A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



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Clarksville Man Meets Daughter He Never Knew

by Jessica Schick

The Leaf-Chronicle, Sunday, June 24, 2001

Tom Cochran will place a single candle on his daughter's birthday cake today. He will hold her in his arms and shed tears of joy.

He has waited 46 years for this moment.

Monika Arnett, a woman from Everett, WA, will proudly stand next to her father and blow out the candle commemorating the first birthday the two have spent together.

Arnett and Cochran met for the first time Tuesday at Nashville International Airport. The pair located each other in early May through e-mails posted on GISearch.com, a Web site designed to help people with military connections find one another.

The more than four decades leading up to the meeting proved long, hard years for both.

"It's been a living hell," said Cochran, fighting tears on the 45-minute drive to the airport.

His Story

Cochran, a 31-year resident of Clarksville, was stationed at Sembach Air Base near Kaiserslautern, Germany, in 1954 and 1955. There, he dated Arnett's mother, a German woman named Irma Grambitter.

Grambitter, who became pregnant with Cochran's child, suffered from depression. During the course of their rocky relationship, Grambitter attempted suicide three times.

After the third suicide attempt, Cochran parted ways with Grambitter, but told her to contact him when the baby was born. He could not wait to hold the infant they planned to name Bettina Teodelinda.

The Army reassigned Cochran to Giebelstadt, Germany. Before he left, he told Grambitter he would return to see her and the baby. Grambitter, who thought Cochran would never return, gave him a picture of her with a dedication on the back, asking him to not forget about her and their baby.

The month after the baby was born, Grambitter visited Cochran's office but never let him see his child.

Time passed and he no longer heard from Grambitter. Cochran returned to Kaiserslautern to find her and Bettina. His search turned up no answers.

"I showed her picture to anyone who had ever seen her," Cochran said.

He had no luck locating anyone who knew Grambitter's location.

Cochran returned to the United States, but continued the search. At all his duty stations, he would hunt down Germans to write letters for him. He sent the letters to German newspapers and military newspapers, praying someone could tell him something about Grambitter or Bettina.

Forty years after her birth, Cochran continued his search on the Internet. He found a new site, GISearch.com, and set up an account.

Her Story

Uncertain about the future, Grambitter lost faith in Cochran.

"Another man who was in the Air Force stepped in immediately during a time when she thought my father would never take care of her and her unborn child," Arnett said.

Born Monika Grambitter June 24, 1955, Arnett's last name was changed after her mother married Issac Arnett five months after her birth.

Her stepfather, at her mother's request, successfully hid her and Arnett from Cochran. The Air Force transferred the family to the United States when Arnett was 2½ years old, and the new couple raised Arnett to believe she was her stepfather's child.

When Arnett was 13, her stepfather and mother divorced. During custody discussions, Arnett learned she was not her stepfather's child.

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Unearthing Her Roots Answers Nagging Questions

***Tribune* Staff Writer**

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TAMPA, FL (12/17/91)—Didi Orendorf is unwrapping2 the gift of a missing past this holiday season.

For nearly all of her 40 years, she has not known who her mother and father were, not known whether she had any brothers or sisters.

Now this German-born woman, adopted by Americans in her homeland when she was a toddler, is finding answers.

But this is not a gift to be torn open. It must be unwrapped methodically, carefully, for it is bound in uncertainty and tied with mixed emotions.

"It's the stuff that books are made of," Orendorf says. "But on feeling level, I don't know how I feel right now. It is a little overwhelming."

In the past four months, she not only has learned who her mother and father were, she has spoken to her mother, the woman who gave her up when she was just two.

She has spoken, too, to a half-sister, a woman still angry at their mother for letting go of her baby sister while she was away at school. The sisters plan a reunion Friday.

Orendorf also has learned of two half-brothers. She hasn't located them, though. They fell out of touch with the family, probably because of historic political divisions in Germany.

