

Reminisces and Recollections

By

Agnes Ann Psotka Cole

I was born and raised on a farm 2 ½ miles south of the village of Duncan Iowa. My parents were Albert and Anna Psotka.

It seemed our lives revolved around Duncan, Our St. Wenceslaus Church, Community Hall and Falads Grocery Store.

We would go to Catechism on Saturday mornings, which were taught by the Priest. At the time, our Priest was Monsignor Kopecky. Father Jerry Skluzacek, was our teacher after Father Kopecky died. We would go to summer school taught by the Nuns of Notre Dame out of Omaha Nebraska. The beginner's class was held in an old pool hall. My first teacher was Sister Alena. We all loved her very much as she would have us take naps. Other classes were held in the hall.

One of my favorite things was to dance and we had many dances. Our parents would take all of us kids to the dances. We all learned to dance on the stage, behind the curtains, as the band played. The hall was always full with parents and children and everyone had a great time.

September 28th was our annual St. Wenceslaus Celebration. It always started with mass. There was also a parade and dinner which was open to the public. The Czech ladies always made Kolaches for which they were noted. Then there was a carnival with games, bingo, raffles and a big dance at night. The Duncan band played throughout the day and it was an event we all looked forward to.

Dad would always give his annual haircuts. I'll never forget the one I got when I was 13, ...I cried! I didn't even want to go even though I had a new dress that year.

When I was about 14, me and my friend Cleta, who was 12 the parishioners decided to have an end of the harvest (oats and barley) celebration. Us girls were asked to be flower girls. I even got to have my hair done. We each had dresses alike and

carried baskets of gladiolas to the alter in a procession. There was then a dinner, games and a dance.

I had two older sisters, two older brothers and one younger sister. Our oldest sister, Mary was born in Czechoslovakia. She died around the age of two. At the time Dad had already immigrated to America.

Dad and his half brother, had a very rocky voyage and were very seasick. After landing in New York he and a friend went by train to Pennsylvania. There they worked in the steel mills. After a short time they moved on to Kansas and worked in the wheat fields. Dad finally settled in Chicago and worked in a glass factory. He was also a Gymnast and took part in all the exercises and exhibits while in Chicago.

Shortly after our sister Mary died Mother's parents all passed away and she decided to come to America to join Dad. She wrote Dad about her decision.

Her voyage across the ocean was great and she never got seasick. She would go dancing in the evenings. The Captain complimented her on her giving courage to the other passengers. When she finally arrived in Chicago by train, Dad was not there to meet her. Their letters had missed each other. Dad had sent her money and told her he was moving to a different boarding house.

Mother waited at the train station for three days. She did not speak any English. The Security Guards were very good to her. They brought her food and kept the bums away. They also tried to get word to Dad that she had arrived. Finally they found him. After that ordeal Mother's hair turned white and she lost all of her teeth.

Mother and Dad lived in Chicago a few years. Brother Albert, born on Christmas Day, and 20 months later Jerry was born, both in Chicago. They took in boarders and Mother cooked and

washed clothes by hand for all of them. Dad's health wasn't good due to working around the furnaces; so they moved to Mobile Alabama and bought 40 acres. There they raised sweet potatoes. Mother did not like it there. She was very afraid of the "darkies", so they left and went back to Chicago. They let the acreage go for back taxes. Dad went back to the factories, but the heat ended up being too much for him. That's when they heard about help being needed in Duncan Iowa weeding beets. That summer they moved to Duncan and lived in a tent on what is now the Gary Hejlik farm (a grandson). The banker, from Garner, asked Dad if he would like to farm 160 acres south of Duncan, so they moved again. This time they lived in a grainary because it was the only building on the place. Dad made it into a one bedroom house. The boys slept in the attic and us girls, Flossy Agnes and Helen slept on a fold away davenport till I was 15. Us girls were all born there. More buildings were added on as time went. A large barn, hog barn, chicken house, etc...Later Dad was renting an additional 160 acres, which he eventually ended up buying.

After Dad and Mom retired Kenny Hejlik a grandson, bought the place and farmed it for many years.

