

It was a cold, sunny winter day in war-devastated Germany. Though it was nearly 60 years ago, I remember it like it was yesterday.

My mother, grandmother, brother, and I worried about the welfare of my father, who was in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp. Other families in our small Latter-day Saint branch also prayed for their missing and imprisoned men. Widespread poverty and the resultant lack of provisions compelled our family to carefully maintain a garden and raise animals for our use. Despite our best efforts at self-reliance, our economic situation at war's end left us in need of basic food supplies. I didn't know until that winter day that Church members halfway across the world would help answer our fervent prayers.

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, came to Europe to counsel and encourage the Saints and to give us donations of food. Our brothers and sisters in the United States had reached out to us in heartfelt kindness, despite the tragedies of World War II.

When we received food authorization papers from our branch president, I could hardly believe it. I eagerly agreed to help Mother push our two-wheeled handcart to the branch president's home, where the food shipment awaited us.

The seven-mile journey on foot was a small price to pay for the load of canned and bagged goods we received for our household of four. I can still vividly recall the Welfare Square logo on the cans and the pictures indicating the contents—peaches, pears, and applesauce. There were also sacks of cracked wheat, flour, sugar, and many other items, including something called pumpkin pie filling. We marveled at the abundance of goods as we tried to pronounce the English words on the labels.

With our cart loaded, we embarked on our return journey, soon to discover we would need the Lord's help to safely arrive home with our supplies. In the late afternoon hours, the weather had turned even colder, and the cobblestone road had become very slick. Part of the trek involved going under a railroad overpass. Going down was manageable, but when we tried to ascend the slick slope with our

cart, we struggled. I exerted all my nine-year-old strength, and we somehow reached the top—only to be confronted by a gruff policeman. The policeman, wearing a dark overcoat and a helmet with the police insignia, seemed to have appeared from nowhere.

“What's in the cart?” he demanded. Mother pulled back the blankets covering the wagon to reveal our precious load. He immediately wanted to know how we had obtained such an array of supplies, for none of them were to be found anywhere in the area. Mother explained that our church had sent the food and that she had authorization papers at home to prove it.

Unfamiliar with our religion and suspicious of how we had obtained the food, he insisted that we bring the wagon and accompany him to police headquarters. I started to cry. I knew they were going to take our food away. But we did as we were told. Mother received permission to return home for the papers, and I went with her,

WHAT'S IN THE CART?

BY ALFRED W. KOCH

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ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT T. BARRETT



remaining at home while she went back to police headquarters with the authorization papers. I was upset, discouraged, and afraid. But I had been taught to pray, so I prayed that somehow we would be able to keep our food.

Close to midnight we were elated when Mother finally came home—with the loaded handcart. As the events of the evening unfolded, I realized my prayer had been answered in many ways. Mother said the police reviewed her official papers, issued from Salt Lake City and endorsed by the Church. She surmised that they saw the English labels on the food items as additional proof of our legal procurement of the goods. After Mother was allowed to leave headquarters, the handle on our loaded cart broke, making it impossible for her to pull it by herself. A kind man saw her predicament and helped her push and

pull the cart home in exchange for a few cans of food.

We enjoyed the food for a long time, and later, when I moved to the United States as a teenager, I realized that the mysterious pumpkin pie filling we had received years ago—which we reluctantly ate after all the other food was consumed—actually makes a delicious holiday pie.

Since my youth in Germany, I have had many opportunities to be on the giving end of Church welfare assignments, helping with a variety of tasks at local welfare farms and at a Church-owned cheese plant and cannery.

Looking back, I am still warmed by the sunshine experience of that winter day. I am grateful that the Lord has

blessed me with opportunities to return the service rendered to my family. Having come full circle, I know firsthand what a blessing it is to give and to receive. ■

