

*Jennifer L. Trout*

## ***The Comprehensive Pennsylvania German Dictionary Brings Back Memories***

*The Comprehensive Pennsylvania German Dictionary* is more than a dictionary. It is a window into the past. As one of Professor C. Richard Beam's (professor emeritus of German, Millersville University) co-editors of his dictionary, many people have asked me what it was like to edit a dictionary and what do you do to edit a dictionary? In this article, I would like to explain what impact this dictionary has had on my life.

Many people look at the titles of the eleven volumes of this dictionary and they see the word "dictionary." Yes, this book has been called a dictionary, but it is more than an ordinary dictionary. The work that I have done on this dictionary has caused me to realize and understand more about my Pennsylvania Dutch background.

When I was a student at Millersville University, I majored in German. I chose to study German based on my Pennsylvania Dutch background. In May 2004, I started to assist Professor C. Richard Beam on his dictionary project. While growing up, my grandparents and other relatives spoke the dialect, but I never read it. While working with Professor Beam and reading aloud the dictionary entries, I quickly learned how to read in the dialect. I caught onto the B-B-B (Buffington-Barba-Beam) spelling system rather quickly.

When editing a dictionary, or any other work for that matter, it is necessary to read the entire text word for word. It is very time-consuming, but it must be done. I have read each volume of the dictionary that I edited at least six times and sometimes as many as ten times. Sometimes when someone starts reading a sentence in the dictionary, I can finish it.

What makes this dictionary so special to me? This dictionary opened my eyes to understanding how Pennsylvania Dutch my family is and I credit my grandparents for sharing these things with me and teaching me the dialect. While listening to Professor Beam tell some of his stories as we came across

words, he often reflected on the fact that his grandparents taught him those things and if it had not been for his grandparents, he would not know the dialect. Even though Professor Beam and I are of different generations, I feel exactly the same way. My grandparents taught me everything I know about the dialect.

When I was younger, my grandparents would speak the dialect so no one would understand what was being said, but I quickly picked up on the dialect and my grandparents found out that it was no longer safe to talk about secrets in the dialect because I had figured out what they were saying. Then my grandparents started teaching me words in the dialect. I remember sitting on the porch behind their house and they would randomly teach me words. I would point to things or say words in English and ask them how to say them in the dialect. They taught me how to count to ten. They taught me **Finger**, **Schtrimp**, **Hund** and **Katze**. I can see my grandpa sitting next to me laughing as I tried to pronounce the words after he said them. I spent most of my free time with my grandparents. I remember many times when I would sit on a chair in one corner of the living room. My grandparents' friends would come to visit and they usually saw me sitting in the chair with a book in my hands. They would speak in the dialect. They didn't see me making faces behind the book as they were speaking in the dialect. They did not know I understood what they were saying. Sometimes my grandma and grandpa would tell their that I understood Pennsylvania Dutch. They would say things to me and I would respond with simple one- or two-word answers.

These are some of the memories I have of learning the dialect and these memories along with other memories have become very clear to me especially since I helped Professor Beam edit his dictionary. I would sit in Professor Beam's living room and read each entry of the dictionary aloud to him. Sometimes I would comment to him that I remember doing that or hearing that word when I was younger. Sometimes the words made me think of things from my childhood, but I didn't express it in words. I just kept the thoughts to myself. Many of the words in the dictionary could make me think of a story about something I did or learned in my childhood.

As I read over the dictionary entries again, I am reminded of many things that my grandparents taught me.

**Kumm esse!**—In the summertime, I spent almost every day with my grandma and grandpa. When it was lunch time, they would often say “**Kumm esse!**”

**Faasnacht**—Every year my grandma would make sure she bought **Faasnachts**. Each year, I still make sure I eat a **Faasnacht**.

**Schtrimp**—There is something about this word. Whenever I read it or hear it, I think of the way that my grandma used to say it.

**Finger**—This is one of the first words that I remember learning from my grandma. We were sitting on the porch at her house and I was pointing to things and asking my grandma to tell me the Pennsylvania Dutch word for those things.

**Kaes**—My grandma or grandpa would often go to the refrigerator and ask me if I wanted cheese. They always asked me in Pennsylvania Dutch. They knew how much I liked to eat cheese.

**Meisli**—My grandpa always called me a **Meisli** when I was eating cheese. I could rarely eat my cheese without pretzels. To this day, I still eat pretzels with my cheese.

**Rotriewe**—When my grandma had red beets in the refrigerator, she would often say **Rotriewe** instead of saying it in English.

**Wasser**—When I was at my grandma and grandpa's house, I often used a small cup with a handle. It was either red, yellow or orange. My grandpa used to ask me what was in it and I responded with "**Wasser.**" I never liked drinking **Wasser** anywhere else. In my opinion, they had the best **Wasser**.

**Wassermelune**—My grandpa grew **Wassermelune** in his garden. I would help him pick the watermelons and cantaloupes out of the garden.

**Hund**—My grandpa would often refer to his dog as the **Hund**. He told me that his Schnauzer was also my **Hund**. He rarely used the English word.

**Katze**—There were a few times when I had cats, but I kept them at my grandpa's house in his barn.

**Schnitz un Gnepp**—My grandma often made **Schnitz un Gnepp** for my relatives. My brother used to eat this, but I never liked it.

**rutsche**—If I moved around often, my grandma or grandpa would tell me to stop "**rutsching**" around.

**Boi**—I often helped my grandma to make **Boi**. We made strawberry, peach, rhubarb and many other types of pies. It was from my grandma that I learned how to bake.

**Keller**—Sometimes I would have to go in the **Keller** to get something for my grandma or grandpa. They kept their canned things in the cellar, such as pears or cherries.

**Gude Marye**—When I woke up in the morning (when I spent the night at my grandma and grandpa's house), my grandma and grandpa would say **Gude Marye** to me.

**Gude Nacht**—When I spent the night at my grandma and grandpa's house, they would say **Gude Nacht** to me. I especially remember my grandma telling me this. I can still hear exactly how she would say it.

**Hasch**—If I would go with my grandma and grandpa to their cabin in the mountains, sometimes we would see a **Hasch**.

**hickle**—My grandma and grandpa would sometimes say that people were **hickling** around.

**Hosse**—I often helped my grandma and grandpa do their laundry with the old ringer washing machine. My grandma and grandpa always wanted the **Hosse** and the rest of the wash hung up on the wash line in a certain way.

**schtraubich**—I would often spend the night at my grandma and grandpa's house. Usually when I woke up in the morning, my grandpa would tell me that my hair was **schtraubich** or a mess.

**Kessel**—I remember when I helped my grandpa look for dandelions or if we cleaned beans or picked something out of the garden, my grandpa would ask me if I had my **Kessel**.

**Millich**—In the morning when I ate breakfast and my grandma and grandpa's house, they would ask me if I needed **Millich** for my cereal.

**naeche**—My grandma taught me to sew. I used the sewing machine a few times and I used a needle, thread and a thimble to sew together a rug. This is where I learned the verb **naeche**.

As in Professor Beam's case, I also could never thank my grandparents enough for teaching me the dialect when I was younger. They sparked my interest in the dialect. I will continue to appreciate the Pennsylvania German dialect and culture and will try to preserve them as much as possible.

I would like to congratulate Professor Earl Haag on his eightieth birthday and I want to thank him for everything he has done to preserve the Pennsylvania German dialect. I am honored that I was asked to write this article to contribute to his *Festschrift*.

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