

Von: Bert Cohn <bertcohn@comcast.net>
Betreff: Aw: 90th birthday coming up
Datum: 15. April 2020 um 02:47:58 MESZ
An: Friederike Fechner <friederike.fechner@t-online.de>

Dear Mrs. Fechner,

Thank you so much for the early and very unexpected birthday greetings. I applaud the efforts you and others have made and continue to make to remember the Stralsunder Juden.

There have been three times that I briefly returned to Stralsund. The first, in 1993, was with my family to give them a taste of the city I grew up in. Then, I returned with my brother Hans when the Stolpensteine were placed in front of Ossenreyer Str. 21/22 and again during a dedication of memorials for my parents and grandparents in the Jewish cemetery. My German, at this time, is not very good.

As you know, I was born in Stralsund in 1930 and attended Lambert Steinwisch Schule from 1936 until Kristallnacht. We lived at Ossenreyer Strasse 21/22 above the men's and boys' clothing store that had been in our family since the 1880's until we were forced to sell it in the 1930s. In March 1939, my brother and I were placed on a train with about 50 other children, bound for a children's home in Montmorency, near Paris. We never saw our parents again. They were murdered at Auschwitz in 1943. In June 1941, about 100 of the children from the OSE children's homes, including my brother and me, were able to get passage from Lisbon to New York, and later that year, we were placed with distant relatives then living in Minneapolis and later in Iowa and Illinois. After high school, I attended Illinois Institute of Technology, from which I graduated with a degree in engineering. Hans, who died in 2009, received his undergraduate degree from the University of Iowa. He has two children living in California.

My wife and I lived most of our lives in the Chicago area, for over 50 years in suburban Elmhurst, where we raised our two children. After Holly died about 5 years ago, I moved into a retirement community in central Chicago. Daughter Helise lives with her husband and two boys in Berkeley, California, and daughter Judy lives with her husband in Chicago. I also did some googling and found that you and Judy have something in common--she graduated from Indiana University in Bloomington. I never played an instrument but Helise played the violin for many years.

I forwarded your email to Helise and Judy, and both replied with enthusiasm about a trip to the old town, with family! Something to consider after the pandemic.

It is interesting that there still is an effort to place more Stolpensteine. My brother and I were never asked whether we wanted to be memorialized in this manner, and if I had been consulted, I would have advised that my name was Bertold at the time. I shortened it to Bert after coming to the US. At 21/22, they include my parents, Hans and me, but also the Lessers who never lived there as far as I know. Charlotte (Cohn) Lesser lived there as a child, but Georg, she and Wolfgang lived in Breslau and Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s. Wolfgang, a talented musician and composer, spent the war years in England but returned to East Germany shortly thereafter.

Charlotte had three younger brothers, my father Fritz, Ernst and Heinrich (Heinz), Baerbel's father, who would have lived there as children. Ernst and his wife Margot left for France in the 1930s, worked at the OSE children's homes and survived. Heinz survived in Germany. My uncle Hans Joseph has a stone at Langenstrasse 69, but there is none for his two sisters, Herta Fraser and Idelotte (Ida). All three survived in England. Hans had two children and Herta had one child, all three still living in London.

Again, thank you for contacting me and offering assistance for a visit to Stralsund.

Best regards, Bert Cohn

On 4/13/2020 4:04 PM, Friederike Fechner wrote:

Dear Mr. Bert Cohn,

I am writing from Stralsund / Germany to you. Your cousin Bärbel Beyer told me about your upcoming 90th birthday on May 3rd, and since you may get a huge amount of letters I decided to write earlier. I know from Mrs Beyer, that Stralsund was your home town until the Nazi terror.

I just wanted to let you know that we founded an initiative just recently to commemorate all the Jewish inhabitants of Stralsund who had to leave the country in the Nazi period or - even more - perished in the Holocaust. The initiative is called „Initiative zur Erinnerung an jüdisches Leben in Stralsund“. We try to complete the stumble stones, research the family histories of former Jewish inhabitants and I am also a member of the association: "Förderverein Historische Warenhäuser Wertheim und Tietz in Stralsund e.V." Do you still speak German? Did you ever visit Stralsund in the past twenty years? I would like to offer you to contact me if someone of your family would like to visit Stralsund. It has developed really well after the turn of the wall, but you probably know that already. Do you have any photos from former times or do you remember a lot from here? When did you leave Stralsund (or better to say: when did you have to flee from Stralsund?).

If you like I would send you some things about how the city looks now.

I googled your photography and I am really moved and impressed.

Dear Mr. Cohn,

I would be delighted if you answered me.

Best wishes

Friederike Fechner

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