

DOUBLE REUNION Continued

importantly, to have a medical history. Visits to doctors invariably left crucial questions unanswered. No, I was forced to tell them, I don't know if my mother or father had a history of high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer or tuberculosis. Not only was I concerned for myself, I was more concerned for any unborn children. Would they be affected by some genetic disorder that only a family history could provide?

As an only child, I had no brothers or sisters to compare myself to in terms of physical resemblance. My [adoptive] mother and I looked nothing alike, but even in natural circumstances that is not so unusual. On the other hand, my [adoptive] father and I resembled each other slightly. Maybe it sounds silly, but I wanted to look like someone I knew. My friends did, and their questioning stares too often provoked an explanation that I eventually became used to giving. I was adopted.

I was nearly 11 years old when my father told me my natural mother's first name—Josephine. I already knew I was born in Munich, the product of a German woman and a



At a Munich cemetery, Ms. Reiser shows her daughter graves of her maternal relatives.

Black soldier. I knew my adoptive mother had the original birth records and adoption documents. But I also knew she would never show them to me. Was it out of meanness, or the fear that I would not love her and my father as much if I met my natural parents? It was several years later before I realized she only wanted to spare me the excruciating

pain of being rejected by natural parents—an experience all too common among adopted children.

Shortly after finding out my natural mother's first name, I got a glimpse of my original birth certificate and found that my last name had been Reiser, Doris Elisabeth Reiser. At last I had a clue, but I was much too young to begin a search.

So I was forced to live with the obsession for several years. By the time I reached my early 20's, I started to worry that time was running out. I had no idea how old Josephine was when I was born, and now more than 24 years had passed.

In the meantime, I had been busy working on a successful broadcasting career in New York City. I knew I was in a good position to make the contacts I would need. What I didn't realize was that, with the information I had, Josephine was literally only a phone call away. My adoptive parents' marriage, however, was not as successful, and they divorced in 1966. Each eventually remarried. My mother lived in Detroit. My father retired from the Air Force in Omaha, Neb., and went on to become a Baptist minister.

If there were any lessons I learned during my search, one was not to depend on friends to do the work I should have done myself. With all of the information I had, I could have found Josephine by simply calling Munich telephone information. During all of this time she had never moved and was listed in the Munich telephone directory. Instead,



Saddened by thought of separating again, newly reunited mother and daughter appear in somber mood as Ms. McMillon prepares to board return flight to the United States.

DOUBLE REUNION Continued

whenever friends went to Munich, I asked them to check the phone book for me. Apparently they didn't take me seriously, because no one ever found her number. As a result, the search was prolonged by at least six years.

About my father. I knew absolutely nothing about him, but *wasn't concerned*. I believed that if I found my mother, my father would be easy to find.

And as fate would have it, the pieces started to fall into place, but the circumstances were tragic. In August, 1981, my adoptive mother called me from Detroit. She told me she had breast cancer and was going into the hospital for surgery. The operation was on Aug. 17. On Oct. 5, my husband, Dr. Raphael Bazin, came to WABC-TV shortly after my last morning newscast. He broke the news to me. My adoptive mother was dead. The only mother I'd ever known was dead.

What hurt most was that I didn't get a chance to speak to her before she died. Following her surgery I would call her every Monday morning at 7:00 a.m. before she left for chemotherapy treatments, but that morning I didn't get a chance. She died around 6:30.

Though grief stricken, I had an eerie feeling that my life was about to undergo several drastic changes. I was going to have to adjust to the fact that my mother was no longer alive, but I also wanted more than ever to find the woman who had given birth to me. I asked myself how I could even think of a thing like that when my mother had just died. I was torn. I felt terribly guilty, but the desire to know won out and I began searching again, actively.

I didn't have to look far. My stepfather, James Murphy, gave me the attaché case containing all of my mother's personal papers. The information I'd been seeking was finally before me in a small plastic bag. My heart began to pound. I read the first few lines of my adoption papers: This day, the 11th of March in the year 1953, Miss Josephine Reiser consents that Doris E. Reiser be adopted. There were lots of papers, written in German and English. I couldn't read them fast enough, but I kept going over her name, address and birthdate. I



Back in the United States in her 14-room Kingspoint, Long Island (N.Y.) home, Ms. McMillon reflects on the recent events — finding two of the most important persons in her life.

found pictures, too. I studied every detail, burning each picture into my brain. At last, more clues to my past. I was hungry, I wanted more.

Again, I was torn. The guilt was becoming very strong. Mom was dead but my father was still alive. Would he be hurt if I completed my search? He and I have always been very close. I always talked to him about everything. Why should this be different? He knew I was curious about my past and never discouraged me from finding out whatever I could. Still, I didn't want to hurt

him and somehow I felt this would.

With the new information, I wrote a letter to the United States Consulate in Munich on Oct. 22, 1981. I explained my situation and requested help. At the same time I called Hal Walker, an ABC correspondent in Bonn, and explained my situation to him. I gave both sources all the information I had. Hal told me that, with any luck, he'd have a birthday present for me. He didn't have it by Nov. 6 when I turned 30, but on Nov. 9 he telephoned to tell me that he

DOUBLE REUNION Continued

thought he'd found Josephine. He wanted to be certain. Did I have a birthdate? I did. That was all he needed.