Unearthing her roots answers nagging questions, but it also someday could save Orendorf's life.

Although breast cancer diagnosed last year is in remission, Orendorf knows someday she may need a bone-marrow transplant. Her sister's may be the perfect match, should she ever need it.

Orendorf's family puzzle fell into place quickly after years and years of missing pieces.

Some 20 years ago, with the help of an organization for adopted children wanting to learn their heritages, Orendorf found her parents' names and the name given her at birth, Petra Bi-

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

anca Lapp.

"It was so powerful to me, I didn't do anything more," she says.

So she stashed the information away until August, when she asked a German exchange student living with her in-laws if he would research her heritage when he returned home.

Two months later, Orendorf had her mother's telephone number in Germany.

"She was able to speak enough English that we were able to talk for 40 minutes."

The next day, Orendorf picked up the telephone to find the voice of a woman speaking broken English.

It was her sister calling from Germany. A half-sister from her mother's first marriage that her mother hadn't mentioned the previous day.

"It's kind of exciting," Orendorf says. "I've always wanted to have a sister. I grew up an only child."

In a subsequent letter, the sister dropped another bomb: Orendorf has two half-brothers from a previous marriage of her father.

Orendorf, a social worker with a home health agency, hasn't dealt with that one yet. Besides, the brothers' whereabouts are unknown.

Instead, she is focusing on a planned reunion with her sister in Cape Coral, where the woman and her husband and children will be vacationing, a trip planned before the sisters found one another.

"I would like to get to know my sister," says Orendorf, sitting on a couch in the home she shares with husband Gary and their two daughters in the woods south of Brooksville. "I would like to make my sister my friend."

In the head-spinning months since she spoke with her mother on the telephone, there have been two letters and some explanation of why Orendorf was given up for adoption.

Her father, a violinist, died when he was just 26, leaving little behind.

"I just couldn't take care of you," Orendorf's mother, now 70, wrote in a letter. "I had to do it."

In her childhood, Orendorf suffered emotional wounds born of feeling unwanted by her mother. The wounds have healed, she says, but her words suggest scars remain.

"I don't feel my mother and I can be like mother and daughter now," says the mother of 6- and 8-year-old girls. "I just can't imagine giving my child away."

Still, Orendorf hopes to meet her mother one day. She already is trying to figure out how to raise enough money to travel to Germany or to fly her mother to Florida.

"I would at least like to meet her, to know her," Orendorf says. "I would like her to face me and say, 'This is what it was like, and this is why I did it.' "

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Achtung! Englisch Verboten!

Germans Wage War Over Words

by Peter Finn

Washington Post Foreign Service

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BERLIN (2/24/01)—Gayle Tufts doesn't like the word "Unterhalterin"—to her mind, the noun resonates with too much beer-swilling oom-pah-pah—so she prefers a little Anglicized German and calls herself an "Entertainerin."

On a recent night at the Bar jeder Vernunft, a popular cabaret in a 1920s art deco tent, she regaled a packed crowd with her schtick, a comedic blend of English and German that mixes the two languages until they become something called "Denglish"—or if you prefer the German versions, "Denglisch" or "Engleutsch."

"Howdy folks, wie geht es Ihnen [how are you]?" sings Tufts in a tune called "Miss Amerika." "So much has passiert since last time I was here. ... I'm a Schoenheitskoenigin, [beauty queen] obwohl [although] not klein [small] or thin."

"I love the languages, and I'm just having a little fun," said Tufts, 40, who moved here without knowing a word of German in 1990. And Tufts' audiences collapse in laughter at her Denglish take on Americana, and her more gentle prodding of German foibles, which includes changing the words of the German national anthem into a series of bad puns.

Not everyone sees the joke, however.

The robust language of Goethe and Schiller is being invaded by English words, leading to an outbreak of what might be called linguistic angst.

