



Meet Mama Holzwarth

Sophia Lebfromm was born December 17, 1870 to Joseph and Klodhilde Lebfromm of Nussback County of Oberkirch, State of Baden (Southwest Germany). She was from Black Forest region of Germany, close to Dusseldorf. Mama used to say that on a clear day you could see the steeples of Strasbourg. Sophia was baptized December 18, 1870. Her Namesday was May 15, 1871 and Patenkind of Mrs. Holzwarth is a Gebhard Schwartz in Denver.

Sophia came to the US in 1890 – age 20 – and worked in Denver as domestic servant for prominent Denver families to pay her way here. Among them was the Gates family who later established the Gates Rubber Company. The trunk in the Taxidermy shop she brought with her from Germany in 1890. Lebfromm is printed on side. It was later made into toolbox by Papa. Johnnie remembered, “When Mama came to this country in the late 1800's she worked as a house servant in Gates home in Denver. Her pay was \$20.00 per month, and she had to work 14 hours a day for it, which went to pay for her passage from Germany to America. In later years when she was running the Homestead by herself she would only pay the help \$20 per month because she thought that if that was what she made, she shouldn't pay more.” Johnnie had an agreement with the help. They would take Mama's \$20 and then go over to the big ranch and he would pay them the remainder of their wages.

Sophia sent for her brother Frank after she came over. He worked in Denver at the Tivoli Brewery where he worked with John Holzwarth and introduced him to his sister at a dance. Frank Lebfromm in 1928 built a cabin ½ mile north of Fleshuts cabin. There is a picture of him in the living room with a hunting catch and dog. Sophia had at least three sisters and a brother, Herman, who stayed in Germany.

John Holzwarth and Sophia Lebfromm were married on May 19, 1894 in the Elizabeth Church in Denver by Father Pins.



John and Sophia had five children. The first, Christina, was born June 26, 1895. She died on December 8th that same year. A little over a year later on September 4, 1896, Julia Holzwarth was born. This same year her father had typhoid fever. Two years later, July 2, 1898 Maria Anna Holzwarth was born followed by Sophia on September 16, 1900 and finally a son, John, Jr. on November 7, 1902. Four children under six years of age.

Mama took Sophia, 6 and 4 year old Johnnie on a trip of several months in 1906 to Germany - Father joined them later. Julia, 10 and Maria, 8 years old, did not go on the trip – probably they were in school. This was a visit planned to see aging parents and other family members whom Sophia had not seen for 16 years and John for 27 years. Sophia was the oldest daughter in her family and there was at least one sister born after she left Germany.

Johnnie said Mama could knit – after she was six years old she had to learn to knit, and as she became older, she knit a wool sock a night. A visitor to the ranch on July 26, 1981 said that Mama and the visitor were attending a knitting class in Denver and the visitor was knitting a green sweater for her husband. As the ladies progressed with their pieces Mama remarked, "After you use the sweater for awhile, it may fade in some areas, and when it does you should dye it black."

Family
1909



John and Sophia were operating a small saloon and boarding house in Denver so Mama was quite busy with raising her children and paying attention to their businesses. With the war, flu epidemic and family concerns, perhaps an escape to the mountains would be a welcome relief for Mama. “It was Mama's idea to move to the mountains. She loved the mountains. They reminded her of the Black Forest. Papa came first, then Mama. She had a dream of opening a country inn along with Papa’s desire to start a cattle ranch. Everything was so wild up here. Sometimes it took three days to get here from Denver, what with getting stuck, etc. Transportation was so difficult. It was more work than they had thought it would be. It was slow going at first. Just for fishermen at first, then they decided to open a hotel.” (comments by niece, Frances Lebffrom).

The summer of 1917 Papa and Johnnie spent in Grand County building a rather primitive two-room cabin. In 1918 they returned to the homestead with Mama and the news that Sophia was getting married to Andrew Geeck. This joyful event was also followed by the end of World War I in November.

The following year had to be very difficult for Mama. On July 1, 1919 the day before her 21st birthday, Maria died. She had a tumor (Geschwur) on her forehead and had been sick for three months and very sick for the last three days. In the family Bible Mama wrote "She was a very good child and liked to work. The Lord may give her peace and may the light be with her."

