

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

Be sure to mark your calendars for the upcoming event, Silver Lake History Roundtable Discussion, which will be held on Saturday, August 6th, from 1pm-4pm at the American Legion Hall. This will be a great opportunity to share your recollections and stories of growing up in the Silver Lake community. Attendees are encouraged to bring a copy of their family tree information and their old historic photographs; volunteers will be on hand to make digital scan/copies for posterity.

This week I am pleased to present this guest column by Silver Lake native, Paul Pavlish.

My Memories of Growing Up in Silver Lake

By Paul Pavlish

World War II brought many changes in our lives; young men that got drafted or who enlisted into the military. This left the wives and the women to undertake many of the work loads. In my situation I worked on my grandfather's farm--was quite a chance for their children and myself to milk the cows and feed the pigs and chickens and on and so forth.

Fortunately for us my grandfather was one of the bright farmers--he had the first indoor water, carpeting, played piano which I wore out, new tractors, the best horses and equipment--our favorite time was threshing time, it's when all the farmers get together and the help harvest the grain. Lunch time was the best, all the wives pot-lucked and cooked together. I especially liked drawing the horses.

Once in a while Navy fighter planes would use us as simulated targets--that's when I got hooked on flying and later on in life I became a pilot. Cars were scary- everyone had coupons tagged on the windshield and allowed some gas. Sugar and other essentials were scarce also so it was rationed also. Everyone had a garden and grew most of their food- potatoes in a bin in the cellar, and canning was essential for the winter months. We had to butcher our own animals and I usually had to help out in some small way.

We had two churches and schools, Czech and Polish. The Czech kids always thought they were the best. The nuns in retrospect were excellent teachers but hell on discipline. Towards the end of the war many men come home- some disabled, loss of limbs, etc. During the war, while in school, if any parent or relative was lost in the war some official would come into the classroom and announce their name and would announce "was lost". Many classmates were affected and they would cry--very sad. After the war the soldiers came back, a lot were shell-shocked and I remember one that I tried to talk to that would not say anything- he eventually committed suicide. No soldiers would talk of their experiences including my father until several years later.

After the war life was changed for everyone--the G.I. bill contributed a much better life and opportunities because people were buying houses, farms and getting an education. Green Giant wanted to start a factory in Silver Lake but was voted out so they went to Glencoe- 3M wanted to locate also, but the same thing happened--they went to Hutchinson and we all know how those cities grew. Many from Silver Lake went there for employment.

But the liquor store was always busy. I remember when we sat outside and the smoke billowed out of the doorway- don't remember anyone who died from lung cancer but in those days with the limited health care, when someone died it was not old age.

The liquor store served many purposes. Everyday Chalupsky was milking cows just on the east side of

town and would herd them to his makeshift barn just behind the liquor store every night to milk them and then in the morning herd them back to the pasture. Then there was the old castle just north of Main Street, nobody would go there, it was told that a witch lived in there but us kids crept up and waited there and I saw what looked like a witch.

Where did we get ice in the summer? Witnessed the solution, just next to the cabin was a shop. On the top of the store was a stage area--lined the bottom with straw and sawdust. Men cut out big chunks of ice with horse-claws and trailer to take it back to the store to put it back under the stage and again stack more straw. Summer time ice could be distributed to houses chunks would be put in the ice box.

Halloween was a main event for the older kids. Outhouses were prime targets. Then the adults decided to form a vigilante committee, which was not too successful, as the kids would just outrun them. The next day it was always a tour to see any damage. As far as I know no punishment resulted. Before the sanitation system was built, the water was somewhat dirty. I can remember feathers in the drinking water, but we drank it and I guess I got used to it.

Swan Lake was our first fishing hole—only caught bullheads, with bamboo poles and chunks of stewed beef for bait; fried was great but no more fishing in Swan Lake. Progress prevailed. In retrospect the post depression and World War II, we all survived and were not ever hungry. The people all ways helped each other and helped the ones that needed the help. The bond we had regardless at ancestry, language barrier was essential then and I still believe that carried over to this day in our little town of Silver Lake.

