A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



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On the Use of Being Left by One's Mother at Birth

by Claudia Guderian

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When my mother decided to put me up for adoption, my head had just been born. My shoulders and the rest of my body were still inside my mother's body.

She asked for an anaesthetic so she would not hear my first sounds and thereby weaken in her decision. When I was completely born I was put into a ward of newborns. There I was bottle-fed, not breast-fed, as was still customary in 1952. My mother, now at a gynecological ward on the floor above, always felt her milk come in when she heard the newborns scream for their mothers every four hours. It was very painful for her to feel the milk shoot into her breasts, and she suffered a great deal, as she told me twenty-five years later.

I have reason to believe that my mother was not the only one who suffered in those moments. I am not in touch with the newborn child I was then, yet I suppose that I, too, suffered a lot. Decades later I played the situation again in a psychodrama group. Since I am not the only one in the world who went through this experience I am asking the reader to imagine the following: How does a newborn child feel who, for nine months, had her home in the middle of the familiar sound of her mother's voice as well as the swaying and the movement of her mother, who also knew her father from her mother's intimacies with him and knew her grandmother as well, for it was with her where her mother sought refuge before her birth. Then, suddenly, she is exposed to the contractions of the birth which press her from her familiar surroundings into a world in which eyes get to see something. But this world lacked everything the old world had: her mother's swaying, the splashing of the water around her, her mother's voice and the endless conversations they had had together when mother would sing to her and tell her about her life. She told me later that the pregnancy was the happiest time of her life.

I was in a classical Robinson situation. I was suddenly in a different world, one that had accompanied me hitherto, and all who had been with me, or rather everything that had constituted my world had now disappeared. Pain about this loss falls over the soul of each such newborn child like a black veil. He does not understand the world any more, for a child is not born blind, deaf and daft. He is individualized after an extremely vivid exchange with his mother. He is used to sending her messages either by beating or by stretching or by moving around happily or by sleeping inside her and communicating with her in every imaginable way. And now, suddenly, the world around him (her/me) has exploded. It has vanished. I am trying to understand the catastrophe.

There I lie, just born and yet in the world for so long, and fail to understand the world. Every four hours someone picks me up, and they stick a teat with a bottle of milk attached to it into my mouth. My cot is always made up nicely, with white pillows and freshly-ironed sheets and covers whose sharp folds make precise shadows. But the voice is gone. I only know that much: *the* voice is gone. I am lying in my cot and awaiting the voice. I am lying there, listening. I am lying there, crying. Crying does not help. People with agitated voices come and jabber at me. Amongst all that I know that she will come back. She has got to come back. And, really.

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Search Journal

by Jim Sweeney

My name is Jim Sweeney and I was born in Wurtzburg, Germany on April 12 , 1960. Never in my first 40 years of life did I consider searching for my birth parents or tracing my roots. It seems strange that I would wait so long to begin a search. Some adoptees wait until their adoptive parents pass away to begin a search; others start a search when they begin their own families. The reason for my waiting so long is really quite simple: I just never knew that I was adopted.

In August of 2000, my mother told me that I was adopted. It was a shock to say the least. I thought she had gone crazy telling me this. I did not believe her. It was not until she handed me the adoption papers that I knew it was true. I was 40 years old at the time that I first learned of my adoption.

Never during my childhood did I ever consider this. Believe me when I write that this was more than a total surprise to me. I even looked like my adoptive father; although I was slightly taller, we had the same dark hair, green eyes and dark complexion. People often commented on how much we looked alike. I'm not sure if this made my father feel proud or that he was secretly laughing inside at them. I'll never get the chance to ask him or joke with him about all those people who made those comments. I wonder what he would say. Unfortunately he died before I was told of my adoption.

Every day since my adoptive mother told me of my adoption I thought of my birth mother and birth father. I often stared in the minor and wondered what they looked like. I often wondered why I was given up for adoption. I recall trying to read the adoption papers written in German and staring at the signature of my birth mother. What was she like? The only information I had was the name and address of my birth mother at the time of my adoption in 1960. My adoptive mother only knew that my birth mother was single at the time of my birth and my birth father was an American serviceman.

Many sleepless nights were spent wondering about my birth parents and the circumstances that led to my adoption. Did I have any brothers or sisters? Did my birth mother have any regrets after leaving the hospital? Did she ever think about me in the past 40 years? Did she get to hug me, or kiss me before I was taken away?

After learning of my adoption, I spent many nights in front of the computer trying to research

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

the name and surfing the Internet to get any kind of information. I found many websites on the subject of adoption and how to conduct a search for a birth parent. However, I found very little information which was actually beneficial in my case. I then came across the *Geborener Deutscher* newsletter and contacted William Gage, who then referred me to Leonie Boehmer, a researcher who specializes in helping German-born adoptees. All those sleepless nights surfing the web finally seemed to be paying off. This was the first time I felt some progress.