One German legislator has shouted "Halt!"—not, mind you, the increasingly common "Stop!" Seeking a French solution to the English problem, Eckart Werthebach, the Christian Democrat interior minister in the Berlin government, is calling for a language law. He wants to fine telephone companies that advertise "evening rates," taxi drivers who have signs telling you to "fasten your seatbelt" and cafes selling "coffee to go."

And if you bump into someone in the "Supermarkt," say "entschuldigung," not "sorry."

"The German language needs legal protection, protection in its culture and for its consumers," Werthebach wrote in the mass-market *Bild*, which editorialized in support of him. "Why can't we use German words for concepts? Do we really need English to take over?"

And woe to anyone who suggests he should "relaxen."

Indeed, Werthebach's crusade has become an "event," to use another goose-stepping English word that has supplanted its German counterpart. And some of the German "leadership," to use another invasive noun, want a blitzkrieg against BSE. "Bad Simple English" is what the German Language Union calls the prevalence of things like "shopping" and "sales" and "secondhand."

"The inflationary use of Americanisms in advertising and the media is foolish and stupid," said German President Johannes Rau.

Hartmut Schiedermair, president of the German University Association, called for an "Academy for the Cultivation and Protection of the German Language" along the lines of the French Academy, which formulates indigenous new words rather than allow the adoption of the English equivalent.

"Why shouldn't German-language user manuals and product adverts use the word Rechner instead of computer, Luftkissen instead of airbag and Programm instead of software?" said Christoph Bohr, a Christian Democrat politician.

And he called on educators to work on the problem, which, presumably, could start in "Kindergarten."

The British media, which loves a good spat with Germany, has reacted as if the country has declared World War III. "Germany is ready for war with the English again," wrote the *Observer*. "GERMANS HAFF VAYS OF BANNING ENGLISH," said the headline in the tabloid *Star*.

Some Germans have cautioned restraint and argued that the rise of English is part of the global zeitgeist. Julian Nida-Ruemelin, the state minister for culture in Gerhard Schroder's Chancellery, said: "We don't need a language protection law, nor a language police. The state should not interfere in a process to which a living language is always subject."

But the anti-English (language) campaign appears to have popular support. A recent opinion poll in *Focus* magazine found that 53 percent of Germans oppose use of English words.

And the German Language Club, which has 10,000 members, has created a place on its *Leitseite* (home page) for people to vote for the worst abuse of German by a "language sinner." Last year's "winner" was the president of the University of Munich, who wanted to change the German word *Fakultaeten* into the English word "departments" at the university. Elsewhere on the *Leitseite*, the German Club allows people to list the English words they hate the most. Examples: "task force" and "win it" and "Xmas" and "party."

Entertainerin didn't make it, but it hasn't gone unnoticed. Werthebach recently crossed swords with Tufts after she told the *Berliner Zeitung* newspaper that being an "Entertainerin" must make her a "language criminal."

Werthebach said she was being uber-sensitive.

"The priority is not to forbid something, but much more to develop a consciousness for the question of where Anglicisms are valuable and where they are unnecessary," retorted Werthebach.

"Keep entertaining us," he added using the proper German verb, "unterhalten."

And the two now say they may have misunderstood one another. To which one can only say, "Wunderbar!"

"I was very devastated during that time," Arnett said.

While the revelation helped her to understand the couple's arguments and her grandparents' mistreatment of her as opposed to her other siblings, it also left her wondering about her real father.

She asked her stepfather, who told her she would find out "over his dead body."

She asked her mother, and received a similar response.

"She refused to give me the name of my biological father because he did not want her nor did he want me," Arnett said.

Arnett's instincts told her otherwise. For years, she had dreamt about a tall, lanky, faceless man calling out to her and trying to reach her. After her mother told her the truth, the dreams stopped.

"My thoughts and feeling of my father were always of a kind and compassionate man," Arnett said.

Over the next few years, Arnett found everything she could about her father, but the road was a bumpy one.

