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Woman lives in fear spouse's killer will be freed

By Larry Maatz, Examiner staff writer

Annette Carlson does not have a pretty tale to tell.

It is the tale of the brutal murder of her husband before her eyes, the sexual assault and attempted murder of herself, and the terror and nightmares that have been part of her life for the last eight years.

But, for the last three years, she has regularly brought it back, told it again, gone over the experience time after time. And she does it, she says, out of fear that Angelo Pavageau, serving a life term for the attack, will be released from prison on parole.

"I live in constant fear," she wrote to the state parole board this year. "I am terrified to think that Pavageau would be given a parole hearing."

Pavageau, who is at San Quentin prison, is scheduled for a routine parole hearing on May 3. So Carlson is retelling the story of Pavageau's crime, which one veteran homicide detective called the "worst he had ever seen."

Carlson, then 24, had been asleep in bed in the Potrero Hill Victorian that she and her husband were renovating on the night in April 1974 when Pavageau climbed a trellis on the side of the building and entered through a window.

She awoke to find him holding a knife on her. Her husband, Frank Marion Carlson, hearing her cry out, ran up from downstairs.

Pavageau forced them both downstairs at knifepoint and demanded money. They gave him all their cash, some credit cards, a jar of pennies. He demanded more.

"We thought if we gave him what he wanted, he'd go away and leave us alone," she testified later, so she meekly responded when he demanded a hammer.

Pavageau did not go away.

Instead, he tied Frank Carlson to a chair and began beating him, first with a hammer, which broke, then with a thick chopping block from the kitchen, which also broke, then with vases and finally with a penny jar.

Frank Marion Carlson died. His head, in the words of homicide detectives who handled the case, had been systematically destroyed before the eyes of his wife.

Then, Annette Carlson testified, Pavageau turned his attentions to raping her and otherwise sexually assaulting her. He beat her with

her childhood rocking chair, then wrapped a heaving paper weight in cloth and beat her again.

Her jaw, shoulder, arms, wrists and fingers were broken before the intruder strangled her with a telephone cord and slashed her wrists with a knife. Apparently thinking her dead, Pavageau poured paint thinner around her body and over her husband's. He set them on fire and left.

But Annette Carlson was not dead. She crawled from the flames and screamed for help as her home burned. Neighbors came, then firemen and police. She survived.

Subsequently traced through items stolen from the scene and identified by Annette Carlson, Pavageau was arrested and convicted. He was sentenced to death; the sentence was later reduced to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole.

Six years after the attack, opposing Pavageau's first parole hearing in 1980, Annette Carlson spoke of the effect on her life.

"I thought I'd died," she said. "When I woke up in the hospital, I thought I was blind because my eyes were swollen shut. I still sleep with all the lights on all over the house, even though I know it's foolish. I still have nightmares about it.

"I can't get away from it. when I go to the store and they put the change in my hand, I have to turn my hand so I see the scars on my wrist. When I brush my hair I can't help seeing the scars on my face and scalp. It's with me. It won't go away. And now they're talking about letting him out."

Carlson remains in seclusion, unwilling to be photographed, to release her current address, her occupation. She lives in constant fear, she says, that Pavageau will be released and will track her down.

Twice, Pavageau has been denied parole.

Although a near perfect prison record was cited by his counsel at the last hearing, along with Pavageau's remorse and plea for forgiveness, the parole board denied parole, citing both Pavageau's "callous disregard" for human life and psychiatric reports that branded him as "permanently disordered."

San Francisco Homicide Inspector Frank Falzon has written to the parole board.

"He...took Annette Carlson...and forced her to partake in every degenerate act humanly imaginable. He beat her with a rock, rocking chair, and attempted to strangle her with a telephone cord. As she lay helplessly on the floor, bleeding profusely and begging for her life, he, Angelo Pavageau, cut Annette's wrists with a knife and set the residence afire. Why the state should show mercy to this man is beyond my comprehension."