

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

The arrival of May and June 2011 has brought me to reflect on the lives of my paternal grandparents, Joe and Rose Kadlec, both of whom who were born one hundred years ago in these months respectively. Although Joe passed away forty-four years ago and Rose twenty years ago, they both still live through the memories and stories we share with family and friends, but also in the physical traits, mannerisms, strengths, and foibles that show up in ourselves, in our children, and our grandchildren.

“We who were fortunate enough to know our grandparents well knew them with the directness and fullness of our youthful senses and the wonderful openness of impressionable minds. In contrast to our disciplining and guiding parents, grandparents provided us a gentle and less confrontational encounter with the past. Grandparents themselves were the children of generations whose individual traits and ways have been irretrievably lost to the body of deep time, transformed into archetypal myths of distant origin, epochal migrations to and primitive settlements in primordial lands. Without grandparents’ stories, photographs, and documents, their childhoods are lost to the great gulf of time, and we are ignorant of their family and everyday life. Knowledge of their diets, manners, gestures, habits, thoughts, emotions, sensibilities and beliefs vanish, and we must reconstruct them. They are the most “familiar strangers” from the past we know, and they prove the right spot to begin our work on the family past.” (*Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 15, Joe Amato).

My volunteer genealogical research for Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI) has introduced me to countless stories of people who were perfectly ordinary and rarely noted for posterity in any history books. In some of these stories you learn of remarkably wonderful people, who led lives full of grace, strength, and integrity, even when life handed them hard knocks and misfortune.

The story of Joe and Rose Kadlec is one of those stories.

Joseph John Kadlec was born in Hale Township, McLeod County, Minnesota on 17 May 1911, the second-born son of Albin and Josephine (Micka) Kadlec. He was a middle child, with older brother Amos (husband of Bertha Wozniak) and younger sister Alice (wife of Arthur Woznak). In his early childhood years, Joseph lived in a log house on the land that the young Albin Kadlec family purchased from the John Lorence family. In 1919, when Joe was nearly eight years old, the family hired local builder Frank Bren to build a new house on the Kadlec farm, the present day home of the Jerome Kadlec family.

Showing up on the first day of grade school at Komensky (District 11), little Joe could not speak English—he only knew the Czech language. After eight years at Komensky, he attended Silver Lake High School, graduating as valedictorian of his class of 1928. As a young man with a talent for mathematics and science, he went off to the University of Minnesota to obtain his degree in chemical engineering, where he graduated in 1933. These were the days of slide rules, drafting tools, and study time spent at his quarter-sawn oak desk (the same desk that would travel with me to the same engineering school some sixty years later, the desktop finish now worn away from his and the forearms of his descendants).

It is funny how certain odd facts are remembered about one's life and it makes you wonder what will be remembered about you, doesn't it? During his years at the University of Minnesota it was more economical for Joe to send his dirty laundry home by mail from Minneapolis to Silver Lake to be washed by his mother or sister and then returned back to him by the same mail service. Joe was said to have had the skill of being perfectly ambidextrous when handwriting with both hands simultaneously, but only as long as he was writing on a vertical surface, like at a chalkboard.

Upon his graduation, Joe would interview for positions in areas far away as Chicago and Detroit, but due to the devastated economy of the Great Depression, he was unable to secure work as a chemical engineer. He would return to work on the family farm, just West of Swan Lake, where he put his technical training to work for the betterment of his local community. In October 1935 Joe was named director for the rural electrification project for bringing electricity to the farms and homes of Hale Township. He also contributed to the design, surveying, and construction of the road which now runs around the North and West side of Swan Lake.



Joseph John Kadlec

Family legend has it that young Joe first met his sweetheart Rose Marie Bednar at a dance at the Swan Lake Pavilion (now the Playmor Ballroom in Glencoe, MN)—just a short walk around the West edge of Swan Lake, from the Kadlec farm.

Rose Marie Bednar was born 25 June 1911 in Rich Valley Township, the daughter of John Bednar and Frances (Cacka) Bednar, with siblings, Frances (Jilek, Zajicek), Josephine (Lassen), Lillian (Wagener), and Cyril Bednar (husband of Florence Weier). She attended school at Steven's Seminary in Glencoe, graduating from the Normal Training Department with her teaching degree.