The first obstacle was her mother's contempt for her and how she resembled her father. When Arnett was 14, she went out with friends one day and police arrested her. Her mother had called her in as a runaway.

Arnett spent a total of three years in Louisiana lock-up, both juvenile and adult facilities. She was released once, but within a month, her mother had turned her in again.

"More than anything I wanted to find him," Arnett said of the time she spent in lock-up. "I felt very isolated. During that time, I felt something is really wrong here. I was determined to find him once I was able to."

When she was finally released at age 17, Arnett's mother wanted nothing to do with her. She lived on the streets until age 19.

After Arnett had her own children, the urge to find her father became stronger. She started collecting documents such as medical and school records to find a clue to her father's identity.

Arnett worked with Operation Identity, a Germany-based organization that helps people find their loved ones in Germany. One woman in particular, Leonie Boehmer, helped Arnett attain many records.

Through Operation Identity, Arnett connected through phone calls with her mother's brother, Kurt. Unfortunately, he was unable to help Arnett because her mother had always been a secretive person.

During the next phase of her search, Arnett hit another bump in the road. While seeking documents, from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Arnett discovered that her stepfather and mother had lied on INS documents.

She became an illegal alien overnight.

Her search halted until she could prove to the INS she had lived in the country since she was 2½ years old. Luckily, all the records she had collected helped her secure permanent resident status.

After dealing with the INS, Arnett continued her search for information and continued pestering her stepfather. Then, one night her stepfather let critical information slip.

"I was a very curious person and very persistent," Arnett said. "During one of his drunken bouts, he told me, 'I know he was in the Army because he was stationed right next to me.' "

Armed with new information, Arnett plugged into any genealogical and military resource she could find on the Internet. She posted several notes requesting help from anyone who knew her mother and stepfather between 1953-1958, but received no response.

Then, Arnett had another dream. In the dream, an eagle came down toward her, lifted her up with its talons and dropped her among a group of men. Very hopeful, she woke up and started searching the Internet again.

On May 7, Arnett found GISearch.com. She looked up Sembach Air Base and found a few men posted during the years 1953-1958. She e-mailed each person asking for his help.

His Story Continued

Cochran, who was first stationed at Fort Campbell in 1964, had found many friends through GISearch.com. But when he came home on May 7 to find a message from Sembach in his GISearch.com mailbox, he was torn.

"I just stared at it. I didn't know whether to open it or not," said Cochran, tears welling up in his eyes. "I was hoping it would be good news, as it was. Then I was reluctant because it could have been bad news."

Cochran opened the e-mail and skimmed its contents. Then, he read the entire message. He yelled to his wife, Jackie, and she came running down the stairs thinking something was wrong. He told her that he found his daughter.

In the message, Arnett had listed her personal Web site. Cochran logged on to find out all he could about her. When a picture popped up on the screen, Cochran knew he had found what he was looking for all those years.

"My wife took one look at her and said, 'It's you all over,' " Cochran said.

Cochran never slept that night. He went into work the next morning, but stayed only long enough to explain the situation to his boss.

Anxious, Cochran logged back onto the computer. Because of privacy issues, he was not able to access Arnett's regular e-mail address through GISearch.com. So instead, he went back to Arnett's Web site and looked at entries in her guest book.

One entry gave him the impression the person knew her really well, so he wrote to that person, explained the situation, gave his phone number and asked that person to relay the message to Arnett.

A short time later, the phone rang. The caller ID said Monika Arnett.

For two hours, Cochran and Arnett talked on the phone. "I was so ecstatic," Arnett said of that moment she first heard her father's voice. "I thought, 'What a powerful dream.' "

The First Meeting

Not one single day has passed that the two have not communicated in some form. They have talked on the phone countless times.

Cochran and Arnett e-mailed each other three, sometimes four, times per day. Cochran has kept a folder with all their e-mails in the last month. It measures one-inch thick.