Us kids grew up during the depression years. Times were very hard and we were poor, but really didn't know any different. We raised a lot of chickens and had that and eggs to eat. Mother raised big garden and canned everything that she could. She would dry the beans and in the winter us kids would clean them. We would end up with over 25 pounds We even had our own plum trees which Mom would make jelly from. The neighbors would also give us apples to make applesauce and jelly with. Mother also grew lots of grapes and would can the juice and make the most delicious pies from. She also canned strawberries, rhubarb and made sauerkraut. We always had enough to eat.

I recall one time when Helen and I were quite small they had us wash our feet, very well. Then as our folks would grate the

cabbage into a huge crock we would stamp it down making it into sauerkraut.

In the wintertime a fellow that lived with Buzickys would go around the neighborhood and butcher hogs. It would be a three-day event. He would stay at the house to process the meat and make eternice jelita “presbust” and cut lard off the rind, which we would grind and render. Sometimes 50 gallons worth! It was not my favorite time of the year! As years went by, we would butcher a beef and then there was Kielbasa made. This would have to coincide with the pork as they used equal parts of each then smoked it. It was delicious.

Our school was across the road and we would come home at lunchtime to eat our dinner. I often wished we could take dinner pails with us like the other kids did.

My longest recollection is of when Helen was born, April 18, 1928. Jerry, Flossie and I were sent to the Buzickys to stay. We all slept on the floor. Cleta and Johnny had a red wagon and Jerry would give them rides in it; but not ME!!! Boy was I upset.

I also remember having all these copper pipes strung around the ceiling of our kitchen and the copper boiler. Mother was making “moonshine” and it was during the prohibition days. It was a good source of income as she later told us. She would buy us all our shoes and whatever else we needed with the money. Her best customer was the Sheriff of Garner, Peck Hanson.

During the war years, least two of them: the farmers were asked to grow “Hemp” (marijuana) by the government. They used the “Hemp” to make rope in a factory in Britt. Rope was very much needed during the war. It was quite a job; we had to tie by hand the 14-foot long bundles of Hemp. We also helped at the neighbors tying the Hemp. Funny, we never even knew what Marijuana was!

For a few years my brothers, Albert and Jerry grew potatoes, onions ,cabbage and carrots. The soil was very good as it was

peat soil. Us girls would spend a lot of time in the fields helping them. Our starting wage was 10 A DAY!!! we also worked for John Turcin, he too grew onions, potatoes carrots for Buzickys. We worked very hard for the 1 1/2cents per crate of onions and potatoes. We were paid for topping the vegetables. I can recall Ralph and Ray Hejlik picking a car load of potatoes, about 1000 bushels, a day. That was before Ralph was my brother-in-law.

We all loved the dances. If our parents didn't go Flossy would often take me even when she had a date. Flossy was a very pretty girl and very popular. I remember one particular Duncan Dance she went to. She went to the dance with one fellow and at midnight when lunch was served she was with another fellow and came home with still another fellow!!!!

There used to be Czech plays and Flossy was in a lot of them. The group would travel throughout Iowa doing the plays. Helen and I belonged to CYO and would be in all kinds of English Plays. Father Jerry Skluzacek, our pastor, was always with the young group. He was a wonderful man.

Us kids never went to school past the 8th grade. There were no buses and Dad said he heeded us at home. Flossy was a very good student. I'm sure she would have done well, as she had a high grade average when she graduated from the 8th grade. I really didn't care if I continued on or not. I was good in spelling and won a lot of spelldowns, even countrywide. I took the 8th grade over at age 11 because I had nothing else to do. I would sometimes substitute teach when the teacher got sick or could not make it to school. I was paid nothing for this. None of us kids knew a word of English when we started school. Our parents spoke only Czech at home.

We wore hand-me-downs or Mother's friend would sew for us. She even made our underwear, out of flour and sugar sacks. We would wear long legged underwear in the winter. When we would get to school we would roll it up so that know one could see it.

