

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

SILVER LAKE MEMORIES FROM RAY MRKVICKA

Please note that on the Saturday afternoon (1 – 4 pm) of this year's Pola-Czesky Days celebration, August 6th, we will be holding a roundtable history discussion at the American Legion Hall. This will be a great opportunity to share your recollections about the stories your parents and grandparents told about their parents and grandparents, about what it was like growing up in a time gone by.

If you have a friend or family member who you think would like to attend the discussion, but doesn't have the mobility to get there, please give them a call to ask them if they'd like a ride. You will be glad that you did. There are so many untold stories just waiting to be told and shared.

Case in point, a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of sitting down to chat with Mr. Ray Mrkvicka, a Silver Lake area native, who now resides in Hutchinson.

Here are my notes from our conversation:

TK: How old are you Ray?

RM: I am 87 years old, a '1923 model' (he smiles)

TK: I understand that you used to spend some time uptown with my grandma Rose's cousin Frank Bednar, where did you hang out?

RM: Frank and I used to drink at the White Owl Inn. I gave up drinking at the age of 36 but still went uptown and drank 7-up with my friends.

TK: Tell me about your family and where you lived?

RM: We lived on a farm North of Swan Lake. My father was Frank born 1895 and my mother was Mary (maiden name Kucera), born 1899. My mom taught school when she was single at District #62 by Henry's Corner before Svanda moved it to his place; she made \$45/month for teaching eight grades.

Pa went to school at District #69; at recess he would go home to clean barn. He had to quit school in 4th grade. My grandparents didn't speak English, only Czech and after they died, we kept speaking Czech. My Mrkvicka grandfather was named John; his wife's maiden name was Sotana. They had three boys and two girls and first lived in Wisconsin before coming to Minnesota. Once my Pa got sick in 1900 and had to ride six miles to the doctor on a horse. Pa was in World War I, served in a company of 250 soldiers and was one of 47 that survived. He served in England, France, and Germany.

In the house where I grew up, two of the rooms were made out of logs. We had large garden which was mostly for growing food, and also poppy seed for kolaches. My favorite kolache, though, is prune. My brother Roger married Shirley Exted.

TK: What do you remember about growing up on the farm?

RM: Back in 1941 I worked as a farmhand. The going rate was 35 cents per hour for shocking grain and 40 cents an hour for pitching bundles. In the 1930's guys worked for a buck a day (10 cents an hour).

I farmed until I was 46 years old; milked eleven cows by hand. In those days, I also worked for neighbors, milking their cows by hand, when they needed help.



Molly and Queen, the last team of horses who worked the Mrkvicka family farm.

TK: Can you tell me about your school days?

RM: I used to ride on the school bus driven by Orin Hager Sr. For school I went to St. Joseph's Catholic school and stayed with Anna (Mrs. John Tupa) and was taught by the nuns. I recall an incident when the teacher left the room to get something and I got into an argument with a classmate and my foot ended up kicking the wall and making a big noise. Sister sent me to the priest (either Boushka or Tomek) and that was alright to me, as the priest was easier on us than the nuns were. I graduated from Silver Lake High School in 1942. One of my classmates was Irene (Svanda) Micka.

Went to one dance at the Swan Lake Pavilion before it was moved to South Silver Lake. The bands I remember were Jerry Dostal, Harry Jerabek, and Whopee John. In those days you would bring your bottle and rent the booth you wanted to sit in. I recall that you could go to Heinie Janousek's on Main Street in Hutchinson and get a hamburger and coffee for 15 cents.

My aunt Bertha (Pilarski) was married to the Silver Lake cop, Jimmy Snaza, who drove a Model A Ford.

TK: What do you remember about the Great Depression?

RM: We lived on a 60 acre farm that we rented for \$3/acre during the depression. During this time I remember that we had the chance to buy the 80 acre Konerza farm and they wanted \$60/acre. In those days, people were simply happy to work for room and board. I remember that we used to get our beer

from Rudy Shiller, who lived just West of our farm. He married a girl from a family of 17 kids. I remember one time there must have been some trouble there when the cop made a trip to visit Rudy.

TK: Do you recall you family's first car?

RM: My dad's first car was a Buick that had side curtains. My first car was a Chevy coupe. It was about two years old in 1948 when I bought it for \$1,250.

TK: When did you move away from Silver Lake?

RM: I was drafted to serve in World War II. I drove truck for an Infantry/Engineering company that was stationed in Japan. I drove past the city of Hiroshima after the bomb had been dropped and saw all the destruction. The smell bothered people and I remembered being surprised about the power of the bomb.

After retiring from farming at age 46, we rented out the farm and my parents lived there at the home place. I got a job at Tonka Toys working in the supply department and rented out a room across the street from the factory for \$5/month. When I started working there, I made 80 cents an hour and by 1984 I was making about \$2.75 an hour.

TK: What are your words of advice for a young person growing up today?

RM: Work for a living and be honest with everybody.

Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

Mrkev – ('MEHR-kev') - carrot

Poctivost je nejlepší politika – ('POTZ-tih-vost YEH NEY-lehp-shiy POH-lit-eh-ka') – Honesty is best policy.

As a rule, you should always stress the first syllable of a Czech word!

Miscellaneous Memory:

Reverian Snaza's nickname was 'Balbish' because no one could pronounce 'Reverian' – Jerome Kadlec.

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