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**PRAGUE, NEBRASKA:
A Traditional Village in Modern Society**

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Sociology
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Gerald Wayne Allen

May 4, 1994

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University
of Nebraska at Omaha.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is life satisfaction as it relates to older persons living in small, rural communities. Particularly, this study is concerned with potential low life satisfaction and loneliness due to limited interaction and increasing social isolation resulting from the decline of rural communities. The focus of the study, Prague, Nebraska, is a village that continues to survive as a social system in which community members, especially older residents, interact and live in a familiar, ongoing social environment. The study looks at the social processes of this small, rural community that has over the years redefined and solved the problems of subsistence, social relations, and social identification within its locality. This has enabled the community to persist. A presentation of the social psychology of the community shows that the traditional nature of the peasant population who settled the community has been maintained through ritual and symbolism. Central to these peasant traditions has been commitment to the survivability of the community. A collective identity has evolved through a process of ritual and symbolism allowing older residents to maintain social relations and interactions resulting in positive effects on life satisfaction. Older persons are not isolated in Prague, but are an important part of this intergenerational community.

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Gerald Wayne Allen

To my best friend, with love,

and to the peasants who came before...

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INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the century, the population of the United States has changed from a rural to an urban society. In the heartland of America, many small towns are becoming a thing of the past. Younger persons continue leaving rural communities seeking economic opportunities in larger population centers. Left behind in the small rural communities is a generally older population, often without the mobility or resources to move (Thorson and Horacek, 1986). Older persons with the least opportunity for mobility who have remained in the declining communities become increasingly socially isolated. As small towns lose people, opportunities for social interaction decline for those who remain. As schools close, church congregations disband, and local business districts turn into hollow store fronts, the decrease in or lack of social participation and reduction in the levels of activity for the socially isolated older residents results in loneliness negatively affecting their life satisfaction.

Social isolation is not necessarily exclusive to the old left behind in the small towns. Persons who have relocated to larger towns and cities because of economic pressure are also subject to isolation and loneliness. These persons, like the elderly in the dying towns of rural America, are lonely because of the lack of social interaction, or the perception of same. Loneliness, because of the lack of participation in the desired levels of activities or social interactions, much the same as the socially isolated older person in the small town, negatively affects life satisfaction.

This study is concerned with potential low life satisfaction and loneliness due to limited interaction and increasing social isolation resulting from the decline of rural communities. The primary focus of this thesis is older persons in rural communities. How life satisfaction of other age groups might be affected by social isolation is not investigated in any detail. In particular, this study looks at a small community, Prague, Nebraska, that, unlike many other rural villages

and towns, has not declined in population. The village has been able to survive as a social system in which community members, especially older residents, continue to interact and live in a familiar, ongoing social environment. Gaining an understanding as to how this community has survived, and of the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction, provides implications for formulation of public policy and decision-making enabling the survival of America's small towns, or expanding services available to residents of declining communities that can help alleviate potential social isolation.

BACKGROUND

Personal Interest

Small towns are of great interest to this writer. During my youth, each summer was spent with my grandparents in a rural, farming village in northeastern Kansas. Many of the values and beliefs I hold are the result of the small town experience. For most of the summers that I spent with my grandparents in the community referred to as Smallville, the village population numbered some three hundred persons. Every storefront on Main Street was occupied. There were two grocery stores, a thriving bank, meat locker plant, two cafes, a pool hall, beauty shop, feed store, a combination furniture-hardware store and funeral parlor, barber shop, drug store, and a Chevrolet dealer. Other businesses in town included a very large farmers cooperative, an ice house, automobile and farm machinery repair shops, a plumbing shop, and my grandfather's blacksmith shop. On Saturday evenings during summer months, all the stores were open and Main Street was alive with townspeople and area farm families. For entertainment during these evenings, black and white movies were projected onto a white sheet strung between two poles in the town square, centered on Main Street. Persons at the well-attended outdoor movies sat on temporary benches made of wooden planks placed atop concrete blocks. Sometimes, ice cream socials supplemented the movies. The socials helped occupy the time as people waited for

darkness to fall so the movies could be shown. On Sunday mornings the community's three churches were filled with worshippers from Smallville and the surrounding countryside.

In those days the town held parades, carnivals, an annual "nail keg derby," which is an event similar to the Soap Box Derby, and other community celebrations. These activities were always well-attended. Over time, changes began to take place. Most of the area's farms, which were usually 80 acres, began to increase in size. No longer did farmers have just the 80-acre "home place," but 160-acre farms became more common. As a result, there were fewer and fewer farm families living in the countryside. Empty storefronts started appearing on Main Street. Soon, there were fewer and fewer people attending village events and celebrations. In time it seemed as though they just completely stopped having them.

When I was nineteen, my grandfather died and I returned to the village for the funeral. Having not been there for three years, I was shocked that the town had declined so much in such a relatively short period of time. The church I had attended as a youth had lost so many congregation members that it could no longer support its own minister; he was shared with a congregation in a larger town located 10 miles away. One of the other churches in the village had closed altogether, as had many of the stores on Main Street. The town's population had dropped to some 200 people and the number of persons living in the countryside had been reduced by over fifty-percent as area farms continued to increase in size. Empty farmsteads were common place throughout the area.

Twenty-five years later, I again returned to Smallville and drove through the village streets to reflect on past memories. When I saw the remnants of what had been my grandfather's blacksmith shop, since converted to a farm implement and vehicle repair business, the sadness of the sight overwhelmed me. I was not prepared to see the dilapidated condition of the shop, though while driving around, I had become aware how "junky" the town had become. On the way into town, I noticed a three or four acre junkyard where government grain storage buildings

once stood. All around the community one could sense a general condition of deterioration. There were many empty, run-down buildings, junker cars sat abandoned in yards and vacant lots, and weeds were seen nearly everywhere. Within this depressed, dying village, the sight that affected me most was seeing that what had once been a successful, well-maintained business for my grandfather was now the most run-down, trashiest place in town.

Only one church remained in the community. Two years ago, I stopped at that church to look around during a weekday when no one was there. The attendance sign board hanging on the wall in the sanctuary showed that only 18 persons had attended church services the previous Sunday. On Sundays during my youth, attendance numbered seventy-five to eighty for most worship services. My memories are of a church with its basement meeting area filled with middle-aged and older women at their monthly Ladies Aid meetings sitting around quilting frames sewing various colored patches into beautiful quilts. All the time they were sewing, they talked and visited with one another about the people and issues of the community.

Sunday services at the church were attended by persons of all ages: farmers accompanied by their wives, often with young children; older, retired farm couples who had moved to town; widows, both young and old; town families; and Mr. Brandt, a wealthy widower, tall with a deep voice, who was the manager of the farmers cooperative and superintendent of the Sunday school. The intergenerational congregation was a big part of my social construct of the world; it represented small town living to me. It symbolized small town as I knew and understood it.

Before my grandmother died in 1977, Smallville had already experienced many changes that impacted her life to a great degree. There was no longer a store in town where she could buy groceries, not even a place to get a carton of milk or loaf of bread. The closest town was ten miles away where persons from Smallville could get their hair cut or done; where they could buy food or get prescriptions filled; where they could obtain the most basic of services; or see a doctor. For my grandmother, and most other older persons in the community, this meant either having

to ask someone for a ride or asking someone to stop and pick something up for her. Since her closest relative lived some distance from Smallville, and many of her friends had died, were infirm, or had moved away, finding someone to help her was a persistent problem. Going to church was not even easy. The only remaining church in the community was situated at the top of a steep hill on the outskirts of town. This made it difficult for older persons to walk there, and it was often not possible to obtain rides. At a time in the lives of the community's older population when church attendance and the church community were increasingly more important to them, the church was not accessible. Compounding the situation, because the minister had to share time between multiple congregations, pastoral visits to older persons in their homes were infrequent to nonexistent.

Getting my grandmother and the other older residents of the dying community to leave their homes to move in with relatives or friends in other towns, to move into retirement communities, or, in some cases, to nursing homes, was usually very difficult. This is especially so if older persons are still able to care for themselves in their own homes, or believe that they can. For older persons, an important expectation (part of their social construct of the world) is to stay independent in their own homes, as most do, until they are so infirm they can no longer care for themselves, or until they die. In Smallville, houses were literally falling down around many of the older residents as there were no services available to assist in the maintenance or repair of the homes. What had once been a vibrant, thriving community evolved into, essentially, an enclave of mostly old women, a gero-ghetto of sorts. In his study of small towns in Kansas, Scheidt (1993) has found several similar communities. These communities have become "dead towns," save for the older residents, mostly women, who remain until the very end.

During the past thirty years, I have spent considerable time traveling to numerous small towns in the Midwest. This includes visiting nearly every community in Nebraska and most of those in Kansas. In increasing numbers I have seen small, rural towns and villages going the way

of Smallville, with the resultant negative impact on persons residing in those communities, especially the older people.

The first time I visited Prague, Nebraska, I did not sense the same despair and feelings of low life satisfaction from older persons there as I oftentimes did in other small communities of comparable size. In a majority of the small towns with declining populations I had observed older persons who appeared to be unhappy with the circumstances of their lives; elderly persons isolated and lonely. This was not the situation in Prague where a population with persons of all ages still continued to exist. The intergenerational village appeared to be comprised of persons who shared a common history, persons not restricted in their interactions.

This thesis is a study of the intergenerational community of Prague, Nebraska, and of the social processes affecting its population, especially the older residents. Of particular interest are the social processes that perpetuate the intergenerational continuity of the community.

Theory

The theoretical basis of this study concerned with loneliness and life satisfaction is the "activity theory of aging" (Lemon, Bengtson, and Peterson, 1972). Some of the central concepts of the activity theory apply to the investigation of potential life satisfaction of older persons living in small rural communities. The essence of the theory is that there is a positive relationship between activity and life satisfaction and that the greater the social role loss, the lower the life satisfaction (Lemon, et al., 1972). Being forced to move from one's hometown for economic reasons, finding oneself left behind in a declining small town after most relatives and friends have moved away, or having to move from a familiar community to a new one, all imply changes in activity levels and roles. Research has shown that "activity in general, and interpersonal activity in particular, seem to be consistently important for predicting an individual's sense of well-being in later years" (Lemon et al., 1972:512).

Life satisfaction, as used in this study relating to older persons living in a small, rural community, is defined as *emotional well-being* which refers to a "state of mind inclusive of feelings of happiness, contentment, and satisfaction with the conditions of one's life." The concept of life satisfaction is often used interchangeably with terms such as *morale* and *emotional well-being* (Lee & Ishii-Kuntz, 1987:459). A person's "quality of life" is conceptualized as "an individual's subject perception and evaluation of various aspects of his or her physical, personal, and social conditions of life" (Wilson and Peterson, 1988:84).

Loneliness, as treated in this study, is defined as an unpleasant, subjective experience that results from the lack of social relationships satisfying in either quantity or quality (Perlman, 1988). Loneliness is typically differentiated from being alone or social isolation. Social isolation is usually viewed as an objective situation, whereas loneliness is a subjective, internal experience. In this sense a person may feel lonely in the midst of a crowd of people, and be alone in their home and yet feel connected to others. Loneliness is seen as being tied to the state of one's interpersonal relationships and as closely related to the number and quality of the interpersonal relationships. This thesis is concerned with the quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships and with social loneliness which results from a lack of social relationships or ties to others and loneliness caused by events that disrupt ties to social networks. Loneliness is an important indicator of life satisfaction, and people undergoing major social transition are at greater risk of loneliness (Weiss, 1973; Marangoni and Ickes, 1989). According to de Jong-Gierveld (1987), living arrangements are related to feeling lonely and may be the most important determinant of these feelings.

The term social isolation is usually seen as an objective situation. In the context of this thesis, social isolation can also be perceptual; perceptual in that a person believes they are

isolated, alone. Whether relating to an objective situation or the perception of social isolation, both can result in social loneliness.

Individuals form their self-concepts or social selves through interpretation of the reactions of others toward them. Throughout the life cycle, interactions with others is what sustains one's *social self* (Maddox, 1963). Although self-conceptions are relatively stable by adulthood, they must be "reaffirmed from time to time by the confirming responses of other people" (Shibutani, 1961 in Lemon et al., 1972:514). In this sense then, the more one interacts with others or is exposed to the responses of others, even in adulthood, the greater the opportunity for maintaining one's self-concept and for reaffirming specific role-identities. Thus, activity in general, and interpersonal activity in particular, offer channels for acquiring role supports or reinforcements which sustain one's self-concept (Lemon et al., 1972). This is likely for persons of any adult age and does not necessarily apply only to older persons.

In looking at loneliness as a basis for reduced life satisfaction, the self-concept aspect of the activity theory is an important concern. An individual's degree of contentment and pleasure with his or her life situation is dependent upon a positive self-concept (Lemon et al., 1972). The degree of self-concept is closely related to the level of activity, to the potential for social interactions. "The person with high activity will not have as much of a decrease in life satisfaction as the person with low activity." "The individual with high activity also has a larger repertoire of interactions and greater social life space which facilitates...the readjustment process" for role losses or negative role changes; "at the same time new role supports must be acquired. High activity may decrease frustration, anxiety, and the sense of hollowness likely to occur under such conditions" (Lemon et al., 1972:515).

