

Easter Memories

By Diana Croissant

I shared a Christmas memory; and because I did, I received emails from distant relatives. That was so exciting for me. But Easter was, in many ways, more special for our family than Christmas, so I want to share memories of that, too.

Though it may not be a German-Russian tradition, the Easter dresses and bonnets always come to my mind when I think about Easter celebrations. Mother worked many hours in advance of Easter sewing special Easter dresses for her three girls. And we each of us always got to pick out a bonnet to go with her new dress.

Easters were most often spent with my Croissant cousins after church having Easter dinner at my grandparents' house. Just walking into the house to smell the food preparing was a treat in itself. We would have roast chicken and all the other fixings. But dinner always started with chicken noodle soup (and the noodles were the home-made variety, of course) with butterballs. Those butterballs were so much part of the enjoyment of having the soup for me that it wasn't until I was much older that I realized that my friends at school did not know what they were. My Grandma Croissant always flavored them with allspice, and we always sprinkled a little cinnamon into the soup. Grandma's garlic rolls and her cherry Kase-kuchen were also not to be missed at Easter.

But for the young, Easter dinner was also special because we got to feel quite grown up since we also got the shot glass of Easter wine at our place setting. My grandparents' house was not very big, so the covered card tables pushed together wound throughout the house.

Grandma had a large collection of shot glasses so that all the aunts, uncles, and cousins could have one at his or her plate. He filled each with Mogen David grape wine. Today, when my "cultured" friends have their wine-tasting parties or when they talk about special wines, I can't even imagine a better tasting wine than Mogen David grape.

Grandpa had spent the morning hiding the colored Easter eggs in his backyard; and, of course the egg hunt is also a source of special memories for me.

As we grew older, Easter also became important because it meant that the week before, during the year each of us turned fourteen, we would be confirmed in the church.

We had been studying our catechism at confirmation school each Saturday since the late fall. On Palm Sunday, we would be confirmed after the pastor had put us through the question-answer session to test our learning. We were usually each presented with a gift Bible from our respective godparents. (I still have mine, and it has always been my favorite Bible.) Then, on Maunday Thursday, we were finally able to participate in the Lord's Supper, having learned its meaning. Reverend Stroh had prepared us for that, too, by telling us what our particular family preferred: the wafers or the pieces of bread.

For us girls, being confirmed was also a transition into a more adult world. We, again, got to have a special dress made to wear, but this time it would first be worn under our white confirmation robe. But more importantly, it was the first time we were allowed to pick out "high" heels to wear with our dress and, of course, nylon stalkings. (The heels were not very high, though, usually only 2 inches at the most.)

Easter was always so important as I grew up. I cherish the memories and think of my family who are now not living, hoping they know how much I miss them.

By Mary Ebach, Rugby, North Dakota

Easter was not quite as memorable as Christmas was at our house. Because it is a religious holiday, church going took precedence. During Lent we went to Stations of the Cross every Wednesday and Friday evenings. But during Holy Week, the week before Easter, meant going to church nearly every day. Holy Thursday and Good Friday were long church services with the reading of the Passion and they were times for serious thinking and praying. On Holy Saturday was the time when Ma got the eggs ready to boil and dye them. Of course they were our own eggs, picked fresh from the chicken coop and aged a day or so. She always coated the dyed eggs with a bit of lard to give them a nice sheen. We seemed to always have ham for Easter and Ma covered it with dough before baking it. It made the meat nice and juicy and retained the flavor. Our mother had baked some bread with raisins in the dough. She then took some to church and put it on the Communion rail and the priest blessed the Easter food that the people brought in for that reason. She also had Easter candy that she put in a basket. Easter Sunday meant the little ones always wore their prettiest dresses, but everyone wore their best clothes, including hats, for Mass. After Mass, we feasted on a large meal with the ham and all the other trimmings. Times and customs may change a bit, but the memories stay on.

By Margaret Aman Freeman, Redondo Beach, California

My grandmother Aman, who lived her last years in Lehr, North Dakota, seeded plates of wheat for her grandchildren for Easter. My mother recalled all the flat surfaces with plates on them, as there were many little ones who lived nearby who looked forward to the Easter bunny placing eggs in the grass at Grandma's house.

