As far as I can remember, no one ever really talked about the childhood of my father or his father. About my grandfather Emanuel Baier I know just about nothing, not even the year he died. It seems probable to me that he died before or, at the beginning of the First World War. And by custom it must surely have been the case that the eldest son, 14/15-year-old Fritz, together with the rest of the children and some day laborers, would run the farm for mother. Similarly, it must have been that Otto, who was four years younger (and who was to be my father), year by year would have taken on increasingly heavier work that may have been strenuous even for adults.

Depending on when the weather allowed it, work in the fields, such as plowing and sowing, would begin by March. Then came the pruning of grape vines, hoeing in the vineyard, corn fields, and bashtan [melon patch], and melon planting. To get hoeing in the fields done, women and children also had to join in. All other field work was a matter only for the men. The young ones had to learn early in life how to lead a team of horses, first by riding on one of the horses, then steering them from a wagon, plow or other machines. The fields were often many kilometers away, the work day was correspondingly very long, and it included the feeding and regular combing of the horses.

During the threshing period, which started in July and lasted about six weeks, the men and youngsters might get only a brief nightly rest. Late afternoon, they took the elongated “ladder” wagon, also known as the harbi, out to the fields and returned it fully loaded, often only by early darkness. After the horses were taken care of, the group slept outside on a wagon bed or even on the loaded one. During the middle of the night, a second group drove out to the field. By the time they had returned with their load, the previously arrived wagon had been unloaded, the latest load was added to the previous one, and everything was then threshed on a flat surface at the end of the yard. This was done by using threshing stones, that is, cylinders about a meter long [just over a yard] and about two feet in diameter, with six star-form edges. Horses dragged them in a circular path across grain and straw that had been spread across the threshing floor, the first step in separating the grain and softening the straw. The threshing material was turned over several times, and the straw was shaken and then removed. But before all that, a kind of “sled” with 2 ½ ft. wooden “runners,” was attached to the stones at an upward angle, and with sharp-edged shards of flint stone attached to the bottom. This made the chaff finer and finer, thus preparing it for use in feed. Children were allowed to ride on these “sleds.” While the chaff-and-kernels mixture was being fed into a putzmühle, a wind machine with a moving sieve for separating, the harbi wagons were once again on their way to the grain fields.

Work on the farmyard was usually stopped only by darkness, but with work yet to be done. The straw had to be stored in the barn next to the threshing place and the chaff put into a separate place. Finally, the kernels, carefully measured out one Russian pud at a time (a pud equaling 16.38 kilograms), were carried to the barn attic and placed in layers for drying.

My father occasionally did talk about these often-night-time trips to the fields he experienced in his earliest youth. He probably took up smoking in those early years of his life, a habit he could never shake, and one that, together with other health issues, very likely contributed to his early death.

**Editor’s note:** Encouraged by his “little” sister, Norbert has written down many memories of their shared childhood, sufficient in number for an entire book, which is to be published sometime this year under the following title: Faraway Childhood Days. A1930s Childhood in South Bessarabia and its End in Germany.
The white flag in the background indicates that the last “harbi” has arrived. Also shown in this photo are drill machines, a plow, a windlass, the “harbi,” and the threshing stone. From Ziebart, Arzis, p. 60.]