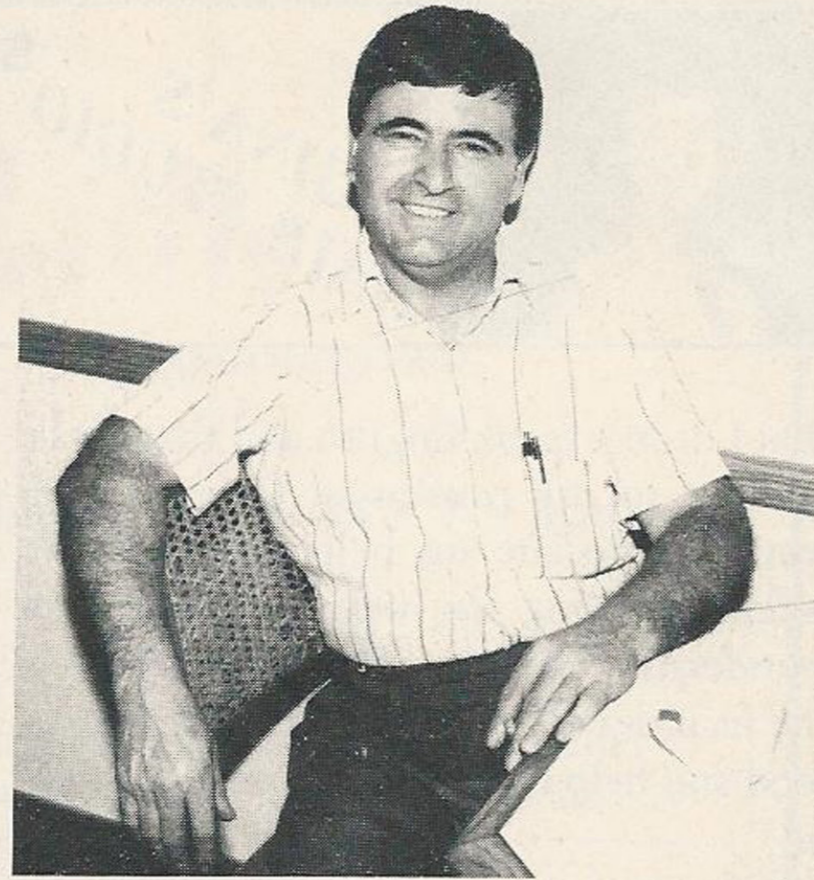


# BURLESON SPOTLIGHT



Spotlight Photo

**Chris Arslanovski welcomes diners to *Our Place*.**



Spotlight Photo

**Otto Arslanovski, Sr., relaxes for a moment.**

## “Our Place” Has Special Meaning for Courageous Family

In 1962, when most of us “war babies” were worrying about how we were going to get out of high school, twenty-two year old Otto Arslanovski was worrying about how he was going to evade the communists in his fourth attempt to get out of Yugoslavia.

At age eighteen, Otto made his first effort to escape communist Yugoslavia, but was scared when authorities began firing at him. His second attempt ended in failure when he lost his way in the Alps. After walking for three days in the extreme cold, he found that he had traveled in a circle and was still in Yugoslavia. His third attempt to escape resulted in his capture and imprisonment for fourteen months.

“I guess I was lucky,” recalls Otto, “my oldest brother had fought with Tito against the Nazis and had some political clout, so I wasn’t treated as badly in prison as some of the other inmates; nevertheless,

I was more determined than ever to escape.”

One month after his release from prison, Otto escaped into Greece. He had to wait six months in Greece for arrangements to be made for his passage to the United States. During that time his mother died. “It was one of the most difficult times of my life,” he grimaces, “I knew that I would face imprisonment and possibly death if I returned to Yugoslavia, but it was hard to stay away from my family during that time of grief.”

His father died when he was eight and his oldest brother had raised the family. Today all of Otto’s family, except one sister, live in the United States.

Otto arrived in New York, then was put on a train to Chicago where he had a cousin. “I didn’t know a word of English,” he grins shyly, “but they pinned a note on my jacket lapel saying

that I didn’t speak English and that I was enroute to my cousins in Chicago and would appreciate any help anyone could offer me along the way. Everyone was wonderful. They would show me where the facilities were, get me water, offer me food and help in any way they could think of.”