THINGS I REMEMBER

- Dad would tell us to never be ashamed of any work as long as it was honest.
- Wallpapering every spring; whether it needed it or not. One time we had a pale yellow paper in our kitchen with red geraniums on it. Jerry and I got into a scrap and he threw tomatoes at me and missed! The paper had added red on it! We didn't forget that one for a while.
- Playing softball in the spring.
- Mother tells of when Grandma Buzicky called on her one-day asking if the boys had any thing in the baby buggy? I guess they were letting it go down this steep hill and would bring it back up again. Doing it over and over again. Mother flew out of the house as Flossy was the thrill-riding passenger, she was still a baby!!
Mother asking Flossy what she wanted for her 4th birthday - - she replied "Kasickka" (cream of wheat).
Another time Flossy bringing Mother a bouquet of dandelions for her birthday.
- Walking barefoot all summer then wedging our feet into shoe's when school started.
- Mother making dandelion wine and a delicious wine out of some large white blossoms growing in the ditch.
- Making all the cherry pies (10) for Flossy and Ralph's Wedding.
- One of Flossy's boyfriends, John Breka would write her letters but you would have to have a mirror to read them. So one day when Flossy was milking, Helen stood watch and I read them!
- We would milk a lot of cows 18 to 24 by hand. I hated it, especially in the winter. It also took all of us to feed the calves. We would then have to come in and get cleaned up for school.
- We used to have some real bad snowstorms. I recall some of the Sundays in 1934, Jerry and Albert would hitch the horses to the sleigh and pickup neighbors to go to mass.
- Albert was asked to meet the mail carrier near Britt, so on horseback he would deliver the mail to all the neighbors. One time Helen and I said we would walk the mail to the

Zrastliks. Well, on the way the Billy goat spotted us. We quickly climbed on top of the chicken house. that was our last volunteer job! That road that winter never got opened until spring. They had to use dynamite to open it up.

- When Dad was in the field we would have to walk to Catechism in Duncan. J. J. Hrubes, the neighbor to the south of us would drive right by, never giving us a ride.
- Several times Dad would go get groceries at Falades after picking us up. I remember once that Father Kopecky was also at the store and he came out with a Lollipop for each of us. It was a dip of ice cream dipped in chocolate. I can still taste it.
- One fall after we got our wages from working in the onion and potatoes fields Dad needed a wagon box. He asked Flossy for her check, which was \$40.00. She never forgot about it.
- I used to have to use the money I earned to buy all my own clothes.
- We also used to clean houses for the neighbors. One winter Flossy worked at the County Home in Duncan in the kitchen. I stayed with her on Saturdays.
I worked for Ed and Vivian Formanek one summer. I took care of Ron and Gary when they were babies. Earned \$2.50 a week. Boy did I get homesick.
I can still recall the storms we would get each summer. Dad could spot a thunderstorm miles away and make us go into the root cellar. He would even drag us in there in the middle of the night. Sometimes the boys would refuse to go. It wasn't a pleasant place, especially if there were salamanders down there.
- When growing up we would make a pilgrimage once a year to go shopping in Mason City. Dad would take his cigar and set on a bench and patiently wait for us! Mother never shopped much until in her later years. Then we would make her go so that she would have a nice dress and hat to wear.
- On Saturdays, it was Kolache baking day. Sometimes double deckers and big ones. We would ask Mom why she

was making them so big, and she would reply,"one should do you then". She would hide them though if she wanted to have any left for Sunday. Mother was a good cook. Any soup she made was delicious and her trudel, nut rolls, rye and various other types of bread were just as delicious. If there were any special occasions going on she was asked to bake her Rye bread for it. Her Kobliki were great. We would help stretch the dough for apple strudel. She always made it in the fall when the apples were in season. At Christmas time, it was nut roll and Halibut. For Christmas Eve, we would have some kind of Carp in prune gravy.

- We never had a big Christmas tree unless the teacher would give us the one from the school after the program.**
- Sometimes Buzickys would give us a branch off of their evergreen. We would make paper chains and string popcorn for decorations. We would also put on small candles, which were lit for a short time on Christmas Eve.**
- There were never many gifts. Sometimes a relative from Chicago would mail us a small package. It would have dolls for each of us girls, a cotton dress for Mother, Limburger Cheese and a bottle for Dad.**
- Dad would order "Campfire" (a brand) marshmallows as a treat for us kids. Maybe that is why I don't like marshmallows to this day!**
- We would also have oranges and bananas. We also got these treats at Easter time.**
- One Christmas Eve, Mrs. Kopacek sent Ray over with a freezer full of homemade ice cream and her famous sugar cookies. What a treat!**
- Many a winter night we would strip goose or duck down from quills for comforters or pillows. We would also clean beans. Some night, Dad would read to us by the light of the Keresene then later gas lantern and Aladdin Lamps. (Whipper Whill) what an improvement It was much easier to embroider by. We finally got electricity in 1939. We had bare bulbs hanging in the rooms.**
- By then, the kitchen was added on and also a bathroom which had no heat. Plus, they added on more to the porch.**

It was an improvement over the galvanized tub we bathed in on Saturday nights behind the kitchen stove.