Rose Bednar Kadlec

One of her first teaching assignments was at the County School (District 29), near the Bednar family farm North of Glencoe. At this school, one her pupils was her nephew Ray Jilek (son of Frances Bednar Jilek), who recalled the young suitor Joe Kadlec waiting down the road sitting in his car, waiting to pick Rose up after classes were done. Rose pulled her nephew Ray aside and made him promise not to tell his family. In this school, there were two groups of students, those whose families spoke German at home and other, children who were raised to speak Czech and these two cliques did not intermix very well. Rose's other nephew-student, Francis John Jilek remembers Rose telling both groups of students, 'we are all Americans now and we will speak English at this school and get along well, together'.

Rose would eventually become the teacher at Komensky School (District 11) from 1931 to 1936, where her duties involved getting to the school early in the morning to prepare it for the day, which in winters meant shoveling snow and getting the stove fired. The Komensky school teaching contract for women in those days stipulated that the teacher be unmarried.

Perhaps this clause is what brought the end of her teaching career, as Rose was married to Joe on her 25th birthday, June 25, 1936, at the Church of St. Joseph (now Holy Family Catholic Church) in Silver Lake, in a ceremony officiated by Father Joseph Boushka.



June 25, 1936 Wedding Photo, from left to right, Josephine (Micka) Kadlec and her husband Albin, Joe and Rose Kadlec, John and Frances (Cacka) Bednar.

For their honeymoon, Rose and Joe travelled up North to stay at the posh Hotel Duluth (now Greysolon Plaza) and drove up the narrow and winding gravel roads to enjoy the North Shore as newlyweds. It was with all the driving of this road trip that Joe first noticed that he was having troubles with his eyesight. What he was experiencing were first symptoms of a disease that would come to ravage his life--Multiple Sclerosis (MS), a chronic, inflammatory, demyelinating condition that affects the central nervous system.

It would not stop Rose and Joe from enjoying the life of parenthood with their three children, Jerome, Joan, and Ken-born in 1937, 1939, and 1942, respectively.



Joan, Jerome, and Ken Kadlec

As the symptoms of Joe's disease advanced, he would gradually lose the ability to control his limbs and to do normal everyday tasks. But where there is a will, there is a way—by the early 1940's, Joe and his son Jerome would still find a way to play "catch" with the baseball. Since Joe could only throw but not

catch, after catching the ball thrown by Joe, young Jerome would have to run it back to his father and hand him the ball, so that Joe could throw it back to him again.

On the eve of August 22, 1942, Rose would go into labor with her third and final child, Kenneth and would need to drive herself to the hospital, pulling over to the side of the road to stop the car during her major contractions, as her husband Joe was unable to drive the car on this occasion.

By October 1942, however, he was still able to help out his father Albin with the farm work. On the 22nd day of that month, Joe set off on the family's Farmall F-20 tractor to do some plowing and headed South down the field road to cross the Luce Line railroad tracks (which cut midway through the Kadlec farm), when he was suddenly struck by an oncoming railroad inspection car.

The force of the impact threw the 31-year old Joseph from his tractor, where he lay unconscious, injured and bleeding. The railroad worker involved in the accident was traveling the line to inspect it; after the collision he ran up the field road to the Kadlec farm for help. Upon reaching the farmhouse, where Rose was in the process of giving her infant son Ken a bath, the railroad worker broke the bad news with the phrase, 'Lady, I think I just killed your husband'.