Prior Empirical Work

In an earlier study, Lee and Ishii-Kuntz (1987:459-60) point out that "most theories of adjustment to aging, including, particularly, activity theory (Lemon et al., 1972; Longino and Kart, 1982), posit that emotional well-being is in part a function of social interaction and the strength of social bonds." Their study examines the "effects of interaction with different types of role partners on the emotional well-being (morale) of older persons, and the extent to which these effects are mediated by subjective feelings of social integration (loneliness)." Their hypothesis regarding the differential effects of friendship and kinship on these emotional states were developed and tested on a sample of 2872 respondents aged 55 and over. They found that, consistent with the hypothesis, "loneliness has a major negative effect on morale, and transmits large proportions of the effects of social integration measures. Feelings of loneliness are reduced, and morale increased, by interaction with friends and, to a lesser extent, neighbors." They also found that interaction with children and grandchildren has no such effects (Lee and Ishii-Kuntz, 1987:459).

Goudy and Goudeau (1981:35) conducted a similar study in which they investigated how social ties influence the life satisfaction of older people. They were following up earlier work by Spakes (1979), who examined relationships between demographic characteristics, family relationships, friendship ties, community involvement, and life satisfaction. She concluded that "friendship ties are very important to older people, although they may not act as a substitute for family relationships as suggested by other writers" (Goudy and Goudeau, 1981:35). Goudy and Goudeau's research results tended to support those of Spakes, particularly on the success of friendship ties and the failure of family relationships to predict life satisfaction. They, however, found an even stronger relationship between community involvement and satisfaction with life.

In attempting to gain an understanding of what affects life satisfaction, Wilson and Peterson (1988:84-91) looked at possible predictors of life satisfaction among adult subjects from rural families. Their study found that proximity to one's childhood home was a positive predictor of life satisfaction.

These previous studies found results that are important to this study. Lee and Ishii-Kuntz (1987:459) looked at the mediating effects of loneliness on morale (life satisfaction) and found that "loneliness has a major negative effect on morale." These feelings of loneliness, they concluded, can be reduced by social interaction, especially with friends. Spakes (1979) and Goudy and Goudeau (1981) found that the success of friendship ties is closely related to the prediction of life satisfaction. Goudy and Goudeau found an even stronger relationship between community involvement and satisfaction with life. In their study, Wilson and Peterson (1988:84) concluded that "proximity to one's childhood home was a positive predictor" of life satisfaction.

The Problem

The hypothesis for the present study is based upon concepts of the activity theory that suggest low activity, or a reduction in social interaction, can negatively affect life satisfaction. Social loneliness is presented as having a very important influence on life satisfaction; it is likely the most important predictor of life satisfaction. Because people who are undergoing major social transition are at greater risk of loneliness, the dying of one's community can be devastating for the older person. With this in mind, and having a concern for the human condition of older persons living in small communities, this study was initiated to gain a better understanding of how older persons in declining communities are affected.

The situation of persons in small towns, especially the elderly, is an issue of increasing concern. A pattern of decline is in evidence in small Nebraska towns. During the time period between the 1970 and 1980 censuses, 48 of the state's 93 counties experienced loss of population.

During this same period, 84 counties had an increase in the number and percentage of persons aged 65 years and older; 86 counties had increases in the percentage and number of persons 85 years and older. The majority of the older population are women, and, in the oldest of the aged population, most of the women are widows (Thorson and Horacek, 1986). The 1990 census indicates this trend is escalating. Eighty-three of Nebraska's 93 counties experienced population losses, but increases in the number and percentage of older persons. In Nebraska, 488 of the 537 incorporated towns and cities have populations below 2,500 residents. Eighty-two percent of these Nebraska communities with fewer than 2,500 residents lost population during the 1980s (Omaha World-Herald, Sept. 1, 1991:6B). Ninety of the state's 93 counties had net out-migration during the 1980s (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1991b). The number of persons 85 years and older in the state increased by almost 23 percent (Omaha World-Herald, Sept. 15, 1991:7B). Young persons continue to leave the rural areas of the state, increasingly isolating the old who remain. As many rural towns lose their youth, basic institutions also disappear, meaning that persons, often those with the least mobility, must travel greater distances for medical care, to see relatives and friends, and often, merely to buy groceries. For these persons, and for persons from small towns who have been forced to leave their hometowns, social isolation is a very real potential.

Central to this research, as well as to the implications of the theoretical orientation of most research studying social isolation, is the assumption that "...the *social self* emerges and is sustained in a most basic way through interaction with others...(conversely) structural constraints which limit or deny contacts with the environment tend to be demoralizing and alienating" (Maddox, 1963:197). The demise of a social system, such as the community, which has been the basis for most of the interactions and relationships of the *social self* can create structural constraints that reduce or limit interaction. For the older small town resident, the structural constraint can be a community in which the *social self* is no longer able to obtain the most basic of services or

life's necessities, to be involved in desired activities, or has limited interactions because of the loss of friends, relatives, or persons with whom one might interact. The reduction or limiting of interactions within the community potentially results in social isolation for the older person.

This thesis has as its focus a small community that has not experienced the losses as have most other like-size, rural Midwestern communities. Older persons living in this ongoing, surviving community are less apt to be affected by social isolation. The village continues to function as a social system where the *social self* can freely interact within a familiar social environment among persons of all ages with whom one has a common background and established social relationships. This is a community where the *social self*, especially as it relates to the aged, can choose from a wide range of options for potential social interactions and social relationships.

Chapter One

THE STUDY OF COMMUNITY

Society and Community

The study of the subject community came as the result of previous trips to the town during which the intergenerational nature of the ongoing social system appeared to be out of the ordinary. Prague, Nebraska, is located approximately fifty miles west of Omaha, Nebraska. Within the fifty mile radius of Omaha, there are over one hundred communities comparable in size to Prague. In most of these communities one would find a declining population, a population having a dramatic increase in the percentage of older residents and a similar decrease in the number of younger persons, and one could readily note the disappearance of basic institutions such as schools, businesses, churches, and banks. This is not the situation in Prague. Understanding how older persons in declining communities are being affected, the need to study a successful, surviving community like Prague becomes apparent.

The community-study method was utilized to study Prague. This method has well-established roots in social surveys, in rural and agricultural sociology and economics, and in human geography (French, 1969). This method allows for the study of human interaction and social relations in the natural laboratory of the community being studied (Wheeler, 1987). In the context of this thesis, a case study of the Village of Prague, Nebraska, a sociological approach is used to present the ways that village society, the people of Prague, have been able to foster the continuity of their community. This approach views the "community as a social system" (Sanders, 1966:11-24). The terms society and community are used extensively in this thesis; both concepts are closely related. Society can be defined as a group of people, and community can be seen as the place, or social system, in which the society exists. Throughout the history of humanity,

combinations of individuals and all types of groups, or societies, have existed together in localities called communities.

Society can be more thoroughly defined as a group of people with a shared and somewhat distinct culture who live in a defined territory, feel some unity as a group, and see themselves as distinct from other peoples. A society must remain independent enough to avoid being assimilated into or swallowed up by other societies, otherwise it would lose its distinct nature and would no longer be defined as a society (Wheeler, 1987).

Culture, the first major feature of a society, is a common heritage shared by the people and consists of customs, values, ideas, and artifacts. This common cultural heritage is transmitted from one generation to the next. Part of the culture that people in a society share are patterned ways of interacting: ways of raising children, forming families, dividing work, greeting one another, worshiping God, and so on. Simply stated, a society is a relatively independent collection of people who share a common heritage and common ways of interacting.

For the society to continue to exist it must meet certain basic needs; the group must satisfy certain functional prerequisites. These include: a means of subsistence, which includes food and shelter, affect or meaning to one's existence, and a system of shared beliefs; a system of subsistence distribution and resource allocation; biological continuity; a means to transmit the culture to new members; protection and security; and a means by which society members can communicate with one another. Meeting these needs allows for the continuity of the society. Societies are able to satisfy the functional prerequisites needed for their survival by existing as, or living in, communities. In this sense, society and community can be viewed as being closely related, if not the same thing. For the present study of Prague, Nebraska, the village society and the community are treated as being the same social phenomenon.

The Essence of Community

A significant amount of knowledge about the social organization and the process called community has been gained through community studies. In the context that community may be viewed as the basic unit in which human beings live and interact with each other, community studies can provide insights into social patterns, social identification, social organization, social relationships, and social change. Community can appear to be different entities depending upon one's perspective in viewing it. Because of this, the boundaries of community can be variable and sometimes not clear. Thus, there are variations in the definition of community. Wheeler (1987) defines the concept of community as:

A community is the smallest social unit which contains persons of both sexes and all ages and which maintains and perpetuates itself by solving the problems of subsistence, social relations, and social identification in a particular locality. It may range in size from very small to very large. In the case of very large communities, they may contain other communities.

All the criteria that can be said to define a community are contained in this definition and are the basis for defining community in the context of this thesis. The manner in which members maintain and perpetuate their particular communities is that which distinguishes one community from another.

As the problem-solving social unit, the community needs to continue to exist. Continuance is dependent upon the community having a population because none of the processes that define a community can occur without the community having people. Just having a population, however, does not necessarily guarantee that the community will, over time, continue its existence. The demographics of the community must be such that there are persons of all ages and of both sexes which allow for meeting the functional prerequisites for biological continuity and intergenerational transmission of culture. Many small communities of rural

America still have populations, but because the persons tend to be older, and mostly women, the likelihood of intergenerational biological continuity is not very high.

In addition to population, a community exists in a particular location with which members can identify. In this respect, a person is able to identify oneself as a New Yorker, a Chicagoan, an Omahan, or as a person from Prague. In terms of location, a community can comprise a small land area with a large number of residents such as New York, or a large territory with a small population, as is more the situation concerning rural communities. Location, however, is not the sole element in defining community. Community can also be seen as a system of common life which need not be restricted to fixed geographical area (Lindeman, 1934).

Most communities are seen as being fixed localities, but there are some that are mobile or nomadic in nature. These communities, dependent upon hunting, fishing, or herding, must move in response to the migration of game or fish that they hunt or catch, or must move seeking abundant grass and water for their herds. As these communities do not exist permanently in one particular place, territoriality can be the basis for community rather than locality. For members of most societies, however, land provides the individual, particularly farmers and other rural residents, with identification and economic resources. The social psychology of these people of the land is similar to that of the European peasant, about whom van Rossum (1980:3) notes, "the land will continue to exist, even if the community disappears."

The survival of the community is assured by how the people meet the prerequisites for survival, how they define and solve the problems of subsistence, social relations, and how social identification in the locality is maintained. In terms of the community solving basic subsistence problems, those of food, clothing, and shelter, a community as an economic unit must provide for the survival of its members by producing goods, services, and dwellings. As in the case of a farming community like Prague where farming has been very important to the survival of the community, members have had to learn how to raise adequate crops and assure successful

harvests under varying climatic and economic conditions. As in Prague, members of farming communities must learn new ways of meeting subsistence needs if the crops fail or if the value of the harvest is greatly reduced. To ensure survival, the community must always be ready to seek alternative means of subsistence, of making a living, should the economic environment, population characteristics, land use, or technologies change (Wheeler, 1987).

Most communities rely on diversity of economic means for their subsistence. Rural settlements, however, are limited in this economic diversity. Their size is an inherent feature which restricts the diversification of the economy, limits the amount of service provision, and diminishes political and administrative status. The distinctiveness of rural communities is dependent primarily upon the scale of settlement and the land use of the region in which they are situated. Whether agriculture still forms the basis of the economy or not, most rural communities have evolved in an agrarian landscape, and this continues to influence their form and extent. "Many such settlements, whether nucleated villages or dispersed farmsteads, are farming settlements, others are fishing communities or even mining settlements. All are functionally, spatially, and demographically small in size" (Bunce, 1982:18). These small communities, regardless of the complexity of their economic systems, are parts of larger communities and are interdependent in a larger whole.

Many communities, especially smaller ones, obtain a greater share of goods from other communities than they are able to produce themselves. As part of meeting the prerequisite for resource allocation, the community acts as a distribution point for goods and services. In this sense, it is important to consider how goods are redistributed in the community, even more so than where they have originated. To a great degree, distribution of economic products within the community is tied to the social relations among members of the community (Wheeler, 1987).

The social organization defined as community consists of an infinite number of social, economic, religious, political, and familial or kinship ties. Within the context of these ties,

individuals and groups are able to associate and interact with each other in a patterned, social basis. When members perceive that the social relations are satisfactory, a feeling of community develops; a feeling of belonging to each other and to the community. "When this feeling develops," according to van Rossum (1980:4), "the locality of a community assumes a symbolic quality for its members."

Maintenance and perpetuation of the community are aided by social relations among members of a community. Social relationships help the social organization satisfy the functional prerequisite for protection and security. The avoidance of internal conflict as a result of social relations helps community members keep from being at odds with one another. In this sense, opportunities for achieving mutual levels of agreement and compromise are greatly enhanced as social relationships take place among members of the community. Through association and social interaction, individuals are likely to discover that there exists common solutions for their individual concerns and needs. Out of this process feelings of security can evolve; positive feelings that affirm the life-style within the community.

Also, through the social relationships and interactions that take place, the process of socialization allows for the transmission of culture to members of the community, especially to the young and other new members to the community. In this manner, social interaction serves to perpetuate the traditions, ceremonies, and rituals that have evolved. As a result of social relations among members, identification with one another and their community occurs.