“In Yugoslavia, I had been an economics major and worked in the payroll office of a large dairy, but I soon found the only work available to an immigrant with very little knowledge of the English language was washing dishes from dawn to dusk for very little pay.”

“An old Greek cook in the restaurant where I worked took pity on me and started teaching me how to cook. I found that I truly enjoyed cooking and like all young people I was sure I had learned all there was to know about my chosen profession in a very short time.”

“I quit my job as a dishwasher and applied for a cook’s position. I got the job. Of course, they fired me in one week, and it was back to learning for me. There was more to being a good cook than I thought.”

Otto spent the next few years learning about quality cuts of meat, how to carve meat, inventory control and overall kitchen management. He has served as head chef in some of Chicago’s finest country clubs and steakhouses.

In one of the restaurants he met the manager’s daughter, Christine.

“I remember how impressed I was with his quiet seriousness,” laughs Chris Arslanovski, “but I think his quiet attentiveness was that he wasn’t sure what I was saying. I’m not sure he learned a true command of English until after we married, because a lot of the things I thought we had discussed and agreed about he never knew we’d discussed.” Chris was a production manager for Pepperidge Farm, in charge of the night shift. “We seemed to just pass each other on our way to work,” she recalls. “I worked nights and Otto worked days so someone would always be with our four children.”

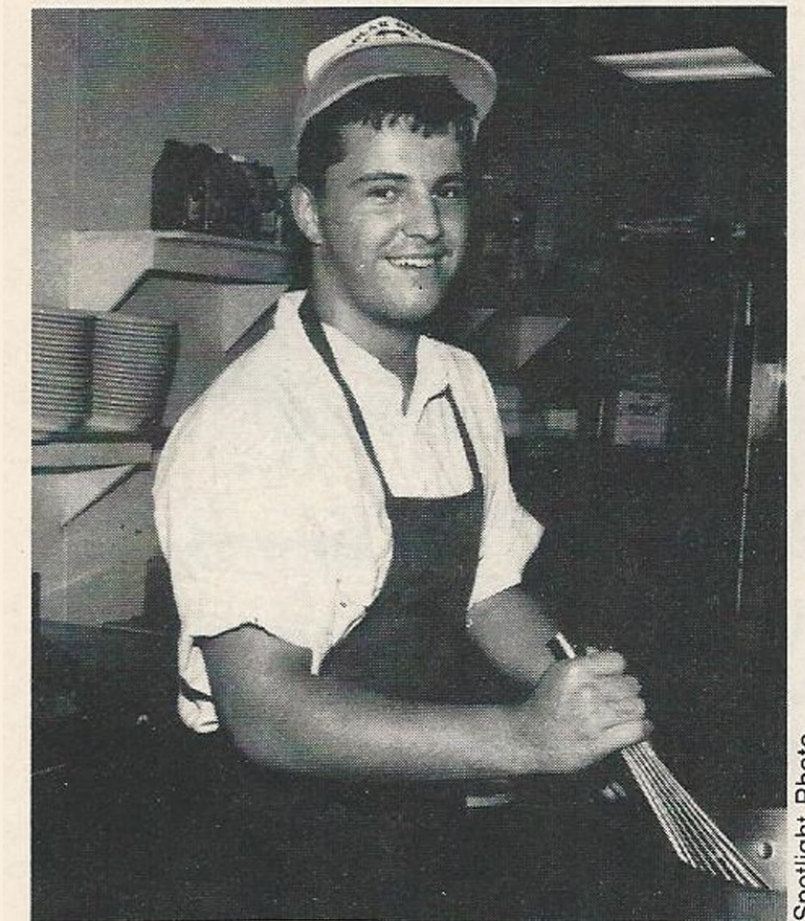


Spotlight Photo

**Otto Arslanovski, Jr. takes over the chef’s duties when his father is not around.**

In 1982 Chris came down with encephalitis, better known as “sleeping sickness.” Encephalitis causes an inflammation of the brain, making it swell and press against the skull. She went into a coma and was not expected to live. After several months of illness, she began to improve, but the illness had left scar tissue on her brain resulting in seizures.