The tent cabin was built that summer and they first started renting cabins to tourists. People came to fish, the limit was twenty pounds which was about 50-60 fish. Mama cooked for the guests and being busy helped to ease the pain. This summer Johnnie and Papa built the horse barn, worked the ranch and returned to Denver for the winter.

The family moved permanently to the ranch in June of 1920 and the note on the Fleshut property was paid. This summer they added a room to the west of the original cabin and a porch to the south and built the ice house. On the back porch there was a bench with basin and bucket of water, mirror above. Papa expected everyone to wash up before coming into the house. The icebox was on back porch. A wood dresser stored clothing and linens and stood next to wash counter. Montgomery Wards churn was used outside the back door of the porch.

On the back porch Mama did the washing. She presoaked clothes in copper lined tub then placed in tub and boiled for an hour in strong soapy water and washed on washboard or in hand operated wash machine. Finally hung out to dry on lines strung between trees near back door. Mama washed every two to three weeks. Later the guest laundry was sent to Denver.



"Admiral Blue", the kitchen range was purchased from Montgomery Ward in 1920-23 for about \$40 and freighted to the homestead. It has a self-cleaning top (spills burned right off), infinite heat control – move pans around on the top, hot water reservoir on side, warming ovens above and an oven thermometer. Mama must have been very proud of her new range where she spent a good deal of her time.

Johnnie dug a hole in the kitchen floor to get water into Mama's kitchen by the pump from a well. This well filled in quickly with sand and Mama still had to carry water. In the years before electricity, young Johnnie figured out a method to get running water into Mama's kitchen. He boxed in a spring out behind the Homestead and laid some large galvanized pipes on top of the ground to the Mama Cabin and put a faucet at the sink so the water could be turned off and on. Everything worked just fine and Mama had running water in her kitchen. When summer time came, the sun would heat the water in the pipes that lay on top of the ground. Every time Johnnie came around Mama would be fussing about her water being too hot. Each time he would explain that if she would turn on the faucet just for a couple of minutes the water would get cool. This continued several times until he finally asked her, "Mama, why

can't you turn on the faucet and let the water run a little white?" Her answer was, "Son, I can't do that. It would wear out my pipes."

"Whatever Mama did, she did well. Ambitious, proud, clean. She would give anything to you. But at the same time she expected you to work. Always had baked goods for her guests. Couldn't sit still. Good humor, talkative. Liked to talk about the old days. She had courage to move up here to the mountains." These comments came from Mama's niece who worked for her in 1938-39.

Johnnie said, "The only things we could raise was radishes, pansies, and hell! We also could raise parsley, parsnips and spinach. We were not able to raise any cabbage or cauliflower. And very seldom could we get any sweet peas to grow, never no potatoes. Carrots you could grow but they'd only get about as big as your thumb. The garden spot we had is all growed up. It's over across the little marsh, northwest of the house. I haven't been over there in years and I'm sure that the colony of beavers has flooded it all out and so forth."



Holzwarth Family



Mama cooked for the guests at the ranch and served three meals a day in the dining room. About 1923 a separate dining room was built next to the road and a second cook, Barney McCoy was hired. Food was trout and roast-whatever meat was found. Due to lack of transportation, meat had to gotten locally: fish, deer, and elk. First elk was in 1938. They were scarce back then. They ate pine squirrels. They kept 4-6 pigs at a time, made their own bacon, ham, scrapple, sausage, head cheese, blood

sausage. They smoked sheep meat. They preserved eggs in the spring when they were plentiful. They bought "water glass" and put eggs in it and they would keep until they were used. When they cleaned hogs, they dipped them in hot water and ashes before scraping them down. A pig's ear sandwich was Johnnie's favorite lunch. They pickled their pork in brine for three weeks before they smoked it. The brine was made with salt, allspice, pepper, bay leaf, cloves and brown sugar. A typical menu for guests was freshly caught fish, Mama always had some soup stock on, wilted dandelion greens (bacon, vinegar, sugar), beef roast was always deer, mostly biscuits for bread, boiled potatoes. Johnnie says we got \$1.50 for a meal and we were getting rich.

