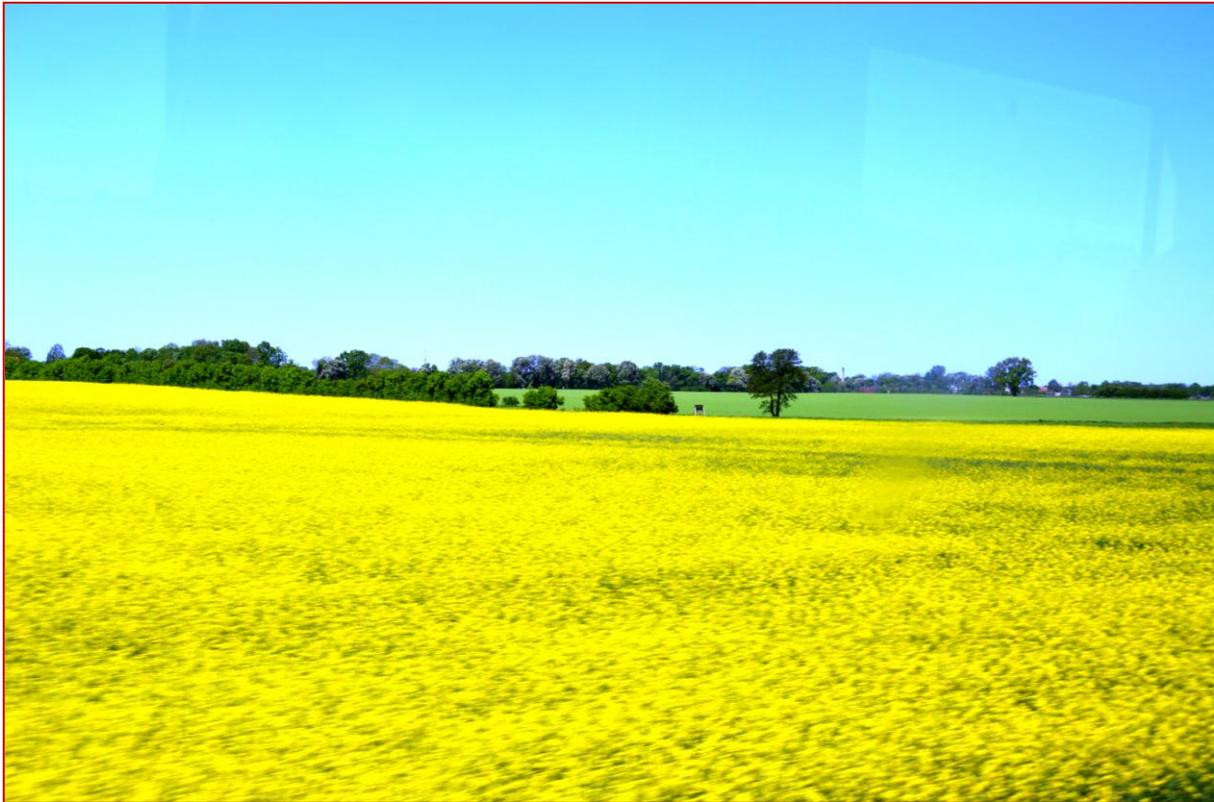


Emmanuel und Margareta Fritzen 傅立光 安芮佳

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Dear friends,

when you leave the urban area of Berlin, you find yourself immediately within the wide open spaces of "Mark Brandenburg". The landscape was formed by the last glacial period and consists of moraines, glacial valleys and lakes. The grounds are either hilly or totally flat. Up to now there are large areas of forests. Nevertheless the agricultural use dominates. Small creeks and rivers meander in the valleys and form swampy areas. The sandy soil is nutrient-poor. For this reason long time ago the Mark got the nick name "The Box of Sand of the Holy Roman Empire". The landscape is dominated by pine trees and heather – and the birch tree is widely spread, as well.



This land was sparsely populated when the Electorate Brandenburg was founded in the 12th century. When the State of Prussia was proclaimed in 1701, a building boom started around the villages alongside Spree and Havel rivers. While the population in those days consisted of only 60.000 inhabitants in the area of Berlin, the number grew up to 3.9 million people some 220 years later, when the City of Greater Berlin was officially founded in 1920.