Grandmother grew up in Bergdorf and Marienberg of the Glueckstal group of colonies.

This custom must have been part of living in more villages in the Black Sea and Bessarabia, and is something that was continued in North America.

By Ida Lorraine, Wright , Bonnyville, Alberta

I was so happy to read Alfred Opp's letter about seeding the grass for Easter baskets. Other than my own family, I had not heard of anyone doing this. My sister and I still do this, one time I got wheat from an organic bakery and then I got a bunch of oats from a farmer but I have never actually used grass seed. I also always plant it too early so its gets so long it lays down. My ancestors came from Tarutino in Bessarabia. One time when I was about 5 and not knowing what selfish meant I put out a big cardboard box for Easter eggs --- to teach me a

lesson I got one egg. I remember finding a path of broken eggs shells in the yard which was the Easter bunny tracks leading to the fence and then disappearing.

My mother must have saved up shells all winter to do this. For Easter Sunday church service we all had to have new clothes. I know Mother used to do special baking but I can't remember anymore what it looked like. I do remember that she made a coating of bread dough on the ham and baked it like that. That was delicious.

In regards to the mist, I can't remember my parents talking about making heating logs (?) but I do remember Mother telling me that they used to put a large container in the middle of the pile of mist and the hot temperature inside the pile would keep the water warm while they dyed wool, yarn or cloth.

So nice to hear these memories.

By Beverly Gutenberg, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

I was interested in the submission of David Kirschenmann because the experience was the same as mine. As a Catholic we were forbidden from eating meat on Friday so out came the noodles. I loved them - we had the egg noodles that Michael described and what I called "fat noodles". The latter were made from flour, milk, a bit of oil but no salt - similar to dumplings for stew. They were then treated similar to the preparation of dough as in bread. They were kneaded and then rolled by hand into strips and cut into pieces. My job as a child was to roll these pieces of dough which had been sprinkled with flour and made my hands itch with the friction of rolling them. They were put in a frying pan with butter and a little water and cooked for 20 minutes. My mother would make two frying pans of these fat noodles - one with onions for my father and sister, and one with sauerkraut for my mother and I. One had to add the correct amount of water to have them steamed. All the water had to be evaporated in order to have the right consistency of the noodles. We loved the crusts that developed in the process. We also ate these with prunes or more frequently with canned Saskatoon berries.

I remember going to church several times during the Easter weekend - on Good Friday was a somber ceremony because it was the day Christ was crucified, Saturday midnight was the time we met in the basement of the church and witnessed the blessing of the Holy Water and the new fire then were all proceeded up the stairs to the church proper. Sunday was, of course, the joyous celebration of Christ arising from the tomb.

We got new outfits to wear at Easter.

We would always have dyed Easter eggs for which to search. These eggs would traditionally be dyed on Good Friday at our house. I can't remember getting the basket but I remember making the basket out of shoe boxes and crepe paper.

My family came from Kandel and Strassburg in the Ukraine, lived in the area of Orrin for a few years and then in 1906 emigrated to the Saskatchewan prairies near Tramping Lake in St. Joseph's colony.

Email message from Ann Stang, Calgary, Alberta, April 2013

I have an Easter memory too, which is a little different.

My grandparents on both sides came to Saskatchewan from the village of Vollmer on the Berg side of the Volga in 1907 and 1909. I grew up on a mixed farm. We had cattle, poultry, a huge vegetable garden, etc. Naturally we churned our own butter. Every year on Holy Saturday, Mom became a sculptor. From about a pound of that butter she sculpted a lamb, lying down. Invariably, one of us would have to find a holy picture of a lamb so Mom would know how to place the legs. Then one of us (I had nine siblings) would take a metal knitting needle and a cup of hot water and make the curls on the lamb. The next day, for sure on Easter Monday, we'd start eating the lamb.

I'm curious. Did anyone else make a lamb? We also made Easter bread that rose really high in coffee cans, and a concoction of sweetened cottage cheese with peppermint flavoring and raisins. I still make the bread and keep promising myself that I'll try sculpting a lamb.