KINMUNDY
(circa 1945-52)

Summers meant two weeks visiting Grandpa and Grandma Jones down on the farm in southern Illinois where my Mom grew up with her six brothers and sisters. Kinmundy, some 250 miles south of Chicago, had been home to the Jones family for decades, and my Grandpa, George Frank Jones, lived and farmed four miles outside of Kinmundy, his entire life.

My Dad wasn't with us during our summer sojourn in the country both because he didn't want to leave his downtown lithography business unattended for two weeks and because he really didn't view staying at my Mom's family farm a vacation.

The Meadowlark

Most summers my Mom, Fred and I traveled to Kinmundy on *The Meadowlark*, a streamlined passenger train run by the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad from Chicago down to the tip of Illinois. On the evening of our departure, my Dad helped us board the streamliner at the Englewood-63rd Street Station, and we settled in for the five-hour train ride through the Illinois country-side, stopping at small farm towns like Momence, Tuscola, Arthur, and Shelbyville. My Uncle James, who lived just up the road from my grandparents, used to joke that the conductor would call out the names of the towns as the train sped along: "Arcola," "Tuscola," and one passenger quipped "I suppose the next station is "Coca Cola," and the conductor responded "No, Champagne is next!"

Mostly, we looked out the window. Sometimes, we played cards. We could mosey around our car at will, but only ventured to the dining car with our Mom. Generally, we ate before we left home so it was rare that we got to enter the white table-clothed

grandeur of the dining car. When it got dark, gazing out the window, the stops seemed more romantic with folks coming and going into the night. Then eventually the lights of a town gave way to the darkness of the countryside. Miles and miles of some of the richest farmland in the country.

While Kinmundy wasn't a regular stop for *The Meadowlark*, the train stopped there if passengers were embarking or disembarking. My Uncle Harold, who lived with my grandparents, picked us up at the Kinmundy depot. Usually, we were the only ones disembarking from the train. It was pitch dark as the train pulled away leaving us behind, blowing its whistle to announce its departure to the town. We climbed into my uncle's Chevy and headed out into the country for the four-mile ride. If it had rained a lot the week before, we worried that the dirt roads might be impossibly muddy or that the bridge

over the main creek might be washed out. By the time we reached the farm, it was getting on to mid-night. Although Grandpa and Grandma were in bed, we were expected to enter their bedroom and give them a kiss hello. I brushed my lips on Grandpa's whiskery cheek. I always dreaded kissing my Grandma for some reason; her skin was so soft, and she seemed so old to me. Climbing into bed with my Mom, while my brother went to sleep in the other bedroom, I knew my special summer on the farm had begun.

The Farm

Those childhood summers on the farm taught my brother and me a lot. It was clear that we were not country people. My Kinmundy cousins labeled us "city slickers." My grandparent's house did not have in-door plumbing. To get to the outhouse, you had to go out through the kitchen and follow a path past the vegetable cellar and the hen house. It was a single so you had to wait your turn if the outhouse was occupied. I remember my Grandpa being in there for long periods of time, reading his newspapers. At night if we woke up and had to pee, my Mom took my brother or me outside and let us pee on the grass. If we had to poop, we used the chamber pot located under the bed.

To get water into the kitchen, a pump was installed at the sink with a basin to catch the flow. I can see my Grandpa standing there with his strap and razor shaving and pumping the water he needed. For our baths, kettles were filled with water from the pump and put on the wood-burning stove to heat. Grandma did all her cooking on a wood-burning stove so fire wood was piled outside the kitchen door to be used for cooking and for heat in the winter. Once the water was heated for our baths, it was poured into a metal tub and we were scrubbed in the kitchen.

My Mom grew up in that house. Born in 1915, she was the fourth of seven children. There was my Aunt Dortha (who lived and worked in Chicago), my Uncles Harold and James (both on the farm), then my Mom, my Aunt Lora (who lived in Kinmundy), my Uncle Cecil (who lived in Chicago), and my Aunt Mille (who lived in Kinmundy at that time). My Mom explained to us that when she was growing up the boys had one bedroom, the girls the other. Since there was an age span of eighteen years between the oldest and the youngest, overcrowding in the bedrooms was not a problem. Generally, a new baby slept with the parents until the next baby arrived. As I mentioned my Uncle Harold, who served in the army in the Philippines in World War II and was a bachelor at the time, lived with Grandpa and Grandma Jones when we made our summer visits. He kept a Japanese rifle that he brought back from the war under his bed. He contracted malaria when fighting in the Philipines, but never talked about what happened to him there. My Uncle James and his family lived just up the dirt road from my grandparents.

