

Memories of Ostern (Easter) in Teplitz, Bessarabia

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In my village of Teplitz, Easter was the holiest time of the year. As springtime arrived, so also did the early flowers and the greening of the trees. It was a happy time. It was also a time to remember to cleanse our souls and appreciate all the good things we continually received.

Easter also was a time to remember the loved ones that had passed away. We remembered that life was given to us to live in God's name and that we had been saved and forgiven from our sins by Jesus Christ. To arouse our conscience, the season started a few weeks ahead of Easter with "Fastensonntag" or Fasting-Sunday - a time to hold back on lust and pleasures in respect of our holy commitment. Then came "Palmsonntag" or Palm Sunday which was a special day in the church.

The time just before Easter was spent in many preparations. For example, men cleaned up the yard and white washed the buildings, the women baked Easter Bread and colored the eggs. The house received a spring cleaning. Then came "Gruendonnerstag" the Thursday before Good Friday which found all the village work and common activities completely shut down. Folks visited the Graveyard to put their last touch on the graves for Easter. Our "Friedhof" (cemetery) in Teplitz looked like a park - it was simply beautiful with all the plants and flowers decorating the graves.

Easter was not all tears and sorrow. The children seeded a plate with grass for the Easter Rabbit. Mom told us kids that when the grass had grown to a height of 6 inches the Easter Bunny would appear on the window sill to present goodies for those children who had been brave. So we kids placed the plate on the window sill and waited. I can so well remember thinking, Why does the grass grow soooo slow!

On Good Friday the church held services were well attended. So many faces were in attendance that were otherwise rarely seen that the place was packed. On that Good Friday every woman was dressed in black with everybody solemnly thinking of Jesus suffering on the cross for our sins. Tears could be seen on many faces during the service. It was a moving experience. No meat was eaten on Good Friday.

After the Friday services, everyone went to the graveyard to share their thoughts about loved ones who weren't here but were still in our hearts. This perpetuated a wonderful family bond of love and appreciation. For the entire day common activities and celebrations were kept to a minimum.

Saturday was a day of normal activities. After church on Easter Sunday, children got up early to check their Easter nest to see what the /Osterhase / (Easter Rabbit) had brought them. After breakfast, the family went to church. After the church service ended, people once again went to the /Friedhof/ (cemetery) in memory of the loved ones long gone. The day continued with a festive family dinner, typically lamb roast with sweet rice and trimmings. Then followed the visiting of relatives where coffee and "Suessbrot" or "Hefazopf" (an Easter Bread) was served. Small children ran around happy in their play and the young folks went out to the pasture to play an Easter Egg game. In later years (after WWI), the young people concluded the day with a folk dance.

We celebrated Easter both in respect for our religious beliefs, and at the same time we celebrated the arrival of spring. The observance of the old traditions passed down by our ancestors were very much the core of how we observed the occasion. We thank God for the good times we had and the feelings we so fondly shared with our family members and friends.

To this day, Easter remains for us a lasting gift of spirit and devotion. Happy Easter to all.