



The Poppy & Pipatsch Conundrum

Misunderstanding and miss-communications were a frequent occurrence in my young years. It required some time, but eventually I learned to take most of them in stride.

I was raised by my 'Batschka Oma', my grandmother who spoke a dialect that she was familiar with from her life in the ethnic German communities in the Batschka region of the former Yugoslavia. After a childhood spent living in Germany, I was also familiar with the local dialect, as well as the proper German that we were required to learn in school.

As a teenager I came to live with my father & grandmother in Canada. I would need to learn english quickly in school and adapt to a quite different dialect at home. I must confess that I found adjusting to the Molidorf-Banat dialect a bit of a challenge. It was difficult to understand and sounded almost medieval to my ears. This caused some comical comprehension gaps that often us stranded in frustrating but somewhat amusing situations.

Shortly after my arrival at my new home, I was asked by my Molidorf grandmother to go and bring her the 'lavour' from the downstairs cupboard. Having no idea what that was supposed to be, yet unwilling to ask, so as not to appear to be stupid, I showed up in the kitchen carrying the big old bucket... No that was definitely not it !!!

Next, much to my grandmother's dismay, I scurried back bringing up the laundry basket. She was shaking her head wondering if I had hearing problems. No my hearing worked well as far as I could tell, but it must have seemed to her that my comprehension was a bit impaired.

Grandmother finally gave up and accompanied me downstairs to show me where the 'lavour' was kept. Aaahh now things began to make sense...you mean 'Schüssel' or 'Becken' is the same thing as a 'lavour' a large basin or bowl in english...different dialect...confusing to me !!!

Once I started school and was required to learn English & French, this communications gap was narrowing a bit. I began to hear the similarity in certain expressions. Yes things began to get a bit easier as we learned to communicate with each other.

In the meantime I had learned to understand that a 'Dippl' could refer to a 'Schopflöffel' aka Ladle or also mean a small pot with a handle and was also the word used to refer to a coffee mug . Little by little I began to get the hang of it - a pot lid was called a 'Deckel', but the translation for the word ceiling that I was accustomed to calling 'Zimmerdecke' or simply 'Decke' for short, was actually named 'plafon' in the Molidorf dialect. Oh yes

then there was the confusion over the word 'Kukuruz' that was the Molidorf dialect word for the German equivalent of Mais and in English it was known as corn.

Years later, having returned from a trip back to Germany, I was visiting my Molidorf grandmother and recounting the highlights of my trip. I began telling her how nice it was to see the lovely red flowers growing along the edges of the fields and alongside of the country roads. Seeing these small clusters of red 'Mohn Blumen' again, seemed to be a real 'welcome back' home to me. Yet I did not understand why this little red flower seemed to hold my fascination or draw on my heartstrings.

Grandmother was not sure what flowers I was talking about. So I tried to explain in English - well I mean some type of small red flowers that grow in clusters and look similar to Poppies. No luck as her English vocabulary did not include poppy and my knowledge of the Molidorf dialect failed to solve this conundrum. I explained: No I did not mean 'Mond-blumen' as in Moon-flowers nor Moos-blumen as in Moss roses or Marsh marigolds.

I looked in the dictionary to see if some clue could be found there to help us solve the riddle. Well there too it said: Poppy = Mohn and in reverse: Mohn = Poppy so now we were stranded. Then I recalled that my Batschka Oma had called these poppies Klatsch Mohn.... aaahh yes now we are on the right track and making progress. Well these are similar to the plants that make the seeds for the poppy strudel , just a lot smaller. The Conundrum was solved at last !!!

My Molidorf grandmother called them 'Pipatsch' and to my complete surprise insisted that they are horrible weeds, definitely not flowers. The Molidorf farmers never

wanted them in their fields since they tended to spread & could quickly ruin any chance of harvesting a good crop. These 'Pipatsch' were really difficult to eliminate, once a field was infested. No definitely they were not really a welcome sight for any Molidorf farmer.



In Canada it is the custom to use the poppy symbol for the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies. We also hear quite often about the poem "In Flanders Fields" written by John McCrae, the Canadian army physician in WWI. This is truly a moving & lasting legacy of those horrendous battles being

waged in the spring of 1915 in Ypres. But what is the connection with poppies - I needed to look further to gain an understanding.

Some explanation can be found in the fact that just like my Molidorf grandmother told me....these wild poppies are quite like weeds, and thrive once other plants have died off. Poppy seeds can be dormant on the ground for many years. When the ground is disturbed - either by plowing or by war, then these seeds will begin to sprout in profusion.

Yes so it was in the spring of 1915 the entire Western Front became an endless vista of pock-marked fields destroyed by war.....here wild poppies bloomed in profusion. Indeed such an



abundance of blood-red poppies had never been witnessed before.

On a recent trip through the Balkans, gazing out of the train windows, I saw huge swaths of fields covered in red poppies. These wild poppies seemed to be growing in profusion everywhere making for a beautiful contrast to the green fields.

On our arrival in the Molidorf area I noticed that here too the pipatsch-poppy is thriving in abundance. The pipatch-poppies have grown tall in the rich dark earth. The blossoms greeted us glowing brightly red in the hot Balkan sun.

Perhaps the pipatsch-poppy is quite an appropriate symbol for what has taken place here after World War II. Perhaps the pipatsch-poppy is all that can still mark the undiscovered and unmarked graves in a silent and appropriate tribute to all who perished here so cruelly and needlessly.



Along with that history lesson about the profusion of poppies in WWI also came a story of an atrocity that left me simply staggered.

I learned about the flight out of Serbia of 30,000 Serbian boys in the winter of 1915. In order to prevent them from falling into enemy hands, Serbian leaders ordered their armies along with 30,000 civilian boys and young men to

leave the country. These youngsters were only about 12-18 years old.

What tragedy and misery they encountered in the mountains of Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro is beyond my comprehension. Severe cold and hunger along with attacks by raiders decimated their ranks. It is estimated that about 23,000 of these young boys died.

If you wish, you can read more about it here:

<http://www.greatwar.nl/index.html>

<http://www.greatwar.nl/frames/default-oldsoldiers.html>

That 23,000 of those boys died is just staggering~~sigh (a very sad sigh) be they Serbian, German or any other nationality, this waste of life and this sorrow just shouldn't be on any side, it makes me reflect upon how strange this life is, that such sorrows are so unknown, by so many.

I am remembering the words on the poster I used to have hanging in my front room many years ago. It showed rows and rows of headstones from Flanders Fields from WWI, with lots of poppies all around:

We are the unwilling

led by the unqualified

to do the unnecessary

for the ungrateful

This expresses so well the feelings of lots of young men who died for who knows what~~for what~~for what? for

the predilections of selfish, fat politicians, who thought only of their rich pockets and never was there a thought for the blood of the young men who had to had to die to satisfy their lusts~~