A Newsletter for German-Born Adoptees



Geborener Deutscher®

Vol. XV, No. 2 *(Issue #55)* *Summer 2002*

We Are Family

Tracing Our Roots Has Gotten Easier with the Help of DNA Tests

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Globe Focus Writer

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BOSTON, MA (6/24/01) – For years, Brian Glennon of North Quincy and a business acquaintance who happened to have the same last name, Tom Glennon of Milford, kiddingly called each other "cousin," even though a check of their family trees showed no overlap.

But both men remained curious about their heritage, so when they were offered a chance to use a new home test that could identify their DNA—and thus determine who, exactly, did belong in their family tree—they took it.

Each swabbed his cheek with Q-tips for DNA material, and sent the swab in to a laboratory for analysis. The response: Their Y-chromosomes scored an identical match on 12 out of 12 items. Somewhere up the ancestry tree, they shared a common male ancestor. They were, in fact, cousins.

"It was fantastic," Brian Glennon said. "We just sort of shook each other's hand and said, 'I'll be damned, we are cousins after all.' "

The Glennons are among the first people to use a recently available commercial service that tests DNA for genealogical purposes—and thus seeks to answer one of the most important questions in anyone's life: Who am I? Or, put another way, where, exactly, did I come from?

In the Glennons' case, the answer exceeded their highest hopes. But as the use of such tests inevitably expands, it is bound to raise many of the same ethical and moral questions that have accompanied the use of DNA testing for other purposes.

Like any use of DNA, which is the nucleic acid that contains the genetic code and transmits one's hereditary pattern, the results might provide unexpected answers. For example, the test could reveal that you are not the biological child of your mother or father. Sisters might not be biological siblings.

Families could be reunited—or torn apart.

"A lot of people could find out they are not related to whom they thought they were," said Robert Tamarin, author of the textbook *Principles of Genetics* and dean of sciences at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. "There is an awful lot of concealed illegitimacy. People are going to find things they don't want to know."

Indeed, in the worst-case scenario, some future Hitler intent on wiping out a group of people could use DNA tests to target his victims.

But supporters of the use of DNA testing for genealogical purposes say the benefits far outweigh the risks, especially if people are genuinely prepared to learn discomfiting information. Brian Glennon never worried. "As far as I am concerned, any answer is a good answer. I never envisioned any negatives at all."

DNA tests have become common in paternity suits and criminal cases, and they are starting to be used more to determine whether an individual carries a gene for everything from breast cancer to Huntington's disease. All of those uses have their own set of ethical issues. But the use of DNA tests for genealogy is so new that even genetics specialists have only recently become aware of it. ***CONT'D ON PAGE 4, COLUMN 1***

THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

Return to Romania Gives Answers, A Goal to Young San Jacinto Man

Ioana Patringenaru

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SAN JACINTO (5/20/01) — When Izidor Ruckel went back to Romania in March, he wanted to find friends and workers from the orphanage where he had spent much of his childhood.

He did. But he also found his biological parents, three sisters and a brother.

"This trip has tremendously changed me," said Ruckel, 20, who lives in San Jacinto and spent four weeks in Romania.

He first left Romania 10 years ago, knowing little about his parents and siblings. He had spent most of his life in an institution for disabled children, where there was little medical attention and workers beat their wards, he said. He was 10 when he was adopted by Marlys and Danny Ruckel, now of Temecula.

In March, he was back in Romania for the first time. An American TV network had paid for his trip and helped him track down his parents.

On March 28, they finally met.

"My mom ran up to me and started crying, hugging me," he said.

Their home in the Romanian countryside is small and narrow with no plumbing or electricity. His father, Izidor Bojani, is a shepherd. His mother, Maria, sells vegetables. His three sisters, Claudia, 24, Maria, 22, and Onisa, 10, live there too. His brother, Mugurel, 18, moved out to look for work.

Right away, Ruckel started asking questions.

He asked how he had contracted the illness that distorted his leg. After six operations, he still has a limp.

His mother said he was infected, along with 40 other children, in a hospital where she had taken him when he was 6 months old. Ruckel's American doctors suspected the illness had been polio.

He also wanted to know how he landed in the institution where the Ruckels had found him.

His parents hinted that it was because of his sickness. ***CONT'D ON PAGE 4, COLUMN 3***

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; and $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.

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WILLIAM LEIS GAGE

Jewish children, shipped to safety

Remembrance: Five who were refugee children of the Holocaust tell the little-known story of America's role.

