

Apple Memoir

by Elisabeth von Holst



The smell of apples is still very much imprinted in my memory. It was a fall day and the whole class of girls attended our grade one classmate's funeral. I still remember her name, Gisela Freytag, her face and her mother standing by the open grave and calling out, over and over again, "My only child!"

At six years of age, this experience changed my outlook on life, on living, and made me realize the possibility of death at any age. Somehow a sense of guilt overcame me, because I was one of five girls in my family.

When I returned home from that cold experience (more than just the temperature), the smell of baked apples was very obvious and that meant the warmth of the cozy tile-stove in our home, because the apples were baked in its heating-oven. It gave me such secure feeling of comfort.

Apples meant a lot to me as a young girl, especially since they were not plentiful around us in the city. I even risked the chance of recurring diarrhea and stomach cramps by eating the tiniest, thumbnail-thick green apples that dropped off the trees and weren't fit to grow into what they were meant to become. After my family and I had been sent West as refugees for the second time, our hunger was serious. I had to walk to school, 4.5 kilometres each way, with hardly any food in my stomach, sometimes sitting in the ditch by the country road because of hunger. I began to dread school.

One day I saw what seemed impossible. There was a beautiful looking apple behind the fence on our school-ground! I lingered after school until nobody was in sight and I squeezed my bony arm through the metal wire fence to reach for that hidden apple. It felt like Christmas! This odd finding was enough to put a new spark into those dreary school days; I left with anticipation every morning...a-n-d that smell! Almost too special to eat!