



## Lavern Carroll

(May 25, 1930 - June 6, 2017)

Vern Lester Carroll was born in Hot Springs, S.D., May 25, 1930, the oldest of the seven children of Glenn D. Carroll and Evelyn Gamber Carroll, both lifelong residents of Custer County, S.D.

Vern and all his siblings, Bernard, Marvin, Wayne, Earl, Beverly and Arlene, grew up on the family homestead at the “headwaters” of Carroll Creek, on what has been for a century Carroll Creek Road, a few miles northwest of Pringle, S.D., where all seven attended grade school.

In May 1945, at age 15, Vern moved to Custer, S.D. in preparation to attend Custer High School in the fall, and got a job at the *Custer County Chronicle*, then owned by South Dakota Congressman (later Senator) Francis H. Case. At the *Chronicle*, Vern learned the printing trade, and became a skilled linotype operator while he was in high school.

At Custer High School, Vern met Joy Whittecar, daughter of lifelong Custer County residents Ethel Cobb Whittecar Bailey and Ralph Whittecar, who had perished in a buffalo stampede during the Custer State Park Buffalo Roundup in 1938. Vern and Joy graduated from CHS together in the class of 1949. The next year, they attended Black Hills State Teachers College in Spearfish, S.D., where Vern worked as a printer and linotype operator for the *Queen City Mail*. Joy and Vern married on June 24, 1950, the day before the Korean War broke out.

Vern continued at the *Chronicle* until he was drafted into the Army in July 1952. The couple moved to Junction City, Kan., while Vern served his two-year hitch at nearby Ft. Riley. He trained as a foot soldier, but a good linotype operator was hard to find, and Vern was assigned to work in the Ft. Riley printing plant during the Korean War. While in the Army, Vern studied photography and he learned both the photo engraving and offset printing processes.

When Vern left the service, he and Joy returned to Custer, and started the business that became Carroll Photo. With additional responsibilities as the paper’s news photographer and photoengraver, Vern continued his work with the *Chronicle*, and Carl Sundstrom, who had purchased the paper from Congressman Case as of Jan. 1, 1947. Vern was with the *Chronicle* until 1960, when he and Joy joined Jay and Bernadine Evans to start a new local newspaper, the *Custer Weekly*.

In 1965, Vern and the *Custer Weekly* won a special award from the South Dakota Press Assoc. for the Custer Hospital story, an extended photojournalism project that covered the development and construction of the hospital, from conception through groundbreaking, through the hospital’s opening and into day-to-day operation. Vern accepted the award, and was elected vice-president of the association during the SDPA meeting in Sturgis, S.D., that year.

By the time the *Custer Weekly* ceased publication in the 1970s, Carroll Photo was a burgeoning operation. Vern and Joy expanded the studio and added a printing operation in the years after they left the newspaper business.

Primarily a news photographer in the early years, Vern covered civic events, human interest stories and local disasters, rushing to the scene every time the fire whistle blew or the telephone rang. Notable among the countless local fires he documented were the Custer Lumber Co. and feldspar mill fires, as well as forest fires throughout Custer County.

Vern took hundreds of pictures of the Pageant of Paha Sapa and the Gold Discovery Days parades and rodeos and hundreds more of local construction projects, such as the ill-fated Big Rock Tramway in the 1960s. He documented progress at Crazy Horse Memorial from the early 1950s into the early years of the 21st century. Vern's pictures of CHS sporting events, theatrical productions and many other extracurricular groups and events, appeared in the Chronicle, the Weekly and the Custer High School annual over the decades.

Vern's primary subjects were the people of Custer County. Over the decades, he photographed hundreds of weddings and he and Joy took thousands of individual and family portraits, including for many years, the annual "packet" photos of Custer County schoolchildren and portraits of graduating seniors. Throughout the Black Hills summers, Vern was called to photograph family and class reunions and various groups meeting at Outlaw Ranch, Camp Bob Marshall and other local and regional venues.

Vern was an active member of the American Legion, the Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce and the Jaycees and he worked on the Gold Discovery Days organizing committee for many years. A 33-degree Mason, Vern performed the Masonic funeral rites all over the Black Hills. Soon after Silver Spur Lanes went up next to the family home on Custer Avenue in the mid-'60s, he became an avid, high-average bowler and enjoyed competing in league bowling and in tournaments.

Joy and Vern celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a reception at the Skyway on June 24, 2000, attended by dozens of family members and longtime friends. Five years later, they sold Carroll Photo and retired in March 2005. Joy died in October of that year.

Vern died June 6, 2017, at Rose Haven, just outside Custer, where he had been living for the past couple of years. He was 87.

Vern and Joy are survived by their children, Kyra, Kevin, Curtis and Bruce, all of whom graduated from Custer High School in the 1970s and went on to earn college degrees; grandchildren; sisters, Arlene (Harold) Flack and Beverly (Ben) Carlson; sister-in-law, Maggie (Marvin) Carroll; and a great many nieces, nephews and cousins.