**German Wedding Traditions**

Germany's different states have many traditional wedding customs, some from Pre-Christian times, while those celebrated in one region may never even have been heard of in another. Although "Wonnemonat Mai", Blissful Month of May, is the most popular month to marry throughout the country, so the English speaking world might refer to "Marry in May and you'll rue the day" but this does not include German speakers obviously.  
  
Weeks leading to the Hochzeitstag, wedding day, are filled with tradition, which can begin with the invitations delivered by a Hochzeitslader. An official invitation carrier dressed in a ribbon and flower covered outfit and black hat, who travels from place to place passing on a rhyming invitation to intended wedding guests. All those accepting an invitation take a ribbon, fix it to the Hochzeitslader's hat and offer him a drink. This, if the beverage is alcoholic and there are many invited guests, can lead to the delivery of the invitations taking days rather than hours.  
  
A wedding newspaper, "die Hochzeitszeitung", is put together by families and friends and filled with childhood photos, reminiscences, some that perhaps one or the other of the bridal pair would rather forget, mock advertisements, poems and limericks. Professionally printed and bound, or handmade, copied and fastened, the Hochzeitszeitung is a wedding day souvenir; not only for the bride and groom but everyone attending.  
  
There are bachelor parties, "Junggesellenabschied", but it is more usual to hold a "Polterabend", a party held in the bride's home on the evening before the wedding; both bride and groom attend and anyone knowing the couple can take part without needing an invitation. "Poltern" is the loud noise made when something falls or has been thrown, and that describes it perfectly; a noisy party where china and porcelain dishes and other items, but not glass as that is "unlucky", are thrown onto the outside pavement. Dating from Pre-Christian days, the noise drives away evil spirits as well as bad luck, and the "Bride and Groom" clear away the broken pieces themselves. Symbolizing a life working together, and that although dishes may break their marriage never will. A pre-wedding celebration it might be, but there is no point in wearing a favorite outfit because in some regions this will be stolen at midnight; the groom's trousers burnt and buried, together with a bottle of Schnapps to be dug up and enjoyed on the first anniversary.  
  
Traditionally weddings taking place before noon as the sun is rising are considered "lucky", so marriage ceremonies are not only crowded into May the mornings throughout the month burst at the seams. As a church wedding is not considered legal, some days or hours before a religious ceremony can take place the bride and groom must first be married officially by a registrar, "Standesbeamte". Usually just with close family, friends and witnesses present, which means the wedding celebrations can sometimes last days. There is no "giving away" of the bride by her father because by the time of the church service the couple are already "man and wife", so they enter the church and walk down the aisle together behind the celebrant. Unaccompanied by bridesmaids or groomsmen although sometimes by one or more young flower girls.   
  
Church and wedding car or carriage are decorated with fresh flowers, and traditionally the bride will wear a white wedding dress; but more a ball gown style than something "over the top", and she will carry a little salt as this "adds flavor to life". The bread she carries hidden somewhere in her dress or flowers is for "a future without hunger", and there will be a long length of white ribbon in her bouquet; while the groom will have grain hidden somewhere for "Good Luck".  
  
As soon as the newlyweds leave the church they might face their first obstacle in married life. Baumstamm saegen, log sawing. A heavy log is balanced on two sawhorses, and they must slice through it with probably the bluntest saw that could be found; as the saw is able to cut only when pulled in either direction their teamwork signifies a future life solving problems together.   
Log successfully sawn, so free to walk again, it is time for flower petals and/or rice throwing. Both are pre-Christian rituals to attract the fertility goddess, and any rice grains left in the bride's hair represent the number of children the couple can expect to join them at some time in the future. Fichtenzweige, boughs from a fir tree, are placed along the way to their car, so the newlyweds first steps are accompanied by fresh greenery; symbolizing hope, luck and fertility.  
  
Wedding photographs are an art form in Germany, and as the bride and groom leave for their photograph session, which can be anything from running through the middle of a field being harvested, climbing ladders on a construction site, standing in a crowded railroad station or rowing a boat in the middle of a local lake, the white ribbon the bride carried in her bouquet is cut into lengths and handed to guests. These are tied to car antennas, for "der Autokorso".   
A procession of honking cars where once again the noise made is aimed at frightening away evil spirits, while at the same time attracting good fortune, and at first this convoy follows the couple before continuing on to "die Hochzeitsfeier." The wedding feast.   
  
For Germans a wedding reception is more about celebrating the occasion with as many people as possible, rather than having a luxury meal shared with a few, and the couple's simultaneous drinking from a Bridal Cup, cutting of the wedding cake with both hands on the knife, and child guests, are all "Good Luck" charms. Hochzeitssuppe has its origins in the 16th century, but is still a traditional first course for the wedding meal. Literally "Wedding Soup", a clear chicken or beef consomme with vegetables and small spoon sized dumplings; although the name has not have changed much since the Middle Ages luckily the ingredients, and customs surrounding the soup, have. In those days a whole ox was boiled in the largest pots available to produce enough "Brautsuppe", Bride Soup, for hundreds of guests; each of whom was expected to bring their own spoons and dishes to the wedding celebration...or go hungry.