

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

March 2022

Dear Franconians,

Storm-battered and covid-cautious, the Franconian Society has so far ventured nowhere this year, and it's already the end of February. The crocuses are already out, and the daffodils are pushing ever upward. So, as the Comedian Harmonists put it, let's put the winter behind us and think about the months ahead:

Veronika, der Lenz ist da, die Mädchen singen tralala. Die ganze Welt ist wie verhext, Veronika, der Spargel wächst! Veronika, die Welt ist grün, drum laßt uns in die Wälder ziehn.

A short time ago I suggested to Bridget and Valerie that we could reserve a little space in the Newsletter (as a separate entry similar to the Aspects of Franconia) to talk about the two languages we are probably most familiar with, English and German! "Der Lenz" is a perfect way to begin.

For the Comedian Harmonists, seen here in a photo taken, I believe, in the early 1930s, "der Lenz" was simply the old Germanic word for spring, that time of the year when the days literally "get longer".



Today, of course, modern German offers us two words for this season, *Frühling* und *Frühjahr*, and "der Lenz" has been firmly ousted. Unless, of course, we come up with expressions like "sich einen faulen Lenz machen", which supposedly derives from the idea that in the spring, when agricultural work picks up again, someone who refuses to work hard is "having a lazy spring"!

The English word "Lent", from the same root, has taken a very different path. In English, Lent is a solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar commemorating the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, during which he endured temptation by Satan. This period of fasting is referred to in German as the "Fastenzeit". In most denominations, the last

week of Lent coincides with Holy Week, the “*Passionswoche*”, starting with Palm Sunday. Following the New Testament narrative, Jesus' crucifixion is commemorated on Good Friday, and at the beginning of the next week the joyful celebration of Easter Sunday, the start of the Easter season, which recalls the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Well, I hope I have more or less correctly explained the very different uses of “Lenz” and “Lent” and how closely related our two languages are, yet often so very different. And if you are reading this over your “*breakfast*” you’ll know the etymology of the English word for “*Frühstück*”, not that your boiled egg will taste any the different!

So soon it will be springtime and we will feel more relaxed about meeting up again at the Turnerbund to catch up on what has been happening in each other’s lives. And there will be a programme to look forward to, although, at the moment, we haven’t as yet made up our minds as to exactly when to begin and with what programme. As soon as we know more, you’ll be informed by our secretary, Andrew.

Sieghard will also be able to give us an overview of our charity work and detail who has received a donation from our society in the recent past. Allow me to thank again all of you involved in raising money for our charity efforts. Your work is much appreciated.

As you will have read in the last Newsletter, we are hoping to have a couple of “Zeitzeugen” evenings which Valerie has kindly offered to organize. What do we mean exactly? Well, if you experienced an event (or events) of significance many years ago, you might like to share your memories with your fellow Franconians. For example, you might have witnessed the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 or its dramatic “Fall” in 1989, or, much earlier, how your parents re-settled in Western Germany after the war and how they fared in those first years after arriving here, the hardships they had to endure, their hopes and aspirations. Or what about telling us about your own first years of schooling in Franconia, the things you liked to eat, the games you used to play. We also have a couple of members from Northern Ireland who might have stories to tell of the so-called “Troubles”, or indeed anyone from abroad who could share with us their first experiences of living in Germany, their struggle to learn the German language, their moments of delight, exasperation, embarrassment etc. as they settled into a new life here in Franconia. Of course, some of you might be a little wary of speaking to a large group in English (though this could be done nicely in the form of an interview), so Valerie and others have promised to lend a helping hand, a little rehearsal time perhaps, wherever necessary.

Let me finish on a very positive note. I have just received news that Marwa, the young girl who suffered horrific burns in Syria, will be operated on in May at Boston’s renowned Shriners Burns Institute. We reported on her plight on several occasions and money was raised by our members to help her travel to the USA.



Take good care of yourselves, and keep smiling, and enjoy the March winds and the April showers. And a smiling spring daffodil.

Frank Gillard

The President's Letter – Postscript

Dear Franconians,

When I began to write this President's Letter, a war on European soil had not yet broken out. Analysts were describing massive military deployments encircling Ukraine, but I suspect many of us were hoping that a "diplomatic" solution would be found. Well, so far, on this final Sunday in February, it hasn't. In Ukraine people, young and old, are now dying. Our society is committed to impartiality, to debate and open discussion, to political and religious non-alignment. We accept that people from different cultural backgrounds hold differing opinions on a host of issues. Nonetheless, when we see the innocent and defenceless coming under brutal attack, we must surely feel humbled to be living in a democratic country and feel obliged to do whatever we can to help.

In this sense, I suggest we immediately donate to a local charity specifically engaged in helping the weakest, especially children and refugees, forced to seek sanctuary from the horrors of this totally unjustifiable war. And in a matter of a few weeks, sadly, we will be able to take stock of developments in our local area and locate further worthwhile recipients of our albeit limited help.

I am also convinced that if the people of Russia and Belorussia had unfettered access to the international media they would not engage in war against Ukraine. That is why a donation to the cause of free journalism would also be appropriate, just as we made a few years ago at the suggestion of Professor Daniel Gossel. At that time, it was the organisation called Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Perhaps, a little later, we can again think in this direction. However, for now, those fleeing from this awful war should be our priority.

Frank Gillard

PS:

Permit me to send you the link to the City of Erlangen 's Ukraine appeal. It will explain how you can make donations and also volunteer your help. The account number is: **DE77 7607 0012 0776 1000 00** at the **Deutsche Bank**. The "Verwendungszweck" is simply "**Spende Ukraine**"

If you want to physically help, send a message to: ukraine@stadt.erlangen.de.