

VISITING YOUR ANCESTOR'S HOMELAND?
WHY NOT VISIT SOME COUSINS.
By Elizabeth Herzfeld

Last October my husband was asked to Europe to visit customers of a former client. My husband is a public relations practitioner and freelance writer. He writes for technology magazines. We thought May would be a good time to do this because we had already scheduled a vacation in February. That wasn't soon enough for the French client however, they wanted him there in March.

I thought this might be our last chance to visit the homeland of our ancestors. I got busy putting together the information I knew about them and got on the Internet to see if anyone with the same name as our ancestors still lived in the towns they came from. In the international phone book I found possibilities for three of the families and for my husband's family I found a query on <http://www.jewishgen.org>. I contacted the people by mail and email and was amazed at the responses. They invited us to their homes and treated us royally. We had tours of the areas and churches my ancestors attended. Some are doing additional research for me and translating records. My cousin Anton Ruetten had been trying to find members of the family that emigrated to America for years. He had part of a letter and a picture of my 2nd great-grandfather Hubert Ruetten. Hubert was his great-grandfather, Englebert Ruetten's brother.

Another cousin Rolf Schaller in Bad Kreuznach had recently retired and our letters had crossed in the mail. He had just learned that I was researching my ancestors from Roxheim, a little town near Bad Kreuznach. He had started doing genealogical research on the family and the archivist at Mandel had given him a letter I had written a couple years ago. He was really surprised to hear from me.

Rolf had articles placed in the Bad Kreuznach edition of *Allgemeine Zeitung* (newspaper) before and after my visit. The first article included a picture of my great-grandfather, Jacob Schaller and in the second article there was a picture of my husband, Rolf, and myself in front of the church where my great-grandfather was baptized. One cousin we visited has a funeral home in Roxheim and another has a winery and vineyards, which we toured. Roxheim is pretty much the way it was when my great-grandfather lived there except for the road going through it. There are no fast food places or modern hotels. The people still live in town and go out to their land to work. Everyone was wonderful to us. There was a little problem with the language difference, but my husband speaks some German and the younger people in Germany can usually speak English well enough to communicate.

Don't be afraid to contact people in the old country, you may be amazed at their response.

My husband wishes to add a small world incident that happened to his cousin when we were visiting him.

CLOSING A SMALL (GENEALOGICAL) WORLD ‘LOOP’

by

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During the mid-twentieth century, it was often repeated that by standing in front of the main New York City Library, eventually you’d see someone you knew. In a sense, you made contact, closed a loop.

In March 2006, my genealogist wife, Betty, and I had a truly strange “it’s a small world” occurrence, as a result of 1) her continuing search for my German ancestors in 2005, and 2) my having boarded with a German family while in the Air Force in 1960.

In the Fall of 2005, an Internet search for a German researcher to research the name ‘Herzfeld’ brought an answer from a Herzfeld descendant in Germany, whose lineage seemed quite close to mine. It was soon decided that the families were descended from a common ancestor in 1715.

Subsequently, a former client of mine offered me an assignment requiring travel to Europe.

It was a great opportunity to visit my cousin, Ralf, and his family – the newly found relatives in Viersen, Germany, which is less than 20 kilometers from where I lived and worked in 1960 – Mönchengladbach Germany.

Ralf picked us up in Dusseldorf in the morning and we spent the day meeting new relatives. In the late afternoon, Ralf offered to drive us past the NATO base, where I worked in 1960, and also past the home in which I’d lived for eight months, as well as home across the street where my 1960 landlord’s son, Helmut, now lived. We had visited Helmut and his wife in 1966, just after we were married and shortly after they had their first child.

Seeing Helmut’s business’ name still on what had been his house in 1966, we stopped and rang the bell. He was glad to see us and very hospitable, even calling one of his three adult children to come to meet us.

When Betty reminded Helmut of our 1966 visit with him, and asked how his first child was now doing, Ralf realized he and that son were the same age. In fact, they had attended technical school together 25 years earlier and had no contact since!

It's a small world, and the loops keep closing...

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