Although the life of Emil Pavlik was saturated with outstanding accomplishments and countless accolades within the world of music, it was his integrity, his courage, and his unending love for those around him that stand out most. He was a genuine man, the real deal who never tired of giving everything his best - and then some. Through his lifelong passion for music, Emil reached countless people whether it was those he mentored, those he inspired, or those he blessed with his gift. He would proudly boast, however, that his greatest legacy was his family, and it was through his extraordinary example that Emil touched numerous generations that have yet to take root on his family tree. We will miss his kind heart, his unwavering devotion to his passions, and his constant presence in our lives.

It was during the same year that America emerged from WWI as world leaders that Emil’s story begins. Born as the only son and youngest child of Stefan and Elizabeth “Betka” (Sabol) Pavlik, Emil began his life on August 22, 1919, in Chicago, Illinois. He was a proud first generation son of an immigrant family from Prague, Czechoslovakia.

From Chicago the Pavlik family moved to Ottawa, Illinois, and then to Racine, Wisconsin, in the late 1920s where his father opened a local tavern, Steve’s Place. It was in Racine that Emil’s passion for music was unearthed. He discovered that he could get two cornet lessons on a horn he got from his Uncle John for the bargain price of six of his mother’s kolaches. The teacher even threw in a spaghetti dinner to sweeten the deal since Emil loved pasta - especially spaghetti with homemade Italian sausage. From this teacher Emil learned that there was no need for payment, just the unspoken requirement to pass the knowledge on to someone else, which became a way of life for him. It was in that neighborhood, with the scents of many ethnic dishes, that he learned to make and began to perfect the Czecholovakian dish he was famous for - Halushki and Kapusta.

After graduating from Park High School, Emil studied music at USAFI, the University of Hawaii, Chicago College of Music, the Midwestern Conservatory of Music, and the Metropolitan School of Music. During WWII, Emil proudly served as a corporal in the Army, was stationed in Pearl Harbor, and played in the 297th Coast Artillery Band.

Life was forever changed for Emil when he met the love of his life. Her name was Beverly Nelson and they married on September 3, 1948. Together they were blessed with two children, Barbara and Stefan. In order to support his family, Emil worked at Morris Letter Service for over 40 years, finally retiring to spend more time with his ailing wife. Retiring wasn’t really a word in his vocabulary, however, as he simply said that he was just “between gigs.”
Music remained a vital part of Emil's life throughout the rest of his journey. An accomplished musician, he studied the Schillinger System of Music at several Chicago Conservatories and did some conducting as well. Emil’s love of music and enthusiastic talent was showcased by playing trumpet and arranging music for the 297th A.G.F. Band in the Hawaiian Islands and Tinian, Marianas. He played with Skinnay Ennis from L.A. and Frankie Masters from Chicago and his best Army buddy was the noted tenor sax man Sam Donahue.

Emil’s musical endeavors didn’t end there. He served as musical director and arranger for the Racine Kilties Drum and Bugle Corps from 1949 through 1970. Under Emil’s musical direction and with his radical jazz arrangements, the Kilties garnered three VFW National Championships in 1964, 1965, 1969. Emil always humbly said that it was not he who led them to the championships, it was the corps themselves who marched on the field as he only stood on the sidelines. Emil’s iconic arrangement of “Auld Lang Syne” has been nationally recognized in the drum corps community since 1960. When asked why he chose that song, he simply said “It was Scottish”. He wanted something to really “nail it” for the Kilties, who already were so recognizable while marching curb to curb in a parade, with their incredible plaid uniforms, or on the field in competition. Well, he did manage to do so, as the crowds have eagerly awaited through the years to hear them play “Syne”. He directed J.I. Case and Western Publishing Company choruses, and various church choirs. He directed the pit band for the Kiltie Kapers, which originated in the early ‘50’s, and directed several Miss Racine Shows. In 1970, Emil was the musical director of the first Cardiac Capers. Many of the young performers he mentored back then are still performing locally with the Penguin Players.

Throughout his life Emil’s unmatched talent didn’t go unrecognized. On July 4, 2004, he was the first inductee and charter member of the Kiltie Hall of Fame. He was awarded with an even a bigger honor when he was nominated by numerous colleagues and inducted into the Drum Corps International Hall of Fame in August of 2009, the same month he turned 90 years old. Emil made the trip to Indianapolis and received this coveted award before tens of thousands of fans. He met some of his biggest fans there and those whose lives were impacted through his work. Back in Racine, he celebrated his 90th birthday with over a hundred friends and fellow musicians. Mayor John Dickert was on hand to read a proclamation naming his birthday “Emil Pavlik Day in Racine.”

The highlights in Emil’s life are numerous, and they continued well into the sunset of his life. Just one month prior to his departure from this world he was thrilled to attend the Penguin Players show where he saw many of the
singers and dancers that he worked with for over 60 years as well as his grandson, Nick, in the cast carrying on the Pavlik tradition. Emil was also thrilled to see his beloved New Orleans Saints win the Super Bowl. From that day forward, he could always be found with one of his Saints caps on, usually the championship one.

It is a daunting task to summarize the life of someone as vibrant as Emil Pavlik as mere words seem to lack the luster he brought us every day. Life will never be the same without him here, but the lives of countless people will be forever changed in a significant way because of him.

Emil Pavlik left this earth to play the big gig in the sky on May 15, 2011. Emil’s family includes his daughter, Barbara (Mark) Riegelman, and their children; Anthony (Kelley) Cooper, and their children, Kaya and Cole Emil; Aeri (Scott) Hetland, and their children, Bailey and Peyton; Nicholas and Charlie Riegelman, all of Racine. He will also be missed by his son Stefan (Elizabeth) Pavlik, and their children, Melissa of Minneapolis, MN, and Aimee of Racine; his sister-in-law, Sharon Johnson; and a host of other relatives, and friends too numerous to name as well as special friends, Ken Norman, Jr., Tom Meredith, Jr., both of Racine, and Stuart Faber of Los Angeles. Emil was preceded in death by his parents; his wife, his sisters, Marge Krueger and Irene Timko, sister-in-law, Lorraine Hansen, and brother-in-law, Richard Nelson.

A celebration of Emil’s life will be held Thursday, May 19, 2011, 10:00 a.m. at the funeral home with Rev. Heather Bumstead and The Rev. Robert Bagley, Deacon officiating. Interment with full military honors will follow at Graceland Cemetery. Relatives and friends may meet with the family Wednesday at the funeral home from 4:00-7:00 p.m. and Thursday at the funeral home from 9:30 a.m. until time of service at 10:00 a.m. Emil had one wish for all when his time came - to put on a genuine smile and do a good deed for one in need, selflessly. In his memory memorials to the Health Care Network, 904 State Street, Racine, WI 53404 or to the Racine Kitties, P.O. Box 085235, Racine, WI 53408 have been suggested. Please visit www.lifestorynet.com where you can leave a favorite memory or sign the guestbook.