

I'm Donna Chernin. Today, we are interviewing Dan Pavlovitch, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. Thank you, Mr. Pavlovitch, for participating in this important project.

It's my pleasure.

I think that we'll start out, if you don't mind, by getting a little bit of information about what your life is like today and your family situation.

Certainly. Right now, I think my life is in fairly good shape. I have been married for 32 years. We have two boys, our baby is 25. I work. I'm trying to take some more time to enjoy some of the things, as opposed to doing things as a workaholic, because we've had friends that keep having heart attacks and dropping off like flies. And--

What do you do?

I am involved with the distributorship of paints and paint sundries. I also like to work with wood. For about 12 years, I have been involved with stained glass. And that's basically it.

So you have one son that's 25. And the other child is--

Yeah. They're both musicians. One lives in San Francisco. And he's running a computer department for a law firm. And he's been trying to put together a band off and on-- well, actually, he's put together about three or four bands, none of which have worked satisfactorily because of the laid back attitude that it seems to be prevalent on the West Coast.

And Joey, our younger son, is also a musician. He plays bass. And he plays both jazz-- and also he's involved with a group called The Echoes that play music of the '60s. And they have a nice following around this town.

Great. Does your wife work?

No. She's not. She did when we first got married until we had the kids. And then, no, she hasn't worked since-- no, I shouldn't say that. She has gotten involved with a few things. She worked for Fairmount-- it was an art center-- and that sort of thing for a while.

Where do you live?

In Cleveland Heights.

OK. All right.

And we have been in Cleveland now since 1963. And we found out that Cleveland, in particular Cleveland Heights, is a great place to raise a family. I don't know how I would have felt had I come here as a teenager. But I think it was a nice place to raise a family. We were in a terrific school system. And we met some people and developed friendships that are very solid and very basic and consider ourselves very fortunate.

That's good. You are fortunate. And it's going to be a real amazing story that you're going to tell. I think that we'll start with what your life was like before you became aware that there was a war going on.

Oh, OK.

You could tell us--

Well, first of all, I'm 56 years old. So I was born in 1928. I was born in Ploiesti, Romania. My father was involved with the oil industry. He was an engineer. And he worked for an American company that did drilling and also sold equipment in the-- this was in Ploiesti, which is-- actually, it's probably around 30, 40 miles away from the main oil fields in that

area.

And I have two sisters who are still alive. Both my parents are dead now. And my life as a child, or up until the point that war broke out in 1939, was basically a reasonably happy one.

My father earn a good living. I mean, we're very comfortable. And we were raised in the, I consider it, very unusual for time and place type of circumstance.

Why is that?

Well, first of all, I think this may help things or illustrate this a little bit. I am the product of what was considered then a mixed marriage. That is my father was a Sephardic Jew and my mother was an Ashkenazi Jewish.

That was mixed marriage then?

Oh, my God, yes. And my grandfather on my father's side, who died before I was born so all I knew was just stories about him, he was very much disliked by the Jewish community because in his heyday, which would have been probably in the '20s or early '30s, tried to do something that was just unheard of. And it was not palatable to anybody. And that was trying to get members of clergy-- that is Christian and Jews-- together. Right.

That's radical for the time

And the Jewish community didn't like him at all for that because the attitude then was we stay on our side of the fence, they stay on their side of the fence. And although there was no ghetto, I mean physical or geographic ghetto as such, but this was the attitude. Also--

Excuse me, was this Romania?

Yeah.

So it was all there. OK.

Mm, hmm. And the other thing was that-- and this perhaps will illustrate the kind of an environment that I was raised in. My grandmother on my father's side-- that was the rabbi's wife-- who lived with us, her attitude on the dietary laws was that it was far more important what came out of one's mouth than what went into it.

[LAUGHTER]

OK?

That's great.

So--

Was she the rabbi's wife?

Mm, hmm. Right.

So your grandfather was a rabbi?

Yes.

And he was the one who was trying to get everything ecumenical arranged?

Yes.

That was really radical, for a rabbi especially.

For those times and for the place. Because don't forget this was in the Balkans in the '20s and '30s.

So she believed that--

Well, she felt that was more important to help implement this type of thing while we observed the holidays and the traditions and so on. I don't remember exactly when, but once we were old enough to understand the traditional things-- well, in the subject of the dietary laws-- were explained to us as strictly as a health measures to prevent people from dying in spite of themselves. And all of these things were explained to us as traditions, but that's all they were, as opposed to the very Orthodox view, which is sometimes taken-- I mean there is no grays at all.

