

PEARL TSCHIRHART BIEDIGER
MEMOIR
Alsatian Customs and Traditions
#B13



PEARL TSCHIRHART BIEDIGER - 1913

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Castroville Public Library Oral History Project B in October of 1980. Deanna Hoffman transcribed the tape and Faustina Sharp was the interviewer and the editor of the transcript.

Pearl Tschirhart Biediger was born on December 4, 1913 in Castroville, Texas. Her parents were August Tschirhart and Katie Kauffmann. Both parents were famous for their fine Alsatian cooking. This is how Pearl learned to cook the Alsatian dishes she describes in this transcript.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken work, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources .

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Tape # B13
30 minutes
transcribed

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Today is October 21, 1980. This is Faustina Sharp interviewing Pearlie Tschirhart Biediger at her home in Castroville, Texas. I am interviewing for the Castroville Public Library Oral History Project B.

Q Pearlie, can you tell me some of the favorite things you had as a little girl to eat, foods?

A Well, my mama used to make cake every Saturday. That was her -- every Saturday we had to have a cake. And on Fridays we had beans and noodles and cooked prunes and filled doughnuts. That was our Friday menu. And at Christmas time we had -- mama used to fix us our dinner and have turkey and dressing and --

Q What kind of cookies did she make?

A She made the fruit cookies and the Michigan rocks and molasses cookies.

Q Did you decorate your tree with --

A With fruit, fresh fruit and candy canes and candles.

Q Did you use any cookies on your tree?

A Yes. Decorated cookies and had a fresh cedar tree, not artificial.

Q That was a good smell, wasn't it?

A Yeah, it was a good smell in the house, that cedar.

Q What did you do, did you make New Year's bread?

A Yes, we made New Year's bread. She made it all the time, and then we'd give some of it away and some to the godchildren, but they had to come and get it.

Q What kind of a bread was it? Was it a fruit bread?

A No, well, it was a sweet bread and it had -- you can put raisins in it. And some put pecans in it. But I prefer raisins only.

Q Did you put any kind of icing on it?

A No, just glazed it with a yolk of an egg with sugar.

Q Tell me how you did that.

A The whole bread?

Q The egg --

A Oh. Just beat up the egg and put sugar in it and then brush the top just before you put it in the oven. It kind of glazes it then.

Q Did you make any certain shapes?

A Oh yes, all kind of shapes. A little man, and a little - like little rows, s's, and then I braided some.

Q Did the recipe come from your grandmother?

A Yes, my grandmother. And then down to my mother and, of course, my mother gave it to me.

Q Do you think it came over from the old country?

A Well, that I'm not real sure of but --

Q Very likely?

A Very likely it did.

Q Did you have any special meals during Lent and Advent?

A Well, we didn't eat no meat on Fridays, and Ash Wednesday we didn't eat no meat. Other than that it wasn't --

Q What did you have then, in place of it?

A Meat?

Q Uh-huh. What did you have instead of meat?

A Oh, we, like salmon or fish.

Q Do you remember what your grandmother served?

A Well, I tell you, they always went fishing a lot. They had a lot of fresh fish, um-huh,

Q How did they prepare their fish?

A She usually fried 'em in cornmeal. They, you know, the older people, and they fried them in pure hog lard, too.

Q Did you have anything special to eat at Easter time?

A Well, not really. The only thing we had a tradition of, and I know that's way back from my mother, we had bacon and we had Easter eggs for breakfast. (laughter)

Q That sounds good.

A But other than that, I mean, we just had an ordinary dinner, a regular dinner.

Q Did you have, did you do a lot of work at St. Louis Day, your mother and your father?

A Yes, they did. My daddy made barbecue and mama cut the cabbage slaw; they're still cutting it down there. It wasn't big yet, the celebration. They had a cabbage cutter down there and we'd cut it. And then Molly Schott used to help us, too.

Q Did they make their own recipe for the dressing?

A Yes.

Q Could you tell us a little about that dressing? You don't have to give proportions, but just tell us what goes into it.

A Well, for the cabbage slaw it's Wesson oil and vinegar and water and mustard and sugar and salt.

Q And it's so good.

A Um-hum.

Q What kind of pits did they use when your father was barbecuing?

