

Our Family News Letter

Issue 31

Greendale, Wisconsin

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Mary A. Mikel Heck 1912 - 2000

On September 3, 2000, my mother, Mary Ann Mikel Heck, passed away after a long illness.

Five years ago she was involved in an automobile accident in which my dad died. Almost a year later, in 1996, mom suffered a severe stroke which left her partially paralyzed and with a loss of memory. She lived in an assisted living home for four years and her health deteriorated slowly. By August, 2000, she had become very weak and came down with a respiratory infection that robbed her of any remaining strength. She spent 10 days in the hospital and made a fair recovery but was still too weak to return to assisted living. We placed her in a nursing home and she passed away in her sleep 10 days later.

I visited with her on September 2nd, the day before she passed away. I read her the entire "Our Family News Letter" for September, and she seemed receptive to what I was reading. I gave her a hug and a kiss like I always did as I was getting ready to leave for the day. When I left she was sitting up with the newsletter in her hand and she blew me a kiss.

This issue of "Our Family News Letter" is dedicated to her.

Mary Ann Mikel was born on 5 September 1912, at Uhersky Brod, Czechoslovakia to John Mikel and Anna Mary Pastrakova.

John Mikel had been planning to emigrate to the United States that same year. He was going to find a place to work and a home to live in for the family

before he sent for Anna and their only child, Bohumel. Little did he know that Anna was pregnant with their first daughter, Mary Ann Mikel.



Mary Ann Mikel Heck 1912 - 2000

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The News Letter is published quarterly and is distributed without charge. Contributions to help cover the costs are appreciated. Our home page address is:

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John Mikel arrived in the United States on March 19, 1912, and soon found work through friends in the Czech neighborhood of Racine, Wisconsin. After he was settled in and had a good job at the Mitchell Wagon Works, Anna sent him a letter announcing that she was expecting a child in September, 1912. Since John had spent all of his money to get to America, returning to Czechoslovakia was out of the question.

Mom often told me that if her mother had told her husband that she was expecting a child, he would never have made the trip to this country. The family would have remained in Czechoslovakia and she never would have met dad. She often referred to this as grandma's little secret.

In May 1914, Anna Mikel, age 27, along with Mary, age one year and nine months, and her brother Bohumel, age three years and six months, said good-bye to the family in Uhersky Brod and started on a long journey to America. They set sail from Bremen, Germany on board the ship the SS George Washington on May 14, 1914. That ship was the same one that John Mikel traveled on two years earlier.

While on board the ship, Anna Mikel was sick for most of the voyage and was confined to a bed. A friend on the ship took care of Mary and Bohumel. Mary learned to walk on board the ship and Bohumel kept looking for the engine.

The SS George Washington, later used as a troop ship during WW1, arrived at the Port of New York on June 8, 1914. Processing through Ellis Island was a real concern for Anna as she was weak from being so sick on the voyage. People were being turned back at Ellis Island if they had certain illnesses. She was able to pass the inspection and was allowed to enter the United States. Anna had \$15 and a train ticket to Racine, Wisconsin on her when she arrived at Ellis Island.

On about June 10, 1914, the family was reunited at the train station in Racine, Wisconsin. John Mikel had \$7 in his pocket and used it to purchase two

large framed photos, one of Anna and one of John, to commemorate their start of a new life in America.

The first meal that Mary had in Racine was hot dogs served at the Benedict's home on Marquette Street. John, Anna and the two children lived in a flat at 1604 Wisconsin Street until later in 1914, when they purchased their first home at 1823 Marquette Street for \$600. What is interesting is that Robert Gerald Heck, the future husband of Mary Ann Mikel, lived just seven blocks away on Marquette Street in 1914. Robert was only five years old at that time.

Mary and Bohumel lived in a Czech neighborhood where just about everyone spoke the Czech language. Mary had girlfriends who spoke English and that became her primary language outside of the home. Bohumel, however, played with Czech boys and didn't learn English until after he started school. His first day of school was difficult for him since he couldn't understand a word that the teachers were saying.

By 1920, the family was still living in the Czech neighborhood but now were at 1814 LaSalle Street in Racine.

Mary and Bohumel attended Saint John Nepomuk school and Washington Junior High School. In 1928, at the age of 16, Mary went to hairdresser school in Chicago. While one would think that this would be difficult and frightening for her at 16, she just loved it. Her biggest problem was learning the streetcar routes. She got lost on her first day because she didn't realize that the streetcars changed "names" when they changed directions. Determined to master the Chicago Transit System she spent the next weekend riding all through Chicago until she learned the routes. She often told me that she would often spend a Sunday afternoon on the streetcars just for the fun of it.

In 1929, Mary returned to Racine and was employed at the Racine Dry Goods Company as a hairdresser. She worked as a hairdresser for most

of her life either professionally or in just giving her friends a "perm."

On a Saturday in August 1932, Mary met Robert G. Heck at the Rainbow Gardens dance pavilion, north of the Water Works in Racine.

There were two versions of how they first met. Robert said that he saw her across the room in her pink dress. He said that she looked like she could dance pretty good so he walked up to her and asked her to dance. They danced all night together according to Robert.

Mary said that she was dead tired after a long days work and she just wanted to get off of her feet. This good looking guy kept asking her to dance and finally she said, "Yes." They danced almost every dance that night which didn't do Mary's feet any good. He didn't have a car and so he asked her if he could walk her home...Just what she needed. On the way home Robert pointed out the big dipper and other stars in the clear August sky. Robert finally asked her if he could take her out when he gets a job. Mary said, "Sure, when you get a job."

Mary and Robert often joked about that first night.

Mary's mother, Anna Mikel, told her that she better be careful with him because he had too much mischief in his eyes.

