

# German Bessarabian Mothers and Housewives

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Note: Information within [brackets] are comments by the translator.  
There was a photo of the School in Leipzig on page 60, but seemed to be  
an error of the publisher and should have been connected to a different  
article. So it has not been included in this translation.

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[Translation Begins]

## German Bessarabian Mothers and Housewives

by N. Reimann

Just as *The Song of the Good Man* (*Das Lied vom braven Mann*) sounded in his time, a song of our good housewife can be sung just as well and the right place for it is this *Heimatkalender*. It has to be said somewhere what these mothers and women have accomplished there in the colonies. It is a pity that I am so far away from our Solo [pen name of a Bessarabian author], otherwise I would borrow his famous pen for this work. As it is, however, I will be brief, and say only that which is to be emphasized in honor of our housewife.

### In the Kitchen

To start with the song, we first want to stick our noses into the kitchen of a German-Bessarabian house, where it has always smelled so mouth-watering. A good part of the butter and egg money that our mother kept for herself was used to feed all the “hungry mouths” of the big folks and the little ones, as our Swabians put it. Most of them could really cook instinctively (*aus dem Effe*). Roasts and coleslaw, “pastry and waffles”, sauerkraut and soups—sweet and sour—and so on, who could list them all? The large, round white breads, this “*nemezki chlib*”, which the Russians still remember with sadness, crumble (*Streusel*) and cheese cakes and all kinds of delicious pastries during the holidays—simply to be amazed at what these women achieved in the primitive stoves and ovens there. After ten years I have eventually gotten used to the local bread, but I would still like to be there to eat such a “weekly bakery”. But Pantelei [man’s name]

and Dunja [woman's name] must also have their share of it, which for me would be even more like eating bread. They were so glad to be of service among us because of the good food and German order. And how strange it was in the city that the Jews only wanted German butter and cheese! Even the sheep's cheese, if it was to taste good, was not allowed to be made by the milk shepherd (*Melkschäfer*), but by our housewife.

## Wealth of Children

If one looks at the two-child system common here, one can only think back with admiration to the times in Bessarabia, when there were ten or more children in the family at the time of our parents. And although in the past, among the few doctors and especially before the discovery of vaccinations, countless small children died there, our ethnic group was able to grow from 4,000 to almost 100,000 re-settlers—not to mention the tens of thousands who had gradually emigrated all over the world. It is almost incomprehensible that our mothers and women are happy to give birth when they are overburdened with work in the big houses and farms! And if the many children grew up mostly healthy and grown, this was again only due to the tireless care and attention of their mothers. They did not pamper the little ones with sweets, chocolate and ice cream, but made sure that the teeth and stomachs of their loved ones remained in order. In addition to the usual nutritious food, the children received plenty of fruit, watermelons (*Arbusen*), melons, grapes and boiled (also roasted) corn-on-the-cob in the summer and, in the winter, there was always the pop corn (*Brazala*). All this was healthy food for the organs, and the corn was used to provide the best dental care—without expensive pastes. A local dentist once said after the dental check-up with a Bessarabian in his fifties: “Yes, you have to search for something like that here, teeth like steel—I would like to have such also.”

## The Nursery

The place where a person spends part of his childhood is probably just as important as the “Kitchen of the House” with the difference, however, that in the kitchen only physical prosperity is taken care of, while in the nursery the spiritual development is more important. Here the mother lays the foundation on which school and life can then be further built upon. At the age of 75, I have already been able to make many observations and have found that housewives and mothers often either serve God or the devil in the nursery. Our mothers there certainly belonged for the most part to the maidservants of God. They simply did not have time to pursue pleasure, but it was all the more fun in the nursery when the mother sang songs during the play-time, when unbreakable dolls were made from scraps of fabric, or something else was made. But when all the games had been played, the little ones were allowed to help their mother with light work. Liesle was already able to bring the ducklings and chicks their food, also pluck *Rotfuß* [botanical name unknown] and *Melden* [botanical name *Atriplex-rosea*] for the pigs and get the eggs out of the nests. If there was nothing more to be done, perhaps the *Bertale* [reference to Italian composer Bertali] that the stork had brought would make itself known, and she would be allowed to do the rocking. The male child, however, was already allowed to herd sheep together with Martin. The mother almost always had “popcorn” in supply and when it was almost all, they were even allowed to do the popping themselves in the summer kitchen with the already older Martin. Ha! How amusing