A Well, they just had the pits, you know, in the ground. A hole, you know, in the ground and had wire over it. That's all I remember. 'Course it wasn't as big as it is now. (laughter)

Q How many years did your mother work on that?

A Oh, gosh, Faustina, I don't know.

Q You took it over from her, didn't you?

A Well, no, not really, but I helped. I mean I wasn't the head of it, but I helped 'em for many a year.

Q I've always heard about your mother and daddy's good roasts. Tell me how they fixed a roast.

A Well, she had an old wood stove and then she just, well, I guess salt and pepper and she used garlic (laughter). And she just baked it. I'll tell you another thing she made good was calf head.

Q Tell me about that.

A She baked that in the oven and, well, salt and peppered it and put barbecue sauce over it and baked it real crisp.

It was good.

Q. How do you serve the calf head?

A. You just slice it off wherever, you know, just slice it and then you break it apart and there you got the tongue in there.

Q. You have to peel the tongue?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. The brains?

A. No, the brains were usually out. They took them out before, you know, when they bought the calf head, over at the market.

Q. Did she serve the eyeballs?

A. Yes. They were left in the -- (laughter).

Q. Have you ever eaten one?

A. No. You know what I like, just the crispy stuff on the outside (laughter).

Q. You didn't care for the --

A. I didn't care for the eye. They always said there's nobody could bake a calf head but Katie (laughter).

Q. That's right. Or roast either.

A. Yeah.

Q. Tell me something about your Holy Communion Day. Did you have anything special to eat on that day?

A. Well, I tell you, we had a lot of sweets. I guess we just had a regular dinner and then we had a lot of sweets. And my aunt made me a big lemon pie on my Communion Day.

Q You still remember how good it was.

A Oh, yes. It had the nicest meringue on there.

Q Did you ever have pastata at Christmas time?

A Yes.

Q Can you describe that?

A Well, you take ground-up pork and just marinate it for a couple of days with salt and pepper, vinegar, parsley and green onions and just leave it set for a couple of days or how long you want to, it don't make any difference - the longer the better, and then you put 'em in your pie crust and bake 'em. Brush the top with egg, beat up an egg and brush the top with an egg.

Q Is that kind of a traditional Christmas food?

A Yes, it is.

Q Did you ever make pickled turnips?

A Uh, yes. Like kraut? Turnip kraut? Yes.

Q Tell me how you do that?

A Well, we just cut up the turnips and I usually put mine in quart jars and put two teaspoons of salt on it and warm water and seal them up.

Q You don't put 'em in a crock?

A No.

Q Do you make sauerkraut?

A Yes. Sauerkraut I make the same way as the turnips.

Q Put it in jars?

A In jars with two teaspoons of salt.

Q Do you make any parisa?

A Well, my mother did, but I never make it. My mother made it. Well, it's special ground meat and cheese and onions and salt and pepper and a little lemon juice in it.

Q And when do you serve that?

A Parisa? Oh, that can be served anytime (laughter).

Q I think people eat it anytime.

A Anytime, that's right.

Q I want you to tell me, did you ever kill hogs when you were -- your daddy?

A Oh, yes, my daddy killed a many a one.

Q What all did you do with the hogs? Start from the very beginning.

A Well, he killed it and then mama usually had to catch the blood and they made blood sausage out of that. And they had boiling water.

Q How did they do the blood sausage? Did they have to make a special cut or anything?

A No, he just stabbed him and mama had to catch the blood and keep stirring it so it wouldn't get curdled and we made blood sausage.

Q What did you put in the blood sausage?

A Well, bread, soaked break in milk, and then parsley and green onions and salt and pepper and, what do you call that from the hog, oh, it's the net of the, of, you know, oh, what do you call it?

Q Sweetbreads?

A No, no, it's lard, it's grease.

Q Oh, tallow?

A Well, no, not really, it's what they call, from the pancreas, you know, from the mells, that they cut up and fried it and put it in there.

Q I didn't know that.

A Yeah, it's, you should cut it off, I'd tell you more about it.

Q Describe this net, it's --

A Well, it looks like a veil, it's, you know, like --

Q It's filmy, right?

A Yeah, you cut that up and fry it and it gets in little crisp pieces and you put that in there.

Q Adds to the flavor?

