

John Garret Kafka  
March 15, 1913 – August 22, 2002

The Platte County Record-Times  
August 28, 2002

Funeral services for John Garret Kafka, 89, were held Monday, August 26 at the First Christian Church in Wheatland, with Andy Gudhal, Minister, officiating and Richard Russell and John Thalken as the eulogists. Interment was held in the Wheatland Cemetery.

Mr. Kafka died Thursday, August 22 at the Platte County Memorial Nursing Home in Wheatland.

He was born March 15, 1913 at the Garret Ranch in Albany County.

He was the third child of four to Joe and Olive (Garret) Kafka. John spent his childhood on his parents ranch and began working with his father at a very early age. At the age of four he was given a violin as a gift and soon he taught himself to play by ear. Blessed with an "audiographic" memory, he was able to hear a song one time and play it from memory. John also learned how to play the piano, banjo, drums, guitar, and saxophone, but the fiddle was always his favorite and music was a great source of joy for many years to come. In his teenage years John met and fell in love with Lucille Barrett.

They were married in Wheatland on April 12, 1933, and were married for 54 years at the time of Lucille's death on September 13, 1987. John and Lucille were blessed with three children, Erma Lu, Jeanie, and Larry. The family spent many years together building the "75" ranch. Together they put up hay, fed cattle, and did a variety of ranch chores. The most cherished times together were sitting down together in the evenings to play music. Jeanie would play piano, Larry was on guitar, John of course played the fiddle, and Lucille and Erma Lu sang.

John worked many jobs to help ends meet during the hard times of the depression.

He carried the mail, helped build a road through LaBonte Canyon and served as a hired hand whenever a neighbor was in need. His favorite "work" was playing for dances, weddings, and "Dutch Hops" in Garrett, Marshall, and Douglas communities. Even after he retired, John played at the nursing home in Wheatland and participated in the "Kitchen Band". John played twice in the "Frontier Days" parade and appeared on live television coverage of the event.

John's proudest accomplishment came years later when he was featured in "The Old Time Fiddlers Book."

His biography was included in the book along with a recording of two of his songs. John's love for music was passed on to his grandchildren, and even when he was no longer able to play, he always enjoyed listening to his grand-

children, Aspen and Jordan. John's five grandchildren were also a great source of joy. He always waited anxiously to hear the latest news about Johnny, Rex, Justin, Norma, and Heather. He celebrated their happy times, cried with them when things went bad, and shared his wisdom with them when they needed advice. Perhaps the saddest times in his life were when John lost the family that he loved so dearly.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his two brothers, but the hardest blow came when his son, Larry, died of cancer at the tender age of 20. In later years he lost his wife, Lucille, and his daughter, Erma Lu, but never gave up on life.

John embraced his remaining family and loved them with all of his heart. John Kafka embraced life with love and dignity. He offered his time, resources, and caring to all who asked, even to those who were afraid to ask and to those who didn't deserve it. He was a man without enemies.

His life is an inspiration and his legacy is one of compassion and love.

Those of us who knew him should be grateful because he showed us what can be accomplished with kindness.

His love changed all of our lives and his memory will live on forever... John was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows, attended the Wheatland Bible Church, and participated at the Services for Seniors.

He is survived by his daughter Jeanie, and her husband Norman Hanks of Wheatland; one sister Mary Barrett of Wheatland; five grandchildren, John Brooks of Fort Lee, Virginia, Rex Hanks of Glenrock Wyoming, Justin Brooks of Golden Colorado, Norma Hanks-Leonard of Casper, Wyoming, and Heather Brooks-Wall of Clutter, Iowa; two great grandchildren, Aspen and Jordan Hanks of Glenrock and numerous nieces and nephews.

Serving as pallbearers were Jim Atkinson, Doug Kafka, Kathy Anderson, T.K. Atkinson, Lawrence Atkinson, Frank Schreyer, Johnny Scott, and Richard Russell.

Honorary pallbearers were Kenny Atkinson, Edwin Ball, Lawrence Prager, Art Bohl, Merle Garwood, Davey Barrett, Matt Johnston, Dick Riley, Larry Wilson, Randy King and Wayne Probst.

A memorial to the Saint Jude's Children's Hospital, 501 Saint Jude Place, Memphis, Tennessee 38105-1905 would be appreciated by the family.

Platte Funeral Chapel was in charge of the arrangements.