

## **Today, Tomorrow, Always.**

*My Uncle Herb was born in a village called Friedenstahl, and my mother liked to tell me that he and her parents came to Canada from Bessarabia. But as a young girl, I thought she was teasing: Bessarabia sounded so exotic, I couldn't find it in my atlas. It was only long after my grandfather died that I learned about the land my Uncle Herb was born in, and the world he and his parents had left behind. My beloved Uncle Herb Schulz -- my mother's eldest brother, whom she looked up to, -- was a writer, in addition to being a farmer, a farm cooperative organizer, a public servant, and a university professor. And this is what he has shared with our family about my Bessarabian grandparents. I am grateful that through the "Germans From Russia Historical Society" I can share this, for today, tomorrow, always:*

Jacob (Jake) Schulz was born in Bessarabia (now Moldova) between the Dneister and Pruth rivers (then part of Russia) in 1901, only son of the German Lutheran farm family whose ancestors had accepted the invitation of Catherine the Great a century earlier, to sink their roots into some of the world's richest soil along the north slope of the Black Sea. Jacob was an energetic young man who soon became deeply involved in the social, political and economic life of the self-sustaining German-speaking village of Friedenstahl. He attended high school and a form of community college, where he proved to be an excellent scholar. He was an active member of the village band in which he played the organ and trumpet.

The maternal language of the village was German, but because of the polyglot population in south-eastern Europe, young Jacob soon learned to speak Russian, Ukrainian and Romanian. In 1917, following the collapse of the Russian army, the

Romanian army crossed the Pruth river and Bessarabia became a part of Romania. Between the ages of 20 and 23, Jacob served with the Romanian army as a drill sergeant with the cavalry. Jacob's slim-legged, jet black, wind-fleet Arabian stallion became the wonder of the village, and crowds would gather to watch as he rode through the cobbled streets. Since the horse was his own property, he brought it home with him when he had completed his service. Shortly after, the horse contracted pneumonia and had to be destroyed. While Jacob spent little time reminiscing about the past, he did, on a few occasions, relate the story of his horse. The grave was dug, the horse was led beside it, and shot. It fell, rolled, slid into the grave standing on its feet with head up as if ready to run as it so often had, then convulsed and collapsed.

And there were other lasting memories that were to shape Jacob's life and influence his decision to leave Europe, and his future commitment to the welfare of the general community in the land of his adoption. His European experience had taught him the pain of one is the pain of all, so that no society can maintain social harmony if there were a few rich and many poor, that life was dangerous when communities remained isolated from each other, that the individual must take the responsibility for his actions but that the community has the responsibility for the welfare of its individual members, and most of all, that human beings pooling resources and working together could solve any problem.

What were the memories that moved him? During the Romanian invasion of 1917, a Russian had run into the high school to escape but it was dragged out by the soldiers and stood against the school wall and, as the 15-year-old Jacob watched in horror, was executed by firing squad while on his knees pleading for his life, and he wondered if one day it might happen to him. The German farmers would go to the Village Market Square to hire fieldhands from among the poverty-stricken Ukrainian boys and choose them by

feeling their muscles as though at the slavemarket or buying a horse, and pay them a package of tobacco for a 16-hour day of backbreaking manual toil, and send them back to their hovels. Jacob wondered how long it would be before they exacted their revenge.

It was impossible to ride through the cornfields at night for fear of being possibly killed by desperate men wanting a few lei to buy food or material to patch their roofs, and he wondered how it was possible to maintain social order under such conditions. It was necessary to speak different language: Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, German, Magyar, Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish... In almost every village one passed through, there was constant turmoil of race riots as people speaking different languages did not understand and therefore were suspicious of each other; attempting to court a girl in a neighbouring village was an open invitation to being beaten and maimed. Bands of young men – including himself – armed themselves with clubs and invaded each other's villages to avenge previous beatings. Young Jacob wondered if there was not someplace in the world where one was not repeatedly robbed in his own village or killed for no other reason than that he had wandered beyond its perimeter.