Another call confirmed it. He had found her. Hal gave me her address and telephone number in Munich. Would you believe I asked him what I should do? Of course, the answer was obvious—call her. I didn't. I was scared. What I did worked out a lot better. I gave Josephine's phone number to a close friend who spoke German fluently. She called and spoke to her, then called me back in tears. My mother, she said, wanted to see me. And, furthermore, she spoke English.

November 30, 1981

AT LAST the plane landed. I was greeted in the terminal by a film crew that ABC had hired to document the meeting. I asked if they had seen her. They assured me she was waiting for me outside of customs with other family members. I had to wait for what seemed like an eternity for my luggage, but all the while I kept looking in the direction of the doors where everyone waited for arriving passengers. Finally, I spotted her. She was waving to me. I waved back. She waved again. I kept trying to get a better look, but there were so many people standing around her. I couldn't get my luggage fast enough. I ran across the floor. The automatic doors opened and moments later we were in each other's arms. I thought the tears would never stop. My natural mother, Josephine Reiser, just kept whispering in my ear, "Doris, Doris."

For the first three days of my visit we didn't have much private time together. We were followed by reporters and photographers from the German press as we took in some of the sights of Munich. Somehow, we managed to start catching up on the past 29 years. Our opportunity to get to know each other came in the evenings. We talked and we laughed a lot. We were amazed at how many things we had in common. We think alike and we even have the same taste in clothes.

There were many places I wanted to see while I was in Munich—the place where I was born, my mother's

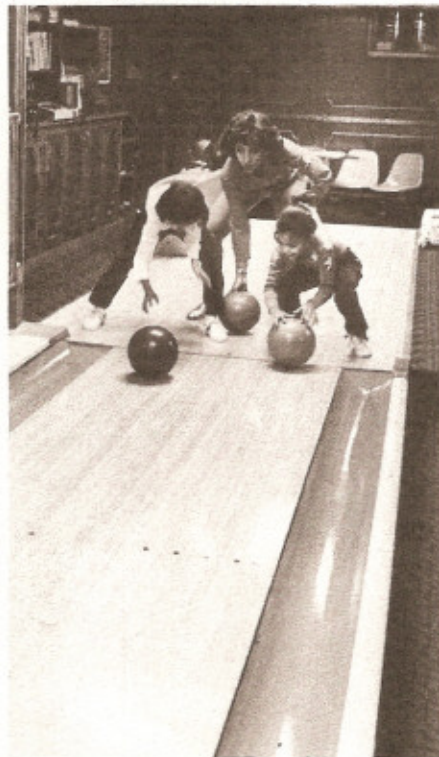


Co-anchoring ABC-TV's local *Five O'Clock Eyewitness News*, Ms. McMillon interviews a celebrity guest, screen and stage actor-director-producer Melvin Van Peebles.

home where she has lived with my aunt and grandmother, and the home where I stayed until the McMillons adopted me. Everything had changed, though. The hospital had been torn down, a car factory stood where my mother's home used to be, and the home where I stayed

until my adoption was now a Kindergarten. I was disappointed.

The last few days were spent rediscovering Munich in private. I



Married to Dr. Raphael Bazin, an orthopedic surgeon from Haiti (above right at their wedding) Ms. McMillon is mother to two girls, Manushka, 8, and Natasha, 6. They are shown enjoying the family bowling alley and a musical rendition by Manushka.



The secret of old-fashioned candy store candy

was fresh, good-tasting ingredients. Mm-m-m.

Brach's brings you that fresh candy store taste today.

Bite into a Brach's Big Ben jelly. So soft, chewy, delicious. Taste the freshness. Taste all the tempting flavors. Flavors made fresh by Brach's.

For old-fashioned candy store taste, bring home some Brach's Today.



BRACH'S

The candy store candy

© 1981 E. J. Brach & Sons, Inc.

DOUBLE REUNION Continued

visited my mother's office at the University of Munich, where she is a secretary. We went shopping, and we had dinner with the rest of the Reiser clan. We also made plans for my mother to visit me soon.

WHEN I returned to New York, the next step was finding my father. Now I knew his name, Ernest Barnett, so I contacted the U.S. Army. I couldn't get the information I wanted, but I learned that he was somewhere in the WABC-TV viewing area of New York, New Jersey or Connecticut. Why then, I asked, hadn't he contacted me? My story had been in the papers and I had mentioned his name during a television interview. Perhaps, I thought, he didn't want to meet me. Still it didn't dampen my desire to find him.

As luck would have it, about a week later my mother called. She said an old friend of my father's had read the story in a German newspaper which mentioned that I was looking for him. She knew where he was. My husband called him. Yes, he wanted to speak with me. He was living in Browns Mills, N. J.

December 25, 1981—Christmas Day

ERNEST Barnett was waiting for me at the Port Authority bus terminal. I saw him for the first time in 29 years. Instead of meeting a stranger, I actually felt like I was meeting an old friend. Had fate dealt the cards differently I suppose we'd have been very close as father and daughter as well as good friends. We would, I'm sure, have had very much the same kind of relationship I have with my adoptive father.

So what's he been doing all this time? He retired from the Army after 26 years. He's now working as a civilian for McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey and he's also in the blueberry business. He's married to a very nice lady and has no other children. Since he lives so close, we have spent a lot of time talking, getting acquainted. Our conversations have answered a great many previously unanswered questions.

For me, life is richer now; I have two more special people in my life. I am fortunate that these two people happened to be my natural parents, because even if they were not related to me, I would still want them to be very close friends.

EBONY • May, 1982