I wrote to Leonie with all my information. Every few weeks Leonie would E-mail me on her progress. Leonie traced the name through several moves in different towns. Then finally she was able to find my birth mother's current address. Leonie called me with the news. What a shock! I was elated!

Leonie recommended that I write my birth mother and made a few suggestions regarding what should be included in the letter. I couldn't thank her enough for all she had done. It took a few days to get my thoughts together then I finally decided to write my first letter to my birth mother. After writing and rewriting my letter several times, I finally sent the copy to Leonie who translated it into German and sent it on its way. I anxiously awaited a reply from my birth mother, each day checking the mail and wondering if a letter would ever come.

I received a phone call on New Year's Day 2001 from my birth mother. What a way to start the year. She spoke very little English, and I could only speak limited German. She was happy to hear from me and informed me that a letter and a photo of her would be arriving in the mail shortly.

Again more waiting but the letter finally arrived. This was the first time I was actually able to see what my birth mother looked like. I was so excited. In the letter she wrote me that she had a daughter from a previous marriage and was single when she was pregnant with me. She had plans to move back to her hometown but knew she couldn't possibly take care of two children by herself and felt her parents would not accept her back knowing of my birth. She moved back to her hometown and then eventually moved to Munich, where she is today.

Knowing my birth mother spoke very little English, I began taking a German class so that I could speak with her. Growing up, my adoptive grandmother lived with us and spoke only German, but after she passed away most of my German was forgotten.

My birth mother and I again had another phone conversation and she promised to write a long letter. I waited and waited but the letter never arrived. I wondered if she could have had a change of heart. Did I scare her? Was she unsure, was everything happening to fast?

I could wait no longer for her letter. I wrote her a long letter but the letter came back unopened and marked "acceptance refused." I was devastated. How could she return the letter without even reading it? Perhaps it was wishful thinking but I thought it might have been her roommate that returned the letter. I was not even sure that she saw the letter.

My next step was to phone her. I called her but before I even got a chance to say, "Please do not hang up," she hung up on me. I wondered what I had done wrong. I was so close. Did I blow it? Why was I being rejected? I needed an explanation on why this sudden change of heart. I would not give up now, but what else could I do? She would not read my letters or answer my telephone calls?

I know this goes against all theories about reunions but I had no other choice. If I truly wanted to meet my mother and was willing to accept rejection, I had to go to Germany. The next day I booked a flight to Munich, Germany. I chose a hotel which was located only a short walk from her apartment.

After checking into my room, I could do nothing else until I saw where my birth mother lived. I located her street and walked by her apartment and checked the names on the apartment directory and there it was. I made plans to return the next day.

Suffering from jet lag and sheer nervousness of the whole situation, that night I got very little sleep. The next day I bought a bouquet of flowers and a card. On the card I wrote that I would be in Munich for a few days and hoped she would call me. As I walked to her building many thoughts entered my mind. What if I couldn't get into her building? What if she wasn't home? Did I travel all this way for nothing? Then my plans were brought to a halt. As I turned the corner to approach her building, there she stood. She was standing face to face with me. My timing was perfect. I knew it was she from the photo she had sent me.

She stared speechless at me as I called her name. I gave her the flowers and asked her to please read the card. She said she would but had to go because she had a doctor's appointment. She went back into her apartment to put the flowers in a vase. As I watched her walk away, I wondered if she would call or would this be the last time I saw her? The rest of the day I toured the city of Munich alone and enjoyed the city as much as I could given the circumstances.

She called me that evening and we made plans to meet later that night. We talked a great deal and I learned that her second letter had been returned to her; apparently she had made a mistake with my address. She thought I had returned her letter and she was angry that the letter was returned. She made up her mind that she wanted to end any and all communication with me, and to forget that I existed; as she was told to do forty years earlier. It turned out to be more of a misunderstanding than anything else. We spent a great deal of time together that week and got along quite well. She and her boyfriend showed me the sights of Munich and she even took me to her hometown to meet her sister.

Since my visit to Germany I speak often with my birth mother. Her boyfriend even came to visit my family for a week in November and I hope she will be able to come visit next summer. I'm looking forward to showing her where I grew up and showing her the sights of Boston.

Because she is not as comfortable with my adoption as myself, I am not including her name in my story, as she requested. For now our reunion photo ***CONTINUED ON PAGE 4, COLUMN 3***

Stone Soup *by Jan Eliot*

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On the Use of Being Left by One's Mother at Birth

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Three weeks later she is there.

Twenty-five years after that my father tells me: "We always went to visit you in the babies' home. I wanted her to pick you up so badly, but she did not want to touch you. She said if ever she touched your skin she would not be able to let go of you again." My father was a good photographer and took photos of his youngest daughter which he gave me twenty-five years later.

