

## **"Too busy! No Time!" -- Ich habe keine Zeit**

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During the course of the World War II, my family lost most of their material possessions. We were able to bring only a few items of special value with us to Germany and then later to Poland. As we fled back to Germany my family was stripped of everything. When my grandparents fled Poland they too could bring with them only what was necessary to live on. Most of that was left behind in Eastern Germany as we fled to the Western sector. My family arrived in Stuttgart with only the clothes on our backs. All we had left were memories of our time in our Bessarabian homeland and the life we walked away from in an attempt to live in freedom.

Once the post-war economy in Germany had improved so that I had the resources to travel, I chose to emigrate to Canada in 1955 to begin rebuilding my life. When Helgard and I married in 1962 we started with very little. With "Fleiss" - hard work - we began to build our future. Eventually the pieces started coming into place. But we had no mementos of the life we had enjoyed before the war. How we wished for some physical objects that could represent our heritage.

One day on a trip out into the countryside, we came upon a town that was settled primarily by people from Europe who had come to this place to make their start in the New World. Walking down the street, we found a second-hand store loaded with beautiful old things from bygone days. Helgard and I went in to see if we could find something we liked. Did we ever! The shopkeeper was a lady who was easy to deal with. And why not, as we loaded ourselves down with the treasures in that store! We found napkin rings, plates with glass inserts -- all kinds of table items dating from the late 1800's up to the 1920's. Many items were silver plated, fitting exactly the style of things we were looking for. We also found hand-embroidered linens such as napkins and tablecloths, crocheted spreads and more.

We asked the shop keeper why people would want to dispose of all of these treasures. She replied that people don't have time these days to bother with such things, and don't always know how to care for them. It didn't take us long to select an entire collection of heirlooms! We keep our fancy things in a glass cabinet and continue to use them today much the same as our folks used their special things back in the Old Country. Come festive holidays and special occasions, our dinner table takes center stage as it is set with items fit for royalty. To keep our treasures in good shape, we use modern products and equipment -- such conveniences were not available to our ancestors back in Teplitz, Bessarabia.

My grandmother Pauline (Mueller) Zacher was a master at hosting a dinner party, and so is Helgard my soulmate. Oma Zacher used to say, "Eat with your eyes to fully enjoy your meal." In Teplitz, Bessarabia, my grandparents had more of the finer things of life than many people. My grandmother had fine furniture, dishes, cutlery and linens to work with to host an impressive dinner party. A special piece of equipment that was kept busy on these occasions was the Samovar for making tea. My grandmother also had a Topfkuchen which was a special baking unit that looked like a brass stove-pipe about 12" x 6" that sat atop an ethyl-alcohol burner. I wish I knew the recipe my grandmother used for making the pastry she baked in that Topfkuchen. The Topfkuchen

was a quick way to bake Kuchen pastry to be served with tea. After baking the dough in the Topfkuchen, it would be sliced and then dusted with icing sugar.

My grandmother considered the making and serving of tea as adding an elegant touch to her dinners. Oma Zacher had special glasses that were reserved just for serving tea. A cube of raw sugar that looked much like an ice cube was placed into each glass of tea. Guests carefully sipped the tea as it flowed over the sugar cube into the mouth. This had to be done elegantly, Russian-style, which meant there could be no mouth noise as the tea was sipped.

To prepare the various dishes that were so special to us in Bessarabia, the women had no modern appliances of any kind, no electrical power in the house, and no indoor plumbing. The preparation of every-day food items was a challenge. To go beyond and prepare fancy party foods took know-how and a willingness to work.

All laundry was washed using a washboard and home-made soap. For fine white things, Oma would add a bit of blue dye. To stiffen shirt collars and table linens such as napkins and table-cloths, she mixed homemade potato starch into the water. The wet laundry was hung outside to dry in the sun, which also helped to bleach the white items. The sun was the only "bleach" we had. When dry, the laundry was taken back inside and the larger items were set aside to be stretched prior to ironing. I often helped Oma stretch these pieces to remove some of the wrinkles and shrinking. She would pull on one end of the item and I would pull on the other end while standing behind a table for balance. Ironing was a fine art that took skill, time and patience. The iron was heated with charcoal -- swinging it from side to side increased the temperature. Learning to iron properly required much practice. Especially difficult to iron were pleated items and the corners of embroidered pieces. The last step was to fold the ironed laundry before storing it away. All of the table linens were made of cotton or linen. If an item was not used for a time, the edges would begin to yellow, and the item had to be re-washed and re-ironed before use. If silver items were not used frequently, they would tarnish and then had to be polished and washed before they could be used.

One day when I was about 8 or 9 years old, I was helping Grossmama with her chores. It was laundry day and she had laundry to hang outside on the clothesline. Grossmama carried the wet laundry out to the clothesline and I carried the clothesline clips in a cloth bag. After we were done, she had a few pieces of laundry left that she wanted to take inside and hang on the rainy-day clothesline up in the attic. These were home-made oval shaped cloth pads - my aunt's private laundry that Grossmama did not want to hang out in public. Being curious I asked, What are these? Grossmama said, These are women's underwear warmers. I asked, Why don't I have any? She said, Boys don't need them - they wear pants. My curiosity was satisfied with that explanation.

Those were the good old days: a time that required hand skills, a time without our modern "time-savers," a time to which we give so little thought! And we say we have "no time!"