October 22, 1942, The Scene of Joe's Tractor Accident

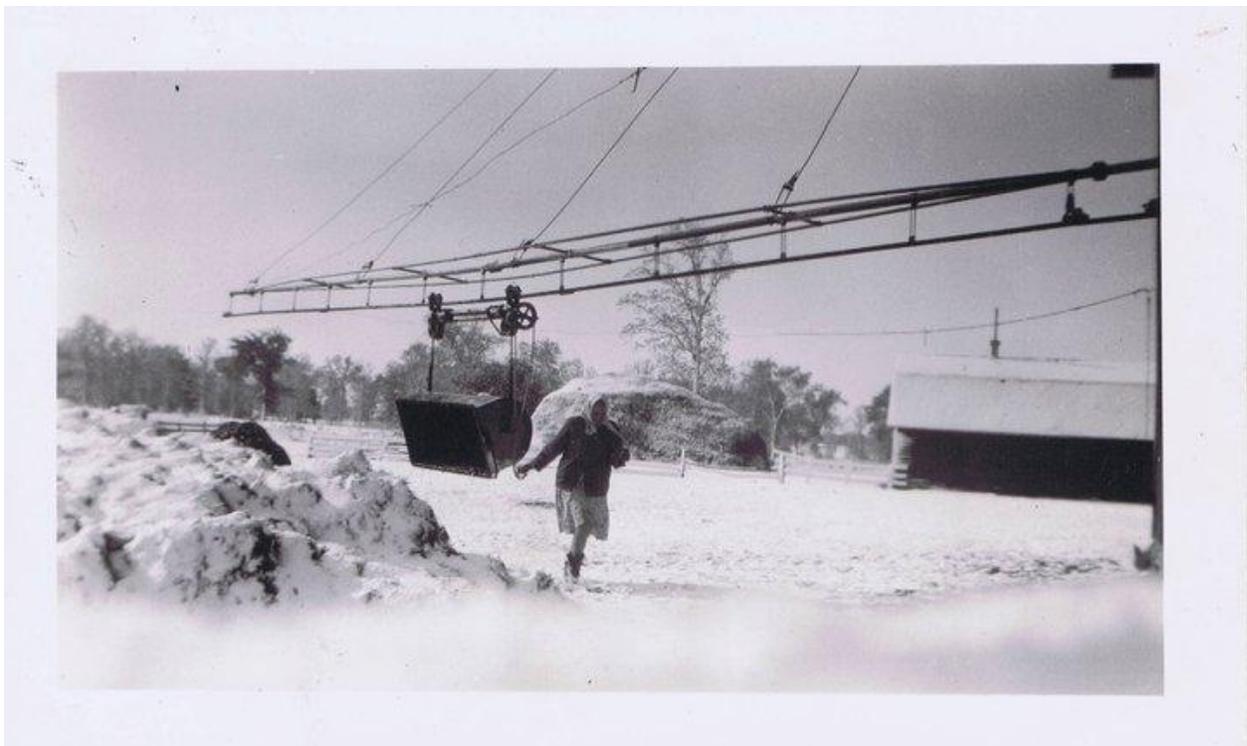
Consternation ensued as they got into the family car, sped down the hill on the field road, retrieved Joseph and brought him back to the farmhouse. Five-year old Jerome still remembers his father's blood on the family car seat, his father's blood-soaked long underwear and the sight of his father's head, with a large six to eight inch long gash that required stitching. Fortunately Joe would recover from his injuries

and it is recalled that Rose's request of the railroad company was not for a large cash settlement, but for the company to simply pay Joe's medical bills and not a penny more.

Over the next twenty-five years through the end of his life in 1967, Joe became completely disabled and physically unable to take care of himself, his wife and young family, and the farm. Holding onto hope, the family brought Joseph to non-traditional medicine/faith healers as far away as Canistota, South Dakota, but to no avail. Joseph would spend his days in the farmhouse dining room, smoking his cigarettes, keenly aware of the world on the farm as it revolved around him. From his daybed he would tutor neighborhood kids in math and science and would tell you who you were calling on the rotary dial phone, as he listened to the amount of time it took for the dial to snap back for each number dialed, as he had all the phone numbers of family and friends memorized. It was through these years, that his wry sense of humor and intelligence continued to persevere and is remembered in our family legend.

And through the trials and tribulations of those twenty-five years, the Kadlec sense of humor (i.e. the ability to tell a dumb joke that is witty only to the teller of it) still persevered and it continues to this day; for example, Joe remarking to his future daughter in law Judy at her first sit down dinner at the Kadlec home, that his favorite dish was indeed, "skunk-meat".

It is with a great sense of reverence and respect that we remember the love, loyalty, and hard work of Rose, who cared for her husband, her three children, and ran the family farm in an era when that was 'man's work'. Her inner-strength and mental sharpness were skills she exercised when playing cards with her Silver Lake and Hutchinson friends. Among the ladies in her 12-person, 3-table Silver Lake bridge club were: Ann (Mrs. Ed) Reid, Rose (Mrs. Henry) Hawlish, Florence (Mrs. George) Warnke, Pearl (Mrs. Henry) Nuwash (formerly Mrs. Joe Lowy), and Marcille (Mrs. Steve) Reml.



Rose Kadlec, Cleaning Barn

Without exaggeration, Rose never complained and never raised her voice in frustration or anger towards the people in her life as she bore her hardships. According to her son Jerome, there was one occasion when her husband Joe was taken outside to witness the new water well being drilled. He was accidentally scratched by a nail and contracted a bad case of blood poisoning; this was the only time he ever saw his mother break down and cry. Rose retired from farming in 1978, selling the farm to her son Jerome and his wife Judy.

Back in the spring of 1967, Jerome and Judy Kadlec were expecting their second child (yours truly), a child who would never have the pleasure of meeting his grandfather in person. Jerome told his father Joseph that if this baby were to be a son, he would name him Joseph in his grandfather's memory (the middle name that I now bear). When Joseph heard this, a tear trickled down his cheek.