

Dear Members of the City Parliament and the City Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Dear group members of the visiting Frankfurt program, queridos miembros de nuestro grupo, Shalom Chawerim, liebe Gruppenmitglieder.

I have been nominated as group speaker in order to speak on behalf of all of us. In today's program is written "Mr. Rolf Stürm presents the thanks of the visiting group."

I accepted this honor happily because I am sincerely thankful. However, this puts me in a dilemma because after one week I do not know enough about all of you to truly speak in your name. Furthermore each of us experienced unique and individual encounters. Thus, I hope you will pardon me when my small speech will have a very personal touch rather than a valid expression of the experiences of the whole group. This dilemma created more questions for me than the visit and the program itself.

What do we have in common besides the fact that our ancestors originate from Frankfurt and have been forced to leave?

From the outside it appears that we have little in common. We live today in Israel, USA, Latin America, Canada, Australia, Great Britain – and I consider myself as a well assimilated Swiss citizen. We have different professions and political convictions. Some like the opera and some fall asleep. PAUSE On the first glance our Jewishness would be our common tie. However on the second glance the way we live our Judaism clearly distinguishes one from another.

The last 7 days showed that many things bind us together. They may appear superficial and without meaning. For instance, we all "Oooed and Aahed" at the sight of the advertisement of 4711 Eau de Toilette. We all could remember our mothers and other relatives using this perfume. We all agreed that this was typical German.

Or fabric shoe bags....people worldwide put their shoes in plastic bags in their suitcases. Our parents had specially sewn fabric bags with a drawstring in order to carefully close the bag. By the way when I packed my suitcase 8 days ago I put all my shoes in old shoe bags of my Frankfurter grandmother – typically German.

And then naturally, there is the small boy with the long disorderly hair whom we encountered in the Library of the Philantropin and whom we all know from our childhood: The Struwwelpeter. Although it was translated in all languages in the world, even into Yiddish it is the most German children's book and especially Frankfurterish.

We all inherited: the memory of the smell of 4711 on a fine ladies handkerchief, the fabric shoe bags and Struwwelpeter. But what binds us together is more than a smell, a fabric bag or a tattered children's book. What really binds us and makes us so emotional and brought some of us to tears is the German culture that our parents and grandparents loved so much. They felt themselves a part of it even long after they had been expelled.

Another thing that binds us together is the silence of our parents. The pain and bitterness of exclusion from German culture and the shame of surviving was so intense that most of them could not find words to describe it for the rest of their lives.

Finally I suppose that the following also binds us: at a certain point in life each of us have decided to break that silence.

- We decided to speak because we wanted to know.
- We decided to ask because we wanted to understand.
- We decided to come to Frankfurt because we wanted to find out.
- We wanted to discover things that had to do with our parents and grandparents as well as ourselves. People they were and that we could be. Something we wear with us like an invisible back pack. You don't feel it but you feel its pressure on your shoulder.

There was a lot of talking in the last week. We talked about and among ourselves, about the friendly and engaged helpers and about the official representatives of the city. We have spoken in classes and with students. I myself have spoken in the Elizabethenschule of my mother where I several times felt a weighted silence. But there were interested 15 year old students asking me intelligent questions. They seemed to know more about the history of the Holocaust and Nazis than I knew about the life of my mother when I was their age.

However some questions remain for me. The NSDAP had about 12 million members, the SA and SS about 4 million, hundreds of thousands used the opportunity of Aryanization to take valuable property and goods, so called Schnäppchenjagd = bargain hunting. But, do these young people really know more about their parents and grandparents than we did at their age? Does the adult German of today really know more – and want to know more - about their own family history?

The story of the company that belonged to the grandfathers of my cousins and myself until 1937 makes me skeptical. Heinrich Vogel, our great grandfather realized the commercial potential of cars during WW I and founded in 1914 the Auto-Inneneinrichtungen Ltd. Under the pressure of the political circumstances our grandfathers had to nominate two senior employees to the Board. In 1937 these two Aryan co-owners took over the whole company completely. The Vogel Ltd became Elsen & Hemer.

Elsen+Hemer is still the name today and on their home page there is a link to their history that we discovered in 2013. The page speaks about the 100 year tradition of the company without mentioning our grandfathers. We asked them to change this and there was no answer. This afternoon my cousins, the journalist Armin H. Flesch and myself visited the company and met with Michael Elsen.

We did not ask Elsen+Hemer to put a stumbling stone in front of the office building because our grandparents survived. But we want our grandparents to be mentioned. Let me create for that the words "electronic memory stone". Elsen+Hemer Ltd ... agreed. Mission accomplished!

In the beginning of my speech I asked: What do we, the visiting members of our group have in common? The answer may be that we realized at a certain point in our lives that dealing with our history liberates us from our past. Only when we look into the backpack we wear and which pressed so much on the shoulders of our parents; only when we know what is in the backpack can we decide what we will carry into the future and what will be released.

I thank with all my heart the City of Frankfurt am Main for their visiting program and their generous invitation that gave us this opportunity to deal with our past. I suppose that each and every one of the group feels the same.

Thus, in the name of all of us, I thank the Lord Mayor, the Magistrate and especially Constanze Wagner and Lea Manger for the invitation and excellent hospitality and the very rich program. Furthermore, we thank the volunteers of the project Judisches Leben in Frankfurt, specifically Angelika Rieber who supported our every need and request.

Words don't really express our gratitude. We have a small token of our appreciation for all their hard work. Of course Struwel Peter or shoe bags would not be appropriate.

I ask Constanze, Lea and Angelika and my two cousins to come forward.

{The tokens are small bottles of 4711}