

Easter in Vienna - when I was a child Lisbeth Owens

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Our Easter festivities started in Palm Week. On Palm Sunday my mother, my sister and I attended a special church service during which the 'Palm twigs' (bunches of pussy willows) were blessed . We took our bunch home and it went into a vase, without water, on the mantle piece - to protect our home, especially against fire. We usually also had a big bunch of forsythia twigs and spring flowers, in a window recess, which my mother decorated with hollowed out egg shells she had decorated and coloured ribbons.

On Maundy Thursday we had puréed spinach with fried egg and potato Rösti and on Good Friday fried fish - cod in egg and bread crumbs and potato salad. That was the time when we no longer heard the church bells ringing (which we were very used to as our windows looked out at the church) - the bells had flown to Rome.

Easter Sunday was a day of great excitement: the hunt for Easter eggs. They were hard boiled and dyed in vivid colours - red, blue, green, yellow - which my mother had hidden while we were asleep. In later years she also added some small chocolate eggs. And although our flat was not large, we often took a long time to find all the hidden eggs. And at that stage the bells started ringing again!

I remember one year when we spent Easter in the Waldviertel, a rural area north west of Vienna where we had been evacuated during the war. The village children went round all the houses chanting "English greetings to all good christians, come and join us " and waving wooden rattles which were supposedly replacing the absent church bells. The farmer's wife would reward them with a coloured egg and sometimes with a piece of a special cake called a 'Pinze' which was eaten with the traditional Easter ham. This way of celebrating Easter made a big impression on me.

Now we don't hide Easter eggs but I still have a bunch of pussy willow and decorate it with small wooden ornaments, eggs, bunnies, chicks which I take down after Easter, but keep the pussy willow twigs.