John Rivera
***Baltimore Sun* Staff**

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Baltimore, MD (4/20/01) – On Jan. 28, 1935, 13-year-old Erich Oppenheim stood before the congregation of his synagogue in the German town of Nentershausen on the day of his bar mitzvah and for the first time publicly read from the Torah.

The next day, he and a younger brother boarded a ship for America to escape Nazi persecution, never to see their parents and two other brothers again.

"Our father settled us in our cabin, blessed us for the last time and left," said a tearful Oppenheim, now 79. "I recall feeling sort of numb and lost."

Oppenheim was one of about 1,000 children clandestinely brought out of wartime Europe to America, where they lived with Jewish foster families. Their stories have largely gone untold, until now.

For the last year, Iris Posner, of Silver Spring, has been documenting the stories of the children and the people who facilitated their rescue. Six million Jews—1.5 million of them children—died at the hands of the Nazis. Posner's interest was piqued by the Academy Award winning-documentary, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, which recounts the rescue of more than 10,000 children to Great Britain.

"That prompted me to ask the question, 'What was the American response?'" said Posner, who has worked as researcher for the National Institutes of Health.

She discovered that 1,000 children were brought into this country between 1934 and 1945 by Jewish relief agencies and found only one book that described it. The campaign was carried on quietly, with the children arriving here mostly in groups of less than 10, for fear that an isolationist and anti-Semitic backlash would bring it to a halt.

"You will not find it in American history books and not in the Holocaust museums," she said. "It is our aim to put it into the history books and into the Holocaust museums."

Posner, along with fellow researcher Lenore Moskowitz, formed One Thousand Children Inc., a nonprofit corporation dedicated to identifying and locating the refugee children—now in their 70s and 80s—and documenting their journeys. Eventually, she hopes to stage a national reunion.

To commemorate Yom Hashoah, the Jewish community's annual remembrance of the Holocaust, five of the one-time child refugees gathered Wednesday to tell their stories at a first-of-its-kind service at Moses Montefiore Anshe Emunah-Liberty Jewish Center, a synagogue in Greenspring.

Erika Danty, who now lives in Arlington, Va., left Germany at age 12 and settled with a family in New York. "My experience does not contain the deep pain and grief so many of our survivors endured, because I was one of the fortunate to be one of the children of the kindertransport," she said.

Still, her family suffered. Her father had lost his job as a traveling salesman and then was diagnosed with cancer. He died in 1934. The situation in Freiburg deteriorated to such a degree that when her family saw an ad in a newspaper about foster family adoption in America, Danty applied and was accepted.

"Little did I know this ad would save me from the agony of the concentration camps and possible death," Danty said. "My mother was glad I was accepted but found it a hardship to let me go."

Michel Margosis was born in Belgium, but when it was attacked, his family fled to France where they hid at a farm in Marseille. When the Nazis seized France, they moved on to Spain. Margosis came to the United States in 1943 and was eventually reunited with his parents here.

"I just wanted to say 'thank you' to this country for being so good and so generous to me," said Margosis, of Springfield, VA.

Trudy Turkel was 14 and living in Germany when her parents arranged for her to join the kindertransport. She traveled with a tennis racket, so if asked, she could say she was on holiday. Turkel boarded the S.S. Hamberg in October 1938 with eight other children, all of whom were seasick during the voyage on rough seas.

"Except for me," Turkel said. "I had a grand time."

She recalls sailing into New York Harbor.

"There was nothing more thrilling in the morning than seeing that Statue of Liberty there," said Turkel, now of Ellicott City. "To this day, when I see it, I remember the day I arrived."

Thea Lindauer also remembers the transport as a happy time, despite being separated from her family. She left Germany in 1934, arriving in the United States on Thanksgiving Day.

"All I could think was, 'Oh, boy! I'll go to the United States, and I'll be in Hollywood!" she said.

Lindauer was put on a train and taken to Illinois, where she was greeted by a doctor and his wife, who had a brand new Shirley Temple doll for her. She liked her foster family so much that she remained with them, even after her family arrived from Germany.

Years later, Lindauer, now of Annapolis, admitted to feeling some guilt over her good fortune at having escaped the fate of the children who died and those who suffered in the concentration camps.

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Buckles *by David Gilbert*

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Briefe

(LETTERS FROM READERS)

06/26/2002

Dear Leonie,

I am finally able to send in what has transpired with the search for my Mother.

