

Book Review

Teege, J. & Sellmair, N. [Carolin Sommer, Translator], (2015). *My grandfather would have shot me: A black woman discovers her family's Nazi past*. NY: The Experiment.

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For decades, I have been approached by adopted students seeking guidance in finding their birth parents. I suspect that I share this experience with most senior professors of social work. I find it chilling to witness the results of their discovery. In my limited experience, when an adult is able to communicate with a birth parent, the result is warm and positive. I never have seen a disaster after or during the connection of child and birth parent. Within my limited experience, I also include the adoptive parents. They tend to face the prospects of having their child meet the birth parent with great trepidation. In the end, the relationship between the adoptive parents and the adopted child is strengthened. However, this is only my limited experience!

Jennifer Teege and her friend and colleague, Nikola Sellmair, tell a different story in this autobiography titled *My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me*. Jennifer is aware that she was born out of wedlock by a German teenager and a young Nigerian man. She was placed for adoption at the age of five and was quickly accepted by a loving white German couple who had sons. Jennifer was indeed fortunate to have such a healthy environment. Although her adopted brothers and parents were white, she experienced unconditional love and acceptance by her family, their friends and her neighborhood. Jennifer was aware of her birth mother's name—Monika Goeth. By random chance, she found a book in the library titled *The Life Story of Monika Goeth, Daughter of the Concentration Camp Commandant From "Schindler's List."* It is the autobiography of Jennifer's birth mother.

Jennifer faces a twofold emotional trauma. First, she realized that if she was born during the pinnacle of Captain Amon Goeth's leadership of the Płaszów concentration camp, she would have been killed. Even worse, because of her heritage, she might have been subjected to a variety of unthinkable medical experiments—then would die. Second, she was subjected to the distress of wondering of her genetic heritage. Is there something in a person's genes that would propel him/her to derive personal satisfaction in the brutal suffering of others? These themes tormented Jennifer to the point of requiring psychiatric intervention.

One can see a fascinating [interview with Teege](#) on C-SPAN. Social work students and faculty who have an interest in adoptions and foster care will find this book nothing less than intriguing. Also, this autobiography provides a great case study for HBSE courses. In addition, the work of Teege and Sellmair supports the findings of Jay Nordlinger's book *Children of Monsters: An Inquiry Into the Sons and Daughters of Dictators*. Both of these respectable books provide the fresh perspective on the influences of family linkages for those who had infamous parents and grandparents. Teege and Sellmair show how one can develop empathy for the pain of others while Nordlinger illustrates how some descendants of monsters can relish the destruction of their ancestors. In the end, it is a fascinating and thought provoking story that I must recommend for others to read.