Satisfactory social relations enhance the feelings of belonging among members of communities. Congruent with the development of these feelings, residents are able to identify themselves as members of that particular community. Social identification can bring about feelings of pride in the community that can become even more enhanced as the community, in turn, bestows honor upon the individual. In this manner, feelings of identity with particular communities or institutions are fostered by social relationships (Wheeler, 1987).

Community identity and pride not only foster continuing social relationships, but also help satisfy the affective prerequisite, the need for affect or meaning to one's existence. In this sense, van Rossum (1980:5-6) writes: "Social interaction, social identification, and social recognition are as basic to community life as is subsistence. The pride and the honor one receives from being a member of a community are as necessary as food, clothing, and shelter. By preserving the community's honor through his own pride, the individual also preserves his pride through the community's honor. Pride and honor are important aspects in the social psychology of individuals, and the creation of community cohesion." Community cohesion achieved through this process may well be the basis for community members to see the survival of the community as important and to work towards that end.

Communities organize themselves to satisfy the needs for social interaction and social identification. Such social organization in communities is important to establish order. Not only does this help achieve the need for internal protection from conflictive behavior toward one another by promoting social order, but by being orderly, the community helps to establish order in the individual's own existence. Social organization allows for the establishment of patterns and routines which in turn provide members with guidance in directing their lives and behavior. In the same light, as social organization allows for the establishment of patterns and routines, life in a community can become comfortable for its members. Existence can become so stable as a result of patterned routine, that the community becomes dull or boring to its members. The bored population is potentially alienated by the boredom. A community must constantly transform itself to avoid alienation of its members. The transformation involves new and different ways of solving the problems of subsistence, social identification, and interpersonal relations (van Rossum, 1980; Wheeler, 1987).

Communities able to adjust and adapt to changing situations by constantly transforming themselves are successful and continue to exist as ongoing social organizations. Communities that

could not, or did not, make the necessary adjustments, adaptations, or accommodations to changing situations have ceased to exist. Over time, members of the community change, as do the existing social relations in the community. To be able to maintain their identification with their community and for the community to continue to exist, van Rossum (1980:7) maintains that, "the members must continually redefine and search for different solutions to the problems that confront them in their group life."

As can be seen, community is an organized system of social relationships that is, according to van Rossum (1989:7), "a dynamic, active agent and product of social change." For the community to survive, the collection of individuals living together that comprise the community must constantly generate new definitions and find new solutions to the ever changing problems of subsistence, social relations, and social identification in a particular locality.

Methodology

In the course of conducting research for this thesis, the method of participant observation was utilized as part of the community-study method. The community was treated as a natural laboratory, a setting in which residents carry out their daily lives. As such, the community is seen as a location where all kinds of problems and phenomena can be explored, investigated, and studied in a natural setting. Within this setting, utilizing the participant observation method, various aspects of relationships and social processes that occur in the community can be studied in context; the community can be studied in its entirety, holistically, or the focus may involve only a small portion of the community, with the relationship of this part to the whole taken into account. The community-study method utilized is, as noted by van Rossum (1980:7), "a special scientific method in the qualitative mode."

Lofland (1984) outlines the naturalistic approach to the investigation of social settings. The investigator approaches the setting without assumptions about what he or she expects to find,

and in the process should be careful not to disturb the naturalness of the setting. The researcher is not experimenting, nor manipulating the social phenomena being studied, but is only observing the behaviors, social patterns and relationships, and social interactions in general of the subjects as they carry out their daily lives in their natural social setting, the community. The neutral observer records observations, analyzes what he or she thinks it means, and reports the findings.

This approach was utilized by this writer during frequent visits to the community that have taken place since the research began in the Spring of 1988. Additionally, during summer school sessions in 1988, 1989, and 1990, students from a cultural studies course that I taught visited the Village of Prague for the purpose of observation. This involved a total of 49 students over the three summers, with each student making one trip to Prague. They recorded observations and insights resulting from their visits to the community. Their data were used to gain additional perspectives of the community. One student noted that the village park was called "Prague Family Park" and helped develop a hypothesis as to the importance of family in the community.

Information gathered through the participant observation method formed the basis of this study. Additional information was obtained from key informants as a means to follow through on insights gained from participant observation. This involved conversations and more formal interviews with approximately 39 persons over the six year period. The informants included local business persons, public officials, residents, clergy, visitors to the community, former residents, and persons from nearby communities familiar with the community of Prague.

The presentation and analysis that follow comprise the qualitative study that outlines subsistence, social relations, and social identification in a particular locality; the Village of Prague, Nebraska. The focus of the study involves the intergenerational nature of the community and social processes affecting its older residents, especially the social processes that allow for the intergenerational continuity of the community.

Chapter Two

THE COMMUNITY

Prague is a rural community of some two hundred and eighty-seven residents located in east-central Nebraska. The village is part of Chester Township on the western edge of Saunders County, an agricultural county that contains several ethnic communities. The community of Prague is primarily comprised of Czech-Americans, as are several surrounding communities. Other settlements in the area are inhabited by German, Irish, and Swedish descendants. The majority of the people of Prague identify themselves as being of Czech descent. While in recent years there are a few persons who have moved to Prague who are not Czech, most residents are descendants of Czech immigrants.

Prague and the Czech communities in the immediate area were settled during the early years of the Czech migration to the United States. During the period dating from the middle of the Nineteenth Century through the first part of the Twentieth Century, over one-hundred-and-forty-thousand Czechs settled on the Great Plains of North America. In Nebraska, more than fifty-five percent of all Czechs lived in the five eastern counties of Douglas, Saunders, Butler, Colfax, and Saline (Garver, no date). Czech peasants who came from Europe seeking land established homesteads in the Prague area. Prague, which observed its Centennial during the summer of 1987, was not the first Czech settlement in the area. Plzen (later changed to Plasi), located approximately three miles southwest of Prague, was settled in about 1871.

Prague is an agricultural community that provides services and products for the farmers in the surrounding countryside and is a place of residence for several retired farmers. While in recent years more and more people live in Prague and work outside the community in non-agricultural related occupations, most of the residents are tied in one way or another to

agriculture. Local residents indicate that farming is the most important activity of the community. Local businesses in the past have been geared to the farm trade, but in recent years this has been changing. The only grocery store in town is a small Co-op (cooperative) store associated with the grain elevator and owned by member farmers. The store, which is quaint in appearance and operation much like a store one might find in an Eastern European village, sells groceries, dry goods, sundries, and other miscellaneous goods. Comparing the present store to pictures of it in the Centennial Yearbook taken in the 1930s, it appears that the store has changed little in the past several years. Other village businesses sell fuel, seed, feed, and lumber supplies to a mostly rural trade.

Unlike many small, rural, agriculturally-based communities in Nebraska, Prague appears to be viable and alive. Driving around the village or the surrounding countryside, one cannot readily see deserted dwellings or business buildings as can be observed in most rural areas of the Midwest. All of the buildings on Prague's main street are occupied.

The settlement pattern of the community is quite similar to other Nebraska communities established when the railroad sold plats of land. The streets are on a grid pattern, except for one street that runs parallel to where the train tracks used to be. Located in the center of the settlement is the business district which essentially consists of one main street a little over a block long. Businesses line both sides of the block. The village's two churches occupy the next block of the main street. The local Farmers Cooperative grain elevator, a bulk oil dealer, the volunteer fire department, and a lumber yard are located around the corner at the end of the main business block on the street that runs alongside the abandoned railroad right of way.

Most of the residents in the village speak with a slight accent, especially persons who were born there or who have lived in the community for a long time. The accent is much like that which can be heard in the Czech communities in Omaha and South Omaha. A similar accent is apparent in Weston, Abie, Bruno, David City, Clarkson, and Wilber, as well as other Nebraska

Czech communities. Although very few people in these communities have fluency in the Czech language, the accent persists (Allen, 1979).

There appears to be a general consensus in the village in terms of values. There is little evidence of affluence. While there are some newer model cars and pickup trucks, they are few in number, and there are none of the luxury-type automobiles that symbolize wealth. The same is true of houses, most of which are small. The style of the residences is quite varied indicating that they were constructed by several different artisans. There are not any prestigious residences in the village itself or large new farm houses in the surrounding countryside such as might be seen in other surviving small Midwestern communities. Local respondents say that it has to do with "being Czech." They do not value having to live in big new houses nor "being the biggest farmer." Essentially, they are not driven by the need for the display of affluence. Respondents point out that even if a person was to have more money or be more successful than others, they "wouldn't show it."

In the countryside around Prague, there is a general lack of the large, oversized farm machinery that is common in other agricultural areas. The farms are small in size compared to farms in the other townships in Saunders County, and smaller than most farms in the eastern part of the state (Saunders County Assessor, 1992). There do not appear to be any center-pivot irrigation systems on the local area farms. Because of the cost of these systems, they are not practical for the small farms around Prague. When leaving the Prague community area, center-pivots appear again on farms that exhibit similar rolling terrain as the Prague farms.

Respondents report that there is a great degree of stability in Prague and the surrounding countryside. There is very little turnover in residences and farm ownership. Farmers are not being "driven off the land" as has happened in most other farming areas. Plats of the farms around Prague indicate most of the farms are owned by persons with the same surnames as the early settlers of the community, and the farms, as previously noted, are small in comparison to

other areas of Eastern Nebraska. Most farms in the Prague countryside are 160 acres or less. The rural population in the area around Prague (Chester Township) numbers about the same as the village, approximately 285 persons. The village population has remained fairly constant over the past 20 years. Population in the village reached 421 persons in 1930 and remained at that level until the 1960s when it declined to 291 (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1991a).

The majority of the residents of the Prague area are Roman Catholic who have, in recent years, built a new church in the village. The new brick church, designed in a very contemporary style, was built in 1983 to replace an older wooden building. Some respondents say that they should have built a larger building as the new one is not big enough for some weddings, noting, "You can't get everyone into the church." The local priest also serves the Plasi parish located two miles south and two miles west of Prague. There has been an effort to combine the two parishes in recent years, but the congregation of the country church, which is all that remains of the town of Plasi, wants to maintain their own church. There is also a Presbyterian Church, an older, white, wooden building, located on Prague's main street next to the Catholic Church. The Presbyterian congregation was established in Prague earlier than the Catholic Church. It was incorporated in 1879 as the Bohemian Presbyterian Church.

In addition to the Catholic Church, other noticeable, newer-looking buildings in town are the bank building and a new medical center. The bank building was built in 1975 and remodeled in 1983. The new medical center opened in 1992.

During an era when banks in many small farming communities were closing or selling out, Prague's bank was able to build a new building, and then remodel it. Several years ago, the bank's owners convinced the basketball coach from Prague's public high school to leave teaching and coaching and take over as manager of the bank. The bank appears to be doing well.

Recently, part of the main block of the downtown business area of Prague was destroyed by fire, as has happened several times in the history of the community. Since the village's

founding in 1887, there have been seven major fires that have affected the downtown area or public buildings. The community has responded to the fires in positive ways. One respondent noted that they "have always cleaned the mess up as soon as was possible." As a result of the grain elevator burning for the second time, in 1897 the village organized a fire fighting group. Since then, they have continually expanded and modernized their volunteer fire department, adding vehicles and equipment. Fourteen years ago, the community built a new, spacious building for the department. The department, which added rescue squad service in 1962, has over 40 members. The fire department is an important social organization, as well as being a vital community service agency, for both the village and its surrounding area.

The volunteer fire department is a mixture of persons who "live in town and those who live in the country," and of many different age groups; several persons in their twenties and thirties belong. There are also women members who "run" the rescue squad calls, especially during the day. Prague was one of the first departments in the state to allow women to join a rescue squad. Respondents note that because so many men work out of town now, "they needed the women." Also, since there are several older women in the community, many of them widows, it works out very well as the older women are more comfortable with the women on the rescue squad caring for them. The bank president's wife is even a member of the rescue squad.

Shortly after the most recent fire, the "mess was cleaned up in short order." Where an implement parts store building once stood is now an empty lot, the lot symbolizing the continuous transformation of the community. The building once housed an implement store. As farm technology and the economics of agriculture changed, there was a reduced demand for implements and the store quit carrying them, becoming, instead, an implement parts store. Also gone, part of the historic economic transformation of the community, is the train that used to come to Prague, the cigar factory, the town's hospital and hotel, and other enterprises of a bygone era. The community, however, survives, the result of years of transforming itself over and over.

Prague, in its early history, was a business center providing goods and services to the surrounding countryside. Prague continues to do this, but the nature of the goods and services has changed with the times. While farming is still important, many people drive each workday to Lincoln, the Nebraska Capital, 39 miles to the south; to Omaha 45 miles to the east; to Fremont 30 miles to the northeast; or to larger towns in all directions from Prague. More and more, Prague is being transformed into a "bedroom community." The majority of goods and services are now purchased in the larger towns, especially "big ticket" items. The businesses that remain in Prague sell goods such as feed and lumber that people usually do not drive great distances to buy, or they are businesses that provide services. Businesses listed in the special directory printed for the village's Centennial are: the post office, a welding shop, telephone company office, cooperative elevator and store, four beauty salons, lumber yard, funeral home, insurance office, two orchestras (polka bands), auto repair, tire store, bulk oil dealer, bank, law firm, and two bars, one of which also serves food.