There is a special bond for those of us who are adopted. Not all of us want to go through the search for our birth parents. But, if there is an emptiness that grows within, then one should finally give in and do a search. The empty feeling becomes a host of emotions ranging from curiosity to depression. My empty hole in my heart just seemed to grow with age. Eventually it was too much to take and I had to seek out resources to find my birth mother.

I began my search by myself, to no avail. I looked for every person with my last name in the city where my mother was born and came up with a few possible matches, but was too afraid of the response. So, I looked for someone who had far more experience and connections in international adoptions. I was pretty proficient on searching the web, so I started reading the success stories of other adoptee children, as well as the searchers themselves. Two names kept coming up with tremendous success and gratitude, William L. Gage and Leonie Boehmer. Some people could not thank them enough and others were just happy at the work and efficiency of them both. This led me to contact them and see if the could find information on my birth mother.

I had always known about my adoption. My parents never kept it a secret and my mom always told me to pray for my birth mother and to love her. I was pretty independent growing up, but at times I would hit my parents with some tough questions about my mother, like what did she look like and where is she? They had always supported a search early in life and as I got older that still supported it and even encouraged it for medical reasons as well as curiosity. I began my journey into the unknown emotions that I had and finally gave into the empty spot in my heart.

My initial fear was of the unknown, of course. The "what if's" and "how come's" began to dominate after my first call to Leonie and we spoke, but she was very understanding, yet professional. She won me over immediately and I had a feeling of complete trust in her ability to at least attempt to get me the information I needed, little did I know, how much information would come out.

The majority of German families tend not to move to far from their birthplace, yet as the look for my mother proceeded, she was doing just the opposite. She had moved to several different cities within Germany, cities like Hamburg and Kiel. Leonie had her work cut out for her, but never gave up. She presented me with each new clue and was always encouraging. I needed the encouragement, since in the pit of my stomach I was having an internal emotional war. So much of my childhood in Germany with my adopted parents seemed to flood back to me. I began to feel a tug of loyalties between the woman who gave birth to me and the parents who raised me. I began to have doubt and at times thought of calling off the search, but the empty hole in my heart would not let me. I knew in the deep recesses of my mind that it was time to give the acknowledgment of love and thanks to the woman who gave birth to me.

As time went on, about 6 months, I began to wonder if I would hear anything more from Leonie. The search seemed to hit a dead spot. Leonie was still optimistic in getting results, but I began to wonder if my birth mother was even alive. Then I got the email, the all mighty email that says, "Mission accomplished," and I had the biggest fear I had ever come across. I had an address in Hamburg. The most current address, the address that would be the entryway to a new journey in life. Was I ready? Could I go through with sending a letter and photo of myself to this stranger? I had never been so scared in all my life. This was it and once I sent out the letter there was no turning back.

I admit that I took some time to think on it. Several weeks passed by and finally I got the courage to write a simple note. It was short, but it conveyed my love and thanks. I fought over which photo to send and finally let someone else pick it because I was just plain stalling out. The package was sent to Leonie, who was kind enough to translate it to German, since my command of the language was awful now. Leonie made it clear that I needed to keep up my lessons. I am getting better now. Once the package was mailed it was out of my hands. It was in the mail, and there is no turning back. Now begins the waiting game.

I did not care for the waiting game. It was long, hard and I was an emotional wreck. I gave it two weeks to get there and after that I started to loose it. I found myself scared to check the mail and would jump when the phone rang. One month went by, then two. I began to get disheartened. I know I said I just wanted to tell her thank you and get medical records, but I know I was lying to myself. I wanted more, and I wanted answers to life long questions. Then the day came, the reply had arrived after almost three months of waiting.