"We are so connected right now that we can read each other's thoughts from a distance," Arnett said.

Their first meeting boiled with emotion.

Cochran, a ball of nerves on the ride to the airport, arrived more than one hour early only to find Arnett's flight delayed.

When the plane finally pulled to the gate, he took a deep breath and walked to the jetway entrance, with Jackie by his side.

Passengers filed off the plane. Cochran moved to the gate counter and peered down the jetway. When he caught a glimpse of his little girl, he bolted for the door.

The two embraced for about three minutes as people gathered around to see what all the commotion was about. Many people around the terminal stared with huge grins an their faces. Some had tears rolling down their cheeks.

Cochran held onto his daughter as if she might be whisked away by the wind if he let go. They walked arm-in-arm away from the gate.

"It just made everything so complete," Arnett said.

Their Story

The Cochran family has grown extensively in a short amount of time. Although they did not come to Clarksville with her, Arnett brings three children and one grandchild into the picture. Cochran brings his wife, their three children and their five grandchildren.

Cochran and Arnett said they are both elated to spend time together.

"I don't believe I've come down from the cloud I've been on," Cochran said.

Cochran and Arnett purposely planned to meet this week to spend Arnett's birthday together.

Cochran plans to visit Arnett and her family in Washington this November.

For now, Cochran and Arnett will spend the week in Clarksville catching up on the 46 years they have missed with one another. They will also have time to further discuss a book they plan to write. The book will offer inspiration and encouragement to others searching for loved ones.

Now that they have found one another, Cochran and Arnett want everyone else to know what they know.

"I guess love is stronger than anything else in the world, isn't it?" Cochran said.

Woman Finds Answers and Questions to a New Life

Lisa Stiffler, P-I Reporter

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SEATTLE, WA (5/14/99)—More than 40 years ago, Fotini Lioliou sent her baby girl Constantia to an orphanage on an island near her village in Greece, with reassurances that the child would be taken care of until her family could provide for her.

Lioliou's husband was ill and she had five other daughters. Greece was in a state of turmoil, trying to rebuild after being occupied by Germany during World War II and a civil war that followed. People were poor and hungry and many large families temporarily gave up their children to aid organizations.

But when Lioliou went to retrieve her daughter about four months later, the orphanage denied ever having the baby.

After decades of frustration and dead-ends, a Greek television show recently helped the Lioliou family find their lost daughter, adopted by a Seattle couple in 1959.

On April 3 this year, the night before Easter, Constantia Lioliou, now 42-year-old Tina Evans of Seattle, came home and heard a stunning message from her teenage son, Nikolas.

"Mom," he said, "I'm going to tell you something that's going to change your life forever."

Nikolas told her that she'd had a phone call from her mother and six sisters living in Greece.

On Easter Sunday, they called again.

"For the first time I got to speak to my family," Evans said. A niece was able to translate for her mother and sisters. Everyone was crying, she said.

Evans told her 75-year-old mother that she loved her, one of the few Greek phrases she knows. They chatted with each other, even though "we didn't understand what the other person was saying."

"It's like we've known each other for a long time," she said. "There's no awkwardness there."

Evans, who had known she was adopted since she was 8 years old, was excited and overwhelmed by the reunion.

Her adoptive parents had shown her photographs of her arrival at Sea-Tac—black-and-white images dated August 1959, of the curly-haired girl, holding a doll and smiling shyly.

Evans' mother, who was Greek, was unable to have children and wanted to adopt a little Greek girl. Tina was the only child of Effie and Morris Wright.

Hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of babies were being adopted from Greece during the 1950s. The poverty and hunger forced many families to put their children up for adoption and other children were abandoned by mothers giving birth out of wedlock.

The majority of adoptions were legal, but some babies were stolen and sold on the black market.