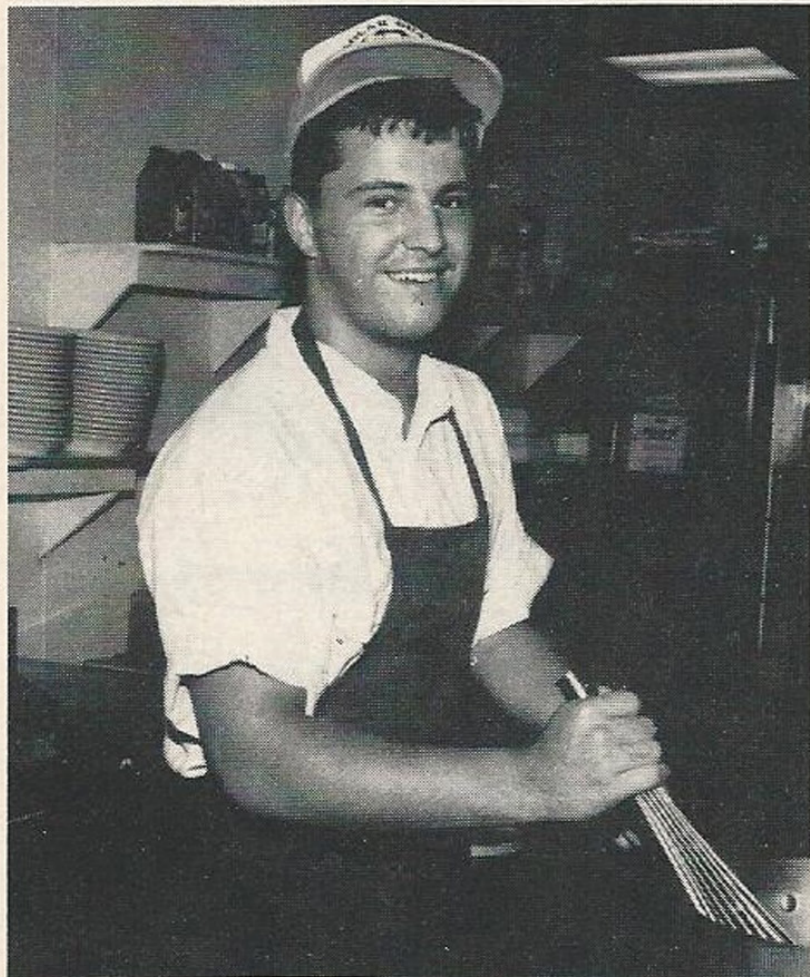
Although she returned to her position



Spotlight Photo

**Richard (Rich) Arslanovski prepares many of his father’s famous recipes.**

as production manager at Pepperidge, she couldn’t seem to get her strength back and Otto constantly worried about the long hours she was working. After many conversations, the family decided to chance everything and open their own restaurant. Chris’ mother and stepfather, Katie and Ken Casteel live in Joshua and the Arslanovskis had visited them often. They loved Texas and decided to open their place here.



Spotlight Photo

**Richard (Rich) Arslanovski prepares many of his father's famous recipes.**

as production manager at Pepperidge, she couldn't seem to get her strength back and Otto constantly worried about the long hours she was working. After many conversations, the family decided to chance everything and open their own restaurant. Chris' mother and stepfather, Katie and Ken Casteel live in Joshua and the Arslanovskis had visited them often. They loved Texas and decided to open their place here.

"All the time we were making arrangements to move here," Chris smiles, "we would say when we get 'our place' we'll do this or when we open 'our place' we'll put that in it. So when we began trying to think of a name for our place, everyone said let's name it what we've been calling it for the past eight months — 'Our Place!'"

Chris came to Burleson in April of '86 and arranged for their present location at 225 Exchange, behind Braums, and the restaurant "Our Place" officially opened in October of last year.

The Arslanovski's four children have been instrumental in the success of the restaurant. Otto, Jr., 20, and Salina, 19,