it was when the bursting corn kernels jumped over the edge of the kettle like little snowballs, what a pleasure! And how good these self-burst pieces, still warm and crunchy, tasted! In this way, the children grew up and then participated more and more in light work. In winter, they helped to pluck wool and wind yarn on balls, in the spring they gathered grapes in the vineyard, tended sheep and went to the fields, cleaned the yard and the wall on the street, and so forth; especially in the harvest and threshing season there were all kinds of jobs where children could be put to good use. This domestic mode of education, in which there is not only play and romping, but also alternating work and duty, turns the children—instead of demanding tyrants—into modest, obedient students, thus making the great task of the teacher of forming people out of children easier. The realm of religion must also be anchored in the nursery, and our wives obediently responded to Christ's command, "Let the little children come to me." They taught those under age the *Father, dear Father* (*Abba, lieber Vater*) or *Angel come..* (*Engel komm...*) and in the evening the beautiful *I am Tired, Going to Rest* (*Müde bin ich, geh' zur Ruh*). When the children began to go to school, the religion teacher did not have to cram the Lord's Prayer with great difficulty. The school could always count on the support of the family in our Christian teaching. As a result, the without equal good church attendance in our villages.

### **In the Living Room**

In this we also want to look around in retrospect. Instead of rocking chairs, soft sofas with armchairs and other luxuries, we find there with our ancestors a spinning wheel and a simple loom, but finally almost always a sewing machine. What for—we will see in a moment. My Lisa had to sew all the clothes for the maids, as was usually agreed upon. Bedding and under clothes, the kindergartener's wardrobe as well, and I myself wore shirts made by her. Do not say: "That was just for then". No, when I held the director's position in the Association of Large Landowners in Akkerman, where mostly landowners and nobles frequented, I did not have to be ashamed at all to wear homemade shirts. This was actually nothing special in Bessarabia. I can serve up even more. With the remnants, they themselves not only made the jackets and overcoats (*Mäntelchen*) for the little ones, but also the adult daughters wore such dresses, probably even ladies' overcoats, in which one could go quietly to the city without attracting any attention there. And on top of that, the fabric was usually purchased with lots of butter and egg money. In this way, it was not difficult for a farmer with 50 hectares [124 acres] or more to become rich and richer, if only he had open eyes for economic issues and knew how to pay attention. We often owed our economic advancement to our Bessarabian housewives.

### **In the West**

Now that all our possessions have disappeared through Resettlement, Flight and Currency Reform, one will perhaps ask: what was the use of all the trouble and work and all the savings of these model housewives? In addition one more thing: the material possessions, working and creating gave us another remaining good, namely excellent characteristics according to the proverb "Habit of a person is second nature". This second nature of ours is our wealth today: we are accustomed to saving and to work. Even if it seems impossible to establish a real existence here, yet many Bessarabians have already taken root again. If some of our young people were

able to marry locals, it was certainly not for money, but for other values. It should also be noted that once a Bessarabian is in position [of a job], he is gladly kept longer and his wages are improved. The many homes of the Bessarabians, which can be read about in the *Mitteilungsblatt* [a newsletter], also testify to our efficiency. These are the kind of possessions that no one can take from us, wherever fate may take us. Our youth, who are now in danger of losing what they have “inherited from the fathers”, should not be tempted by the bad examples in this partly already “Americanized” world, which in reality is anything but beautiful. And when American soldiers look for women here, they do not do so in any case because there are no such beauties over there, rather they want to have German “Gretchen” and especially good German housewives. “If you still have a mother, thank God and be content.” This is especially true of Bessarabian mothers, and our youth strive to be like them, which will be a great blessing for them as well as for the next generation. And he who still has a real colonist wife at his side is still rich, even if it seems as if everything is gone with the lost property.

[Translation Ends]