

# Former Willard store owner recalls town's heydays



Avis Suda holds a framed photograph taken in her parents general store in Willard in 1931. Behind her on the wall is the same regulator clock that hangs on a wall of the store in the photograph. Avis and her husband, Stanley, bought the store in 1958 and ran it until 1984.

by Dean Lesar

Like some Norman Rockwell painting of the local townsmen gathered at a general store to swap the latest gossip, Avis Suda can see in her mind's eye the patrons of her family's Willard store as the busiest place in town. For 58 years, her family owned and operated a general store and farm service business in the heart of Willard, supplying the area farmers in the community's heyday. Sadly to Avis, who still lives a long stone's throw from town, that day is gone.

Willard's Main Street is quiet most days now, except perhaps when the Holy Family Church draws a few dozen cars for weekend services or when there's an event at the Willard Athletic Club. But it wasn't like that in decades past, Avis says, when stores were open on Friday nights to handle all the customers and folks traveled no farther than a few miles from home to buy whatever they needed. How times have changed, in Willard.

"It was busy all the time," Avis said. "When you look at that Main Street now, it just makes you sick. It's so sad."

Avis was born into the Willard store business. Her parents, Joe and Lucille Lunka, bought the former Plautz general store in 1926 and grew the business for more than 30

years. Avis and her husband, Stanley Suda, bought it in 1958 and renamed it Suda's Store. It was a focal point of Willard for almost 30 years.

In the days of her youth, Avis said her family's store was a place where families looked for all that they needed.

"We just had everything, dry goods, gift items. We even sold appliances, Monarch ranges, freezers, refrigerators. We had dresses and bedspreads. People just didn't go anyplace else. They shopped for everything in Willard."

The store was more than just a place to buy goods, Avis said, as a trip to town was a social event. Families didn't just hop in the car and come to town every day, so when they did, they wanted to find their necessities, and the latest news, too.

"The stores were open until 10 every night. The guys just came to the store and visited," Avis said. "At

10, everybody'd go home and they (her parents) would close the store. That lasted until the war. So many of the boys went to the service and that ended that."

Avis also remembers her father operating without electricity. Until the late 1930s when power became available, Mr. Lunka had a Delco system to run lights. Still, he managed to build a feed business while tending a store business that carried bulk quantities of vinegar, oil, buckwheat flour, cornmeal and rice.

"They bought so much more

because they didn't come to town that often," Avis said of the early customers.

When Stanley and Avis took over in 1958, they built the mill business to as many as 125 patrons, and also dealt in farm machinery. Stanley's skills were an asset.

"The feed business and farm machinery line was a real interest to him with his farm and mechanic background," Avis said of Stanley, who passed away almost four years ago. "The customers appreciated the fact that they could call him to repair anything on the farm or in the house, especially plumbing, as he had acquired a master plumber's license. He sold and installed a lot of equipment and could always be called for service work."

With so many irons in the fire, the Suda business was strong.

"All the while, it was going better and better," Avis said. "It never really went down. It was a flourishing business. It was big. The farmers were all progressive farmers. They kept buying more modernized stuff, from the fertilizer to the better seed. The farmers were flourishing so our business was better."

Stanley and Avis and their two daughters, Pamela and Tamara, were busy enough running their business, but people wanted more yet. Avis said customers wanted more than groceries when they visited the store, they wanted conversation.

"To a certain extent, a lot of people came in just to visit," she said. "A lot of people said, 'What's new?'" kind of expecting us to know."

**It's hard to believe now when you look at the town. It was a booming business. It's just unbelievable to think that it used to be such a flourishing town, to think that all three stores were flourishing. We all were doing well.**  
-- Avis Suda

## Pozdravljeni

**Congratulations Willard and Township of Hendren as you celebrate your 100th anniversary**

From **Slovenian Women's Union Branch 102**

Rose Pakiz, president

Aggie Debevec, vice president

Sue Pakiz, secretary-treasurer



## Blacksmith To Body Shop

**Thank you Willard, and surrounding areas, for your business over the last 50 years!**

The property presently occupied by Greenwood Body Shop began Aug. 26, 1869, by Abstract of Entry USA to Elijah Eaton. It had numerous owners over the years: L.R. Stafford, James Chandler, Robert Schofield, John Weston, Greenwood Mercantile and Manufacturing Company, William Roseman, Albert Schwarze, and George Seliskar, who purchased it in 1943. The building was used as a blacksmith shop in the early years by Albert Schwarze and later became an auto body shop when owned and operated by George Seliskar from 1945 until the time of his death in 1969.



James Metzke bought the property from Mrs. Seliskar in 1969 and is running it at the present time. Before owning the business, James worked for Mr. Seliskar, starting in 1957.

## GREENWOOD BODY SHOP

James Metzke, Prop.  
109 W. Central, Greenwood, WI  
Phone 267-6377



**Please see Store, page 5**