
Fred in America

Young Fred is the only surviving family member of Sigmund Dottenheimer. It is not known how and when he found out the fates of his family members. He probably did the same thing many emigrants did after the war was over, he tried to find out if anyone survived.

In 1952 he contacts the headquarters of the JRSO in Nürnberg. „My parents were the owners of an exceptionally valuable breastplate covered with precious items.“



Yet the search for the breastplate was unsuccessful.

A few years later, a letter addressed to him appears. It is from Mrs Gertrud Schwarz, born Lehmann (Burgstallstraße 7), who also left Gunzenhausen.

[...Dear Fredi,

...When I came to the US about 8 years ago, I tried to find you, but was unsuccessful, since nobody knew where you were. Finally, Mrs Katten, born Herta Rosenfelder (Marktplatz 9) was successful in finding you.....You have a charming family, I find the young boy looks just the way I remember you, and the girl looks just like Irene did. You personally look very similar to your father...We were in Israel, and haven't been here for long, like many others....I would be very happy to meet you in New York sometime, why don't you give me a call when you are here...

The reason I was so interested in finding your address is because your house tailor said that she had saved some of the personal belongings of your parents. She would like to give these things back to you, as far as I know, were talking about silver and of that kind. Friedl is a good person, and would never take things that did not belong to her. She bought our store, and is now running it similar to the way it used to be run. She can probably also explain to you, what the benefits of compensation are. I hope you have everything under control.....there are many former residents of Gunzenhausen living in New York.....]

Fred writes to Gunzenhausen

[My dear Fräulein Wiedemann, ...I have shortened my name from Fredi Dottenheimer to Fred Dottheim. I am married and have a son, who is 6 ½ and a daughter, who is 2 ½. ...I would be overjoyed to hear, as soon as possible, from you, how I can get the belongings of my parents back. I am also very interested in whether things were stolen from my parents' home. I still have not requested compensation to this day.]

Frieda Wiedmann answers

[Dear Herr Dottheim,...this morning I was in Ansbach and had the customs cleared on your things, and have sent them to you.I hope the things get there in one piece, so that you may enjoy them for a long time to come. I have included a little something for the children too, I hope they'll enjoy it. Do not worry about reimbursing me. Old friendships are worth much more to me. I am glad that the package was not stolen from me and that I can send you a memory of your dear parents. You would be surprised to see how far Gunzenhausen has stretched itself across the world. Through the bunches of refugees, many things are being rebuilt, and stores are being modernized. ...

Do you have contact to your relatives, the Straußes? We have heard that Mrs Strauß has died. We are interested in how Mr Strauß is doing and how Ida is doing.....It must have been very hard for her, it was a goodbye for life....]

Here's what's in the Package:

6 knives
 6 forks
 6 tablespoons
 6 teaspoons
 1 sauce spoon
 1 sugar fork
 6 used tablecloths
 5 used napkins
 5 used pillows
 6 used quilt covers
 3 used sheets
 an old fur
 These things are in possession of Fred Dottheim in St. Louis.



This is the only letter correspondence with former residents of Gunzenhausen that has been found. We read that Fred now is married and has two children.

Ten years after the war, he discovers of the things his parents left behind. In 1954 he receives a small sum of money from his parents estate, but the contents of this suitcase probably meant a lot more to him.



Fred becomes secretive about the fate of his family. He never speaks one word of German. He never speaks of his relatives, so his children know very little about their family. None of them speaks German today. He will never come back to Gunzenhausen.

On Juli 5th 1986 Joel Fredi Dottenheimer dies as Fred Dottheim in the USA.

The Present

The Breastplate leads the way to Reconciliation

In early 1990, a man from Nürnberg went to the city museum of Fürth, and handed over some Jewish ritual objects. He said that his father in law has bought them as a private salesman in Gunzenhausen in the early thirties.

Only years later, in 1997, when the new museum in Fürth was being built, did they clean these objects. For the first time, they saw the beauty of the breastplate. And a further surprise: In a hollow inside the unicorns the restorer found a small slip of paper, saying „hineingelegt a. 3. Okt. 1901/21. Tischri 5662 als hier Sali Haas Schiur hatte. Gerolzhofen, 3. Okt abends 7 Uhr – Julius Godlowsky.“

Gerolzhofen in is Frankonia, but it is about 130 kilometres north west of Gunzenhausen. The solution came from art historian Theodor Harburger, who had photographed the ritual objects of the Gunzenhausen Synagogue in 1927. The breastplate was named private possession of Sigmund Dottenheimer.

In the city archive, we were able to find a connection between the Dottenheimer family and Gerolzhofen quickly. Sigmund's wife came