A Yes.

Q Okay. We have blood sausage. Now what else, what was the next step that you did to the hog?

A We scraped it and then we cut it in half and then we leave it hang over the day, overnight, you know, and then the next day we made our sausage and cleaned the pig's feet and then we made head cheese.

Q How did you make head cheese?

A Well, we take the head, and then the bones that we trimmed off when we made the sausage, and we take them, boil it all and then cut it up and put it in. We cleaned the stomach of the hog, and put that in the stomach and then we cooked

it for about an hour and then we took it out and we pressed it down and put a big weight on it until it was kind of flat. And the next day we hung it up and smoked it a little and we could just slice it off.

Q Was that called schwarda maga?

A Yeah, what's schwarda maga (laughter).

Q And what is gollery?

A Gollery is the pig's feet, you know, you boil 'em and then you put 'em in the vinegar, salt and pepper, and put 'em in, and chill 'em, you know. Some of 'em, mama never cut 'em off, she left them whole, you know, cut in quarters, the feet, but I trim mine off sometimes, and then cut it and just slice it. It's easier to eat that way, but mama never did. She just -- and the ears she put with it yet.

Q What else did you make besides sausage and these things?

A Well, we made bacon, made our own bacon, and we made salt pork. We'd salt the bones down in a crock and then make a heavy salt water, salt water strong enough to carry an egg, and then we left it in there, well, a couple of weeks anyway, and then we took it out and smoked it, and that was our salt pork.

Q How long did this last? Did it last all year or 'til the next hog killing, or how long did it last?

A Well, no, not all year. Maybe 'til the next hog killing.

Q Did you ever have any in the summertime? Could you carry it over into the summer?

A No, no. We never carried it into the summer. We always, you know. Now the bacon we might have, you know. carried it a little longer, but not the salt pork.

Q How did you cure your bacon?

A Just salt and pepper and smoked it. Put it in salt water first like in a brine, and then we hung it up and smoked it. And when it got too warm, well then we put it in the ice box.

Q So did you make sausage out of most of the meat?

A Yes. And well, we bought, you know, beef to go with it, pork and beef to make it. And then another thing that we had on the day we killed, that we made the sausage, we had the backbone of the pig that we put in the oven and baked it. That was our day of making sausage, we had backbone.

Q Did you have any other good food that day?

A Oh, yes. We had sweet potatoes and sauerkraut.

Q Real feast, huh?

A Yes, a real feast. And we had, well, the neighbors would usually help each other out, and, you know, they'd come over and help and we had the dinner.

Q So it was a party.

A It was a party. 'Course they don't do that anymore. But the backbone was good. See, we didn't cut the pig, you know, we cut it on both sides, so that's where your backbone is, you know. Anyway, and oh, they were so good.

Q What part of the pig do you use for pastata pie?

A Well, it's that along the backbone, that pure meat.

Q There is no fat on that?

A No, there's no fat on it. And my mama used to just slice it real thin, not grind it, but most people nowdays use chili-ground, but mama sliced it.

Q What are the main spices that your mother used in cooking?

A Well, she didn't use all that many. I mean, fresh garlic was her, and then, well, salt and pepper and well, I really-- she didn't use too many spices like that.

Q Did she use parsley?

A Well, yes, parsley and green onions, she always 'em in the garden.

Q She didn't use anything like cumino or paprika or anything like that?

A No, she never used paprika at all. She might have used chili powder when she made chili, but that was about it.

Q The main thing she used then was garlic and onions?

A Yeah, fresh garlic.

Q Did she make any real good soups?

A Oh, yeah, she made good soup. She had homemade noodles in 'em (laughter).

Q Describe the homemade noodles.

A Well, you just take your eggs and flour and work it up and then you roll it out as thin as you can and you let 'em dry and then roll 'em up and then cut 'em real fine. That's the pure egg noodles.

Q Did she make any gnepfla (little buttons)?

A Oh, yes, gnepfla.

Q Describe those.

A Well, I think she used to put a little water with the egg and then, you know, add a little salt and just dropped 'em by teaspoonful into the boiling water and that was gnepfla.

Q And how did she serve them?

