebensborn program were moved with other official papers from one besieged city to another before the Nazi regime was finally defeated, and records left in what became East Germany were confiscated by central authorities or destroyed. The Lebensborn program eventually grew to involve more than a dozen maternity homes. Selected SS officers mated with women deemed to have the right physical and moral characteristics, and expectant mothers were then cared for in secrecy by state cooks and nurses until their children were born. A few hundred were given up for adoption, as envisioned by Hitler's misguided builders of a master race. Most were reared by their natural mothers according to Dorothee Schmitz-Koester, a German historian who has researched the Lebensborn program and written a book about daily life in the maternity homes. Schmitz-Koester believes that most surviving offspring know the vague outlines of their origins.

Source: *The Los Angeles Times*