Some strange crops were grown. I saw acres of poppy seeds and would remember thinking to myself wow that's a lot of poppies growing, but they always got rid of them. Then the strongest was the growing of the hemp--was told it makes rope for the military. One time several military trucks drove up with armed guards and loaded up all the hemp and then left. It took me awhile to figure out was made out of poppies and hemp. There must have some happy soldiers and I wondered what type of cigarettes was in the k-rations (maybe a motivation remedy).

No liquor was sold on Sunday, liquor stores closed on Sundays--solutions usually after church services were over, the men would go to the drug store, where conveniently liquor was sold for medical purposes off-sale, it took me awhile to figure out why the men would go to the drug store. Christmas midnight masses were trying for me as an altar boy with the services being three hours long. Of course I was told that the men sat in the rear usually slept because they had just come from the liquor store I guess to have a few belts to last the three hours. I could smell alcohol on one of the priests, but I thought he might have had too much wine out of the chalice.

There was little crime--our house never had a door key. Many cars didn't even have locks or even an ignition key. No drugs, armed robbery or any major crime most contracts were oral agreements--you were looked down on if you sued anyone. Most cars needed to be hand-cranked, of course a lot of broken arms resulted. Never did see any deer in the Silver Lake area when I grew up--hunters would travel up to Northern Minnesota and if successful, would drape their deer over their front fender. After proclaiming their trophies up and down Main Street they would hit the beer joints to celebrate, and maybe fib a little bit about their exploits.

At one time I counted three churches, four beer joints and one liquor store all on the main street. Saturdays in the winter time the main street was packed with farmers mostly, all the businesses were busy. A lot of farmers would throw on their overalls and work cloths and head to town--well after a while the odor was a little strong, but by that time everyone was in the beer joints where they were just happy and didn't give a damn or also smelled themselves. During the war the birth rate was low but in

post war years everyone's families was having babies, prosperity was blooming again. Television arrived--you did not have to watch a TV though a window of an appliance store anymore. As for refrigerators, many of us older folks would still refer to them as "ice boxes"

When it was time to widen our street, there was one house was over the boundary. They tried to buy her out but she would not sell. After many offers were made on the house, she was told the house would be cut in half and she still refused to budge, so they cut her house in half. It made many news papers.

It was a strange sight, the day when the atom bomb was exploded. A group of people sat in our back yard, listening to a radio. Then "atomic rings" were on sale--a replica bomb that would glow in the dark when you pulled the tail off it. Of course now we know the bomb was large rounded sphere.

Mickey Mouse watches, numerous comic books, Superman, Dick Tracy, etc. Many job opportunities opened up and many closed down, such as the once stable creamery, Bren's saw mill, various gas stations, the rail road depot, blacksmith shops and other small shops. After the war, many barns were constructed. To christen the barn was a barn dance was held up in the hay loft area, which meant climbing a ladder. After kegs of beer and music, there were quite a few who weren't able to navigate the ladder to go home.

I do not wish to leave out "Sherman Station", a defunct railroad depot. The owners were very clever--they reformed it with a nice bar, pinball machine for the kids, ample dance floor, books, and they always seemed to have a crowd. The roads to the station had large ditches and many were visited by the patrons going home. Cars back then were made of iron and steel, no seat belts but rarely anyone got injured and little damage was done to the car. The demise was to the construction of the Pla-Mor ballroom on the South bank of Silver Lake--many well known bands played there.

To summarize, these are my most vivid memories of being a young person growing up in Silver Lake, through the worst and best of times. Many young citizens leave Silver Lake for a successful future, but it left them with a solid foundation on the basics of life which many will never have!

Paul Pavlish attended St. Joseph Catholic Grade School, Silver Lake High School, and Mankato State and St. Cloud State universities. He joined the Marine Corps Air reserve, and attended officer training school and is now a resident of Montclair, California.

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