A Well, she served 'em either, you know, when she'd sometimes make that instead of the noodles on Friday with beans and she cooked a lot of raisins on Fridays she'd have raisins and that's where sometimes she made her little filled doughnuts out of -- she made doughnuts and then put some of that raisin filling in it.

Q Do you still have the recipe for those doughnuts?

A No, Faustina, I don't, but I think I could make them, I mean.

Q I bet you could. Oh, I wanted to ask you, did she ever make rivala soup?

A Oh, yes, I still make it.

Q You do? Describe that.

A You just take the egg, well, I usually take a couple of eggs and then I put flour in there and stir it until it's real thick and then I take my hand and just kind of rub it so it gets little pieces, you know, and then I put it in my flour sifter and sift it so all the loose flour gets off and then I drop 'em in my soup.

Q How do you keep 'em from sticking to your hands?

A Oh.

Q Mine always sticks to my hands.

A Stick to your hands. Well, put flour and then--

Q And then just rub your hands?

A Rub your hands and just rub 'em and then --

Q And what does it look like?

A Well, just crumbled up little dough, that's all.

Q About like rice?

A Yes, maybe some are bigger if you're not that --

Q Sticks to your hand --

A If it sticks to your hand it might be bigger.

Q Do you have any of your mother's really favorite cookie recipes still?

A Yes, I guess her fruit cookie, like I say, the fruit cookie and the brown sugar icebox cookies. And then I have a recipe that Molly Schott gave me for the ice box, oatmeal cookies. I still use that.

Q How big a batch do you make when you make molasses cookies?

A Well --

Q You probably don't use a recipe, do you? Do you make a dishpan full or --

A No, I don't think it'd be a dishpan full. Maybe less than that, I believe, not that many. You can double the recipe.

Q What do you put in it?

A Well, it's molasses and, well, you can use hog lard in that if you have it. If not you can use, well, any kind of lard you have, and it's molasses and spices, you know.

Q You know, we didn't talk about rendering the lard.

A Oh, well, no we didn't. Let's see. We didn't finish.

Q We didn't finish the hog killing did we?

A Well, you take the lard and cut it off in little pieces and then you put it in a big black kettle out in the yard and build a fire and render it 'til it gets real crisp, until it floats on top and then you strain it, put it in your can, and then you've got your cracklins.

Q Is that what floats on top?

A Yeah, uh-huh, whenever it's cooked enough well then they start floating on top.

Q What do you store your lard in?

A In five-gallon cans.

Q Do you have to keep it cool or anything?

A Well, not really, I mean, we used to never have it that long, you know, you just killed one hog at a time and you never had too much.

Q What do you use the cracklins for?

A Well, you can make cracklin cornbread or you can eat 'em like that. Put a little salt on 'em. We used to couldn't wait until they were finished so we could eat 'em.

Q Good and warm.

A Good and warm, put a little salt on 'em and oh, the crispier the more they crackled (laughter).

Q How did you keep those?

A Well, we just used 'em fresh and what was left we kept and cooked homemade soap.

Q Tell me about cooking homemade soap.

A Well, we took that, and we had to get some tallow from the meat market and then used lye with it and just -- 'course I really don't know how much of it. I never paid no attention to that but I know we had to stir it all the time so it wouldn't cook over.

Q Did your mother, did you all do it any certain time, certain time of the moon?

A No, hum-um, whenever we had the lard and the stuff to cook it with.

Q When they had funerals in the early days did they ever take food to people?

A No, I don't think so. Not that I can remember, Faustine.

Q They didn't take any food to eat at the wake or anything?

A Un-um, no, I really don't know. I know we -- I don't think so, unless they did that I don't remember, you know.

Q That's something new, then?

A Yeah, um-hum.

Q What did your daddy take to work when he went -- what did your daddy do?

A Well, he worked on the road for awhile and he had his horses and mules. He plowed the lots around the neighborhood.

Q Did he come home for lunch then always?

A Not always. When he worked out on the road he didn't.

Q What did he take for lunch?

A Well, lot of times we had sausage and that's what, you know, he had sausage and bread and coffee.

Q When you were little children going to school what did you take to school for lunch?

A We come home for lunch.

Q Oh, you came home for lunch. You were very lucky.

A Yeah, we came home for lunch 'cause we didn't live too far from the school.

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Pearl Biediger
Interviewee's signature

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