At the back of the house, there was a mud room where you took off your boots or shoes before you came in and a small room off the kitchen where Uncle Harold slept. The living room had a large wood-burning stove, my Grandpa's easy chair where he read the paper and smoked his pipe after the noon-day meal, a sofa and a clock that chimed the

hour. There was a seldom-used parlor, three small bedrooms, and a front porch where my Grandma sewed on her pedal-driven sewing machine. When the sewing machine was not in use, it often held a pink hobnail glass vase full of colorful zinnias from my Grandma's garden.

During the summer, my cousins, my brother and I chased each other through the house, entering through the screen door to the mud-room, running through the kitchen and living room, and out the screen door of the front porch. My Grandma sat on a stool in the kitchen by the old hand-wound phone with her fly swatter. Exasperated by our carelessness at not closing the screen doors and allowing the flies in, she implored us to behave with more consideration. I thought she was strict and a bit scary. Sitting along side the wall-mounted, hand-cranked telephone, she often was busy listening to her own and her neighbors' calls on the party-line.

The "cave" or vegetable cellar outside the house was dug into the ground. Potatoes, beets, carrots and onions were stored there for the winter, along with the canned tomatoes, pickles and peaches that my Grandma preserved. Further up the walk was the hen house that housed the white Leghorn chickens with their bright red combs. They laid their eggs and slept in the hen house, but during the day roamed freely around the yard. When we were old enough, my Grandma told my brother and me to gather the eggs in the afternoon. Since basically I was afraid of the chickens, this was a problem for me. Sometimes a hen was still sitting on her eggs when I approached her box and refused to move. Frightened that she might peck me, I cold heartedly lobbed corn cobs at her until she abandoned the nest.

Besides the hen house and the cold cellar in back of the house, there was a wash house. There, too, my Grandpa or Uncle Harold separated the milk from the cream they got from their dairy cows. Using a hand crank on the cream separator, they turned the gears that spun the bowl with whole milk in it. Because cream is lighter than milk, it stayed toward the center while the milk went toward the outside of the bowl and was drained off into a container. This "skim" milk had a bit of "blue" hue to it and wasn't drunk by us or our cousins. Instead the "skim" milk was fed to the hogs and chickens, and whole milk to the family. Whole milk was the source for butter and for daily use in cooking and drinking. Both my brother and I, however, refused to drink even the whole milk, much to my Grandma's displeasure. She was doubly displeased when my Mom bought homogenized milk for our consumption from Jesse George's grocery store in town.

The yard was large with a swing that occupied me for many hours. If you faced the house while on the swing, you could see whomever was in the kitchen and if you faced the other direction, you could see the red barn, the tractor shed and the corn crib, along with the occasional cow that wandered by. A wire fence encompassed the barnyard. Next to the fence was another pump and a large hand-cranked knife grinder for sharpening. Through the gate, heading to the barn, there was little to divert our attention. Except one evening, when it was time to milk the cows, Fred and Grandpa went out to the field in back of the barn to gather the cows. Grandpa was using a stick to prod the cows along, so Fred thought he could help by going after a calf that wandered off. The angry mother cow took after a frightened Fred and chased him some thirty feet before Grandpa intervened. In the safety of the barn, you could watch Grandpa milk the cows or try and catch the wild kittens that lived there. Just outside the barn was the pig pen where very

large hogs wallowed in the mud and squealed. After dinner, we went with Grandpa to feed the pigs from a slop bucket that included the leftovers from the day. While Grandpa and Grandma didn't have riding horses when we visited those summers of our childhood, they did own some work horses.

Grandpa Jones

The only time I saw Grandpa Jones wearing dress pants and shirt was on the occasional Sunday he went to church. Otherwise, he wore denim overalls, a work shirt and boots. I liked to think I was his favorite grandchild because I was his first granddaughter. Sitting on my Grandpa's lap next to the wood burning stove, I can still feel the rough texture of his overalls on my bare legs. When he rubbed his whiskery face against my skin, I squirmed and giggled and bumped against the tin of Prince Albert tobacco that rested in his pocket. Those emptied tins were used to create pyramid structures by Fred and me, and when Fred got a bee bee gun for target practice in the yard.