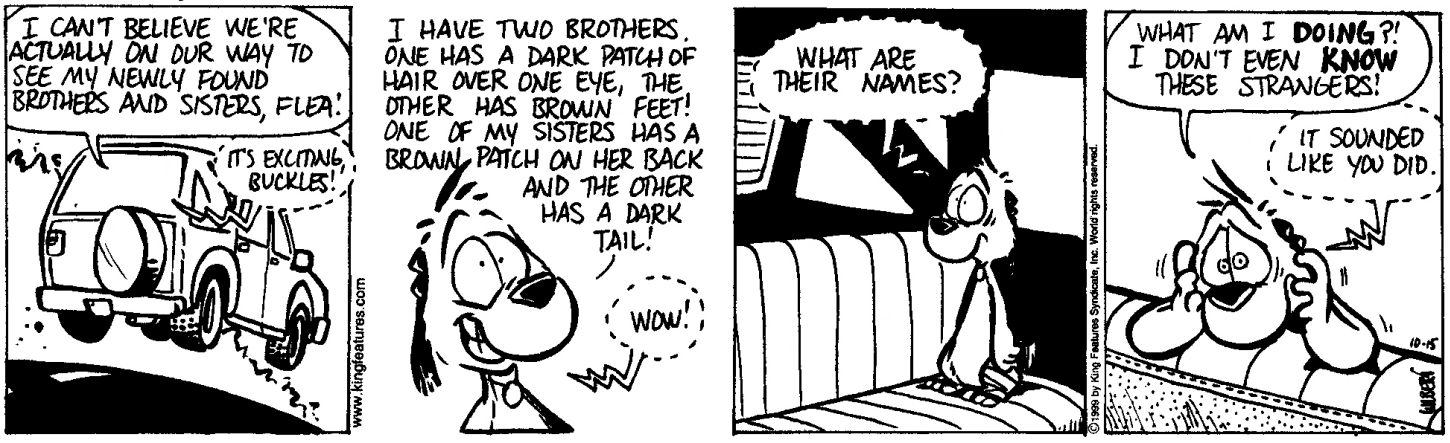
I turned on my computer and checked my mail. I saw her name, my mother's name on the screen and felt my heart stop. I read it, I read it again. I cried and called family members to give the good news, she too wanted to start to communicate and become close. The reason it took so long was because they were working in Israel and a death in the family brought them home to Hamburg. By chance Mother got my letter. I was on top of the universe. I was literally out of my mind with happiness, and you know, the empty spot stated to disappear. We wrote back and forth, and I learned of a wonderful Mother, new family and a new awesome step-father. We have since been in contact constantly whether calling or writing. We are also trying to plan a reunion at this time.

I know that not everyone will have the same results as I did. Sometimes people either don't find the parent or even get rejected. I was willing to take that chance. If it had not been for Leonie Boehmer and William Gage, I could not have gotten this far. God bless them and their great work. I wish you the best of success on your current and future searches.

— Pam Johnson (kunert10@go.com)

Buckles *by David Gilbert*

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We Are Family

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Until just a year ago, you would have had to be part of a scientific research project to obtain such a DNA test.

That changed after Bennett Greenspan, a Texas real estate broker, tried to conduct a DNA test to determine whether he was related to someone in Argentina. Greenspan tracked down a researcher who was conducting DNA tests to determine the migration patterns of Jews in Eastern Europe. Greenspan asked the researcher how to get his own DNA tested for genealogical purposes. Greenspan was told that no commercial service was available.

So Greenspan, sensing a business opportunity, created a company called FamilyTreeDNA, which conducts its tests in conjunction with the University of Arizona. (At least one other company, GeneTree of San Jose, Calif., also performs the service.) So far about 1,000 people have used the FamilyTreeDNA tests, primarily Jews seeking affirmation of their heritage. As word has slowly spread about the service on the Internet, members of other ethnic groups, including the Irish, have begun to use it.

In the case of the Glennons, the interest in the DNA test came from Clarke Glennon of Merion, Pa., who for years has tried to track down other family members. But, like many genealogists, he was stymied by missing records and unclear family connections. When Glennon heard about the availability of DNA testing, he tracked down people with the same last name and asked if they would be interested in participating in a family study. So far, 10 Glennons have accepted the proposal, including Brian and Tom from Massachusetts.

Thomas Glennon, who works for Verizon in Boston, said it was "kind of scary" that "this all comes from saliva." But, he said, it has been a "fantastic" experience. "Knowing all of this, you get closer to where you came from. When you go back to Ireland, it is almost like you never left."

Clarke Glennon, who is overseeing the reconstruction of the family tree, said the work was especially important for Irish-Americans.

"Because of the destruction of the Irish culture and language and religion and records, most people looking for Irish family records run into a brick wall in the 1800s," Clarke Glennon said. "The DNA helps us tell if people that we don't really know are closely related."

Glennon was referring to a variety of laws that were intended to deprive Ireland's Roman Catholics of their vote, religion, language, and civil rights. That was followed by the famine that began in 1845 and ushered in an era of emigration to North America, Australia, and elsewhere. The combination meant that many vital records were lost, making it much more difficult for many Irish-Americans to reconnect with their relatives in Ireland.