I hear her voice. I know that at last she has come. We look into each other's eyes. I wrinkle my forehead. My face says: *Where on earth have you been? I have been waiting for you. Why are you so late? I need you.* She is talking to me. At last she is with me again, this voice. The voice. It is the voice of my life. And whatever was frozen inside me melts in these afternoon hours, and I smile up at her in utter bliss. My father is taking photos. We flirt like lovers, my mother and I. Now everything is fine. She is there. And then, suddenly, she is gone again. This dreadful quiet envelops me. I cannot move by myself. This dreadfully heavy head of mine prevents me from being able to see where she has gone. She just went away. And I have to remain lying down, with my heavy body which keeps me from being with her. I hate this body. I hate this heavy head. If only I did not have it I could be with her.

Now I have to lie again and wait. Oh, it was so good to be with her. How we laughed. I was a totally different human being. I have never laughed in my short life outside her body. I do not understand where she is. I need her. How can I laugh without her? And, what is the worst: she has melted away the protective crust around my heart, and now my soul is lying there exposed to this dreadful silence and this cold. They pierce me like iron needles, stitch by stitch, sardonic, scornful.

I have to have my protective ice coat back again as soon as possible. I cry, I scream, but I know: that will not make her come back. My screaming aches in my throat. My tears wet my shirt, my chest. But they do not make her come back. I am lying in my cot as if I was a corpse, and slowly this pleasant cold comes creeping back over me. It creeps up from my toes, climbing up my legs, those curved skinny, useless little legs, and then covers my body with its cold coat. Thus I am lying and waiting, holding my breath so I will not melt this comforting cold, and when I have waited long enough she will, of course, come back and laugh with me. My God, won't that be funny.

In the meantime, I am lying there in Sleeping Beauty's slumber.

Thirty years later I learn this: amongst my ancestors there were men who coined the intellectual life of Berlin in rising a Prussia since the end of the 17th century. My ancestor # 2000, David Ancillon, a protestant pastor who had fled from Metz, France, because of the annihilation of the Edicte of Nante which guaranteed religious freedom, founded the French Grammar School in Berlin in the late 1600s, now more than 300 years old. His son Charles became a judge in Berlin and director of the Berlin French Colony. Later he founded the Brandenburg Society (which later became the Prussian Academy) of Science. David Ancillon's great grandson Jean Pierre Frédéric was a Prussian statesman and since 1810 was the teacher of what later became the Prussian King Frederic William IV. From 1832 to 1837 he was the Prussian Foreign Minister.

It is their blood that runs in my veins, too. They were refugees who could start a new life in Mark Brandenburg. I know nothing about that. I only know that my life has ceased to exist. My world had existed for a short while, and now it has disappeared. When all tears have been cried and my heart has reached the comfortable state of petrification in which no pain can easily move me to new tears, I am building my new world. I am in exile. Everything around me I have to explain myself. I find life very strenuous.

Two months after my birth my parents' visits have stopped. My mother, as she explained 25 years later, could no longer bear the farewells. I am lying there, waiting. My hands are grasping the feather quilt that is lying on me—flattening me. They are desperately searching for the customary touch. There is not even the umbilical cord whose pulsating would always comfort me. I am as alone as any man can be. I have no language to talk to them although my intellect is searching frantically for sounds, for syllables, for sense. I have no legs to look for her. I cannot even lift my head in my petrification. I am lying rigidly and do not twitch for to do so would be to reawaken the pain inside me whose tears would drown me if only it came back.

This is how, months later, my adoptive parents to be find me. At nine months, I still cannot raise my head let alone sit up. They are taking me with them. I smile at them encouragingly. I had no choice. I needed a face to look into, needed a patient mouth to speak those syllables which my brain alone cannot invent. These new people praise me. I smile. I have learnt: If I smile, they will stay longer. The smiling does not touch the permafrost coat around my heart.

I grow. I learn rapidly. After one week I can sit up by myself, after another one I begin to talk. I am cramming in words like mad. I learn to walk. On my first birthday, I can walk. The new family is content with their *offspring*.

Twenty years later. I now know that I am adopted. I know I had to wait nearly a year until somebody looked after me properly. I have attended a classical grammar school. Language fascinates me—totally fascinates me. But a whole part of myself is blocked off, as if a complete section of my brain was cut out. I have great difficulties understanding the knowledge of certain domains. Anything connected with the topic *loss of parents* I fail to understand. I just cannot remember novels in which children are disowned, from Hansel and Gretel up to Oedipus. Yet I grow up. I read René Spitz, a psychoanalyst in Denver, Colorado. He has, in 1967, done research on the syndrome of hospitalism: children, mainly orphans, who spend the first year of their lives without their parents, in a hospital, show strange symptoms. They rock around in an attempt to comfort themselves, they have this

Buckles *by David Gilbert*

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blank look and this frozen coat around them. And I wonder: am I a case of hospitalism?