If you leave the urban area of Berlin nowadays by train or car, you will realize that this fast growing metropolis has developed in the middle of nowhere.



A couple of days ago we have tried to spot out some traces of our ancestors at the city of Neuruppin. We started our trip at the Jungfernheide Railway Station. This station is easily accessible from our home by the urban train system alongside the Circle Line, where the trains commute every ten minutes. Although Jungfernheide Railway Station is located only one kilometer from Tegel Airport, it very much looks like a station in the rural areas.

In the course of our trip with the regional express train RE6 we had a stop at Berlin-Spandau Railway Station. Here again we could realize that we are still in the urban metropolitan area. From this station you can reach most major German and European cities by high speed trains. You also get access to numerous regional trains, the urban train system, the subway system and many bus lines.



After leaving Berlin-Spandau we passed through the relatively small suburb of Falkensee and then continued our journey through forests, meadows and fields. - Our next stop was the small town of Henningsdorf that since decades is well known for its factory for locomotives and motor coaches that are nowadays exported to the rail systems of many countries in the world.

Here, the train changes its direction. From here on you really travel through the Mark Brandenburg. The track is surrounded by pine forests, swamps and a diversity of agricultural lands. Due to the agrarian reform in former East Germany sizes of the fields and meadows are extraordinarily large.



Just a few kilometers from Berlin you can see cows and horses grazing on meadows. You can also see the buildings of the former East German agricultural production cooperatives that are now used according to the current needs, or are even abandoned.



Since our photographs were taken from the train we could not snap the forests and swamps, since they directly border the railway track.

We did pass through villages whose names we have never heard, before: Bärenklau, Vehlefan, Schwante, Beetz-Sommerfeld, Wustrau-Radensleben... But we also stopped at places like Velten (Mark) or Kremmen that are familiar to us from the signboards alongside the Autobahn.

Finally we reached our destination Neuruppin and left the train at Rheinsberger Tor Station.

Neuruppin is called Fontane Stadt, since the novelist and poet Theodor Fontane was born here. The town is also called the most Prussian of all Prussian cities. Its unique appearance was caused by a big fire in 1787 that destroyed most of the former garrison town. In those days the town planning officer Bernhard Matthias Brasch drew a reconstruction plan. He decided to tear down parts of the old town walls in order to gain more space. On this territory he designed a new town with wider roads in rectangular arrangements, interrupted by large open plazas. The town was rebuilt in an early neo-classical style with in general two storied buildings.



When Germany was reunited the old town was mainly unchanged, but most of the buildings were totally neglected and in extremely poor conditions. In the early nineties a city development plan was agreed with the aim to systematically restore the town in the historic style of the city with government subsidies. Up to now more than 600 buildings are already finished. Neuruppin can now be considered a piece of jewellery of the state of Brandenburg.





We did find the memories of our ancestors. In the autobiography of one family member we found a text describing his visits to his grandmother as a young boy in 1918: "The frontage of the house had five windows on the second floor facing Friedrich-Wilhelm Street. But most of the rooms of the building were located in two wings behind the house that were divided by a very narrow courtyard that led into a garden. My grandmother used to live in the right hand wing together with Uncle Max, while the left hand wing was used by the stepbrother of my father, Franz, and his wife. Uncle Franz owned a cigar shop that did not really provide lots of income for him. He was mainly making money by trading with second hand cars.



This photograph out of our family archive was taken hundred years ago. It helped us to find the house described in the text above. Nowadays it is in very good state. The tiny columns framing the display windows made from cast iron are still in extraordinarily good conditions and the showcases of the millinery that initially covered the columns hundred years ago have disappeared.

The city of Neuruppin is located next to the Lake Ruppin. The water front with its cafés invites visitors to rest. From the pier you can start lake cruises even to the other lakes in the surroundings. Once in a while there is even boat traffic linking Neuruppin with Berlin-Tegel.



At the shore of Lake Ruppin you will find a nineteen meter high monument: „Parzival am See – die Suche nach dem Sinn des Seins oder eine Stadt im Aufbruch“ (Parzival at the lake side – the search for the meaning of being or a city on the move) created by Matthias Zágón Hohl-Stein.

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With warm regards

Emmanuel + Greta