Many other ethnic groups have similar reason to use the tests. Jews, for example, are often stymied by the failure of government officials in 19th-century Europe to properly record their ancestors' presence in various records. People who believe they have some Native American blood often find it difficult to determine tribal relationships. Many genealogists simply find that their trail goes cold.

Californian Doug Mumma, who has a database of 46,000 relatives, is widely recognized as one of the trailblazers in the use of DNA for genealogy. Mumma coordinated testing of many potential relatives, eventually determining that his DNA was a perfect match with some people named Momma in Germany. But Mumma also has seen the downside of the tests; one of his potential relatives found out that he wasn't a Mumma at all.

"It was a little devastating to him," Mumma said. "You always thought that was your surname, then someone tells you you are not a Mumma, it kind of takes a little of the breath out of you. That happens as a result of adoption" and people who have had a child out of wedlock.

To determine whether two people are related, each typically swabs the inside of his cheek, enabling a series of DNA "markers" to be produced, typically the "Y" chromosome that determines male ancestry. If those markers match up identically, then the two people are almost certainly related. If Y markers do not match, then the two do not share the biological father. Some more complicated tests can also be used to determine female ancestry.

But for an individual who does not have any idea of his or her ancestry or potential relatives, the task is much more complicated. Many African-Americans, for example, do not know where in Africa their ancestors lived. Terrence Charmichael, president of GeneTree, said that he expects to get a growing number of inquiries from blacks who may be able to determine at least a general outline of their family's heritage.

Indeed, a series of studies are underway to try to provide a general genetic blueprint of mankind's migration patterns. If the studies are successful, a DNA test could determine that people with certain characteristics came from certain areas of the world.

Taking the DNA test does not assure a match; sometimes one simply does not exist. Greenspan has spent months trying to determine whether he is related to other Greenspans in the United States, including Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. So far, he has collected DNA from eight other Greenspans, but none matches his own.

The Glennons, meanwhile, are planning a family reunion on Cape Cod next month—one that will be much bigger than originally planned.

Michael Kranish can be reached by e-mail at *kranish@globe.com.*

Romania

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He asked whether they knew what living in the institution had been like.

"It was like living in hell," he told them.

They said they didn't know.

During the reunion his parents asked him to live with them, Ruckel said, but he declined. He was bothered by the way they called him "poor thing" all the time, he said.

But talking to them helped him come to terms with his experience.

"Everything happened for a reason," he said. "I wouldn't have been in the United States otherwise."

Soon after seeing his biological family, he visited the institution in Sighetu Marmatiei, a city near Romania's borders with Hungary and Ukraine, to spend Easter with his friends.

He had come to Romania believing conditions in the institution had changed. The truth, he found out, was a little more complex.

Some workers had benefited from training provided by Dutch and German organizations, but others have stuck to the old ways. Some children had good clothes, other didn't. They had toys, but the food still had a foul taste, he said.

Ruckel discovered other problems. After they turn 18, the disabled orphans go to a "senior" home, where they slowly waste away, he said.

He saw the results firsthand on a friend, Anita Lingurar, who lived at the home, had lost a lot of weight and barely ate.

"If I'm going to die, I want to die at home," she told him.

After his return home three weeks ago, Ruckel said his resolve to start an organization to help Romanian orphans became stronger.

He wants to raise money to buy food and clothes for the orphans and to supervise delivery of the goods. He also wants to build a shelter for the disabled children and another for the disabled adults, where they would get job training.

"I'm willing to do anything to start this," he said.

Remembrance

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"For a long time, it made it uncomfortable," she said. "Why wasn't I punished? Why didn't I have to go through that? I wasn't any more religious."

For that reason, "I have dedicated my life to making it easier for people," she said.

Of the five Oppenheim children, three escaped Germany through the kindertransport programs—Erich came to America with his brother Manfred. Their sister Berta, now of Baltimore, was taken to England.

But Erich Oppenheim felt anguish over the years. He recalls that he began receiving letters from his parents in 1938, three years after he arrived in America.

"They were urging us to find someone to put up bond to bring them over," he said. "We could not find anyone. It was so upsetting to be so powerless.

"After 1941, the letters stopped," he said.

It would be nearly a quarter century before he could bring himself to recite kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, for his parents.