There are plans in the community to build a new convenience store. The business, which will also sell gasoline, is to be located directly across from the town's baseball field on the corner of the road that turns off the main highway and runs into the village. Four or five new homes are to be constructed in the community during the coming summer.

A new cafe and medical center have recently opened in Prague. A doctor from a nearby community built a new one-story building on the corner at the end of Prague's downtown business district. He practices medicine two or three days per week at the clinic. Most Midwestern communities with a population larger than Prague are unable to find doctors to serve the small, rural population. In this situation, it was possible as the practice in the Prague clinic is in addition to the doctor's main clinic in David City, a community of 2,522 persons located twenty-five miles west of Prague.

The sign on the new cafe in downtown Prague reads: "Kavarna-Kolacovy Koutek" (the Kolache Corner Cafe). For five years, a billboard along the road leading into town proclaims Prague as the home of the "world's largest kolache" produced for their Centennial and included in the Guinness Book of World Records. But, until the new cafe opened, there was no place in town to buy one of the Czech pastries to eat. In addition to kolaches, the family-owned cafe features other Czech pastries like buchta, babovka, siska, and apple strudel. Other ethnic entrees include pork, sauerkraut, and dumplings, as well as burgers, fries, and other American foods (Stevens, 1992).

Having the cafe open in Prague is a welcome addition to the community, according to several respondents. It provides a dining alternative to the bars. Some older persons were quite outspoken about not liking to go into "the bars," nor did they think young people should frequent "such places." They additionally noted that the cafe features "Czech food." "Young people can stay Czech!" The cafe is seen as a daily way to carry on the ethnic tradition in the community.

The cafe is a multi-generational, family effort. A mother and daughter who lived alongside the highway at the edge of town sold kolaches for years to football fans traveling to Lincoln on University of Nebraska game days. They later added pork and kraut sandwiches to their football fan menu. The enterprise was so popular they decided to make the Czech favorites available on a daily basis, and they opened the cafe. The women's husbands provide some assistance, acting as "go-fers" and performing odd jobs for the business. One husband's primary occupation is "heading up" one of the two polka bands in Prague. All of his family, except one member, play in the family band; his wife plays piano when she is not baking kolaches. The son-in-law (husband of the daughter in the cafe) teaches music in a junior high school in another town located 30 miles northeast of Prague. When he is not teaching, he helps his wife at the cafe and also plays tuba in Prague's other polka band.

The two bars in Prague apparently also do very well. They serve a social function much the same as the "cafe" in Laurence Wylie's (1977) Peyrane. Many farmers take their afternoon "breaks" in the bars, and on rainy days, spend much of their time socializing there among fellow villagers. Evenings find more of the same, but with many people choosing to have dinner in the dining area of the larger of the two bars. For many years, Eddie's Bar and Grill was a popular eating establishment in Saunders County. The bar was famous for fish dinners on Friday Nights, prime rib on Saturday Night, and Kansas City strip steaks on Sundays. In the past year, it was closed for a brief time, two months. It recently re-opened under new-ownership and is now called the "Czechland Inn." Several respondents were quite happy that the bar is again open. They reported that they missed the "bulachecs," frosted mugs containing 32-ounces of beer, for which the bar was famous.

A tradition leftover from past Catholic beliefs and the custom of eating fish on Friday is maintained in Prague. Each Friday evening is "fish fry night" and "people come from miles around" to partake of the deep-fried fish dinners served at Eddies (Czechland Inn) and, now, in the Kolache Corner Cafe. For several months after the cafe opened, it served approximately 75 pounds of fish every Friday evening. Bars and restaurants in many of the other towns in the area also serve "Friday night fish specials."

One problem that seems prevalent in most small communities is not evident in Prague. While many rural towns are at a loss for youth, Prague seems to retain the young. Looking around town, one can see many examples of young persons involved in the leadership and activities of the community. For example, there is an active Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycee) organization in the village. Prague was the first community in the nation with a population as small as 290 to establish a Jaycee chapter. Chartered in 1973, after seven years membership had grown to over 60 members and the chapter was ranked 11th in size in the state and first in their

population division. Considering that Jaycees must be thirty-five years of age or younger, having 60 members in a community as small as Prague is an achievement.

During 1981 and 1982, the Prague Jaycees acquired controlling interest in the Prague National Hall, a large community center built in 1925. The chapter has been involved in updating and restoring National Hall, and in several other projects, such as raising money for the Prague Rescue Unit; providing a public address system for the Prague High School Gym; conducting an Easter egg hunt every Easter weekend for the community's children; and providing recreational equipment and lights for the high school sports field. One of their earliest efforts was the creation of a park in the community dedicated as "Prague Family Park." In its promotional literature, it is noted that: "The Prague Jaycees Chapter has always been involved in community improvement efforts, and they have been an active force in the betterment of Prague." For the youth of the community, the Jaycees sponsor educational programs, PeeWee baseball, and a winter basketball "Super Shooters" contest which leads to a state level competition.

As a project, the Prague Jaycees erected new permanent street signs on all the street corners in the village for the Centennial celebration. The Centennial activities included persons of all ages. At the center of the Centennial activities, a total community effort was the creation of the "world's largest kolache." The giant Czech pastry provided a salient, ethnic symbol for the celebration. Still today, leftover from the Centennial, is the large blue sign at the edge of town that proclaims the kolache achievement. One of the assumptions prior to this study was that young people were moving out of small rural communities, leaving the older population alone in the deserted, dying ghost-towns of tomorrow. This is not happening in Prague, persons of all ages are in evidence throughout the community.

Other organizations include the Women's League (formerly Prague Jayceettes) which has approximately 30 members and associate members, the American Legion Post 254 numbering 90 members, and the American Legion Auxiliary which has over 100 active and nearly twenty

Honorary members. By observing interactions within the community, one can see the old, the young, and the in-between interacting on a regular basis. In the village's two bars that serve as social gathering and dining places and in the new cafe, young and old are to be seen together, very often two, three, and four generations sitting together. Social greetings and courtesies, seemingly indicating respect, are exchanged between the young and the old.

With assistance from the Area Agency on Aging, an advocacy and services organization for senior citizens, Prague was able to remodel a large stone building that was once the community hospital, and later the Catholic school, into an apartment building for older residents. The remodeled structure accommodates ten apartments. When it first opened, only half the apartments were occupied by senior citizens, as most older persons continued to live in their own homes or as part of extended families. Younger persons were able to rent available units with the stipulation that they would have to move out if there was a request by persons over sixty-five years of age for housing. The initial lack of demand by older persons for the "senior housing" might indicate that Prague is not a community of isolated older persons as many small towns appear to be.

During this study, questions were asked about the identity of community. Specifically, how are the boundaries of the community defined? What are the boundaries? Responses were fairly clear-cut. Given the choices of defining community by the geographical area the post office serves, the rural fire department district boundaries, township area, trade area, village limits, or school district area, nearly every respondent said that the school was what brought the people into town and gave them, and the community, an identity. People responded that for the most part they drive to Wahoo, the county seat, for groceries because of lower prices and better selection, but come into town for other needs and for school activities. Over the years, especially the past twenty years, as small, one-room country schools have closed, the town's identity has increased. Respondents emphasized that school activities are important to rural people and school

activities are centered in Prague. One respondent reported that her parents live in Elk Township and her brother in Mariposa Township, but when asked, they all say they are from Prague.

The village baseball field is another center of activity that draws people from the surrounding area into Prague. The facility is more developed than one might expect and is not at all representative of baseball fields in towns the size of Prague. The well-maintained complex has a modern, lighted scoreboard; lights to illuminate the field for night games; a spacious concession building; and a "big league fence" around the field. The fence, besides enclosing the field, also serves as a signboard upon which the achievements of all the Prague High School championship sports teams are painted in big letters for everyone entering town on the main road to see. The names of each team participant are listed, about ninety-percent of which are Czech surnames.

Many things about the field are similar to the baseball field in the South Omaha Czech community of Brown Park. Early in the history of Brown Park, Czech immigrants built a community baseball field (Allen, 1979). Both youth and adult teams in the Brown Park community played teams from other ethnic neighborhoods at their well-maintained field. The field in Prague is also utilized by both adult and youth teams to play teams from surrounding towns, many of which are other ethnic communities. It should be noted that Prague's baseball field is a much more developed facility than that at Brown Park. There are not many towns in Nebraska, let alone small communities, that have baseball fields comparable to Prague's.

One exception in terms of community identity involves the congregation of the Saints Cyril and Methodius Roman Catholic Church at Plasi, which is located four miles southwest of Prague. Most of the Plasi church members sent their children to their "country school." Their "school pride was for their country school." It was their next-to-last institution that gave them identification as a community, the Plasi church being their last. They had avoided the Prague public school and "wanted nothing to do with the Catholic schools." "Even when Prague had a

Catholic elementary school, the Plasi people did not support it." In recent years when the country school that served the Plasi area was forced to close, parents chose to send their children to the Catholic elementary school in Weston, Nebraska, located approximately eight miles southeast of Prague. The older Plasi children go to the Catholic high school in Wahoo. The Plasi congregation consists of approximately 65 families. Each year about 20 children from these families attend the Catholic schools at a cost of approximately \$1000.00 per student. The Catholic Education Fund pays for most of the tuition.

By comparison, there are some 170 families in the St. John the Baptist parish in Prague, but only three or four children at most during any given year go to the out-of-town Catholic schools. Even though very few of their children go to Catholic schools, the Prague parish is assessed over fifty-thousand dollars each year for the Catholic Education Fund. Informants reported that the assessment for the most recent year was \$68,000.00. When Prague still had their Catholic elementary school, most children of the parish attended school there. After completion of elementary school, some would go to Wahoo to the Catholic high school, but the majority stayed in Prague attending the public high school.

The Prague and Plasi congregations have resisted merging together. While the local priest in Prague serves both parishes, it is difficult at times to manage them separately. Partly as a result of this, there has been a large turnover in priests. Eight priests have been assigned to Prague in the past eleven years. Two of them developed "nervous problems" while in Prague. Key informants note that for priests, "it was not a pleasant experience." Some of the priests felt like the local people had not "been friendly to them;" that they "were not accepted" in the community. Some local informants verified this insight, noting, "that some persons are just not friendly to strangers and it is hard for 'outsiders' to be accepted."

Roman Catholics in Prague differentiate between their church, Saint John the Baptist parish, and "the Church." "The Church," as used in this context, is the whole body of the church

that is perceived to be above the Prague congregation and outside of the community. There have been disagreements regarding theology and behavior between "the Church" and the local congregation. Informants were outspoken about this subject. It is thought that the villagers do not take their religion seriously and are "Sunday Morning Catholics who do not want to see the international mission of the Church." "They are not interested in the homeless of the cities, the poor, or the social ills of the world." "They are only interested in this town and in their lives." "They think too much about having fun and they drink too much!" Informants note that this is of concern for officials in the Diocese of Lincoln which encompasses the Prague parish.

The independence of the parishioners may be related to the "Freethinker Heritage" of the Czechs who settled on the Great Plains in the late 1800s. More than fifty-percent of the Czechs who emigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Europe and the authoritarian Habsburg rule were also leaving the Roman Catholic Church. The Freethinkers, with their theology of atheism and ideology of socialism, were not only in search of individual freedom, but were also seeking religious freedom, as well as economic opportunities (Garver, no date). Over the years, most of the Czech immigrants and their descendants returned to the Catholic Church, but with a different relationship in terms of commitment and attitudes. Local Catholics are "more loyal to their church and the people than to the Catholic Church." To a certain extent, the church in Prague is localized; it is "much like a Sokol," a Czech social club out of the Freethinker tradition. The Sokol, which means "falcon," was a very popular national organization in the "old country" that involved gymnastics. "Of all associations organized by Czech Freethinkers, the Sokol with its colorful uniforms and mass gymnastics demonstrations provided the most impressive display of Czech discipline and solidarity. After its founding in Prague in 1862, this patriotic and gymnastics society became the most popular association among Czechs in the Czech lands" (Garver, no date:24). Sokols, for many freethinkers in America, became places to go where they could have social relations in lieu of the church. A local sokol unit was formed in Prague, Nebraska, in 1898,

three years before St. John's Catholic Church was dedicated in 1901. These independent attitudes can also be seen in the Czech neighborhoods of Omaha where one respondent described relations with the church: "We are not 'run over' by the Church!" (Allen, 1979)

Remnants of the popularity of the Freethought movement early in the history of Prague exist today. There are two cemeteries in the community. The Catholic Cemetery was started in 1901, shortly after the dedication of St. John's Church. The other cemetery, Narodni Hrbítov, was established in 1888 as the Bohemian National Cemetery by Lodge Vladislav I, No. 147 of the Bohemian Slovonian Society (now Western Bohemian Fraternal Association), another organization that evolved from the Czech Freethought movement on the Great Plains. This movement was well-established in Prague for several years before the founding of the local Catholic parish. In the early years, before the parish was built, local Catholics organized a Catholic Workman Lodge in 1895 (Centennial Documents). The lodge continues to exist today. A highway litter/beautification program sign along the highway, three miles north of Prague, identifies "Catholic Workman Branch 13" as having adopted the next two miles of the highway.