Young conscript soldiers had the skin peeled off their faces by a single downward blow with the flat of the hand of an officer simply because they had not obeyed a command fast enough, and young Sergeant Schulz feared if a war started, the soldiers would shoot first their officers and then go home. The Russians had been humiliated by the Romanian seizure of Bessarabia and he firmly believed one day the new Red Army would take it back. He did not want to be there when that happened. The national government bureaucracy was remote, authoritarian. Their word was law, and any citizen in disagreement with a government employee always lost the argument. It was the government administrators, not the citizens (who were still referred to as subjects (*untertanen*) who had rights -- subjects only had obligations. While the public

administrators had status, they were so poorly paid they lived on graft. Nothing happened unless the palm was greased. The policeman, walking by, would stop to chat and would casually comment that his flour bin was empty. Unless his flour again bin was soon filled, he would find a way to make life difficult for the villager who had failed to understand his hint. Jakob wondered if there was not some place where it was not necessary to bribe an official to get service, and where the citizen taxpayer, not the employee administrator, had the last word!

There were also happy times. At 22, Jakob Schulz married the shy-quiet, attractive Amelia Kelm, whose uncle, the village wise man, was to become his good friend and mentor. At 23, he completed his military service, established his own homestead, began taking over the family farm -- the fifth generation of Schulz to have owned it -- and adding to it. Fascinated by new technology, he built his own tractor and straw-cutting machine, and soon had a crew doing custom-cutting throughout the village. He became a good vintner, making his own wine from his own grapes, and storing it in the cellar by the keg-full. He was happily involved in the strenuous activity of seeding and harvesting when neighbours cooperated, moving from farm to farm, working hard and playing hard. He was often engaged in a carefree conviviality of the village weddings, playing his trumpet, engaging in feats of strength and skill, and shortening the all-night bacchanals with wine and song. He was an esteemed member of the church, through which the people at the village sustained their values. He read prodigiously and listened to his wife's uncle explain how a society could change itself and improve the quality of life of its members. At 26 he became the youngest man ever elected to the village council. At 27 he purchased his first car, one of tvery few in the community. At 28 he was the owner of 200-hectare farm, one of the largest in the community. But at 28 he had decided to go...

In April 1930, Jacob Schulz, his wife, and their three-year-old son Herbert, left Friedenstahl, family and friends, took the train across Europe to Bremen, the ship to Montréal, and then the train to Winnipeg. He drove and walked through the countryside looking for land and finally, in July, made a down-payment on a 160-acre farm, with a fine two-storey oak-panelled house in the municipality of Grandview, 250 miles north-west of Winnipeg. Their immigration coincided with the onset of the Great Depression. They had brought about \$1000 dollars with them, and shortly after their departure the Romanian government prohibited any further export of currency. The cows they had purchased for \$60 each in 1930, were only six dollars by 1931. The Fordson tractor purchased for \$200 was traded the following spring for \$25 worth of seed wheat. The fieldwork was done with four windbroken horses bought for a few dollars. Their only transportation was a one-horse, two-wheeled cart with a smaller wheel on one side. Within a year after their arrival in Canada they were destitute. They could not make the payments on their farm.

In the spring of 1932 they abandoned the farm and relocated rented one on crop-share basis. They toiled prodigiously: ploughing seeding, stooking, threshing. One month after they had satisfied their five-year legal residence requirement, Jacob and Emily were granted Canadian citizenship. By 1939 he was farming 1000 thousand acres. He was elected by his neighbours to the municipal council in 1944, a German. He became active in the farmers movement. Life was good and the family grew. He became founding president of the Manitoba Farmers' Union. In 1957 he became a member of Parliament...

This is a story of community. Across the oceans, it exists in our hearts and minds, with our ancestors. My beloved Uncle Herb died five years ago, ever-proud of his roots in Bessarabia and Canada.