

## **Powdered Milk and Other Discoveries**

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...Instant-soup...instant-coffee...milk-powder...egg-powder...do these innovations spell an end to our ways of preparing food and how we live? What will they think of next!

When Washington noticed a cloud formation, laced with Hammer and Sickle, drifting from the East to the West after WWII, the alarm bell went off. At that point, the US was sorting out its options regarding Germany. The US realized that Germany could be a walkover for the Communists if no help was given them. For the sake of world peace, Germany's plight could not be ignored.

The Americans took immediate action with the Marshall plan. Shipments of food and various forms of aid left US ports bound for Europe and the divided city of Berlin. Included in these shipments were foods of the instant and non-perishable variety. When the shipments reached Germany, these powdered foods were largely distributed to school children. It was at that time our people got their first look and taste of this food of another sort.

Our people from out East had never heard or seen of instant foods. Or if they did, they didn't give such things much thought. The way we knew to prepare food was to get up early, roll up our sleeves, work over the dough, start the stove, boil the water, grab the washboard and do the laundry. What else was there to know? Food had been prepared in the traditional way for centuries, and wasn't likely to change anytime soon.

Even with the food shipments from America, food was still in short supply. It helped to know a farmer - it was even better to know someone who lived in America. As soon as Germany was again connected to the international postal service, people started to write. One family did just that and mailed their letter to distant relatives in America. It had been years since they last wrote. After weeks of waiting, a parcel arrived. The family jumped for joy and started to unwrap it to see what was inside. They found cans and packages of food well wrapped and labeled, except for one container that had no label. Strangely, there was no letter or note with the package.

A couple of days later, the family started to get into the box of food. They started with the can that had no label. Inside they found a powdery substance of something. Mother took a taste of it, but it had no taste. It must be one of those instant meals, she thought. So she emptied it into a pan with water and brought it to a boil. Still it had no taste. They knew Uncle George and Aunt Frieda wouldn't send them something that wasn't good. So Grandma took over - surely she could make something of it. By adding more ingredients to it, the taste improved. The family sat down and ate every spoonful.

A few days later a letter arrived from Aunt Frieda to let them know how happy she was to hear they were alive and well. She went on to say that since the letter would arrive before the parcel, she wanted to explain what was in the box and to also let them know that Uncle George had passed away. Uncle George, she wrote, left a wish that his ashes be sent back to his beloved Germany. In the unmarked can she was sending his ashes so that they could be spread out somewhere in the forest. Folks, this story is no joke. In desperate times, strange things happen.

Our people may have heard about cremation, but never talked about it. To honor our dead, we laid them to rest in a well-kept graveyard. A visit to the graveyard meant a lot to us. To share a few moments at the graveside thinking of our loved one, even to have a good cry, made us feel better.

Going to the inferno voluntarily is not what our ancestors lived for. If one of us winds up going there, it will be soon enough. I may go up in smoke, but when it happens I hope there is some incense to help me be remembered.

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### **Family Secrets**

Heinrich was a business man from Teplitz with a wife and four children. While living in Bessarabia, he made a good living. When they were resettled in Poland, they were assigned to a farm. The problem was that Heinrich was no farmer. He told the authorities he was not a farmer, and asked to be given something else to make a living. The officer in charge told him, "If you weren't a farmer, you are one now. I don't want to see you again." Heinrich went back to the farm. Under their reduced circumstances, things did not go well between Heinrich and his wife.

Three years later, the Soviets closed in, and Heinrich's fortunes changed forever. Along with other Germans, he and his family packed their horse-drawn wagon and left the farm, fleeing toward East Germany. But on the way, Heinrich went missing. Once in East Germany, the wife reported him as a war casualty. Heinrich's family did not understand this - why would he be a war casualty when he wasn't in the army?

Years later, after Germany was re-unified, Heinrich's sister went to visit her niece. Heinrich's wife by this time had also died. During the visit, Heinrich's sister and the daughter began talking about what had happened to Heinrich. The daughter said that when they fled Poland, she was very young, so she knew only what her mother had told her. Her mother had recounted that after they left the farm, she had discovered that her jewelry box was missing and she had asked Heinrich to go back to the farm to find it. Already late in leaving, Heinrich told his wife to continue westward with the horse and wagon, and he would peddle the bicycle back to the farm and see what he could find. He never came back. Years later, the daughter went back to the area in Poland where they had lived, to see if anyone might know what had happened to her dad. The new people living on the farm knew nothing. An old lady from next door said she remembered seeing Heinrich walk back onto the property, but did not see him leave. Another neighbor told the daughter that he saw Heinrich's dead body on the farm.

Heinrich's sister then asked her niece if she thought her father's life was worth the jewelry: Your mom sent him back, and you lost a father and she lost both a husband and the jewelry.

Then the niece revealed that she had the jewelry box - it was never lost.