I go to university. I study politology (because I want to find out who rules over whom in the world and how), English, Russian, philosophy (because endless pondering, going from the unnecessary to the ridiculous, seems an integral part of my thinking process), law (who rules over whom and with what means?) and psychology (what are the inner processes that really form our decisions?). I practice various professions.

First, I become a teacher. Then, a journalist. I begin to write books. I work as the media representative of the German society of Psychoanalysts. I get to know three thousand psychoanalysts, and some of them have taken up René Spitz's thread and done research on the question as to what damage is done if a child is disowned right after birth. Ludwig Janus in Heidelberg is one of them. Robert Emde in Denver, Colorado, is another. The common opinion is that such an early loss damages a child badly in his development. Yet I do not feel damaged. I think something must have happened in those first nine months up to my adoption. I am puzzled.

Then, at an international psychoanalytical congress in 1999, I meet professor Robert Emde from Denver, Colorado, a former student of Prof. Spitz. Here, they are doing systematic research on the effects of early separation of child and mother in terms of psychological development. They measure brain waves, they do long term research. I want to know: in what way was I damaged by being left all to myself in those early months? What scars are there on my soul?

In the course of the evening a big surprise is waiting for me. "Of course it all depends on the personality," Robert Emde says. "But we have found out that amongst those who have lost their mothers very early on, there are extremely many creative personalities."

"How so?" I want to know. "What connection is there between creativity and the separation from one's mother?"

"What children really need," Bob Emde explains, "in this early period, right after birth, is their mother. Through her touch they learn to *touch* the world, to grasp the world, to comprehend. They learn to orientate on their mothers' hands, in their mothers' arms, in looking at their mothers. They build up a system of orientation and by that they know they have nothing to be afraid of as long as mother is near. We say that they experience the world by way of object relations with whom they identify. Their mother is their primary object. Its withdrawal does not stop the thinking and the desire to orientate, but it puts an end to the possibility. So the infant starts to invent the world himself. It does exist. He just has to interpret it. He has to incorporate it into his own body by way of his own effort. And this he learns at that point in his life, for the rest of his life. Whenever he is later confronted with a problem, he has to re-invent the wheel. But he can do it. He has a lot of practice. And if somewhere a solution is needed for a new problem, it is peanuts for the adoptee to find his way through the jungle of thoughts that has never been penetrated."

I am beaming. At long last there is a psychoanalyst who does not just see the pathogenic aspect of being left alone. At last there is one who understands what a great effort we have undertaken at an untimely age: we have not just re-invented the wheel—we have re-invented the world.

And is it not peculiar that for twenty years now I have been working in a creative profession, writing books and textbooks, and all of them have in common that I am finding paths that no one has trodden before me? Who knows, maybe one day I might even be appointed a member of the German Academy, the successor of that Brandenburg Society which my ancestor #1000 founded nearly three hundred years ago.

In a quiet moment I understood, too, that God, who after all gave me this life and did not suffer my leaving my mother's body merely as a secretory droplet, that God has ordered this zigzag course for my life because he had planned to use me for certain projects. In the course of this qualification it was essential to live without my mother and learn to interpret the world without her being my *understanding object,* because otherwise I would never have learnt that.

He probably thought that only thus could I fulfill a useful function within human society. I am glad I have finally understood that.

Perhaps other adoptees have similar experiences? Would anybody like to send in their personal report?

— Hamburg, Sept. 26, 2001

INCOME & EXPENSE SUMMARY FOR 2001

INCOME	
Subscriptions	$ 384.00
Subsidies	400.00
Total Income	$ 784.00
EXPENSES	
Printing	$ 245.39
Postage	191.68
Envelopes (estimated)	6.00
Advertising (running ad in *German Life*)	220.00
Copyright Registration	120.00
Permissions	100.00
Newspaper Database Research	24.50
Total Expenses	$ 907.57
Net Income/(Loss)	$ (123.57)



Claudia Guderian was born in 1952 in Bremen. Following graduation, she worked as a high-school teacher and later as editor at the Gießener Anzeiger. *She has been a freelance author since 1984. She has published radio plays, as well as many stories for children and adults. For her novel,* Kinderheimlich, *she won the C. Bertelsmann Literature Prize.*

Search Journal *cont. fr. pg. 2*

and her name remain only in my adoption scrapbook. However, I am glad with the way things turned out and am glad I persisted.

The search now continues for my birth father. I only have his first name given to my by my birth mother. Hopefully over time she'll remember more and realize how important this is to me. Perhaps in the future, I will be able to add more to this story and include how I found my birth father.

Buckles *by David Gilbert*

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