There were many cabbage or vegetable soups; thick items, meat roasts – especially deer meat, sourdough bread was famous. Mama made liver dumplings, spaetzels and sauerbraten with rabbits (Hazenpfeffer). A typical breakfast consisted of mush. Suppers were stews or roasts. Potatoes, carrots, rutabagas, apples, etc. were kept in the root cellar. A schmear case – a milk sack for making curds was hung up beside Rose Cabin on a tree.

Mama made Hutzelnbrot (pear bread) for Christmas; it contained nuts, citron and raisins and was the color of light rye. She also made plum kuchen, her own rye bread with caraway, stewed kidneys and noodles, lederknodel, potato pancakes, a thin pancake with lots of egg the size of a dinner plate, a cereal-type dish of cut up pancake batter.

Mama clipped recipes. Newspaper clippings in German for three layered white, chocolate and spice cakes with different icings were found in the kitchen.

After Papa died at Christmas of 1932, Mama cooked meals at Johnnie's ranch and the guests at the Trout Lodge had cooking stoves in the cabins. Fran (Johnnie's youngest daughter) said Grandma was an excellent cook. Her specialties were liver dumplings, omelets and baked goods. Fran has the recipe for liver dumplings and it is the only way she'll eat liver.

Mama always had a dog, Waldmann (Waldo) a German shepherd mixed dog
A visitor told the following story: "I used to go mushroom picking with Mama, she showed me the difference between mushrooms and toadstools, but I still had a hard time getting the



right kind. So one day I asked Mama, "How can you be sure you get the right mushrooms?" She answered, "Well, I cook up a big batch and then I give the first bowl to Voldo!"

"Mama was 5' tall and I (Johnnie) can remember her wearing a gingham dress and an apron with a sunbonnet. She would walk around with her wagon into the woods and pick up pieces of wood and put them in her apron or the wagon and would pile it on the east side of the shop." Wood was of small size like kindling which she could use in her kitchen range.





Mama said American women have no posture. She used to put a 6-8 qt. pot on her head and waltz around the kitchen. Mama had an alto voice and Johnnie sang duets with her – one of their favorites was "Whispering Hope". Mama had a battery powered RCA radio, table model, sitting in her sitting room (middle room) she could receive three stations. Johnnie bought her a battery each year for \$25.00. Some of her favorite songs were "Irish Lullaby" and "Whispering Hope". Mama and Johnnie used to sing German songs together.

On September 7, 1995 Charlene Geeck came in to Kawuneeche Visitor Center and donated a Birdseye Maple Rocker. It came from the Mama cabin at Holzwarth's Trout Ranch. She believes it to be about 70 years old. She remembers it located in the living room of the Mama cabin. It has been reupholstered and the arm fixed with an angle brace. Charlene acquired it from her mother, Sophia Holzwarth Geeck who got it from the ranch when Grandma Holzwarth passed away. It has been in the Geeck family since then.

A visitor reported that Mama always moved her rocking chair around to where ever she was going to be busy – on the porch, front or back, wherever. Mama, Papa, Johnnie and guests sat on porch in summer. Chairs were brought out from house. One or two tree stumps were always there for sitting or used as tables.

Mama's hands were always busy. The gray quilt was made from material scraps which were discards from Denver casket factory. Johnnie worked there putting handles on caskets after flu epidemic 1918-1919. Mama and Papa's bed had a silk taffeta bedspread made by mama from these scraps. Pillows were made from chicken feathers and Mama made sheets of flannel outing. They also used some cotton sheets and wool blankets purchased in Denver. Mama braided rugs and embroidered dresser scarves and pillows. She made many table covers and doilies for the cabin.

Mama was pro-German; she spoke German to Johnnie until she died.

A visitor to the ranch said that Mama had the spring box clean and the brook area cleaned, always. It was neatly trimmed up to the brook, and the area around the shop was also cleaned.

Charlene (granddaughter) remembers if people stayed even just one night they had to tear the cabins apart to clean them.

Mama thought that gentlemen should have a diamond ring and a sharp pocketknife. That's the only reason that Johnnie has his diamond ring.

Mama's life changed in 1931 when her son married Caroline Pratt and then the following year Papa died. She lost much of her reason for living. Mama had grandchildren, two granddaughters by Sophia and Andrew Geeck in Denver and John and Caroline had a son in 1933 and a daughter in 1935 and the last granddaughter in 1945.

In 1933 Mama's daughter Julia paid for a trip to Germany for Mama. She sailed on the Europa, beginning her diary November 1 enroute.