While "the Church" and the local congregation appear to have disagreements, parishioners generally do not seem to be too concerned. Some respondents agree that some villagers do drink too much and are not "ideal Catholics." However, nearly every one of the local residents interviewed indicated that St. John's congregation was not as bad as has been reported. They see much good coming out of their church. This was especially true for the older members who appear to be doing a lot of the work supporting the parish. The older women form the majority of those persons whom can be seen preparing and serving food and refreshments at church functions. There are persons of all ages involved in activities associated with the funerals and weddings that take place at the parish, but it appears that the older women do most of the work. They report that they "have the time and enjoy getting together," and do not consider it work.

The Presbyterian Church in Prague has a small congregation and most of the members are generally older, over fifty years of age. Attendance usually numbers less than forty persons on a typical Sunday. While they are a religious minority in the predominately Catholic community, there do not appear to be any problems related to this. Social relations in the village between Catholics and Protestants appear to be good. Protestants can often be seen at wedding dances or other celebrations in the Catholic Parish Hall, and both Catholics and Protestants alike are involved in activities at the religiously "neutral" National Hall. Most community service organizations are comprised of persons who are Catholic or Protestant, and some with no religious backgrounds at all. People know who a person is in terms of religion, but for the most part it does not seem to matter. Prague residents, to some degree, do differentiate on the basis of whether a person is of Bohemian or Moravian ancestry. Most persons over forty years of age know who is a "Bohi" and who is a "Morav." While they say that their behavior is no different towards one or the other, there is still this distinction, this "understanding."

There is also a general knowledge about who is related to whom. Kinship is very important to community members and most persons have several relatives in the village itself or neighboring countryside. When asked a question about a need for a transportation program for older villagers, a clerk at the Co-op Store responded, "Heavens no! Everyone has relatives. You can always get a ride to Wahoo or wherever you want to go." The response was offered with a little bit of sarcasm. I suspect that the mobility of the population and the "higher prices" in the Co-op Store affect the store's volume of business. Nevertheless, the notion of family and kin relationships appears to be very important in the community. This is further indicated by the name of the village park, "Prague Family Park." The concept of family is important to the residents of Prague; most community activities include families.

It is this sense of kinship in the small village that seems to benefit older members of the community. Most respondents, when discussing family, included parents and grandparents, and

often uncles and aunts as well, in their description of what constitutes family. Rarely did anyone identify only their immediate nuclear family when describing their concept of family. This was true of all age groups, old and young. Even the very young, children six and seven years old, included older family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles in their responses to questions about family. In a few instances, some younger persons mentioned great aunts. For nearly everyone, the concept of family involved large numbers of people as cousins, which are numerous, and sometimes second cousins were included in the total family count. Informants recounted many stories of holiday meals, weddings, and other events and of the many relatives who participated. Older persons appeared to be an integral part of the social construct that was portrayed over and over again to me by those who shared their descriptions and memories of family life in the village.

Survival and Transformation

Driving north on the highway to Prague and catching the first view of the village nestled in a valley, there seems to be something different about the settlement. Turning east to enter the town, the first thing to be seen is the community's well-maintained baseball field with signs proclaiming pride in the state championship school teams. On utility poles in the downtown business block are public address speakers used to play Christmas music on weekends and evenings in December, and Czech polka tunes on other weekends. The village is particularly clean and well-kept for such a small town. Most houses and yards, in the settlement itself, are well-maintained. The exceptions are a couple of residences located just outside the village. Civic properties such as cemeteries, churches, downtown buildings, and streets are neat and clean.

Many other small settlements in Nebraska look depressed, not appearing as clean and well-kept as Prague. Some communities having reputations for "community pride" often cannot compare with Prague. Cook, Nebraska, for example, won a national award three years ago for

being the "best small town in America." Cook, while comparable in size to Prague, does not appear to be as well-kept. Cook, which has a population of 333, has business buildings in its downtown area and several residences that, unlike Prague, are in need of painting and repair. One building in the center of the Cook's main business block has been torn down, but the old foundation and floor remain, presenting an appearance of disrepair. There are empty buildings, as well, in the downtown area.

Such is not the case in Prague. Within a few weeks of the implement parts store fire, the remaining gutted structure was torn down and the debris hauled away. The place where the building had stood was cleaned up so well that, without having known about the fire, one could not tell what had happened, or even that a building had once been there. All of the downtown business district in Prague, as does most of the community except one building located one-half block from the main street, presents a well-kept look. This particular building is being partially torn down, but the work is not yet complete.

Two years ago, the village obtained a street sweeper; a large, self-propelled machine with a revolving brush. Most larger towns do not have such a piece of equipment and Prague probably is the smallest community in America to have one. Omaha, the state's largest city with a population of 336,000 persons, contracts for their street sweepers and only has five to seven units available at any given time. The City of Omaha is only able to sweep each of the city's streets one time per year. Typically, most cities only "sweep their streets" one time per year, ideally in the spring. The one street sweeper in Prague can accommodate all of the village's streets 15 times each day. The streets, however, are only swept when needed.

Observing the townspeople, an attitude of pride and well-being can be sensed. The pride is exemplified in the level of participation in community organizations and projects, the well-kept appearance of the community, and the enthusiasm and support shown for school activities. During the 1991-92 and 1992-93 basketball seasons, Prague High School basketball teams qualified

for the state tournament in Lincoln. On days of the tournament games, the village appeared deserted as so many people left town to travel to the state capital for the games.

During the 1992 Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament, on Friday the Prague Bank closed at 11:25 a.m. By 12:00 noon, most all of the other businesses also were closed. When asked if he was not expecting any business that afternoon, the bank president responded, "Our business is in Lincoln." That is where his daughter, a member of the Prague team, would be playing, and that is where he and nearly everyone else in town were going to be, young and old alike, cheering for their Prague Panthers.

Around the village were signs supporting the team. In the cafe window, the signs read: *Jdi Veliky* (Go Big Blue) and *Dobrou Stasnast* (Good Luck!). A little boy stood at the corner stop sign with a booster card proclaiming: "Pump it up Panthers!" The following week, the town would be doing the same thing for the boys' tournament (Stevens, 1992).

During July of 1992, five years after the Centennial celebration, the community held the "World's Largest Kolache Festival" during which they made an even larger giant kolache than that of the Centennial effort. Several hundred people attended the successful two-day event, partaking in polka dancing, dining on ethnic food, and participating in the creation of the "World's Largest Kolache II." During the 1993 effort to "better their world record," the giant kolache did not rise in the oven as required. What appeared to be a kolache with the fullness of a "true champion pastry," "fell flat" upon removal from the oven. There are discussions in the community about another attempt at a new "world's largest kolache" record.

There is something about living in Prague; residents exhibit an attitude of commitment to community that is not evident in most other small Midwestern communities. There is also something about Prague as a place. Unlike most small towns, Prague gives the impression that it is alive and well.

Some small towns in the Midwest have been able to maintain their population by becoming "bedroom communities." Because of their close proximity to larger cities or towns with job opportunities, and because they typically have lower costs of living, people are drawn to them. While people who move into the small, dwindling towns are likely saving the towns from dying, they are often viewed as "outsiders" by the older persons living in the small communities (Scheidt, 1993). This is not the situation for Prague. It is not a dwindling town. However, like the towns described by Scheidt, the residents of Prague are generally suspicious of outsiders. This is not a behavior of just the old. Younger persons in the village appear, as well, to be unfriendly to "outsiders." Such behavior was reported by key informants in the Church and other respondents who often visit Prague.

Prague is still able to maintain a homogeneous population even as it undergoes economic transformation, as it becomes a "bedroom community," of sorts. Prague is only being transformed into a "bedroom community" in the sense that more and more of its residents are working outside the community. Persons who have moved to Prague because of lower living costs, in most cases, are former residents or relatives of community members. Some respondents reported that the favorable cost of living and the fact that they had grown up in Prague were the reasons for coming back to the village. Several persons noted, "This is home." One family specifically said they moved back because they did not want to raise their children in the city; Lincoln, Nebraska. Within the context of this economic transformation, most seem to feel a sense of belonging in the community.

As can be seen, Prague is different from most rural communities of similar size that are dying, communities that are without young people. Prague has been able, over the years, to satisfy the prerequisites necessary for the community's survival. When agriculture and family size changed, the community transformed the means of subsistence with new businesses emerging and community members taking on new occupations outside the community. Because of their

proximity to larger towns and cities, residents have been able to find jobs within distance of the village. Being close to larger market places also allows the community to obtain goods and services the local economy cannot provide.

Within the community, authority is not concentrated in any particular group, but is shared across the age spectrum. Because of this, persons with leadership qualities have emerged and have been able to contribute their talents to the community. Villagers appear to take care of one another; no one appears to be without food or shelter. In this sense, the prerequisite of distribution, economic and authority allocation, are being met. Social relationships appear to be numerous, most people participating in on-going friendships and social interactions. Social needs are being met on some level.

There are persons of all age groups in the community allowing for biological continuity and for socialization of the young. The village, operating under the protection of the "greater society" with its military and police forces, is safe and secure from external threats. The Saunders County Sheriff provides local police protection. Village residents can be at peace in their homes and do not have to be concerned about protecting the streets of their community.

How this community survives, and even prospers, constitutes an important aspect of this study. Community identity and social identification seem to provide the basis for survivability of the society and community. Community identity and social identification are sources of pride and honor to community members. The commitment to the survival of the community is related to the villager's apparent traditional peasant values and self-proclaimed identity as "Czech." In the following chapter of this presentation the social psychology of the community, especially the subject of collective identity, is discussed as it relates to the continued survival and prosperity of Prague.

Chapter Three

PRAGUE: A TRADITIONAL VILLAGE

Betwixt and Between

Prague is a community in a social milieu "betwixt and between" bureaucratized, rational-legal, modern society and one characterized by traditional life-forms. In this context, the village is neither completely a modern society nor entirely a traditional one. Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* can be utilized to present a better understanding as to where Prague stands in relation to modern society.

Tönnies (1957) used the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to contrast societies in the "Great Transformation" associated with the Industrial Revolution that occurred in the Nineteenth Century where simple, preliterate societies were transformed into massive, complex, industrial societies. He used the term *Gemeinschaft* ("community") to refer to a type of social organization based on tradition and enduring, personal relationships. People who lived in rural villages were bound together by kinship, neighborhood, and friendship. *Gemeinschaft* is a small, traditional society where people have personal, face-to-face relationships with each other, where they value social relationships as ends in themselves. People are committed to tradition and group values.

In *Gemeinschaft*, human relations are intimate, enduring, and based on a clear understanding of where each person stands. A person's "worth" is estimated according to *who* the person is, not *what* he or she has done; status is more ascriptive rather than achieved. In community (*Gemeinschaft*), roles are specific and consonant with one another; a person does not find one's duties in one role conflicting with the duties that devolve from another role. Members of a community are relatively immobile physically and socially; most individuals neither travel far from their locality of birth nor rise far up the social hierarchy. In addition, the culture of the

community is relatively homogeneous which, Tönnies noted, it must be if roles are not to conflict or human relations to lose their intimacy. The moral custodians of a community, the family and the church, are strong, their code clear and their injunctions well internalized. There are community sentiments involving close and enduring loyalties to the place and people. So, community encourages immobility and makes it difficult for people to achieve status and wealth on the basis of their merits. Community makes for traditional ways, and at the very core of the community is the sentimental attachment to the conventions and mores of a beloved place. Community reinforces and encapsulates a moral code, raising moral tensions and rendering nonconformity as not desirable. In community, everyone is known and can be placed in the social structure. This results in a personalizing of issues, events, and explanations because familiar names and characters inevitably become associated with everything that happens. "Community makes for solidary relations among men" (Tönnies, 1957:12-29).

Opposed to the concept of community is *Gesellschaft* (variously translated as "society" or "association") which means, essentially, everything that community is not. *Gesellschaft* refers to a type of social organization based on cultural pluralism and transitory, impersonal relationships. Tönnies characterized urban industrial society as *Gesellschaft* where people have more impersonal, distant relationships with each other and tend to use social relationships as a means to an end. Individualism is valued more than group solidarity. People are motivated by self-interest rather than the well-being of the entire community. With little common identity, Tönnies suggested, city dwellers view other people as a means of achieving their own goals.

Tönnies believed the growth of cities heralded the erosion of traditional social relations in favor of the temporary and impersonal ties typical of business. More complex societies are held together by large scale, impersonal, webs of trade among otherwise quite different individuals,

by contractual ties. In this sense, the farmer and the transportation worker need each other, and both depend on manufacturers and bankers.

In the context of this presentation, the German terms *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) are conceptualized as a continuum between two polar types. At one end of the continuum, the concept of *Gemeinschaft* involves three central aspects: blood, place (land), and mind, along with their sociological consequents of kinship, neighborhood, and friendship. Together they are the home of all virtue and morality. *Gesellschaft*, at the opposite end of the continuum, has a singularity about it; all its activities are restricted to a definite end and a definite means of obtaining it (Tönnies, 1957:192).

Tönnies' concepts are typological in their usage--a typology usually expressed in terms of a dichotomy. In this context, one could place "traditional authority" on the *Gemeinschaft* side of the continuum, placing "rational-legal authority" on the *Gesellschaft* side (Weber, 1978). In the transformation of authority there is a growing emphasis on rationality in all aspects of modern social life; rationality replacing tradition and personal qualities.

