

September 3, 2006

Moin Moin; travel to Fredesdorf, Bad Oldesloe, and Lübeck; and Tschüss

On Sunday morning, September 3rd, we loaded in Yogi's Mercedes and set off on a busy day of travel that would take us to Fredesdorf, Bad Oldesloe, and Lübeck. Since the day's activities would involve a lot of walking, we dropped Gitta off at *Prof.-Mensing-Straße* 14, where she would spend the day with Ingo and Hilde.

Moin Moin

On our way out of town, we passed the offices of a newspaper with a rather unusual name: *MoinMoin Flensburg*. For a seemingly simple phrase, the etymology of *Moin Moin* appears to be quite complicated and the subject of much debate. Even native North German Dr. Joachim Reppmann, who taught German at St. Olaf College in Minnesota and whose Web site is called "*moin-moin*," copped out when I asked for his opinion. The more I researched the phrase, the more I understood Yogi's reticence at making any definitive pronouncements on the spelling, meaning, or proper usage of this ostensibly redundant little phrase.

So what is the correct spelling of the phrase? Darned if I know! North Germans themselves can't even agree. I have seen it spelled in many different ways, including:

- *Moin, Moin* • *Moin Moin*
- *Moinmoin* • *MoinMoin*
- *moin, moin* • *moin moin*
- *moin-moin* • *moinmoin*



Above: The sign of *MoinMoin Flensburg*, a weekly newspaper located at *Friedenshügel* 2, about 1.2 miles to the southwest of the Reppmanns' apartment.

When it comes to the meaning of *Moin Moin*, disagreement is equally widespread. *Moin* might be a contraction of the Low German *moien*, which simply means "good." Hence, the complete expression could be *Moien Dag* ("Good day") or *Moien Abend* ("Good evening"). Therefore, *moin* and *moinmoin* would not only be contractions of the original word but also contractions of the whole expression.

Others, however, feel that *moin* might be short for *Morgen*, or "morning." Still other linguists are not convinced, and feel that the roots are distinctively Frisian with *mooi* (which I've also seen spelled as *moi*) meaning "good" or "beautiful." Thus the Frisian *Mooi Morn* ("Good morning") easily becomes either *moin* or *moin moin*. (Since nouns are supposed to be capitalized in German, *moin moin* seems an odd way to write "Good day." Shouldn't both *moins* be capitalized, the first *moin* as the first word in the sentence and the second *moin* as a noun?)

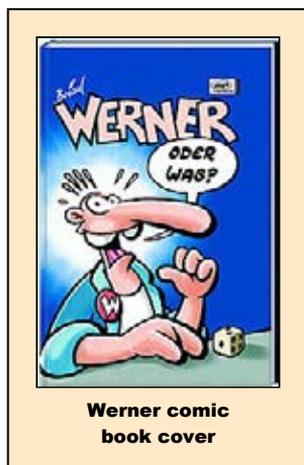
Confused yet? Perhaps, too, are still others who view *Moin* as a Frisian and Low German greeting meaning "Hello." These folks believe that the seemingly redundant *Moin Moin* is used as emphasis and for an even more polite greeting.

Apparently, there are some areas in northern Germany — Oldenburg, for example — where *Moin Moin* does not have so pleasant a connotation. Instead, it is another way of saying *Leck mich am Arsch*, which roughly translated, means "Kiss my ass" or "Leave me alone."

Some even feel that the phrase is gender specific, noting that while the two words are enthusiastically used by males of all ages, they are seldom uttered by a woman.

Not surprisingly, since there is no general consensus on the precise meaning of the phrase, there is also little agreement on *when* to use the word or words. Some feel that although *moin* might be short for *Morgen*, or "morning," *moin, moin!* is a universal greeting that's as appropriate at ten in the evening as ten in the morning.

Others, however, feel that the phrase should not be used in the evening, and that doing so is a sure way to get a puzzled look from a southerner in Germany. Still others feel that *Moin* is only acceptable in the morning, while *Moin Moin* can be used the entire day. Adding to the confusion, in northern Germany, it's common to greet someone by saying *moin* and then receive *moinmoin* as an answer.



The use of *Moin Moin*, which is also found in the Danish dialect known as Southern Jutish, spread during the first half of the twentieth century all over the northern part of Schleswig-Holstein. Although the use of *Moin Moin* within Germany tends to mark the speaker as a northerner, it is now increasingly understood across the entire country. One reason for this may be because of Werner, the most successful German comic character of all time, who appears in comic books and animated films. Werner, who always greets others with *Moin, moin!*, is known for his anarchic humor which is often based on northern German dialect and puns.

The phrase has also seeped into popular culture. Hamburg's famous hip-hop band, *Fettes Brot*, began their 2005 anti-war song *An Tagen wie diesen* (On days like these) with an eerie "*Moin moin — was geht?/Alles klar bei dir? Wie spät?*" (*Moin moin — what's up?/Everything okay? What time is it?*)

On to Fredesdorf, the home of Heinrich Christian Finnern

Back in late March and early April of 2006, before Yogi and I had even met in person, we began corresponding about Heinrich Christian Finnern, a German immigrant who became a successful newspaper owner and editor in Iowa. Yogi was considering writing a book about Finnern, whose life had been briefly dealt with in Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dale Maharidge's book, *Denison, Iowa*. At some point, Yogi asked if I would help with a little research, and given all of the help that he had already given me on my book about my great-great grandfather, I was only too happy to try and return the favor.

I worked nonstop for the next week, assembled a lot of data which I organized into chapters, and even suggested chapter titles and a title for the book. I was very flattered, when after receiving the binder with my findings, Yogi sent me the following e-mail:

Hallo Scott,

Seconds before I left the house the happy UPS man showed up at our doorstep. I opened the bright red folder, read the first three pages, and immediately phoned Boedee Böttcher in Herrenberg



Our first stop was Fredesdorf, the birthplace of Henry Finnern. Fredesdorf ("B") is located about eighty-six miles southeast of Flensburg ("A").