

Dear all,

Dear Werner and Norber Tyrasa, dear Peter Siebert. Thank you for joining us here today from Lauenförde

On behalf of the Society for Christian Jewish Cooperation in Göttingen I welcome you very warmly at this place. Together with the Historical Association and the City of Göttingen we, the Society, are the organizers of the stumbling stones project.

It was into this house, in front of which we are standing, Toni Löwenherz, her daughter-in-law Florence Löwenherz (Webb) and her grand-daughters Renate and Vera had moved, in 1936.

This house was their last home before they had to flee Germany. Toni escaped by suicide, her free will. Florence and her children could save their lives by escaping to England, and later migrating to the US.

Today we are placing 4 memorial plates for Toni, Florence, Renate und Vera. They are visible signs of our remembrance. More than 80 years after the Löwenherz family had been excluded and threatened to death, we symbolically welcome them back to the civil society of Göttingen.

Who were the persons we are commemorating today?

Toni Löwenherz loved flowers, especially dahlias. We know this from a painting by Käthe Kruse, (known in Germany more for her hand-made dolls than for her paintings). Toni was certainly a woman of style, as they put it in her days. She was born in 1876, shortly after the establishment of the German Kaiserreich. She came from a wealthy family in Mecklenburg and had married a successful businessman from Lauenförde, Hermann Löwenherz. Hermann started his business with timber trading in Lauenförde and became a person of high esteem as the head of a flourishing furniture factory, later known as Herlag (to this day known for its garden furniture). The Löwenherz family lived in Lauenförde since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lauenförde was their home. Hermann Löwenherz there died in 1916.

After his death, his widow Toni and their five children still lived in the large villa with a sprawling park in Lauenförde. Toni had a wide range of interests, she was involved in various social initiatives. She was a friend of Franz Rosenzweig, the founder of the Jewish Lehrhaus in Frankfurt. Martin Buber, the philosopher of religion, who had published a new German translation of the Tanakh, was also a friend of hers.

Toni bought the house in front of which we are standing, in 1917, shortly after Hermann's death. Her son Oskar (1900-1956) worked as an independent businessman in Lauenförde. In 1929, he married the American actress Florence Webb (1900-1980). Their children Renate and Vera were born in Göttingen in 1929 and 1930.

The political circumstances in Germany forced Oskar not to return from a business trip to the Netherlands in 1934 and to emigrate to the US in 1938. His wife Florence, then 34, remained in Germany, taking care of their two children and her mother-in-law. So, the Löwenherz family was torn apart already in 1934.

To leave Lauenförde was not a voluntary decision, but was enforced by the political circumstances. In 1936 Toni moved with her daughter-in-law to Göttingen, because her grand-daughters Renate and Vera, 6 and 7 years old at the time had been refused public

schooling due to their so-called “mixed” heritage The villa in Lauenförde and the assets were confiscated, the furniture which had been left behind sold off.

In Göttingen, the fragmented family tried to build a sort of normality, to arrange with life in uncertainty. The grand-daughters were educated at home, the house-keeper who joined them from Lauenförde cared for the family together with Florence. We know that Toni did not leave the house too often. And we also know that she proudly wore the Star of David, a sign that all Jews were forced to wear since September 1941. But to keep up a kind of normality, even in small ways, was getting harder and harder. In 1939, Florence was able to leave for the US. The children Renate and Vera fled to England, and later to the US. Renate called herself Renée after migrating. We do not know much about the details of these journeys, which must have been dramatic and traumatic for the children.

For Toni, the normality she had painstakingly created, broke down gradually. She faced more and more pressure from the environment around her, and struggled without the safety net which her family had been for her. A delegation from Lauenförde tried to force her to endow the plots of land, she still owned there, to the municipality. Eventually, like all Jews from Göttingen, the authorities ordered her to report to the Albani-Kirchhof for her deportation. On March, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, she resisted this order by suicide. Her body was cremated in Kassel and brought in a cardboard urn and interred in Göttingen. After the war, her daughter Erna was able to have the urn re-interred next to her husband Herrmann in Lauenförde. After 1945, Her daughter Erna and daughter-in-law Florence pursued claims for restitution after 1945.

After their emigration and naturalization, Toni’s son Oskar, her daughter-in-law Florence and the her grand-daughters Renate / Renée and Vera did not use the name Löwenherz, but took Florence’s maiden name Webb. Oskar passed away in 1956 in New York. Renée, passed in 1970, aged 41, also in New York.

After the Second World War, Florence and Vera made the difficult decision to again face the country which had forced them to leave and migrate. They contacted the new owners of the villa in Lauenförde, who had rebuilt the house and run it as a hotel for motorbikers. Florence and Vera stretched out their hands towards the German post-war-society. We owe our thanks to them and to the descendants of the Löwenherz family for agreeing to place the stumbling stones here.

By placing these stones, we want to honour and ensure that the memory of people who were citizens of Göttingen, but who were excluded, deprived of their rights, persecuted and murdered, does not disappear.