Grandpa kept bees out past the hen house. Tending the bees, he'd don a hat with netting and thick gloves and capture the honey he loved to eat. Watching him dip his bread into a

bowl of honey that also contained a honeycomb, we learned once again how our food came to table.

Grandpa Jones, who was almost six feet tall, trim and strong, was probably in his sixties when we visited. He was up at six, ate a breakfast of bacon and eggs (from their pigs and hens), and on his tractor before seven. They raised corn, soy beans and hay for their livelihood. The main meal for the day was at noon. Grandpa and Uncle Harold, along with Grandma, my Mom, Fred and I, ate a big meal that included vegetables from the garden, iced tea and probably meat from the store. It was never chicken during the week; fried chicken was reserved for Sunday dinner. After the noon meal, Grandpa retired to his easy chair in the living room to read the newspaper and smoke his pipe. Later he returned to the fields or repaired machinery or mended fences. Supper in the evening was light. With no TV, we sat outside and played with the beagles, Rex and Jiggs. Often Uncle Harold entertained us by pulling ticks off the dogs, lighting a match and popping them. Because there were no street lights and few cars passed on the road, it seemed there were at least a million lightening bugs, sparkling in the evening shadows. We captured them and put them in jars with blades of grass, planning to set them free in the morning. Once the stars came out, we headed off to bed in the quiet, listening to the cicadas and the dogs howling as they chased various critters through the night.

Grandma Jones

I can't picture my Grandma, Lulu Belle Robb Jones, without an apron. She didn't smile a lot, but she had a wry sense of humor. Once she told us kids that all of her chickens had names and that she could tell them apart enough to call them by name. One Sunday morning, she took Fred out in the backyard and asked him to choose a chicken for her. Unwittingly, Fred pointed to one of her feathered friends, and Grandma proceeded to grab it and wring its neck with one twist. To Fred's utter horror, she dropped the chicken, and it ran around for another bit without its head! That Sunday dinner, Fred declined his portion of fried chicken, the vision of its demise clearly imprinted in his head.

Grandma's pride and joy, however, was her garden. We children, even my cousins who lived on the farm, were not allowed in the garden which was enclosed by a white picket fence. It was her sanctuary. Along with her apron, her bonnet hung in the kitchen. She wore her wide-brimmed hat whenever she toiled in the garden, mindful of the hot summer sun and the bugs. She grew beans, peas, potatoes, sweet corn, beets, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers…..every vegetable you could imagine at that time. She also added colorful flowers, like zinnias. Just outside the fence close to the road were hollyhocks and tiger lilies. Riding bikes back from our cousins' house, we knew we were close to home when we spotted those orange tiger lilies.

My grandmother, like most of her friends, was a quilter. She made her girls' clothes when they were growing up, and with leftover scraps, created colorful patch-work quilts

with other members of the Shanghai Club quilting bee. I have a quilt, though it's in poor shape, made by members of that bee. You can read their names embroidered on the squares, members of the bee and their children: Em, Mrs. Brasal, Mrs. Metzger, Mrs. Gray, Ag Jones, Vivian, Pearl, Cora, Lora Agnes, Julia, Ag Arnold, Millie Lou, Beulah, Hazel, Lou, Mary, Emma, Hat, Mildred, Dortha, Josephine, Nettie, Clara, Nell, and Hilda. The quilting bee got its name from a little country church, called Shanghai (a Cumberland Presbyterian Church), that was the center of that farming community back in the early 1900s and disbanded in the late 1930s. Hand sewing became a challenge as she grew older. She often asked me, as a child, to thread her needle for her.

Grandma's peach cobbler and pies were renown within the family. Although my Mom rarely made cakes or even baked, she made a mean fruit pie to which she attributed her own Mom's example. Just as she used to watch and help her Mom make a pie and wait for the trimmings from the pie crust to create cinnamon rolls, so did I. With a little bit of butter, cinnamon and sugar, strips of pie dough were rolled and baked in the oven for a little bit of heaven on earth. Yum.

Cousins

One of the best things about being on the farm in the summer as a child was going bare foot all day. Yes, ALL DAY! The only danger we, as children, entertained was stepping on chicken poop or into a cow pie! There were four of us to play together: Fred, cousin Jim who was my age (born just four days a part), me, and Don (two years younger). Our

favorite past time was to go fishing in the farm ponds or in Grandpa Gray's creek (he was Jim and Don's other Grandpa and lived down the road). There were lots of turtles in the ponds. Uncle Harold cautioned us that they were snapping turtles and to beware or we'd lose a toe.