Other dichotomies that can be placed on the continuum are "authority-power," "status-class," "sacred-secular," and "alienation-progress." As expressed by Robert Nisbet (1966:6), these dichotomies may be regarded as epitomizations of the conflict between tradition and modernism, between the old order made "moribund" by the industrial and democratic revolutions, and the new social order that followed. All of these dichotomies can be used to study social change or to indicate current status for the social organization called community.

Note that in terms of community, one factor is its basis: the territorial factor, the place, the locality. When sociologists use the term community, they almost always mean a place in which people have some, if not complete, solidary relations. Yet community as originally used, though it included the "local" community, went beyond. It encompassed religion, work, family,

and culture; it referred to social bonds characterized by emotional cohesion, depth, continuity, and fullness. Community in this form is like fabric; the individual fibres woven together into a whole. As society becomes more modern, the fabric becomes less a whole, but exhibits more individual threads. This traditional community, with its fabric intact, is the baseline for studying social change in community.

In the realm of the discussion of community typologies, the concern, for the most part, involves the rural-urban continuum. Most other typologies have essentially taken this as their starting point, either to present some variation of it or to establish their opposition to it. This typological approach to communities is also a theory of social change; its aim is not merely a matter of community classification, but also to say something about the nature and direction of social processes.

The idea behind the rural-urban continuum is a familiar one—not only does it include Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, but also, among others, Hillery's (1955:117-118) concept of a "village-city" continuum. Another very useful means of study in this tradition is the "folk-urban" continuum in which Redfield (1947) listed five characteristics found in a folk society. Redfield's community studies were used to test the general thesis that the progressive loss of isolation, when associated with an increase in heterogeneity, produces social disorganization, secularization, and individualization. He postulated a continuum, from folk to urban, on which communities could be placed. His characterization of folk society is much more complete than that of urban society; the latter is seen as being the antithesis of the former. Redfield (1947:293) summarized the traits of the folk society:

Such a society is small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group solidarity. The ways of living are conventionalized into a coherent system... 'a culture.' Behavior is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical, and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relations and institutions, are the type-categories of experience and the

familial group is the unit of action. The sacred prevails over the secular; the economy is one of status rather than the market.

According to Redfield (1947:295), "The type (the folk society) is an imagined entity, created only because through it we may hope to understand reality." Placing the folk society at one end of a continuum and its characteristics are very similar to those usually associated more generally with the concept of "community," it can be implied that as villages or settlements are placed on this continuum further away from the folk society end, they are less and less "communities." Community, as used here, refers to community in the more traditional sense; community that "went beyond." The characterization of folk society can be considered again with this point in mind. "The folk society is a small society" (p.295), therefore, on the folk-urban continuum, the larger the community, the more urban it is. "The folk society is an isolated society" (p.296), therefore, the less isolated, the more urban. "This isolation is one half of a whole of which the other half is intimate communication among the members of a society" (p.296). therefore, the less intimate the communication, the more urban a community. Presumably the ultimate is the stereotype of urban anonymity. "We may conceive the members of the (folk) society as remaining always within the small territory they occupy" (p.296), therefore, the more physical mobility, the more urban the locality. "The people who make up a folk society are much alike" (p.297), therefore, the more heterogeneous a community the more urban it is. Redfield also states that, "In such a society there is little change" (p.297), therefore, the more change, the more urban a society. "The members of the folk society have a strong sense of belonging together" (p.297), therefore, presumably, urban society is "anomic." Thus, according to Redfield's typology, folk society can be characterized as "small, isolated, non-literate, and homogeneous with a strong sense of group solidarity" (p.297). Urban society can be characterized as the opposite: large, non-isolated, literate, heterogeneous, and lacking a strong sense of group solidarity.

The Czech-American village of Prague, steeped in traditionalism, has to be placed somewhere in the center of the rural-urban, the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*, continuum. This ethnic, rural society has several characteristics of *Gemeinschaft*. Status, to a certain extent, is based on *who* the person is; the society member's notion of kinship and social and physical mobility over the years has not been like that of the greater society. The local population is extremely homogeneous; nearly everyone is of Czech descent. Family and church are central elements of the peoples' existence and there are very strong sentiments involving close and enduring loyalties to the place, the community, and members of the community. Yet, while being entrenched in *Gemeinschaft* characteristics, the village is part of and operates in the realm of the greater modern society. In this sense, the local Jaycee Chapter is comprised of villagers interacting within and serving the community of Prague, but the Jaycee organization is that of the greater "outside" society. The Prague Jaycees are chartered by and exist under the rules of the state and national Jaycee organizations. The same is true for the local Roman Catholic church. Villagers see themselves as "good Catholics." They built a new church in a very small town at great financial cost at a time when many churches in like-size towns were closing. Local Catholics support their church and they appear to live their lives in a manner that they believe is the right way. "The Church," however, is of the world. It has changed as the world has changed, and it views the local parishioners from a perspective more of the greater "outside" society. It should be noted that if "the Church" had a greater effect on local parishioners, influencing them to conform to "the ways of the world," it is very possible that this thesis would be addressing the demise of a community and not the survival of same.

Prague can also be found to fit into the picture of Redfield's "folk society" in several ways. The village is somewhat isolated, is small, and is relatively homogeneous with a strong sense of group solidarity. To a certain extent, ways of living are conventionalized into a coherent system,

a culture of sorts. Kinship and family are central to one's existence. Behavior is still tied to tradition to a great degree and is spontaneous, uncritical, and personal. Much behavior within the community has a sacred foundation. This is not to say, however, that the people of Prague are not affected by modern society. Their society also shares many characteristics of modernity.

In this sense, then, Prague is in a social milieu "betwixt and between" what Max Weber (1978) described as bureaucratized, rational-legal, modern society and that of society characterized by traditional life-forms. Prague is somewhere between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between folk and urban society, village-city, or the rural and urban existence. With this in mind, we approach the study of this semi-isolated, rural settlement with the understanding that there is an overlap of modern and traditional forces taking place in the community. In the following section, these forces are examined as they relate to ritual and symbolism in the traditional village and to the establishment of a collective consciousness; a collective identity of the community.

Ritual As A Means To Establish Collective Consciousness

Zdenek Salzmann and Vladimír Scheufler, writing about the Czech farming village Komárov, describe the social forces of modernization and political change in operation as they outline how Komárov society maintained its essentially traditional ways. Because of maintenance of traditional ways and the nature of the Czech peasantry, they conclude that the village was able to retain its autonomy despite the ever-increasing forces of industrialization and commercialization. In the village, the peasant society was the mainstay of traditionalism, the means to village survival. "The Czech peasant could be characterized as educated, politically conscious, and genuinely religious, despite his materialistic inclinations. His land was far more than just a source of income to him: it was the cornerstone of his existence, a family heritage forged through many centuries of servitude. The village in which he lived was economically and socially self-sufficient, or nearly so, and its members maintained tight-knit relationships. It was

from this recognition of village collectivity that the peasant derived his own sense of identity" (Salzmann and Scheufler, 1974:15).

Czech peasant immigrants who settled in Prague and the numerous Czech-American villages in the area surrounding Prague in the late Nineteenth Century carried with them the traditions and life-forms of the peasant villages of Bohemia and Moravia. In their new communities they were able to establish and maintain much of their Czech peasant culture through participation in rituals and the use of symbols.

Ritual is an important concept in the study of communities. Viewed in the context of "dramaturgy," as defined by Goffman (1967) and Turner (1974), ritual provides a basis for analyzing social life that occurs in communities. By invoking the dramatic world of the theatre, we are able to analyze the profane world of everyday life and the sacred world of "extraordinary life." In the common usage of the dramatic metaphor, the theatre is a depiction and enactment of the mundane and extraordinary events that occur over the course of human lives. In dramaturgy, the relationship between action and its reenactment on stage is reversed. Human life is viewed as an enactment of learned roles, settings, language, and patterns of interaction. Everyday life, therefore, is like the theatre, because both rely on the structure of social meanings, rules, and expectations. With a dramaturgical perspective, everyday people are viewed as performers. Like actors on a theatrical stage, we fit into the dramatic expectations of others and thereby construct our lives and actions (Goffman, 1967).

Within this theory of self-presentation and human interaction, the social principles that guided and structured action and presentation are outlined in his interpretation of everyday life as theatre. Goffman, who primarily studied the everyday life of modern, industrial America, defines human experience as a product of the rules used to organize that experience. These rules are called "frames," and they enable the individual to guide and interpret experience in a fluid and socially created reality. The capacity to internalize and use social rules and expectations

allows for human creation and control, and this underlying power of the person can be explained by the dramaturgical perspective. Mary Jo Deegan (1989:6-7) asserts that despite this built-in potential for human creativity and liberation, Goffman, writing of modern, industrial American society generally depicts life and its dilemmas as generating alienated and manipulated individuals.

Contrasted with Goffman's view of "people chained to norms of tact and mundane social expectations" are sharply different views held by Victor Turner, who elaborated a theory of life based on data gathered largely in nonmodern societies. In Turner's studies, communities are found to have formal rituals that transcend and order everyday life. These "extraordinary" events portray the individual as part of a society that generates dignity and meaning. These rituals employ rules that separate the people and the events incorporated in the ritual from everyday life. The rules governing everyday life are distinct from those governing ritual events, but "the common thread in both realms of life is the shared experience of community." In fact, for Turner, the experiences generated by formal rituals bind the individual to the group in everyday life. "The symbolic structure of rituals is the means for connecting experience and meaning between the individual and the group. The social appears in the individual through the union of group experience and meaning" (Deegan, 1989:7-8).

Turner's imagery of nonmodern ritual is filled with human vivacity, drama, and renewal. Turner stresses the uniqueness of ritual life. The power of the ritual is based on this distinctiveness, the world of mystery, and new definitions of action. Traditional roles of power and stratification are often inoperative, if not reversed, during ritual events and the community experiences a shared life built on this new context. The everyday world is specifically set aside. The rules of the everyday life form a social structure, while the ritual rules form what Turner specifically calls an "anti-structure," or new structure of meaning. In leaving the mundane world

through ritual, the people enter the new passage or stage of life and are "betwixt and between" the sacred and the mundane, and this passage is marked by heightened awareness and meaning.

Deegan (1989:9) points out that this "betwixt and between" process that Turner calls "liminal" "is an extraordinary world created and entered through the ritual process. The persons who share this liminal world are special. The experience they share is unique to the ritual and reveals both the individual and group in a personality and emotionally complex way. This experience of the self and the other as one in community is called "communitas."

Turner's "communitas" concept expresses much more than "the brotherhood of man." Communitas refers to the emotional surety that one's world is just and shared; that being with others can be a unifying experience; that the actor is not always acting and pushing the self forward to the detriment of others. It forms the basis for human commitment to the group, to the other, and to oneself. Rituals perform the function of uniting meaning, action, the abstract, and the real. Rituals are crucial to being human and part of society (Deegan, 1989:6-7).

The ritual world, according to Turner, binds people through ties of commitment and love.

Here the notion of love as the basic societal bond is related to the notion of both real and symbolic death--to be in a true social relation to another human being one must die to one's 'selfhood,' a term which...is *inter alia*, a shorthand for the ambitious, competitive world of social status and role playing (1974:68).

Turner's ritual world based on love differs sharply from Goffman's perspective of modern society where, often as not, "the social glue is coercion, fear, or tact" (Deegan, 1989:9).

Rituals also become sources for social and cultural creativity. They provide a rich resource for "the production of root metaphors, conceptual archetypes, paradigms, models for [action] and the rest" (Turner, 1974:50). This is significant, according to Deegan (1989:9), because "root paradigms are the mechanisms for intergenerational transfer of cultural meaning and tradition."

Steeped in cultural tradition and a mechanism for human renewal, ritual is also a model for liberation. Through their ability to transcend the categories and existence of everyday life, rituals are the antithesis of alienation. The dramatic metaphors and symbols of rituals create the human space for the generation of meaning and a lived experience of the sacred as communal. Turner holds that liberation is not found in escape from rules and group experiences. Rather, liberation through the 'extraordinary' realities of liminality and ritual process are grounded fundamentally in the rules and the group (Deegan, 1989:9).

The rich and powerful ritual world of premodern societies studied by Turner contrasts starkly with the ritual world of Goffman's modern societies. Rituals for Goffman are daily events that occur with some regularity. They are the "minutiae of life that create the context of morality and meaning." Goffman spends the majority of his time on the mundane and on rituals that are a piece of this world. "They are part of the system of rules and frames that organize experience, generate tact, and characterize the modern, often alienated, life" (Deegan, 1989:14).

In the study of Prague, ritual is especially important to understanding the social phenomena that take place in the semi-isolated, rural, traditional, and ethnic village. Ritual appears to play a major role in the lives of the villagers living there and of those who have moved away, but who return often to take part in rituals of the community.

Two major categories of rituals in American life are used in the context of this presentation; participatory and media-constructed rituals. First, according to Deegan (1989:4-5), "participatory rituals exhibit common characteristics: (1) they involve face-to-face, participatory interaction; (2) they are socially situated in a matrix of roles, social statuses, and culture; and (3) they are organized by a set of rules for ritual action." Deegan notes that, "Rituals of this type are deeply embedded in the lore and traditions of local American communities" (p.5).