She arrived in Germany where she visited her brothers and sisters, celebrating many family birthdays, her 63rd in December, attended family funerals and enjoyed her homeland. Sisters: (Fanny (birthday May 19 - 43 years old in 1934), Luise (birthday April 4, 1885 - 49 in 1934), Anna (birthday March 17), Karoline, and a brother (Hermann) in Germany (Hermann's wife died March 3, 1934, buried March 6) (also mentions Joseph and Erwin in Germany - maybe brothers in law) - although Joseph's wife celebrated 62nd birthday Feb 18, 1934.

Mama grew up with wine. In the Black Forest area, everyone had apple trees and made apple wine. It was a way to keep apples. Mama recorded in her journal that they drank a lot of wine and ate lots of good food.

"While reading her diary I got the following picture of her: She was a very religious woman. She went to church a lot. She must have been Catholic since she goes to confession and holy mass. She liked to talk to people and thoroughly enjoyed a good conversation about old times. She was impressed when she met important or higher educated people. She always watched her money and cared about the prices of items. She belonged to a club (Bruderschaft) which she visited often. She loved to travel and visit. She cared a whole lot about good food and wine. She wrote down several recipes in her diary. She enjoyed flowers, parks, and also cemeteries. She visited graves of relatives frequently, especially her parents." Translated from German by Sigi McConnell, August 1976

She kept accurate records of the cost of everything she did. This trip was when Frances Lebfromm (who was still in Germany) met Mama for the first time. "It was a small town and we all knew each other." Mama mentions Election Day, November 5, 1933 - it was very one-sided. She visited an air ship Graf Zeppelin (Airship)

Feb. 11 Sunday I went to church. In the afternoon we went to prayer hour. Then we went to Oberkirch. Saw a Persian, Chinese and a group from Venice. We had coffee, cake and wine. Was interesting. In the evening we went to church again.

Feb. 12 Mardi Gras Monday

Feb. 13 Mardi Gras Tuesday - Saw the masked parade and went to the masked ball in the "Schwane". Mr. Schindler, Luise, Anna, Joseph and I drank 3 liters of the best wine. Music was \$6.50.

May 20 Saw three airplanes at take off without any sails or motor? This was at Mummelsee. She went for dinner and had to wait for two hours. She comments: Thousands of people here wanting to eat. Super business. People spend more money for food in Germany than they do in America.

Mama left Germany on the Bremen in June 22, 1934 and returned to Colorado.





When Mama returned from Germany the cabins were changed to housekeeping cabins with wood-burning cook stoves and Mama cooked for Johnnie at the dude ranch. Laundry was sent to Denver. Guests at Mama's could chop their own wood and many loved to do it. Sophia came to help Mama with the cabins and her husband helped with the repair work that needed to be done. Sophia lived in a home – **Hilltop Manor**, just up the hill from Mama's cabin.



Fran (Johnnie's youngest daughter) remembers going to Grandma's to take naps. Her parents would put her on a horse after the noon meal and send a little bottle of milk with her and off she'd go to Grandma's. She says, "Can you imagine trying to go to sleep on the bed with all those heads of deer looking at you?"

Mama stayed in Mama cabin until right before Christmas, and then Big Johnnie and Little John III would hook up the team and go get her, pack up her things and bring her to the main house. John III said Mama would give his dad "holy hell" all the way home about his driving. She would take the train to Denver where she stayed with Julia mostly and for a couple years with Sophia. "Mama saved garbage in Denver for the pigs at the Homestead. She'd tie it all up and package it. Here was a 14 or 15 year old John III getting on the Trailways bus with his package of garbage," recalled Johnnie.

"Mama was alone for so many years. About 1938 she started going to Denver to Julia's in the winter. She stayed alone from September until Christmas, then went to Julia's. Then she came back in May. She loved it here and it was hard for her to leave," remembered Frances Lebfromm.

Mama was in the hospital in Denver just before she died. Johnnie went to visit her on his way to deliver a speech. From her hospital bed Mama said, "Let me see your hands." After inspection she admonished, "They're dirty, go wash." Mama died on Thursday, October 15, 1954 at the age of 84. She is buried at Mount Olive Cemetery in Denver. She was a devout Catholic.