

# The Pavelkas - George and Philomena

by Sam Kermoian

In CHANG'S fifty-five years, certain individuals stand out for their human kindness, dedication and service. Among them is an admired couple who regularly makes the long trek across the Bay Bridge --George and Philomena Pavelka. Together, they have given over forty-six years of service to CHANGS.

In 1949 this East Bay couple saw an item in a local newspaper about a folk dance festival to be held on a Sunday afternoon in the Oakland Auditorium and inviting both folk dancers and spectators to see the floor full of dancers and the balcony full of spectators. They were captivated! Investigating, they found a folk dance class within walking distance of their home. They attended many classes and joined at least three different folk dance clubs in the East Bay; George was elected to serve as president for two of them at different times.

While dancing in the East Bay, they heard a lot about a well-known folk dance club named CHANGS in San Francisco with the reputation of having the very best to offer. They decided to see for themselves and in 1955 they enrolled in the advanced class, becoming members the following year. In 1958 George and Philomena joined the Exhibition Group which was taught by Anatol Joukowsky. They danced with the group until the late 70's --a total of 12 years.

George served as Treasurer of CHANGS for one term --1960-61, and as President for 12 years, the last seven being consecutive--1984-1991. He also served as Vice President for ten years (in between the times that he wasn't president). Philomena served as Research/Historian Chairman for two years and Bulletin Chairman for 17 years (a post she still holds). The last 11 years have been consecutive--1982-1993. She also served as Public Relations Officer consecutively for 14 years. Both have been CHANGS' members for 37 years.

George was born in Nebraska and grew up on a farm. Of all the animals on the farm, horses were his favorite. When he was eight years old, he was given a pony to ride to school and back. When he was 15, the pony was replaced by a horse. (now-a-days, instead of riding horses, kids drive their own cars to school).

George's great grandparents and their children came to Nebraska from Czechoslovakia. When George was 12 years old, he met author Willa Cather at his grandmother's house. Willa and his grandmother were friends from childhood. Willa left Nebraska to go east for a higher education. Periodically she returned to see her family and always went to visit George's grandmother. Incidentally, Willa used George's grandmother and her family as prototypes for characters in her well-known novels "My Antonia" and "Neighbor Rosicky".

George graduated from high school in 1932 at the height of the depression. Like many others, he found it difficult to get work so he decided to join the Navy. He was stationed mostly on the west coast. After his service was over, he realized that he had come to like California and decided to make it his permanent home.

Philomena was born in Northern California; but when she was a year old, her parents moved to Vallejo where she grew up. One of her earliest memories was her desire to go to school when she was just five years old. More than once, she slipped out of the house to follow the older children on their way to school. Her mother had to go after her and take her home, trying to explain that she had to wait until she was six years old. So she was ready when the time came! She says that she always liked school and vacations couldn't go by fast enough to suit her.

Philomena is proud that she was a good student, on the Honor Roll every year in high school and was valedictorian at her graduation in 1932. Although she wanted to go to college to be a teacher, the circumstances of the depression would not allow it. Jobs were very scarce in those days, but six months after graduating, she was hired as a secretary for the Vallejo Board of Education. Later she left that job for a civil service position with the Navy.

It's appropriate that this dancing couple met at a dance at the Veterans Memorial Building in Vallejo where the Big Bands came to play their music. Four months later, on January 10, 1942, George and Philomena were married. Both of them worked for the Navy and they both retired at the same time after 30 years of service. Besides folk dancing, they like to travel and they travelled extensively after their retirement. They were avid 49er fans and have held season tickets for many years.

George and Philomena feel that over the years CHANGS has been a source of much happiness, giving them good friends, good recreation and good memories. And isn't CHANGS lucky to have the Pavelkas as good leaders, good dancers and loyal members --truly an inspiration to all of us. WE LOVE YOU, GEORGE AND PHILOMENA!