



From War to War - But Not Alone Anymore:

The Story of Pavlo Smaha

"Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you!" -Isaiah 46:4

Pavlo Smaha's life began in the shadow of one war - and, at 80, he now lives through another.

He was born on March 8, 1945, in the small village of Kamianka in the Lviv region, just as World War II was drawing to a close. The war had left Ukraine in ruins. Cities and villages lay in rubble, and more than 20 million lives had been lost. Hunger, loss, and hardship filled the air.

Pavlo never knew his father, who was killed in the war. His mother, unable to care for him, entrusted him to an orphanage. Life there was far from easy - there was little food, few clothes, and no comfort. *"It's good that they at least taught us to read and write,"* Pavlo says with a faint smile, though he remembers how the children often fought over bread or a warm jacket.

At 18, Pavlo left the orphanage and joined the ranks of builders who were desperately needed to rebuild the country. He traveled from city to city, laying bricks, repairing homes, and helping raise walls where war had left emptiness. On one of these sites, he met Stefania — a painter and plasterer with a gentle laugh and a determined spirit. They married in 1972, settled in Lviv, and were blessed with two sons, Volodymyr and Petro.

Like many families in the Soviet era, they lived modestly. Pavlo worked hard — so skilled at bricklaying that people often called on him to help build private homes. In the 1990s, after Ukraine gained independence, churches long destroyed under the Soviet regime began to rise again.

Pavlo, who had been taught all his life that God did not exist, found himself helping to rebuild seven churches. That work quietly opened the door to questions about faith.

But life dealt cruel blows. Both sons fell into drugs and crime, ending up in prison. There, they contracted tuberculosis. Both died shortly after their release. Losing their children broke Pavlo and Stefania's hearts. Stefania's health declined, and in 2015, she too passed away.

At 70, Pavlo found himself completely alone. His pension barely covered food and utilities. To pass the time and keep loneliness at bay, he wandered the streets, sat in parks feeding pigeons, and tended to flowerbeds outside his apartment building.

One day, he was spotted sitting at a bus stop near the House of God church — unkempt, thin, and wearing worn-out clothes. Pastor Oleksandr Savchenko introduced himself, bought him groceries, and invited him for tea. (House of God church is a long-time HART partner.)

That conversation was the start of a friendship — and a new chapter in Pavlo's life. Since then, the church family has been looking after him. They cook meals, clean his apartment, wash his clothes, cut his hair, and help with everyday needs. Pavlo has found warmth, dignity, and community again.



He has a gentle, quirky sense of humor. On his balcony, he keeps a flock of pigeons he calls his *"family,"* talking to them every morning. He hides bread under his pillow and clothes in his bed — habits formed in the orphanage when nothing was safe unless it was hidden. Sometimes he repeats the same story several times in a day, always with the same sparkle in his eyes.



Now, at 80, Pavlo worries about his country once again at war. *"I was born during a war,"* he says quietly, *"and it seems I may leave this world during a war."*

Yet his heart is filled with prayer for Ukraine and for the soldiers on the front lines. He reads the Bible with church members and talks about the home God has prepared for him — a place with no pain, no sorrow, and no loneliness.

Pavlo smiles and says, ***"Jesus is also a builder. He built the whole universe... and now He is building a home for me."***

Today, Pavlo is no longer invisible or forgotten. **Thanks to the kindness of people like you,** he has warm meals, clean clothes, and a community that loves him. Your generosity makes this hope possible. Every visit, every meal, every word of encouragement reminds elderly Ukrainians like Pavlo that they matter — that their lives are still precious in God's eyes.

Thank you for being an important part of Pavlo's story.