Our fishing ritual was defined by the resources at hand. First, we got a tin can and looked for worms that were easy pickings under rocks if it had rained recently. Next, we gathered bamboo poles, cork bobbers and hooks for our travels. En route to one of the ponds or the creek, we usually passed grazing cows that, to me, were huge and scary. My cousins thought my fears very amusing and ran toward them, sometimes pulling their tails and generally trying to frighten me even more. Once at our chosen site, we squished the worms onto our hooks and tried to catch sunnies and small catfish. After a bit, one of the boys located a large stick and broke off the branches so that we could attach the fish we caught by their gills. It was my job, according to the boys, to carry the stick home with the fish attached and pick them up whenever they flopped off. Once back in the barnyard, we dropped the fish in the water trough and hoped they survived.

Once we visited the farm when school was still in session. My two cousins attended a one-room elementary school house, Swift School in the country, the same school my Mom and her siblings attended. We went with them and saw how the teacher organized the children by grades in the rows.

Swift School (also known as "Breakneck"); Kinmundy twp., Marion Co., IL
Mary Brasel, teacher – 1949-50
Back row: Richard Ford, Darrell Chance, Patty Cigar, Betty (Ford) Gottfried, Kenneth Ford, Beverly (Feather) Hawkey Brasel, Mary (Feather) Jones, Mary Brasel - teacher
Front row: Karen Ballance, Dorothy Chance, Rosalyn (Lowe) Uphold, Donna (Ford) Jackson, David Ballance, Jimmie Jones, Don Jones, Darrell "Buddy" Hanna, Donna Chance

Although my Grandpa didn't have a riding horse, my Uncle James (Jim and Don's Dad) did. One day, he was giving rides around the yard. It was Fred's turn. He was probably a bit older during that visit, maybe eleven. My Dad happened to be there and asked if the horse was safe. Fred climbed on and suddenly something spooked the horse, and it took off running across the fields with Fred hanging on for dear life. Everyone started chasing after, screaming and yelling while Fred, holding on to the saddle horn just hunkered down. At some point, the horse slowed down into a walk and family members caught him. I don't think my Dad ever forgave my Uncle James.

To add insult to injury, poor Fred also often suffered from hay fever those summers on the farm. No rides on the hay wagon into town for him. One summer his allergies developed into asthma, and we all had to head back to Chicago on the Meadowlark earlier than planned.

Kinmundy

Every Saturday, everyone went to town. Kinmundy, with a population under 1000, was a bustling community on Saturday when all the farmers from the surrounding community did their shopping, gossiped and shared news. The two-block long commercial area was

lined with stores on both sides of the street. Wooden side walks, raised well above the street, required a stretch. Jesse George's Dry Goods and Grocery Store was our destination and my favorite. You could buy anything and everything there. Across the street, Norris Vallow (my Aunt Millie's father-in-law) published *The Kinmundy Express*. His column *Zat's So* was filled with commentary and amusing anecdotes. Our names often appeared in the paper. Anyone visiting from out of town or just anyone visiting someone from the town was listed in the paper. There was a bank, a hardware store, post office, funeral home, and a small coffee shop. My Grandma brought her extra eggs to sell and extra cow's milk was taken to the creamery.

There wasn't a lot to do in Kinmundy. The highlight of Fred's summer was to travel with Uncle Harold to St. Louis for a night baseball game. Though we lived in Chicago, Fred became a rabid, life-long St. Louis Cardinal fan with Stan Musial as his hero.

Like many small mid-western towns, Kinmundy had a Baptist Church, a Methodist Church, and a Christian Church vying for members. In the summer, we attended the Methodist Church because that's where my Uncle James' family belonged, and we could go to Sunday School with our cousins. My Grandpa usually didn't go. In fact, I was surprised to learn when I got older that neither of my grandparents attended any of their children's weddings, except when Uncle Harold got married for the first time when he was fifty years old! Kinmundy was a white, Protestant, basically Ango-Saxon community of farmers who had lived in the area for generations. In fact, there was a separate part of the cemetery reserved for Catholics if any happened to live and die in the community.

The Meadowlark no longer runs through town. *The City of New Orleans* flies by on its way south from Chicago, but if you want to take the train to Kinmundy, you must be content with disembarking at Effingham some 30 miles away.

Note: Kinmundy is said to be named after a place in Scotland.
Photos of the old train station and old Swift school are from the Kinmundy Historical Society website.


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