

## The Market Place

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A trip to the open market place was both a necessity and an enjoyable highlight in the life of our ancestors. This was for them like a trip to the mall is for us. Even as late as 1940, shopping at the market place was very similar to what it had been in the very early colonial days. Even in Germany, the open market place was a long-held tradition into the 1930's. Wheeling and dealing was the order of the day at the open market.

During the pioneer days in South Russia, our ancestors were on their own to grow and produce the goods they needed for life to be successful. Rarely did they aspire beyond the basic necessities. Their traditions were hand labor and living close to the land. Change did not come easy or soon.

Going to the market was a special occasion. The nearest market to Teplitz was at Arzis, a town 8 km. to our west. Another market was held at Tarutino, but that was farther out. Both places had consistent offerings of merchandise, and people in the region knew which place would likely offer what they were looking for. Arzis generally had a wide variety of items from stores to health services, whereas Tarutino featured equipment, people who knew how to repair equipment, and gasoline for purchase.

As an example of how far behind we were in technology, in 1940 Teplitz boasted five automobiles in town. And even that is surprising, given that we had no roads fit for automobile traffic! My wife's grandfather had a Buick from the early 1920's but it rarely would start. Most villages had no mechanics who know how to maintain or repair automobiles. In Teplitz, the owner of the store did have a Ford that ran. The son of Mr. Neugebauer, the store's cashier, drove the Ford on store errands and could be hired by the villagers for a fee. As kids, just to see a car on the street, and especially to stand close to one, was exciting. As Mr. Neugebauer lived across the street from my Opa Zacher, I had the chance to see the Ford quite often.

When Opa went on trips to the market, he often took me along. My job was to keep an eye on his horses and gear while he went shopping. These open markets covered several acres, and it took a lot of walking to take it all in. One could find new wagons, horses and animals, all kinds of goods for sale, and leather gear for horses. Stoneware in all shapes and sizes was for sale. Fruits and vegetables for sale were available in huge amounts. Sacks of sunflower seeds were sold, some roasted and others not. Vendors came up with specialty merchandise that was not easily produced by everyone else. The Bulgar people were known for their fruits. Gypsies and others were known for making things out of tin. There were stands where one could purchase a snack or a meal, although most of our people took a Brotsack with their lunch packed in it, along with them to market. On one trip my grandpa bought me a sandwich from one of the market stands – it was so good I can still taste it!

The main feature of these markets was the bargaining – and there was lots of such activity. If one was good at it and timed it right, he saved money. It was humorous to see people arguing one minute and shaking hands the next! Then there were the roadside Schenke (taverns). Traders went inside to either fix a deal or soften up a client to get a deal. The saying was, "There's no deal so difficult that a glass of wine can't fix it." But the drinking was a nightmare for the wives. Mom told many stories about how a husband's drinking caused problems for his

wife and family. Many times grandpa was called upon to settle an argument where a man could not sell his wagon to obtain desperately needed income. Trying to ply customers with alcohol, the would-be salesman also imbibed too many schnapps, and at the end of the day his frustrations spilled over onto his poor wife at home. Many times husband and wife went to market together, each shopping on their own. While many villages had a local store that carried a variety of needed items, soon everyone's tablecloth or window curtains had the same pattern! A trip to the market gave access to added variety. Arzis also had a jewelry store where a groom could get a ring for his sweetheart. For most, Arzis was an exciting place to go. As a kid, I have nice memories of getting treats such as colorful markt candies and pretzels. My grandma Zacher went with her parents to Odessa one time before WWI. That was a once-a-year trip even for people with money. Grandma proudly told me many times about the embroidered blouse or nice belt she had that other girls in the village did not. These finer things were only available in Odessa. As time went on, shopping became more convenient, especially after Teplitz opened a Co-Op store about 1904. But going to the open market was still an exciting event until we left in 1940.

After the war, when we arrived in South Germany the land of our ancestors, the face of the markets changed, especially once the new monetary system was established. But the old traditional markets such as Jahrmarkt, or Kirbemarkt came alive for their once-a-year festivals. The new Markt had entertainment and lots of trinkets for sale. The traditional Christkindles Markt remained an outstanding and well-preserved tradition. I can still see the glittering ornaments and smell the treats that were featured. There were so many toys that any kid's heart would beat faster. It was a true joy for young and old. Kids went to these market events with joy and high expectations. However, with money so tight our parents could fill only a small portion of our dreams. But even a small token was a huge thing for those of us who had survived the war. We still took pleasure in the anticipation and the chance for dreaming about something nice. To this day, I'm still a kid thinking about those times and places. These events gave us wonderful feelings and good memories to go along. We also learned to be satisfied with little and to be thankful for what our parents gave us. Looking forward to the Market at Christmas and Easter was a dream come true for us. Having little and expecting little opened the door to enjoy the good things we did experience. Such a feeling of contentment is essential for children to be successful in their up and coming life. There is more value in this approach than meets the eye. Today, I'm an old man with a good feeling and a smile as I think back on my childhood memories. I fully realize that I was so lucky – I never saw myself as a poor kid.