Mary and Robert spent a lot of time together after that. They did a lot of dancing, walking, going to baseball games and going to the Douglas Theater on Thursday evenings. That was ten cent night and they usually went Dutch treat meaning that they each paid their own way into the theater. Robert earned his share by working at Walker Manufacturing Company and other odd jobs such as selling shoe polish, tooth brushes and soap door-to-door. Robert's father died in 1923, so he had to work to help support his mother and family.

On June 29, 1935, Mary and Robert were married at Saint John Nepomuk church. They didn't have much money as they started their married life together. Robert had \$11.25 and Mary had \$7.00.

Since Robert didn't own a car, they went to St. Louis for their honeymoon.....with Mary's parents. John and Anna Mikel owned the car and paid for all of the expenses along the way. Robert drove with Mary in the front seat and with John and Anna in the back seat. To make matters worse they stayed with relatives while in St. Louis. The relatives lived in a small three room house that had a living room, a kitchen and one bedroom. There were no doors on the rooms, no air conditioning, and the outside temperature was well over 110 degrees.

John and Anna Mikel bought a large house at 1212 Hagerer Street for \$2,500 in 1924. The house had a neat two bedroom flat on the second floor. Mary and Robert moved in there right after their wedding and remained there for the next nine years.

Gary was born in 1938 and Bob in 1940.

In March 1944, Mary and Robert purchased a home at 1306 Jones Avenue in Racine for \$5,500.

Don was born in 1945.

Mary and Robert loved to travel and during their married life visited all 50 states, Mexico, Canada, and Western Europe. In the early years the trips were by car and Mary's parents often came along with Gary and Bob stuffed in the back seat. Don was generally sent with Aunt Tillie to buy an ice cream cone and when they got back the rest of us were gone on vacation. He never did catch on but I think that he became very distrusting whenever anyone offered him an ice cream cone.

I recall one trip that we made with Mary, Robert, John and Anna, and Gary and me. We were going to Noral, Alberta, Canada to visit Anna's sister, Mary Holish. The roads looked like two dirt paths that had been deeply rutted by wagons and horses. There were no motels or hotels and we ended up sleeping in the car several nights. I slept on the back window ledge, Gary slept on the rear floor, John and Anna slept in the back seat and Mary and Robert slept in the front seat.

Mary used to take a lot of verbal liberties and almost developed a language of her own. Robert understood everything that she said and we would often kid both of them about it. Some of the terms that she would use as we were growing up include: Which-a-ma-call-it, Thing-a-ma-bob, Thing-a-ma-jig, Do-hinkie, What's-its-name, What's-its-face, Who-za-ma-call-it, and You-know-what. Robert even got into the act and often could be heard saying, "Dassent-aught-ta.

Mary was heard more than once introducing a daughter-in-law as "This is my daughter-in-law, Which-a-ma-call-it."

From the photo album....

The following pages contain many photographs from the album. Starting in the upper left corner and moving in a clockwise direction they are:

Page 5: (1) Mary Ann Mikel on her grandmother's lap in 1914 at Uhersky Brod. (2) L-R Tillie Kriva, Bohumil, Lydia, Mary, Tillie, and Anna Mikel in 1924. (3) Mary and Robert Heck with the Heck and Henningfeld families. (4) John and Anna Mikel with Mary and Bohumil in 1920. (5) Mary Heck (6) Visiting Mary Holish in Norel, Alberta, Canada in 1946.

Page 6: (1) Dan, Bruce, Jim Mikel and Don, Bob and Gary Heck. (2) Mary & Bob Heck. (3) Same (4) John Mikel, Jim Mikel and Mary Heck (5) Anna Mikel with cousins from St. Louis and Bob & Mary Heck. (6) Mary & Bob Heck with Bill & Mary Zurweller (7) Mary & Bob Heck (8) Mary Heck with Don, Gary and Bob at 1306 Jones Ave. (9) Mary & Bob Heck (10) Mary Heck with Bob, Don and Gary. (11) Mary Heck and Mary Siska in St. Louis. (12) Lydia and Harvey Nelson and Mary Heck playing sheepshead. (Center) Mary & Bob Heck on June 29, 1935.

Page 7: (1-4) Mary Heck. (5) Robert G. Heck & Tiny. (6-11) Mary and Bob Heck. (12) Mary Heck. (Center) Mary Heck.

Page 8: (1-2) Mary & Bob Heck. (3) Mary Heck and Mary Siska. (4) Mary Heck. (5) Mary & Bob Heck with Bob, Don and Gary. (6) Mary Heck with Millie Vanek. (7) Mary heck with Darlene Sterba from Chicago. (8) Mary Heck with Lucy Holish from Norel, Alberta, Canada. (9) Mary and Bob Heck. (10) Mary Heck naturalization photo. (11) Mary & Bob Heck. (12) Mary & Bob Heck with Don, Gary and Bob. (Center) Mary and Bob Heck with Gary.

Our Family News Letter now available on CD...

Several people have asked if they can get past copies of Our Family News Letter. If you have a computer with Windows 95, 98 or ME 2000, you are in luck. I scanned every page of the last 30 issues of the newsletter in very high resolution and put them on a CD. It took many many hours to do this.

The newsletters can be viewed and printed or you can just scroll through each and every page. You can zoom in on the pictures or you can copy them with a simple right click of your mouse. The pages are in Adobe Acrobat Reader RTF format which is generally available on every Windows based computer. Just in case you don't have Acrobat Reader, the latest copy of it is included on the CD.

The CD uses a self loading menu system so that you can pick which issue of the newsletter to view and print.

If you would like to have a copy of the CD, just send \$10.00 to me at the following address:

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Be sure to include your full name and address so that I can mail the CD to you.

Thank You.







