

Froeliche Wienachten

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My childhood memory is that my parents set up a Christmas tree in our house every year in Teplitz, Bessarabia and so also did my Grandparents in their house. In Bessarabia we had no forests of any kind. From what I have read and also been told, in the early days people with means pooled their money together and persons were chosen who then traveled to Odessa to purchase Christmas trees. Once Bessarabia became part of Romania (1918), trees for Christmas were brought in to Teplitz from Siebenbuergen in Romania.

Christmas was always a special time for us and followed the well preserved customs of the traditional fest. In our family, especially at my Grandparents' house, Christmas time started on December 6th with the celebration of Nicolaus Tag. Not every home celebrated this, but for me it was a special day to remember. Dressed in a Bishop's garb, Saint Nicolaus was so kind and giving. We had to recite a prayer or sing a song to please the Saint who always gave us an apple and cookies in a colorful bag. One has to remember that getting apples in December was rare, so for us this was a real treat. For us kids the weeks leading up to Christmas were wonderful as we watched mother baking Christmas treats and both our parents working behind the scenes to get everything ready.

We were not allowed to see the Christmas tree until 8 PM on Christmas Eve. Oh, was the waiting long! When mother finally opened the door to the parlor the sight and the smell of the candles was heavenly. Mom and Dad, along with our Grandparents took a seat by the tree to sing Christmas carols. Then came "Pelzamerde" with a rod to remind us kids to be brave and obedient to our parents. "Oh yes, we were 'Pelzamerde' very well now! Let me hear you say a Gedichtchen (verse) to me." So many times I got stuck on reciting the verse because of excitement. "Your grandparents told me that you behaved, and that was good, now I give you a gift for being a good boy."

After he left, one called "Christkindle" came. She usually was played by my Aunt Maria. She was so sweet, covered in a veil, and she gave us kids sweets to eat. After that it was time to focus on the gifts underneath the tree. Our gifts were wrapped - wealthy parents used fancy paper and poorer families might only have brown paper, but the excitement was the same in all families. We first opened up the packages that didn't feel like socks!

In our family, we didn't have the luxury of receiving expensive gifts as there wasn't enough money to go around. I remember getting a flashlight once. Was I happy! In appreciating little we were rich.

I wish everybody out there a Merry Christmas.