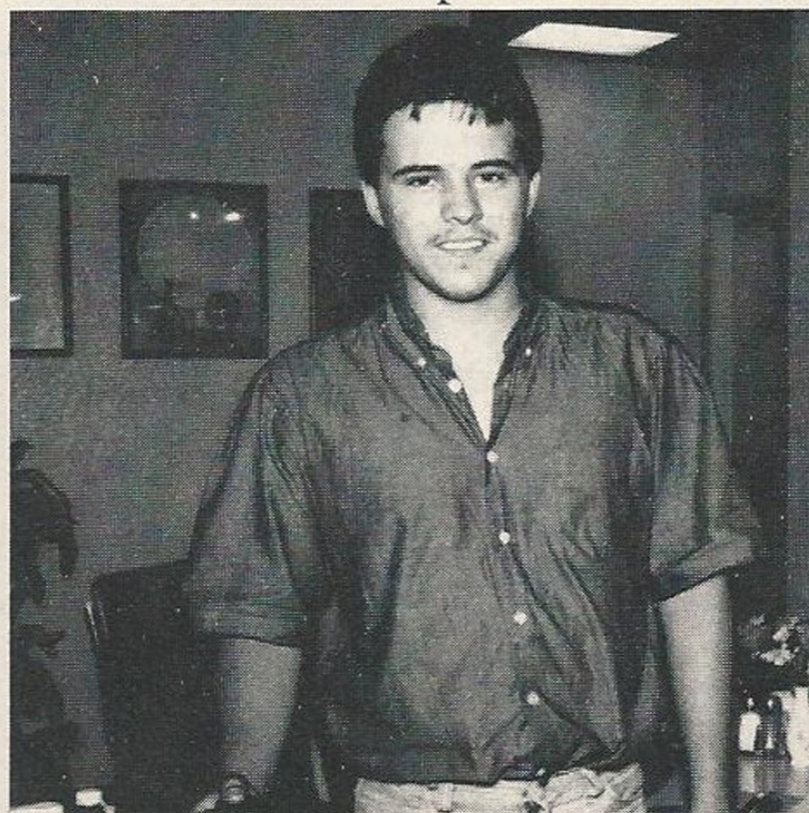
Spotlight Photo

**Salina Arslanovski makes Our Place customers feel at home whether she is taking their requests for meals or running the cash register.**

open at 7:00 a.m. and handle breakfast and lunch. Rich, 18, and Benji, 17, work through the dinner hours and close. Of course, Chris and Otto, Sr., are usually on hand all the time.

Intensely shy, Otto prefers the kitchen while Chris loves being out front, meeting people and making them welcome. Her gentle nature and sincere concern for others is immediately apparent. It is not unusual to hear her younger customers call her "Mom" and her older customers actually report in when they are ill or going out of town.

"We have one couple that dines with



Spotlight Photo

**The youngest Arslanovski, Benji, fills in wherever he is needed.**

*Continued on next page*



Spotlight Photo

**Salina Arslanovski makes Our Place customers feel at home whether she is taking their requests for meals or running the cash register.**

open at 7:00 a.m. and handle breakfast and lunch. Rich, 18, and Benji, 17, work through the dinner hours and close. Of course, Chris and Otto, Sr., are usually on hand all the time.

Intensely shy, Otto prefers the kitchen while Chris loves being out front, meeting people and making them welcome. Her gentle nature and sincere concern for others is immediately apparent. It is not unusual to hear her younger customers call her "Mom" and her older customers actually report in when they are ill or going out of town.

"We have one couple that dines with us every day," grins Chris. "One day they didn't come in and we all panicked because we knew she had a bad heart. After discussing it and at the risk of being considered nosey, we called them just to be sure they were okay. As it turned out, he was ill. Now, whenever they are not going to be in, they call us and let us know."

Chris' soft-spoken, good humor encourages one to relax, have another cup of coffee and just enjoy the pleasant, quiet atmosphere of Our Place.



Spotlight Photo

**Our Place waitress Fran Baker serves Leo Dickerson, Jr., his family and sister Cindy Miller at right.**

"I don't think I have ever been so proud of my kids as I have been since we opened the restaurant," smiles Chris. "They've never had to work before, so this hasn't exactly been a picnic for them and, of course, like all young people, they'd rather be somewhere else. But I don't know what we would do without them."

"A family business really brings a family closer together," she noted. "We all depend so much on one another and the kids know that if they don't carry their weight, then someone else will have to work twice as hard. When one of them has a date, the others often pitch in and pull a double shift so that one can be off. They are very careful to let me rest and I've recovered from the bout with encephalitis with no apparent ill effects."

Our Place has the distinction of being the only restaurant in Burleson that serves breakfast any time of the day. Otto's homemade soups have to be tasted to be believed and Chris says that the large servings of everything come from Otto's European background.

I think Salina summed it up one day when I took my Dad there for breakfast and he commented on how much he enjoyed dining there. Salina smiled her contagious smile and said, "We want everyone to feel at home in Our Place."



Spotlight Photo

**Katie Casteel takes an order from diners in Our Place.**