Deegan describes media-constructed ritual as a "different and very modern event." The following characteristics highlight these events: "(1) the rituals are constructed by professionals who work in the mass-media industry; (2) the professionally constructed products are presented to an audience; and (3) the products and presentations are organized by a set of rules for

portraying ritual action" (p.5). Examples of media-constructed media include "the visual presentation of the city on fat-letter postcards, the television and film series *Star Trek*, and the written adventures in the magical land of *Oz*." Deegan additionally noted, "Ritual events of this type create shared symbols and meaning over widely dispersed regions and communities" (p.5).

Participatory rituals are important to the people in the Village of Prague. They actively participate in these rituals throughout their lifetimes, children participating alongside adults. Most rituals involve young persons, parents and, often, grandparents and other relatives. Persons who have moved from the village also come back frequently to attend weddings, the popular wedding dances, funerals, and special events of an ethnic nature. Nearly all the rituals have an ethnic identity, meaning, or association. In the village and area churches, which have high participation rates, the Saints of Bohemia are displayed and have special significance with much of the scriptures and words on statues and artifacts written in the Czech language. What Turner saw happening in nonmodern communities appears to be happening in Prague. Experiences generated by formal rituals binding the individual to the ethnic group in everyday life. Ritual is the means of connecting experience and meaning, the ethnic identity, between the individual and the group. The ritual brings together "self" and "community." These participatory rituals, with ethnicity as a central part of most activities, likely explain for the perseverance of the group's ethnic identity and traditional values associated with that identity.

Often, when members of the community go to events outside the settlement, they go with one another. Trips to Nebraska football games are popular with some of the residents. A large group of Prague "Big Red" fans travels by charter bus to away games. In this sense, a football game, which could normally be defined as media-constructed ritual, becomes more of a participatory-ritual for the Prague residents. The trip to and from, and the entire experience together is of a ritual nature, that overshadows the game itself.

Media-constructed rituals for the people of Prague are almost, if not all, emanating from the outside, greater, dominant society, and it is through these rituals that class codes are conveyed to villagers. Through this process, the people may see themselves as different from the dominant culture, thus, potentially becoming alienated from the outside world. These modern rituals can be viewed as the sources of most of the perceptions that older villagers have of non-village society. In this respect, media-constructed rituals can be integrating within the context of members of the local community to one another, but being alienating in regards to outsiders.

Participatory rituals can also be viewed as being integrative. Through face-to-face interactions, people are able to develop a sense of group membership and probably feel good about it. This may account for why many persons return often to the community to participate in rituals. They may carry feelings of alienation from the greater society when they are forced, for economic reasons, to leave the village and live in an urban society from which they are alienated. Returning to the community where they feel they belong is an opportunity to be re-integrated with the group of persons with whom they identify. Rituals may not only help explain why many people often come back to visit the village, but also why many people choose to live in the ethnic village and to maintain the intergenerational nature of the community.

In the study of Prague, ritual can be seen as being a key to transmitting the nature and meaning of symbols. From rituals and symbolic objects and associated meanings, it appears that there has evolved a "collective consciousness" for the villagers of Prague. The social phenomena of ritual and symbols involve the communication of concepts, or collective representations, to the whole social group, the community members. The concepts help the village society shape "the collective sentiments and the collective ideals which make its unity and its personality" (Durkheim, 1965:475).

Durkheim (1965) divided the universe into two very distinct domains; the sacred and the profane. He distinguished sharply between beliefs and practices, between mythical world

interpretations and ritual actions, between dealing with sacred objects cognitively and actively. Habermas (1987:51) notes that, "Both, however, express the same attitude. Durkheim described the character of the sacred as impersonal, commanding respect, overpowering, and at the same time uplifting, as triggering enthusiasm, motivating the faithful to selflessness and self-overcoming, permitting them to put their own interests aside."

Most symbols in the rituals of Prague historically have been of a religious or sacred nature. Durkheim places great emphasis on the symbolic status of such sacred objects, noting, "All sacred objects--flags, emblems, decorations, tatoos, ornaments, figures, idols, or natural objects and events--share this symbolic status. They figure as signs with conventional significations, and they all have the same semantic core: they represent the power of the sacred; they are 'collective ideals' that have fixed themselves on material objects" (1960:335-336). This formulation comes from Durkheim's essay in which he gives his theory of collective consciousness the shape of a theory of symbolic forms: "collective representations originate only when they are embodied in material objects, things, or beings of every sort--figures, movements, sounds, words, and so on--that symbolize and delineate them in some outward appearance. For it is only by expressing their feelings, by translating them into signs, by symbolizing them externally, that the individual consciousnesses, which are by nature closed to each other, can feel that they are communicating and are in unison. The things that embody the collective representations arouse the same feelings as do the mental states that they represent and, in a manner of speaking, materialize. They, too, are respected, feared, and sought after as helping powers" (Habermas, 1987:51-52).

The "collective consciousness" that has arisen from "collective representations" of sacred symbols in participatory rituals for the people of Prague has likely given them a collective identity, an identity that encompasses persons of all ages in the community. The collective identity is closely related to the identity of the early settlers from Bohemia and Moravia.

In the community and area around it, there may be seen many symbolic remnants of the early Czech immigrants. The simple, but stately, wooden structure that houses Prague's first church, the Presbyterian Church, does not appear at the outset to be rich in sacred symbols. It is only after one considers that the church is the product of the efforts of several Protestant families then recently-arrived in 1867 from Eastern Europe that the symbols become more apparent. For many years, the services were in the Czech language, the language of the Bibles carried by the congregation members. Several members today are descendants of the early church founders carrying with them their Czech surnames and heritage of their Czech peasant past.

In the Catholic churches, numerous in the area, symbols abound. This is especially so in the older churches built before Vatican II. In these churches there are symbols like those that could be seen in the old Catholic Church that was in Prague. In the old, traditional church, village members taking part in special religious holiday rituals, especially those involving Czech traditions, were greatly influenced by all the sacred symbols that surrounded them in the church. Seated together, on cold, snowy evenings sharing symbols of Christmas Eve services, feelings of warmth and belonging likely radiated through the ethnic congregation.

Saint Vitus at Touhy, Nebraska, is very similar to the old Catholic Church that was replaced in Prague. It is reminiscent and representative of the churches of the area during the time period when most of the adults of Prague today were socialized. When the residents, through "collective consciousness," gained their collective ethnic identity.

The Saint Vitus Catholic Church, very much like the old St. John the Baptist Church in Prague, and the Saints Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church at Plasi, has to be the creation from a vision carried from the "old country." The church is a sturdy brick building with a high steeple rising out of the front part of the roof, but the building does not have indoor plumbing. The front doors do not have any locks allowing parishioners to visit at anytime during the day or night to pray and to light candles. At the front of the sanctuary in the church are statues of Czech saints.

The church has colorful pastels accenting the hand-detailed ceiling and an altar with numerous, colorful, rising spires representative of those in Bohemia and the other older Czech-American Catholic Churches in the area. Each of the eight stained glass windows in the Touhy church has written across on the bottom of the stained glass: Doroval (donated by), and the name of the person who donated it. All of the names are Czech surnames, the like of: Ludvik D. Chapek, Vaclav J. Wais, or Jacob Pekarek. Additionally, along each side wall of the church sanctuary, immediately above eye level, the Fourteen Stations of the Cross are depicted in very explicit, colorful scenes with raised figures framed in rugged wood. Across the bottom of the frames, engraved in the wood of each station, the scene is described in the český language:

- | | |
|------|--|
| I | Ježíš k sinrti odsousen. |
| II | Ježíš těžký kříž na se béře. |
| III | Ježíš pod křížem poprvé klesá. |
| IV | Ježíš se svou milou matkou se potkává. |
| V | Simon Cyrenský pomáhá Ježíši kříž néstl. |
| VI | Vernonika-Ježíšoyi-roucho-k-utření-podává. |
| VII | Ježíš po druhe pod křížem klesá. |
| VIII | Ježíš potkává se s plačícími zenami. |
| IX | Ježíš po třeti pod křížem klesá. |
| X | Ježíš o šaty své oloupen. |
| XI | Krista Pána na kříž přibijejí. |
| XII | Pán Ježíš na kříži umivá. |
| XIII | Krista Pána a kříže sňali. |
| XIV | Pána Ježíše kladou do hrobu. |

Upon entering the church, one is overwhelmed with the symbolism. Taking part each week and on special occasions in participatory rituals in these symbolic settings over the course of years has contributed to the establishment of a "collective consciousness." From this "collective consciousness," there has arisen a sense of community, "communitas," encompassing everyone, old and young, with a collective identity, a collective ethnic identity.

Because the village is somewhat isolated from the dominant society, the collective identity has persisted. This is especially true when one considers that towns around Prague with the names of Abie, Bruno, Touhy, Weston, Octavia, Morse Bluff, David City, and the like, are

predominantly Czech-American communities. Only Malmo, located a few miles to the east of Prague, is not a Czech settlement. While Malmo is primarily a Swedish community, it too has been affected by the dominant Czech influence in the area. There is a large sign in the downtown area of the village that proclaims: "Malmo - Home of the 1987 National Czech Queen." Within this primarily Czech area, isolated from the alienating qualities of the greater society, "collective ideals" have helped to entrench the Czech identity and traditional ways of the people of Prague.

Symbols not of a religious nature are also visible in the community. National Hall, built in 1925, provides a place for Protestants and Catholics alike to get together and participate in Czech community rituals. Officials of National Hall have the Czech surnames of Kaspar and Stanislav. The brick building houses the Prague Jaycees, the Women's League of Prague, the Z.C.B.J. Lodge (a Czech fraternal organization from the Freethought tradition), the Prague Volunteer Firemen, and the American Legion. The 72x48 foot dance floor in the hall is regularly used, as is the dance floor at St. John's Church Parish Hall. Both facilities are kept busy with wedding dances and celebrations, activities serving as participatory rituals often involving sacred symbolism.

An important aspect of any ritual in the community is the speaking of the Czech language, which now only involves using important Czech words and terms. The Czech language has been used primarily only for rituals. On a day-to-day basis, English has been spoken from the earliest days. Even the name of the town is pronounced Prāgue, the "ā" pronounced as the "a" in prāy, instead of sounding like the "ä" in brä, the usual Czech-American pronunciation for Prague or Praha, the traditional pronunciation. Respondents say that early townspeople pronounced the town's name as the Americans they came into contact with did so they would not sound different. They gave up speaking their native language so they "would fit in" but, for important celebrations they used "Czech talk," as they still do in limited form today.

In 1987, when the residents of Prague celebrated their Centennial, it involved an entire community effort. The "world's largest kolache," that became the center of attention for the celebration, was a powerful Czech community symbol for all to see. The large blue sign that still stands today alongside the main road leading into the village is a constant source of pride and a symbol of the ethnicity of the community as it proclaims: "Prague, Home of the World's Largest Kolache."

An important pre-centennial activity was the installation of new street signs by the Jaycees. These signs that read: Moravia Ave., Elba St., Danube St., Moldau St., Sousek Ave., Lusatia Ave., Pribram Ave., and Beraun Street have a symbolic meaning. The Eastern European names on the street signs reaffirm the ethnic identity of the village.

A new ethnic symbol for the area is located about one mile north of the village. By its very name, Czechland Lake provides another affirmation to the villagers that they live in the "land of Czechs." The new name for the long time popular bar, Czechland Inn, additionally reinforces this idea. Perhaps no greater symbol exists in the area than the fact that most farmers, landowners, and villagers carry the same family surnames the early settlers carried here from Bohemia and Moravia.

As has been described, through participation in rituals and associated symbols, there has developed a "collective consciousness" for the people of Prague. From this, a collective identity in the form of a normative consensus built up in the medium of religious symbols and interpreted in the semantics of the sacred has evolved. For the people, of Prague this collective identity is as members of a community, a distinct community that goes beyond place or locality. In weaving the cloth, achieving "communitas," Prague has established a community that encompasses religion, work, family, and culture. In this community, social bonds are characterized by emotional cohesion, depth, continuity, and fullness. To the degree that this form of community,"communitas," will survive and continue is related to the community's commitment

to community and to ritual practice. According to Habermas (1987:53), "Consciousness that secures identity is regenerated and maintained through ritual practice."

In the context of this presentation, the people of Prague can be seen as having developed a collective identity through participatory rituals and sacred symbolism. In the community, which lies on a continuum of modernization somewhere between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, or between folk and urban, nevertheless traditional, the people appear to be comfortable and to have a sense of belonging. They are not alienated from one another, but live together in "community" with good social relationships. They live an existence, in terms of social relations, similar to that described by Turner of a nonmodern society. As members of the village are forced to leave the small community for the more modern, bureaucratic world, they are often alienated from the world they are entering due to media-constructed ritual, or by hearing the negative experiences of others. Respondents who have moved from the village report that they still miss living in Prague and that their new communities will probably never feel like home. Other persons who moved back to Prague responded that they "just never felt comfortable" in the city, or they were "worried about crime." One person noted that "people weren't very friendly in Lincoln."

The people of Prague, through ritual and life experiences, have developed their perspective of their social world, their social construct of the world and all it encompasses. Jürgen Habermas (1987:117) calls this perspective a *lifeworld*. Habermas proposes that, "society is conceived from the perspective of acting subjects as the *lifeworld* of a social group." It is possible, upon leaving the village, that the world into which they have moved is disconnected from their perception of what their *lifeworld* should be and they become alienated. Returning to their village, to their familiar *lifeworld* where they are able to find that which Turner (1974) describes as commitment and love, where there can be warmth, friendship, and a sense of belonging, or the perception of same, can be very positive and very rewarding.

