

Czech Refugee Establishes Company

By SUE PASCOE
Staff Writer

Exquisite swimming pools, imaginative spas and artistic fireplaces are Horusicky Construction's specialty. Started by Michael Horusicky and now run by son Michael, Jr. and daughter Andrea Horusicky Heindel, the family business has been in Pacific Palisades since 1970 and the company is well-known for quality work.

Less familiar is the history of the family of how Michael and his wife Jana brought their two boys Danny and Michael Jr. to the United States after escaping from Czechoslovakia following the August 1968 Soviet invasion. (Andrea, their third child, was born in the United States.)

Horusicky learned masonry skills at "Old European" trade schools, but that might not have been his first choice for a vocation. He and his sister Alexandra, a gifted artist, were not allowed to attend any of the top schools. It wasn't the Communist system that precluded them from



Horusicky Construction builds new pools and remodels old ones.

schools, but rather their name. Their father, Jaroslav Horusicky, was jailed in 1950 because of his involvement with the anti-Red underground forces that were allied with the C.I.A.

Michael Horusicky's father's escape from the notorious Pilsen prison was recorded in the May 1955 San Jose Evening News and reads like a movie thriller.

Jaroslav, then 39, a former Olympic swimmer and doctor, masqueraded as a broken, much

older man, shuffling around in prison. He convinced guards to let him join 18 other men to make baskets.

In two months' time, he became the top producer, making eight baskets a day. Shortly afterwards, he complained that if he could have a bigger needle (about the size of a pencil), he might be able to make nine or 10 baskets a day. Although his record labeled him a cunning undercover agent, guards started

to forget about the "basketmaker's" political background.

Selecting two other co-workers, Jaroslav convinced prison officials that they could best work on a new basket design in

his cell after hours. The guards didn't realize that earlier in his career as a spy he had committed the prison blueprint setup to memory and knew there was an attic above his cell.

The men took precautions, like scattering sand outside the prison door so they could hear the approach of the guards, allowing them to bore through the ceiling unnoticed. Meanwhile, Jaroslav was able to buy carbolic acid and a tube of toothpaste (which he emptied out and refilled with butter and string to make a candle), by bartering with cigarettes he had earned from making baskets.

On the night of the escape, the three men went through the attic to open windows and the roof. From the fourth story, using a long rope made from sheets, they lowered Jaroslav down close to the ground and then began swinging him like a pendulum. Eventually he was swung over the wall. He held the rope tight as the other two men climbed down it and over the wall. They had sprinkled carbolic acid in the cell in an effort to stymie tracking dogs.

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On the Cover

The red, white and blue are handsomely presented at the front entry of this house on Almar.

Rich Schmitt/Staff photographer



In addition to sidewalks, driveways, retaining walls and spas, Horusicky Construction also designs and builds indoor and outdoor fireplaces



Michael and Jana Horusicky with sons Michael Jr. and Danny after starting the family's construction business, shortly after arriving in Los Angeles from Czechoslovakia.

"If my dad did a job five years ago or 25 years ago, it doesn't matter. He stands by his work, and if there's a problem he'll come back and fix it."

—ANDREA HORUSICKY HEINDEL

Horusicky:

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According to the San Jose newspaper story, Jaroslav ran three hours until his feet were bloody and blistered. He hid in the forest for 20 days, begging food from farmers and stealing clothes to wear. Then he was taken to the Czechoslovakian border by the underground with his wife Helena in the car. She wouldn't see her husband for the next 30 years. Eventually Jaroslav worked his way to Vienna and reported to the American Forces.

Jaroslav's escape (no one had escaped from the Pilsen prison in more than 13 years) prompted officials to jail Helena and their live-in housekeeper for a year and young Horusicky and his

sister went to live with their grandmother.

After his wife and housekeeper were released from jail, Jaroslav worked to get them out of the country, but found it impossible. He stayed in contact by sending them letters under assumed names, knowing that any connection to him would cause further problems.

