Five generations of the Adolf family, front row from left: Mary Faut, 1; Angie Faut, 28; and Erna Adolf, 95. Back: Clyde Knell, 54; and Marcella Knell, 74.

5 generations, 1 county, measureless blessings

By Allee Mead

The Adolf family has many reasons to be thankful. Many of the family members live in Mercer County, so they can share their relatives’ moments of joy without days or even hours of travel. If a family emergency occurs, they can gather in minutes. The large family spends many special holidays, graduation ceremonies, baptisms and weddings together.

And Beulah resident Erna Adolf, 95, has the rare privilege to meet her great-great-granddaughter, Mary. Five generations of Germans from Russia get to share traditions, special occasions and, of course, German cooking without leaving the county. The Adolf family tree is quite expansive, its branches reaching well into the 19th century.

FAMILY HISTORY

It all started in 1886: Erna’s grandparents, Daniel and Theresia Radke, married and moved from southern Russia to the United States. They first settled in South Dakota but later moved to Mercer County. Daniel used to walk to Mandan, work on a farm for three straight months, and walk back home. Theresia walked a total of 10 miles every day to pick corn on a ranch. Together Daniel and Theresia had 14 children, one of whom was Karl Radke, Erna’s father.

Karl married Louise Reinhardt, an immigrant from Russia, in 1910. They stayed in Mercer County, farming near Hazen and later living in Golden Valley. They had eight children. Erna, the fourth child, was born in 1915. She was only 7 years old when her father died of pneumonia.

Growing up outside of Hazen, Erna had lived only two miles away from her future husband, Gustav Adolf. She used to work on his parents’ farm, therefore “earning” her husband. Erna married Gustav in 1932. They and their four children lived in Oregon and Montana before moving back to the Hazen-Beulah area. Erna, now residing at the Knife River Care Center, is in poor health.

Erna’s daughter Marcella, now 74, married Alvin Knell in 1954. They raised three children and farmed for over 40 years. Marcella and Alvin moved to Hazen in 1998.

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Erna’s son Clyde Knell, now 54, went to school in Riverdale and met Karen Huber in his first year of college. Karen was a freshman at Garrison High School at the time and they married once Karen graduated. They later divorced. Karen and their only child, Angie, moved to Minot, where Karen remarried. Clyde lived in Garrison until 1998, when he purchased a farm near Pick City. Both parents have become close friends and remain active in their daughter’s life.

Angie, now 28, met James Faut in Minot before discovering he had grown up in Beulah. It was love at first sight for Angie, and James even bonded with her parents. Angie explained that it was very important to find someone of whom her father approved.

James later asked Clyde for his permission to marry Angie. When Angie’s father walked her down the aisle, he told her to always keep God in her life and family. He later told James, “No returns!”

James and Angie Faut moved to Mercer County in 2008 to be closer to their families. They now live near Golden Valley with their 1-year-old daughter, Mary. James owns a business called Gopher Alley Motor Works (after his childhood nickname for Golden Valley). Angie is a stay-at-home mom and the secretary of the Mercer County Farm Bureau.

KEEPING TRADITIONS ALIVE

As one can see, farming is a huge part of the Adolf family. Clyde owns a farm and hopes to keep it in the family. Angie and her grandmother Marcella Knell plant gardens and make sauerkraut and pickles together. Marcella also plans on teaching Angie the art of tatting, which is similar to crocheting.

Each year Clyde and Angie spend the end of deer season making sausage and jerky. Clyde also taught her to make pie crusts from scratch. Other recipes have been passed down from generation to generation as well.

Music and language also define the family. The older generations pass down dances such as the polka, waltz and two-step to the younger generations, and some family members play the accordion and mouth-organ. Many family members also speak German, while Marcella and Alvin even attend a German club in Pick City. When Clyde started school, he could only speak German. Angie and James speak a little German but they hope to become more fluent.

More tangible hand-me-downs include Mary’s wooden cradle, which once belonged to Marcella’s husband, Alvin. Alvin is the youngest of eight children, all of whom most likely slept in the cradle as infants. The solid-paneled cradle has needed some maintenance over the many years, but it still works very well.

Angie also owns a set of china, a wedding gift passed down to many brides in the family. Angie’s daughter wore a baptismal dress that other children in the Adolf family have donned for their baptisms. Angie plans to continue passing down the gown, cradle and china when other family members need them.

The younger generations also have inherited certain traits from their elders. Many family members have a strong appreciation for traditional values, and Angie plans on passing down these morals to Mary. The family also prides honesty, faith and other virtues. Angie said that another trait is stubbornness.

“Of course,” Marcella laughed, “we’re Germans!”

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Family means everything to the Adols. When Angie was younger, she felt closer to her friends than to her family and had no intention to stay in Mercer County. As she grew up, she realized just how much she truly appreciated her relatives and the land in which many of them grew up. Angie and James even traded city life in Minot for closeness to their families and neither regrets the decision.

“We’d rather be with our family and close friends than make more money and not have time to spend with our family,” Angie said.

Before moving to Mercer County, Angie often felt that she was missing too many family events, but now she can easily keep in touch with her relatives. She and her husband love being close to their families along with living in the country.

Marcella added that she has always loved, cared for and worried about her family.

“If you didn’t care for them, you wouldn’t worry about them,” Marcella said.

Spending time together is especially important to the Adols. They spend every Christmas together and enjoy each other’s company on other occasions. The Adolf family continues to stay close by sharing food, jokes and many memories. They make sure to keep their heritage and history alive for future generations. The Adols feel blessed to have their many relatives in one county and enjoy living under the beautiful North Dakota sky.