Katerina Lagos, a New York University doctoral candidate who has studied modern Greek history, has heard horror stories of mothers who gave birth, were told that their baby was stillborn and were never shown a body. The infants were taken by doctors who had arrangements with lawyers to sell the babies for adoption.

Amalia Balch of Mesa, AZ., who was adopted by an American family after being stolen as an infant from her unwed Greek mother, has worked for 12 years helping others find their relatives.

"Planeloads and shiploads of kids were adopted," said Balch, who has met some of her Greek family. "People could hardly afford to feed themselves, let alone another child."

Evans doesn't know whether her adoptive parents knew that she was wrongfully taken from Greece. Both are deceased and were unwilling to talk much about her adoption before they died. She believes the adoption was arranged privately through a lawyer.

At the age of 11, in the seat of her adoptive parents' piano bench, Evans found documents with her Greek name and information about her parents and birthplace in Greece. She tried to find the tiny village on a map, but could not.

Years passed and in her mid-20s, Evans worked at the Woodland Park Inn Restaurant. She told her story to Louie Apostolou, the inn's Greek owner, and showed him the documents she'd found. He offered to call the president of her family's village and ask for family members.

"They were very quick to deny me there was such a name in the community," Apostolou said. He doesn't know if they were covering something up or there was a valid explanation for the suspicious behavior.

Today, Evans believes the news of her call filtered down to her family in Greece and gave them continued hope to track her down.

Earlier this year, a Greek embassy official called the family home, and insisted on speaking to one of Evans' parents. Her father confirmed that his daughter had been adopted from Greece, and nothing more was said.

Shortly after the call, Evans' family in Greece contacted her.

On April 11, Evans' birthday and the day that the Greek Orthodox church celebrates Easter, Evans called her family in Greece. Her family got on the phone, and collectively sang "Happy Birthday" to her.

Just as she began to explore connections with her new family, her adoptive father died. Evans says she is still struggling with both his death and her newfound family. She plans to travel to Greece sometime.

For now, letters and phone calls will have to suffice.

Evans said she felt alone before finding her Greek family, that she didn't feel like she belonged.

"Here I thought I'd hatched from an egg," she said.

She marvels at her family's perseverance. On his deathbed, her Greek father commanded the family to continue their search for the missing one.

Their break came when one of the sisters went to a Greek television station and asked them to tell the family's story.

Following the Greek government's decision several years ago to open files with information about adoptions, the station has been broadcasting a program that features re-enactments of adoption cases.

In a letter to Evans, her Greek family tells her she was lucky to grow up in America. She wonders what life would have been like if she had stayed in Greece.

"My life would have been much different," she said. "It would have been much simpler."

The Lioliou's are a very loving family, she said. "I missed out on that."

But if she had grown up in Greece, she wouldn't have met her now-deceased husband and had her two children, she reasoned.

"You'd be missing out on something on either end."

New Law Provides Automatic Citizenship to Foreign-Born Children Adopted by Americans

WASHINGTON, DC (10/13/00) (AP)—Children adopted from abroad and other foreign-born children of American parents will receive automatic U.S. citizenship under legislation Congress has passed and sent to the president.

The legislation, which passed the House last month and the Senate late Thursday, would confer automatic and retroactive citizenship, on all foreign-born children who are under the age of 18, admitted to the U.S. as lawful permanent residents and are in the legal and physical custody of at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen.

"After what these parents have been through in bringing their children to the United States, the naturalization process is an extra burden they shouldn't have to bear," said Rep. Bill Delahunt, D-Mass., a chief sponsor.

"More than 15,000 foreign-born children are adopted by U.S. families every year," said Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., a Senate sponsor. "They shouldn't be buried under a mountain of red tape just because they've opened their homes and their lives to these children."

Delahunt said the legislation would also prevent the consequences of a 1996 immigration law where non-citizens are subject to mandatory deportation for committing certain crimes even if they have lived in the U.S. since infancy and have no ties to the country where they were born.

[The law took effect on Feb. 27, 2001.]