

**Peggy Ulrich**  
**Vital Life Review**

*(written by Tom Berquist, Wesley Village volunteer)*

My life story begins with my parents, Basil Pavlosky and Catherine (Tarasovic) Pavlosky. My dad immigrated from Kiev, Russia and my Mom from Austria-Hungary in the late 1880's. They first settled in Wisconsin, but found farming and the cold weather hard to bear. I have this photograph of my Dad when he worked as a foundry worker after they moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut. He was always embarrassed by the scar on the end of his nose which was frostbitten by the cold Wisconsin winters. I was born in Bridgeport on September 25, 1917 – the last of seven children. My nickname was “Babe” which carried with me from early days in my Dad’s lap. I wished as a child that there was one more after me so I could say as everyone said to me “respect your elders”.

My father cared deeply for his family. For many years Pop worked 10-hour days at that foundry. I remember one day he came home in tears. They were tears of happiness as he told us the NRA (National Recovery Act) changed the shift to 8 hours – now he could spend more time with his family. When I was pregnant in 1944 with Paul my Pop used to rub my tummy and say, “My babe is going to have a baby.” On July 4<sup>th</sup> of that year he died of a ruptured appendix before my baby was born. I was heart-broken for many years wondering if he “knew” I had a baby boy.

My early memories of my Mom centered on the kitchen as there were always wonderful aromas coming from the stove. She couldn’t read English, so I used to help her measure and put up all the ingredients before I left for school. Mom taught me many things including self-responsibility. When I first started school I would sometimes ask the teacher permission to go to the bathroom then I would walk home. My Mom would send me right back. But perhaps the most important thing I learned from my Mom was to be kind to others less fortunate. During the depression, hobos would come to our door and although we had no more than the next family, Mom would always feed them. During the war years, she told me to sit on the porch and ask any soldier in uniform walking by the house if he needed a meal.

We were a proud, hard-working family, but also had a lot of fun. We owned a duplex and sometimes rented one side to families without jobs who paid the rent with \$2.00 government welfare checks. My Mom used to send us kids to shop with those checks so the storekeeper wouldn’t think she was on welfare. Every Saturday we had to help scrub and wax the kitchen floor on our knees. To make it shine, we would put on our old woolen socks and slide on the floor like a skating pond. We had a back yard and one summer my older sister was married there with the ceremony held under a canopy over the grape vines. How beautiful it was and how beautiful I felt in the special dress with the “Bo-Peep” pocked my mother made for me.

While growing up during the depression, movies were an important way for people to get out of their depressed feelings. I remember going to see comedies especially those featuring Wallace Berry and Marie Dresser who made a wonderful team. They were older, out of shape (not sexy), but made you laugh. Tuesday at the movies was "Dish Night," where the 25 cent admission also got you a piece of dinnerware, so you could collect a whole set. We used to go down to Frisbie Pie Company in the South end to buy broken pie crusts for little money. I guess the help used to get tired of making pies all day and started throwing the pie plates around. They say that's where the idea for the Frisbie toy came from

When I got to high school I had homework, not the studying kind, but piece work. I'd bring home scarves and tablecloths in a wagon from the American Fabrics Company in Bridgeport. Then Mom and I would use a tool to make fringes on the ends and we'd earn as much as \$10-20 a week.

Weekends in the summer were spent tending and enjoying our garden lot in Stratford where Pop had built a small brick fireplace and planted all the vegetables and some flowers for Mom. We'd fill a wagon with supplies invite our friends to come along, pick the vegetables on the spot and grill them along with the meat – those were unforgettable days.

When World War II came along, I remember the young boys lying about their age so they could join. Maybe it wasn't the right thing to say but the war came along at the right time as it took many out of their depressed surroundings and gave them food and shelter. Women who never worked were needed to replace the men who had joined the forces. Many women worked in the defense factories for two weeks straight with just one day off. I think this was the beginning of the independent woman, she proved she could do what was once believed a "man's job." I worked as an inspector at Remington Arms going over 50 caliber shells. It wasn't a hard job but you had to be alert so no shell would pass with a primer. Later, I had to quit as they wanted me to work the 11-7 shift and my Mom felt I wouldn't get the proper sleep.

In 1939 I met and married my first husband, Arthur Delvy at a skating rink owned by his family. After my Dad had died we moved into the other half of their duplex where my Mom lived until 1951. On November 10<sup>th</sup> of 1944 I had my son Paul and he became, and still is, everything to me. But for months after he was born I still kept wondering why the Lord took my Pop before he was born. I wanted so much for him to know my boy as he grew up and I often imagined my Dad in the basement with Paul tinkering as he used to love to do. One night when Paul was starting to learn to walk, he approached the basement stairs, I yelled "My God, he'll fall." In that moment a vision appeared in my mind of my Pop and he said "Don't worry, I have him." With this I finally felt he knew I had a beautiful baby boy.

When Paul was a toddler and still in his playpen, I used to give him electrical plugs and connectors to play with as he didn't have many toys. One time he put together a bunch of things and my Mom asked him what he made. To our surprise he said "a monstrosity!" Paul had an interest in things electrical and I was proud when he'd volunteer at the school to run

lights and equipment. Bright kid my Paul and he went on to make me even more proud with advanced degrees from some of the top colleges in the country.

Because his Dad didn't have much interest in raising children, Paul and I became great buddies. We loved going to the beach and on hot days in the summer, I'd sometimes call in sick to work so we could keep cool at Walnut Beach. Sadly, Arthur had a gambling addiction and it got much worse, so when Paul graduated from High School in 1962, I asked God to show me the right thing to do. We separated and divorced and with \$1500 of my own savings, I bought a cute house in Shelton for \$12,000. I supported the family by working at Warner's the corset company, as assistant floor lady. It was a great job as all the "old maids and widows" and the boss, Brad Warner, liked me. We had banquets, bowling teams and dances that went to 1:00 in the morning, but we'd be back at work at 7:30.

In 1964 I married my second husband, Henry Ulrich. Henry was younger than I and had a young sister, Arlene who was about my son's age. One weekend we invited Arlene and Paul to dinner and they hit it off. When their wedding announcement appeared in the paper, my friends and co-workers were confused. Yes, I would tell them Arlene Ulrich is both my sister-in-law and my daughter-in-law! Paul and Arlene had two beautiful children, Jeffrey who lives in Massachusetts and Michele, who has two of her own darling girls, Sabrina and Elizabeth, who live in California. Sadly, I don't see them often, but I get pictures, letters and phone calls to see and hear them grow up.

After retiring, I spent time volunteering first as a school bus driver for handicapped children, then for seven years visiting patients at the Lord Chamberlain nursing home. When I look back at the people I've helped in my life I think of my Mother. She taught me generosity and to show kindness to all people no matter what their background. And when I look back at the tough decisions I made in life I look to God and thank him for giving me the strength to do the right thing.

I've been at Crosby Commons since January of 2009 and look forward to doing some volunteering here was well.