- We bought Mother and Dad a floor lamp one Christmas, but they never did use it. It used too much electricity.
- Ralph Hejlik was our telephone repairman. He was also courting Flossy. Needless to say it seemed our phone always needed repairing. One time it had been raining for three days so we couldn't work outdoors. After dinner that day Mother told Flossy she could take a nap, since she had been out late the night before with Ralph. Well she did and was quite embarrassed when the telephone repairman came by! I think they must have had a spat because the following Sunday Ralph's father, John Hejlik, cornered Dad after mass and said he should make Flossy date Ralph again. Well that was the wrong thing to tell Dad. He then forbade Flossy to date Ralph. Well Flossy had a mind of her own, just like Dad!! So what do you know, they were soon engaged to be married!
- August 27, 1940, Jerry married Irene Wellik.
- January 7, 1941, Flossy and Ralph were married. I was maid of honor. I still have the dress today. Dad paid \$18.00 for Flossy's wedding dress.
- January 24, 1949, Agnes and Bill were married. 8 years later than Flossy's wedding. Dad paid \$65.00 for my wedding dress. Flossy didn't let Dad forget it either.
- May 4, 1948 Helen married Jim Utt.
- The war years were especially bitter years for Mother and Dad, as Hitler occupied Czechslovakia and much of their families were living there. Dad forbade Helen and I to date any Germans. Well he didn't see a lot of what went on!! Helen married a German!
There was rationing of gas, tires, sugar, coffee, shoes, etc...Sometimes mother would bake with honey. Her oatmeal cookies were great!
- The oldest car I can remember Dad having was a Blue Whippet. It had a black canvas top. I remember it well, as it was parked in the shed. Helen and I climbed on top to get at a sparrow's nest and we found ourselves inside the car. We didn't set well for a while!

- Mother to was handy with her large wooden spoon! Dad would use a razor strap.
- Our closest neighbor were the Buzickys, to the west of us were the Kopaceks, east of us the Placeks. We also loved to go to Barteks across the fields. There were a lot of children in the neighborhood and we had a lot of fun together.
- My best friend Evelyn Kopacek died at the age of 8 from a ruptured appendicitis. She was 10 days dying. We always played together.
- Evelyn and I also always played with Bernard Zeman. His mother died when he and I were about ten. It was around Easter time.
- Helen's best friend was Margaret Placek.
- I also played a lot with Cleta, Marcella Placek, Monica Wellik and Sally Lorenz. we all attended the same country school together.
- I remember one time when Flossy took Tony Placeks cap and threw it down the hole in the outhouse. The teacher had to fish it out and washed it. I can still see it drying on the furnace. Can't recall how Flossy fared.
- We used to visit the Parelk's a lot as Joe and Dad both came from the same province in Czechoslovakia. Flossy and Margaret were good friends. Leona Parelks and Helen were also good friends.
- Flossy was noted for her date cakes and sponge cake, which she cut into squares and rolled in orange frosting and peanuts.
- Mother also made the most delicious poppy seed cake. All of us neighborhood kids had some great times together. When cats would have kittens, grandma Buzicky would drown them. Us kids would have burial grounds all over the place, even under the snowball bush!
- Mother would tell us about the time when Flossy (who was a hugh cat lover) couldn't be found. Well she was at Beizickys playing with the kittens in the horse stall in their barn.
- After a rain we would go catch frogs out of the ponds by the barns and bring them in the house. Mother was deathly

afraid of them and we were awful trying to scare her with them.