Life in the intergenerational village, within the context of the residents' *lifeworld*, the collective social construct of their village world, is a community comprised of persons of all ages. It is a homogeneous society based on close, personal, social relations with nearly everyone participating at some level in community activities. People are not left out of social relationships or activities for most residents are related to someone in the community. If a person does not have any local relatives, their needs are known as the village is small in size and people are more aware of persons in need. When one grows old in Prague, autonomy is not lost, nor are the enduring social relations of the community. Villagers are content with community life and appear committed to the continued existence of the community. Through experience and the process of rituals, utilizing profane and sacred symbols, the people of Prague have developed a *lifeworld*, a collective social construct of their village world. The *lifeworld* defines the way life is and the way life should be in the village.

The survival of Prague as a community is primarily the result of the people being able to maintain the sense of themselves as community reflected in their *lifeworld*. As a community, they have solved problems of subsistence through economic transformations. Social relations have been maintained and enhanced to a great extent through community ritual. Social identification is associated with their collective identity, an identity as a community.

Within a homogeneous population such as Prague, community is much easier to achieve than with a heterogeneous population. This presents a concern considering the heterogenetic characteristics of the American population. Can a pluralistic society, as it exists in the United States, establish a sense of community within a locality, or is this only possible with a homogeneous population? Is it possible to establish a sense of homogeneity among a heterogeneous people based on other common characteristics or interests? This study is not prepared to answer these questions, but must raise the issue. Prague cannot be viewed as having

total ethnic homogeneity as there are some persons who are not of Czech descent in the village. Some villagers have married non-Czechs, and persons with other ethnic backgrounds have moved into the settlement. Additionally, there is diversity of religion in Prague; some persons are Catholic or Presbyterian, while others are neither. More than ethnic homogeneity, it is likely the peasant tradition that persists in the village has contributed to the sense of community that exists in Prague. It is this tradition that has likely negated differences between Freethinkers, Catholics, Presbyterians, and others allowing a sense of community to develop in the village. This is a tradition very much like that of the Czech neighborhood in South Omaha called Good Luck. Of the three Czech neighborhoods in Omaha, Good Luck, Brown Park, and the near-downtown area close to the Bohemian Cafe and Omaha Sokol, only Good Luck exhibits a similar peasant tradition (Allen, 1979).

Ethnic homogeneity, in and of itself, is not a consistent predictor in terms of establishing a sense of community. The Czech settlement of Touhy is essentially nonexistent, most of the settlement is gone. This is also the situation for Plasi. Weston has a population, of which most are Czech-Americans, but does not indicate a sense of community. Other ethnic communities in the area around Prague (Malmo, Abie, and Bruno) are in decline. The communities of Dodge, Howells, and Clarkson, located in what is referred to in Nebraska as "the Bohemian Alps," are also losing population. Oakland, "the Swedish Capital of Nebraska," experienced greater than an 8 percent decline in population during the 1980s (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1991a). Wilber, "The Czech Capital of Nebraska," has many persons who are not of Czech descent living or working in the community, but there is still manifested a fairly significant sense of community. Finally, Cook, Nebraska, is not comprised of an ethnically homogeneous population, but the people exhibit attitudes of caring and pride in their community. Their efforts indicate that they are trying to have a nice community. They have, at some level, like the people of Prague, a commitment to community; commitment that goes beyond just ethnic homogeneity.

Chapter Four

GROWING OLD IN A FAMILIAR SOCIAL WORLD

The Lifeworld

The *lifeworld* is the *social self's* perspective of the social world, a social construct of one's world. The social world includes all the people and roles within the social environment. In the context of Goffman's (1967) dramaturgical perspective, human life is viewed as an enactment of learned roles, settings, language, and patterns of interaction. Everyday life, in this sense, is like the theatre, because both rely on the structure of social meanings, rules, and expectations. Everyday people, in this dramaturgical perspective being viewed as actors on a theatrical stage, fit into the dramatic expectations of others and construct their lives and actions accordingly.

Another closely related perspective based on the theatrical metaphor, role theory (Turner, 1978; Biddle, 1979), holds that a substantial proportion of observable, day-to-day social behavior consists simply of persons carrying out their roles, much like actors carry out their roles on the stage. Persons, as they conduct their daily lives as participating members of groups or organizations, occupy distinct positions. Each of these positions entails a role, which is a set of functions performed by the person on behalf of the group. A person's role is defined by how other group members expect him or her to perform. These expectations are formalized as norms; rules specifying how a person should and should not behave. Role theory maintains that a person's role determines not only behavior, but also beliefs and attitudes; individuals bring their attitudes into congruence with expectations that define their roles.

Within a person's *lifeworld*, the *social self* learns the expectations for various roles through observations of other persons occupying the roles. In this regard, a person who has lived in an intergenerational community for most of one's life develops expectations about the makeup of the

society and the roles that older people occupy in this social construct. Experiencing an outcome out of context from expectations can be structural constraints that, according to Maddox (1963), can be demoralizing and alienating. An example is the person who arrives at old age and finds that the intergenerational composition of the community has drastically changed, as have roles of older persons, and the level or number of social interactions is not what was expected.

In this example, the person's actual experience is not the same as their perception of the *lifeworld*. This can cause the person to become disconnected from the *lifeworld*. As a result, the person can experience social isolation and loneliness which in turn affects life satisfaction. This is not just a situation for older persons, but for anyone who has expectations about a level of activity or social interaction related to specific roles who discovers that reality and expectations are not congruent. Their life satisfaction is also affected (Allen, 1990). Most older residents of Prague have lived nearly all their years in the village itself or in the surrounding area. Their concept of what to expect during their later years is based on the many lifetimes of observations within their *lifeworld*. In Prague, this can be viewed as a "collective *lifeworld*," the representation of the "collective identity" of the community.

Wedding dances and other community dances that regularly take place in Prague provide an insight into the *lifeworld* of the members of the community. The dances exemplify the multi-generational nature of the social world in which community members live and interact. Persons of all ages take part in these dances, as they do in most other social activities in the village. The village's oldest residents, and the very young, can be seen on the same dance floor, dancing and smiling. All appear to enjoy the dancing and music, as well as the friendship that abounds at these festivities. Persons not dancing to the lively polka music do not seem to be left out, but actively participate in conversations and other interactions. No one--neither the old nor the young--is excluded from the activities because of age.

The same phenomena occur when people of similar ethnic background get together at other towns for ethnic-related events. At the "Czech Festival" in Wilber, the "Czech Capital of Nebraska," the same intergenerational behavior can be seen. People of all ages dancing to polka music, visiting, drinking, eating "český food," and freely laughing and smiling. The various ages are all there, all appearing to share the "good times." At least, all are participating in social relations.

In their *lifeworld*, when a villager in Prague has an image of a community activity or ritual, the picture includes persons of all ages. This could involve stopping at one of the two local bars to have a beer at the end of the workday. It is not unusual to find children in these bars, except during school hours and later evening hours. At most other times, persons across the age spectrum can be seen gathering at what used to be "Eddies" to eat or drink--the children do not drink alcohol--often to take part in social events or activities centered in the dining area of the establishment. One evening the activity centered on a nun who had grown up in Prague and who was observing her fifty-fifth year in her religious order. The celebration dinner was in the dining section in the rear area of "Eddies Bar." While the nun and her many elderly, middle-aged, and some younger relatives and friends occupied the dining area, other patrons dined and drank in the front section of the bar.

That particular evening, there were some very young children sitting in "stair step" fashion on bar stools at the front bar eating dinner and drinking sodas. All the tables were occupied with the nun's party or with families and older couples there for the Friday Night fish dinner. Gathered around many of the tables were what appeared to be two and three generational families. While not a typical evening, it did exemplify the intergenerational nature of an important social gathering place in the village.

When a person is born in Prague, he or she essentially grows up in a "community of generations." All during one's existence in the community, the *social self* is surrounded by people of all ages. The aged are able to perceive themselves as being members of the society, part of the "in group." This is an important aspect of the social psychology of the community for older persons living there. Social isolation or feelings of loneliness due to the lack of potential social relationships or interactions appears to be nonexistent for most older persons in the community. Older persons, as part of the social organization of Prague, have the opportunity to have their self conceptions reaffirmed from time to time by the responses of other people, which, as Shibutani (1961) points out, is important in the enhancement of their perception of life satisfaction. This interaction potentially sustains one's *social self*, as Maddox (1963) has proposed.

As described in Chapter Three, through rituals and symbolism the community members take on a collective identity. This is a collective effort involving all age groups. Being in social relationships and interacting with older persons become part of the expectations of the whole community. It has become part of the social construct of community members and the social reality of the community--the values, beliefs, and norms. This social reality is maintained through the ongoing process of socialization. Within the social organization of Prague, being able to participate in social relationships, older persons have a greater potential for dignity than persons isolated in dying towns. In an ongoing social system, older residents have more opportunity to maintain a sense of self-worth as they see others like themselves occupying viable roles or positions within the social structure.

Older villagers in their *lifeworld* are often surrounded by family and friends, persons with familiar faces, and persons with similar backgrounds. In this homogeneous, *Gemeinschaft*-like *lifeworld* they can interact with "their kind" of people, others "Czechs." Such a *lifeworld* not only potentially enhances life satisfaction for older residents, but empowers them by their existence in

a familiar social world. A social world that is based on tradition and enduring, personal relationships bound together by kinship, locality, and friendship.

Independence

In a surviving community such as Prague there are practical considerations for the enhancement of dignity of older residents. Having a medical center means that older persons do not have transportation problems in getting to a larger town to see a doctor. They can also bank in their hometown. They do not have to make special efforts to have someone help them get to a store in another town merely to buy a loaf of bread or quart of milk as the aged must do in Smallville and in many other small towns of the Midwest. In several ways, the Co-op store is an investment in the dignity and independence of its older population. Having to seek rides or to have someone get essentials on a continuous basis can mean a loss of "internal locus of control," a loss of self-determination for the older person. When the locus of control is external, outside of one's self, self-determinism is negated and the older person is less and less able to maintain independence and to exercise autonomous actions.

In larger communities, senior citizens' centers and residential complexes for older persons provide opportunities for social relationships and interactions which can help alleviate potential social isolation or feelings of loneliness. Residents of these larger communities are more able to maintain some degree of an internal locus of control, to exert some level of independence as they have more options available to them. Such was not the case in Smallville or for many older Nebraskans in other small, rural communities where the bank and grocery store have closed, where there is no doctor, and where even their children have left because of the changing nature of the rural economy. In many rural communities like Smallville, even the churches have closed, abandoning the older population.

Older residents in Prague have many choices that afford them opportunities for independence. They can control their decision as to which church they want to attend, even being able to keep the Plasi parish open. They can choose between three beauty salons and do not have to leave the community to have their hair done. They can opt to socialize in the local bars or not go into "such places," as some choose not to do. Because of the new cafe, they are now able to eat "Czech food" that, by its ethnicity, symbolizes the collective identity of the community. Whatever their choices or needs, if such cannot be found or satisfied in the community, most older persons have relatives or friends in the area to whom they can turn for assistance. All of this helps the older members of the community to maintain social relations and to enhance their life satisfaction.

There is a commitment in Prague that the community survive, and this is of benefit to its older residents. As the problem-solving social unit, community must continue to exist. As it is able to continue, older persons are better off. Without community, the elderly have to solve the problems of subsistence, social relations, and social identification in isolation. In several small towns in Kansas, such problems have had to be solved by small groups of older residents who remained behind in decaying settlements. In some situations, women in their seventies have informally taken over small stores, cafes or taverns just so the settlements could have some semblance of community and to provide the most basic services. Often these are collective, cooperative efforts involving several older women. Women who are trying to gather the last remaining bits of thread; old women trying to maintain the fabric of community. In time though, even these settlements are no longer able to solve the problems of community and are gone (Scheidt, 1993).

As research for this thesis was being conducted, a small village in Nebraska lost the "last sign of life on Main Street." Hinderer's Store and Tavern, which for many years was the social center for the St. Mary area, closed. What is now little more than a rural enclave in Johnson

County, St. Mary, like Prague, was once a thriving railroad town with a bank, grocery, and hardware store. Now the closed general store is the last obvious sign that a Main Street once existed in St. Mary (Tysver, 1993).

While the train no longer travels to Prague, the community continues to survive and exist in many ways as a traditional society. The community exists as a form of *Gemeinschaft*, or folk society, "betwixt and between" complex, bureaucratized, rational-legal, modern society and a society characterized by traditional life-forms. Such a community is a good place for older persons. In a community like Prague, the *social self* emerges and is sustained across the lifetime through interactions with others who have the same collective identity as the *social self*; the interactions taking place in a *lifeworld* that remains a "community of generations."

Summary

This thesis has presented a study of Prague, Nebraska, a small, rural community that has over the years redefined and solved the problems of subsistence, social relations, and social identification within its locality. This has enabled the community to persist. The presentation has shown that the traditional nature of the peasant population who settled the community has been maintained through ritual and symbolism. Central to the peasant traditions has been commitment to the survivability of the community. The collective identity that has evolved through the process of ritual and symbolism has allowed older residents to maintain social relations and interactions which result in positive effects on life satisfaction. Older persons are not isolated in Prague, but are an important part of an intergenerational community.

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