

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

I am pleased to reprint the next excerpt from the autobiography entitled, My Journey Through Life, written by Rev. Frantisek (Francis) Pokorny, D.D. (1867-1962), who served the Czech Reformed (Presbyterian) Church of Silver Lake from 1891 to 1910.

“Although Silver Lake was not so large or conveniently located, we managed to have numerous visitors and to stay in touch with those further away. We corresponded with our family, friends, and associates in Habrkovice and Kolin. We had letters of advice and encouragement from Pastor Dusek. Several girls came regularly to the house to have Johanna teach them handicraft or give them piano lessons. Students who preached in Tabor during vacations used to stop at our home.

One of the sisters in the church died and left four small girls. The oldest was ten and the youngest about three. The father could not take care of his daughters alone. The dying mother expressed the hope and confidence that, "The Lord would watch over the children." Johanna and I decided to take the youngest child into our home.

So we now shared our life with little Sophie. She soon grew accustomed to us. At first, she wondered why we didn't do the same things her parents had. Why didn't her new mother go to the woods for fuel, and why I didn't go to work every morning? It was interesting to see how her young mind worked. She would play and talk to her doll Katie for hours at a time, and still know what was going on around her. We were surprised when she told us that, "Katie is so practical." We recall how she expressed some of her thoughts such as "We are glad that we're glad," "We love one another and love mother," and her wise discovery, "We're doing all right, we have what we need, and what we don't have we don't need."

I doubt that I would recognize many buildings in Silver Lake today, if I were somehow able to visit. I would be proud to know that the church we loved so dearly is still standing and still serving the Lord. That a woman now serves as a minister reflects the changes in lifestyle—in my day it would have been unimaginable. No women were among my classmates at Seminary. Women played an important role among us, but it was a different role from that of men. I could not have imagined a home without a woman dedicated to its smooth operation and the care of the children, and a man was needed to tend to the horses and other physical labors. I would be most reassured, however, to read the following statement of Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, of which our Silver Lake Church, now Faith Presbyterian Church is a part.



Sofie Janecek, looking like an angel.

“Over and above all else, we seek to be faithful to God's call to faith, service, and witness. We are open to taking the risk of change by leading boldly, by living out Gospel's call to live transformed lives in our lives and in our work, and by working together in shared mission and ministry.”

Chapter 9 Later Years in Silver Lake

Toward the end of 1898, the letters from Kolin told us that my wife's mother was not in good health. We decided to make the trip to visit her. I found a substitute for myself, Alois Barta, a doctoral student at the University of Chicago. A church family agreed to take care of Sophie.

We set out on an extremely cold day in February. The thermometer stood at 36 degrees below zero. "While we waited in the St. Paul station for our train several girls from Silver Lake, who now worked in St. Paul, came to bid us good-bye. We left the train Racine, Wisconsin for a short time to visit our friends, the Brens. In New York, we found the entire city covered with a heavy layer of snow, and had difficulty making our way to the home of Pastor Pisek.

The next day I went to the steamship company's office to find out when our ship, "Pretoria," would sail for Hamburg. The clerk told me that the ship had run into a storm and was not seaworthy. He refunded my money. It so happened that Mr. Pisek had in his home at the time another guest, Vladimir Novak, who had tickets to Bremen on the steamer, "Lahn." We were able to purchase tickets on this same ship, and the three of us were soon on our way to Europe. Dr. Novak was an excellent companion. The day finally came when we docked at Bremen. We left the ship and immediately took a direct train to Prague, and from there we took another train to Kolin.

Johanna's father and oldest brother greeted us as we arrived at their home. Coming in from another room was her younger sister, wearing a black mourning dress. At that moment we knew the sad truth that their mother had passed away. She had been buried a month ago. The news had come to Silver Lake after we had started on our journey. And so, we had traveled all this way with the hope of seeing her again.

All we could do was to weep and leave everything to God. The conversation turned to all the things that had happened to the family and to us during the seven years we had been away. What a change there was in the household! Compared to former years, the house was practically empty. One daughter had married and two sons were in the army. Only the three family members, the father, his oldest son, and youngest daughter, remained.

Johanna and I were soon on our way to Habrkovice to visit my family. After several difficult years, my mother had tamed over the farm to my brother, Josef. She lived with him in her retirement. Josef had returned from military service in poor health, but he was happily married and the farm was prospering. Brother Rudolf was also doing well. After he returned from the army, he married into a farm in Habrkovice. Johanna and I also visited the families of all my sisters. Some of their children were almost fully grown.

I visited other old friends. My former teacher, Antonin Kopac, had retired. He was in good health but his hair and beard were white as snow. We talked about the old school, and chuckled over some of the events of the old days. He and his wife were living on a farm operated by their son, and were enjoying the peaceful years of the autumn of their lives.

Senior Fleischer of the Chvaletice had arranged an excursion for us. We rode with him to Prelouc where we picked up Pastor Bohmil Mares and continued to Bukov to visit Pastor Josef Dobias. Pastor Dobias was glad to see us and to get news from America, particularly about his son Jaroslav, who was the minister in Tabor, Minnesota. The family was glad to know that we had been visiting

Jaroslav quite often. We spent a pleasant day resting and talking in the parsonage. Later we strolled in the garden, which adjoined a small lake.

The parish in Nymburg had just finished building a new church and parsonage. Mr. Dusek was the administrator for the parish and was expected to preach there every third Sunday. He asked me to preach in his place. I started going there regularly, preaching to a sizable congregation morning and evening and serving the Lord's Supper at Easter and Whitsunday. While the celebration at Easter commemorates the resurrection of Christ and his victory over death, Whitsunday or Pentecost commemorates the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ. Whitsunday, of course, is so called from the white garments which are worn by those who are baptized during the vigil between Easter and Whitsunday.

At the time of our visit, the Trebic worship services were held in an upstairs hall in a building in the city. I was glad to preach there on the first Sunday of our visit. On the second Sunday, we attended services in Brno. I wanted to get acquainted with the pastor, Vaclav Pokorny, my second cousin. Unfortunately, we could talk together only briefly after the service. His wife was seriously ill and he had to hurry home. We corresponded by mail after that. Some years later, his daughter Milena paid us a visit. She was a graduate nurse and worked in American hospitals. She worked in her profession in Prague, Nebraska, and for a short time in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I would have never have imagined, that many years later my granddaughter would visit one of Vaclav's grandsons, Petr Pokorny, in Prague, or that Petr would one day visit the church in Ely, Iowa. I would have been intrigued by even the thought of such visits. Petr would become a renowned theologian and author."

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: tkadlec@gmail.com or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. See this article online at: www.kadlecovi.com Dekuji! Tony Kadlec