- After Flossy and Ralph were married they lived by the highway going to Farner. Dad gave her aour dog, Towser so she wouldn't be afraid when she was alone. Towser was always finding his was home across the fields. Helen and I started tying notes to his collar sending him back to Flossy's.**
- Flossy was one of the most generous, unselfish people. In later years, she loved her coffee extremely black.**
- Mother would send either Helen or I to help her. Gary was born in the winter (January). I remember going to help in the summer with washing, mowing the lawn and other chores.**
- Kenny was born at harvest time so there were a lot of chores to be done. I remember she wanted me to go kill a chicken for supper and dig some poatoes. Well I had never killed a chicken before, so she got out of bed and went and killed the chicken for me. In those days you were in bed for 10 days after giving birth.**
- Flossy told me that one day she had come in from outside and Gary had climbed on the cupboards and to the stove and was sitting on top of the burner. I don't think he had turned it on yet.**
- Helen and I sang in the church chior for many years. Cleata was the organist. Many times I sang solos and duets for weddings.**
- Jerry used to play the violin at midnight mass.**
- Both Albert and Jerry played both the violin and trumpet. Jerry played in various orchestras for many years. He even played for our wedding dance.**
- For our Mother and Dad's Silver Wedding Anniversary In August, the neighbors gave them a dinner, party and a dance. They gave them a set of silver as a gift.**
- I can remember a friend of Mothers making her a blue print lightweight dress. She had no idea that it was for this party.**
- When Flossy was about four the owners of our farm decided to plant walnut trees there. Flossy had to drop seed in**

holes. A few days later a large box of candy arrived for her by mail from Des Moines.

- When I was 5 and Helen was 3 we were left home to sleep this particular morning. The rest had went to church, (November 2nd) All Souls Day. There would be 3 masses in succession starting at 5:30 a.m. At about the same time 3 gangsters drove by and made the turn below our farm and proceeded on when they got to another turn the missed and wrecked their car. They hid under a bridge. When Jim Zroslick his wife Rose and their baby Clarence were on their way to mass the gangsters jumped them, shot Jim killing him and injured Rose and Clarence. The gansters threw them all out of the car and proceeded on.**
- I can remember the time Flossy was in the hospital with yellow jaundice and when Helen had to have surgery for a double hernia at the age of 8. The day Helen came home from the hospital they found her outside (middle of the winter) skating on the ice pond. Needless to say she didn't sit for a while.**
- It would take all of us to go out and catch the pullets (young chickens) that would be roosting in the trees in the fall. This would take several nights.**
- I also have fond memories of Mother making noodles. She would have them drying all over the kitchen. She would serve them in many different ways, all of which were delicious.**

I have many happy memories and some very sad memories too. I hope my children Mary Eileen, "Pete", Colleen and also Tim, who passed on to eternal rest have some happy momories of their growing up too.

Helen and I are the only ones of the Psotka family still remaining.

Albert Vincent, born December 25, 1913 died on October 22, 1936. He was to be married to Madeline Vonasek in January 1937.

Jerry John, born August 7, 1915 died on October 24, 1976. He married Irene Wellik on August 27, 1940. They had four children; Jerry, Marlys, Jim and Gloria.

Vlasts "Flossy" Estella, born October 17, 1919 died October 30, 1995. She married Ralph Hejlik on January 7, 1941. They had nine children: Gary, Kenny, Audrey, Dennis, Larry, Mary, Ralph Jr., Robert and Greg.

Agnes Anna, born August 5, 1925. She married William F. Cole on January 24th 1949. They had four children: Mary Eileen, William "Pete", Tim (now deceased) and Colleen.

INFORMATION AND STATS:

Albert John Psotka

Born, September 28, 1886

At, Hustnovvice Olamuc, Czeckslovakia, Moravia Province

Died November 30, 1974 at age of 89

Anna Mary Blaha

Born April 7, 1889

Stare mesto Uherske Hradiste, Czecksovakia

Died November 27, 1965 at age of 76

Mary Eileen Married John Fritz. They had 3 children; Amy Marie, Died at 2 months of age, Jennifer Amy, and Angie Anne.

Willian "Pete" married Krys Mierzynski. They have one son, Edward Vincent.

Tim married LuAnn Nelson. They had two children; Rebecca "Becky" LuAnn and Theresa Michelle.

Colleen married James Boucher. They have two children; Ryan Edward and Reagan Elizabeth.



Psotka Family - Circa 1930







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Name:	Psotka, Anna
Ethnicity:	Austria, Bohemian
Place of Residence:	St. Mesto, Moravia
Date of Arrival:	December 24, 1912
Age on Arrival:	23y
Gender:	F
Marital Status:	M
Ship of Travel:	George Washington
Port of Departure:	Bremen, Germany