

## **A Memorable Ride in a Horse - Drawn Sleigh - Sliding About Town in Deep Snow**

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In Bessarabia we had long winters with lots of snow. Sometimes we had snow-drifts as high as a house. Our house was near the end of town which gave it easy access to the winds. One winter a snow-drift hit our house that reached from the ground to the roof. Dad had to shovel a tunnel to get out.

On one memorable outing, my grandparents took me along to visit Tante Emma in her uptown home. The street was packed with snow, which made walking difficult. Grandpa pulled his horse-drawn sleigh out from the barn for us to ride in. While it was good for us to get out and around, it was also good for the horses to get their idle legs in shape.

It is wonderful to recall these memories at this snowy time of year. This year my good wife Helgard decorated our coffee table in the front room with a spread Tante Emma made about 70 years ago. It looks as good as new. The spread is 26 x 26 inches in white cotton. The edges are nicely crocheted. The spread shows fine needlework with fir twigs and red candles burning brightly symbolizing the Advent time and Christmas. The needlework is so fine that it looks as though it is painted. Emma was an arts and crafts teacher who was married to Grandma Zacher's brother Oskar Mueller, a school teacher who passed away quite young. Emma not only gave classes in arts and crafts, she also gave lectures on fine cooking and baking. She was a charming lady who only spoke in classic German. Her house was a fun place to visit. Her afternoon tea with all the baked goodies was something that I looked forward to. She was also good with children and told us many stories.

That day I visited Aunt Emma with my grandparents, she let me look at some of her children's books. I especially remember that she made me comfortable sitting on her leather sofa - I was not allowed to sit on ours at home. She gave me two books to look at - one was titled "The Struwelpeter" about a boy who didn't take a bath, didn't comb his hair and refused to have his nails cut. The book showed how messy he looked, with the others laughing at him. The other book was "Artur mit dem langen Arm" (Arthur with the long arm) - the story of a boy who didn't listen to his parents when told to not hang onto a wagon that was in motion. The boy was not listening to what his parents said, and so he did it again, only this time his arm got stuck to the wagon, pulling him along and stretching his arm to twice it's normal length. He walked home ashamed, dragging along his long arm.

Grandpa had an old horse that he didn't feel deserved to be retired or even put down. He used this horse on short outings or light fieldwork. "Maschka" the horse also needed to exercise her legs to keep them from getting stiff. I was about seven at the time, and had some horse experience by then, thanks to grandpa. "Maschka" had a bit of a joint problem that needed a foot-bath from time to time. After grandpa showed me how it was done, he then trusted me enough to do that job. All I had to do was to give the leg a tap, and the foot went in the canvas pail filled up with the warm liquid. Did the horse ever love that! I then kept watch until the time was up.

Grandpa harnessed "Maschka" onto my sled so that we could go up and down the road. Was I ever proud of that! My friends joined their sleds onto mine - sometimes as many as 10 sleds in one long line. The horse had a blanket on to keep warm. I was not allowed to have "Maschka" go fast, although I was tempted. We all had fun,

and so did "Maschka." After that, I took "Maschka" home and Grandpa took off the harness and put her into her stall. I gave her some oats for being my buddy that day.

Christmas, snow, sleigh rides, visits and the pure fun we had are memories that I cherish so very much. Even in the summertime with all the animals around us, we felt so good. As kids, we had to work from an early age. We learned to be responsible for the tasks that were given to us. That was a tool passed on to us that helped us to get along in life.