Jaroslav moved to New York, where he got a job as a lifeguard and from there to San Jose, then to Los Angeles, where he opened a medical equipment business. In August 1968, Soviet tanks rolled through the streets of Prague in an effort to squelch a revolution. Eventually thousands of troops moved into the country, and the Michael Horusicky family escaped to Austria in 1969. Jaroslav, because of his past involvement with the U.S. gov-



.(Left to right) Helena Horusicky, Michael, Jaroslav and Alexandra, shortly before Jaroslav was jailed in Pilsen prison.

ernment, was able to get his son's family green cards and they joined him in Los Angeles.

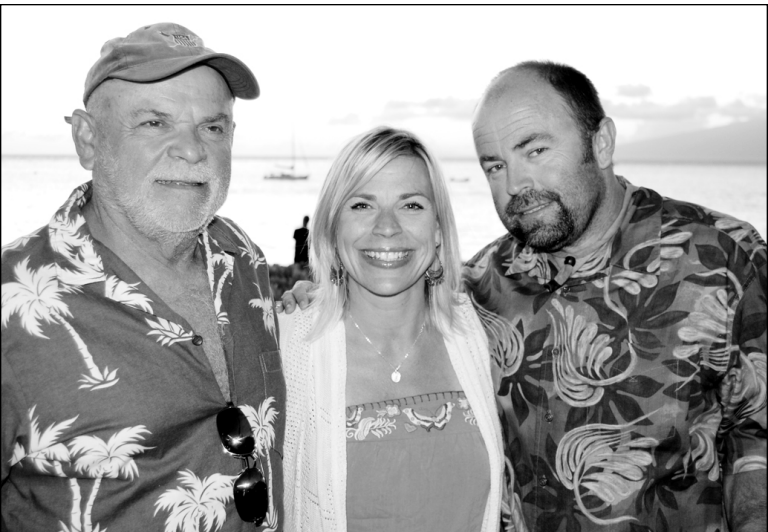
The family, which didn't know English and had no possessions, moved into a mobile

home in Paradise Cove.

Seeking work, Michael Horusicky advertised in the Santa Monica Outlook for masonry work. His first job was a "scratch coat" on a fireplace that netted

him \$86. Andrea said that because of his limited English, he wasn't sure what the customer wanted, but learned and did the job.

His wife Jana, who had been a
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Forty years later, Michael Sr. Andrea and Michael Jr. run Horusicky Construction.

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lab technologist, stayed home with the kids, but eventually redid her credentials and then worked at the VA Hospital in Westwood for 23 years.

Horusicky's reputation as a hard worker, as well as someone who stood by his jobs, has kept the company flourishing 40 years. "If my dad did a job five years ago or 25 years ago, it doesn't matter," Andrea said. "He stands by his work, and if there's a problem he'll

come back and fix it."

The same qualities that established the business are still the cornerstone of Horusicky Construction. The company will do a project no matter how small, including mailboxes, walkways, sidewalk repairs and also remodels outdated pools, builds new ones and constructs fireplaces, BBQs and outdoor kitchens. In addition to "pretty" projects, it works on retaining walls, foundations and drainage issues.

Ten years ago, Mike Jr. and Andrea took over the family business and continue to provide



Horusicky Construction offers clients design plans that incorporate "hardscaping" with landscaping in order to give a backyard a natural flow.

detailed estimates. "What we say it's going to cost, is what it will cost," Andrea said. "There won't be unexpected bills at the end. We also discuss the pros and cons of a customer's plans," Andrea said. "Telling customers this might not be the right stone for what you want to use it for, or your budget won't allow this material."

Mike and Andrea (and brother Danny, who lives in Colorado)

graduated from Palisades High School. Mike graduated from Cal State Long Beach with a degree in construction management and Andrea received her degree in international business from the same college.

"I then studied in Prague to finish some of my classes for my degree and lived with my grandmother," Andrea said, adding that in 2002 her grandmother was sick and she took care of

her. Her grandfather, Jaroslav died in 1988. "He passed away the year before Czechoslovakia became free as a nation and Communism collapsed. Of course he would've wanted to see that," she said, noting that she's proud of her family's history and the business.

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