

Memories of Childhood Toys

By Alfred Opp, Vancouver, British Columbia

Edited by Connie Dahlke, Walla Walla, Washington

The toys my Dad made for us in Bessarabia were all made out of wood. I remember he made a little wheelbarrow for us to play with. He also made a four-wheeled toy cart.

He made real ice-skates for us out of wood that had an iron piece fitted onto the bottom. The wooden part of the skates had holes in them that allowed me to feed a string through so that I could tie the skates onto my shoes. These skates worked well on icy surfaces.

My Dad also made me a scooter – it was a two-wheeled rolling wooden piece with a handle. I stood with one foot on the scooter and pushed with the other foot.

Most of the toys he made for us were miniatures of things in our every-day life. He also passed down old tools for me to use in my own "shop." One item I remember was an old plane with no plate – it was dull and worn out. All the various tools he gave us we handled like adults and pretended we were skillful. I still have today two wooden rings Dad made for Mom to crochet around, to make a bag to carry things in.

At my grandparents' place, it was the same. There, I had a smithy shop with hand-me-down tools that were not dangerous. My /Opa/ Zacher was especially skillful in his toy making. He made me a little wagon to play with. He also made a toy wheat-cutting machine that had so much detail that as we pushed it along, it had parts that really moved.

Girls received home-made dolls, and many parents constructed "Pupenstube" doll houses to go along with the dolls. Balls were also home-made out of rags tied tightly together. Although these balls had no "bounce" they were still good for kicking, throwing and catching.

All in all, we had plenty of toys that fostered our imagination and dreams to go along. This gave us the opportunity to discover on our own how to make things work. We invented our own games, using our imaginations to the fullest. We also had plenty of accessible space and numerous opportunities to explore nature. All of these experiences made our days memorable.

As boys reached school age, most had their own pocket knives and some became quite good at carving, making small toys and whistles from various materials. Some would take a stick and carve on it to make a fancy walking stick.

Mom made playing cards from candy wrappings from Christmas – from these we played Odd Man Out. Our parents didn't leave much time for us to play except in the winter months. But I have so many happy memories – we had so much fun from little things combined with the creativity we had on our own. That gave us a real sense of satisfaction.