Sure.

That kind of a thing. So it was really a very enlightened household that we were raised in. We were exposed to all sorts of music, literature. I don't recall anybody ever saying to me, no, you're too young to know this or ask this and that sort of thing, which is something that we have tried to do. And I think we have done with our kids.

Did religion play an important role?

Not-- when you say an important role, insofar as in terms of going Friday evenings for the Sabbath services and on Saturday to the temple? No. I remember-- this is when I was just six, seven, eight, nine years old, or something like that, during the high holidays, the kids used to play in the yard of the synagogue. And then they were being dragged into for the so-called important parts.

And there was something that just came to mind. In the town of Ploiesti, where I was born and lived up until I was about 13 years old, in the synagogue that my father belonged to, there was one man, whose name is not really important. But anyway, he was a jeweler by trade. And everybody, including myself, who was an eight or a nine-year-old, had heard more than once of what a thief he was.

And I remember one Yom Kippur when I was dragged in the afternoon when there was the beating of the chest, it occurred to me that here is this man begging to be forgiven for all the thievery he has done all year, and starting tomorrow or day after, thinking that he has a clean slate, then he'll do the same thing all over again, which I found rather ironic. And I think to a certain extent at that point, I rebelled against organized religion as such.

I remember-- this, I'm jumping things-- I did not want to go into a synagogue or a temple. I think based on that experience as an eight or nine-year-old, I felt that if I wanted any communion or anything, I can do it at a time of my choosing in a place of my choosing. In other words, I didn't feel that I have to go at a certain time at a certain place.

And my mother felt-- and it gave her a lot of comfort going and observing the holy days. And I'm thinking about when I was in my 20s or so. She asked me if I would go with her to occasionally to a service. And my first attitude, no, I don't. And then I sort of realized that it was not much of a price to give a few hours out of one's life occasionally to someone that something like this was important, or something like that.

Well, looking back at your parents, you know, I know your story is really a powerful one. And it seems that you're-- I'll have to hear about both your parents. But were you aware of certain personality strengths about them at the time? Like that you had a particularly spunky and strong mother?

Yeah, actually, they were both fairly strong people. And--

What did your father do?

My father was a mining engineer. Yeah. And he was more reserved than my mother. In retrospect, I can understand it. He lost his father when he was in his early 20s. He lost a younger brother and a younger sister.

What-- were these two illnesses?

Yeah, this was just illnesses. And then I think he found himself in his early 20s having to support his mother. And I imagine a certain amount of bitterness. I really don't know what his relationship was with his brother and sister, although I suspect it was fairly OK I would guess. So he was rather reserved by comparison. He was very loving, very attentive, very caring, very devoted.

My mother was the second child of a family of seven and completely different from her brothers and sisters in terms-- she was the kind of a person that always took control of things. Or if something needed to be done, she always did it, and that sort of a thing, as opposed to most of her brothers and sisters took a more passive attitude towards things. And later on, I think as we move chronologically, it's really thanks to her and her initiative and her guts that I and my two sisters are alive today. This is-- I'll go over this after, how we got out of the camp and so on.

And she was also very business minded, although my father, as I've said before, generated a very good living. Once the kids-- that is myself and two sisters-- were old enough, she opened up a dress store.

Oh.

Yeah.

Oh, my goodness, now that was unusual, wasn't it then?

I suppose for-- and this would have been in the late '30s.

On her own, opened up a business, a dress shop?

Yeah. And then I remember-- well, she and my dad, they would go on shopping tours and buying stuff in other countries, in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and so on, which I mean physically it's a hop, skip and a jump. It's like going like from here to Cincinnati, you know. So that wasn't that much of a deal. But she felt, first of all, that she wanted to do it, and she did it.

That's wonderful. Did your sisters work? Like how old were they? Younger than you? A lot younger or--

One sister is three, about three years younger than I am. And then my younger sister is 12 years younger than I am.

Oh, so there was a big-- 3 and then 12 years. OK.

Yeah.

Well, do you remember-- did you have close friends who were Christians in your community? Or--

Yes. Again, I never thought-- and I'm going back, honestly, as far as I can go back-- I never thought of people other than they were I liked them or I disliked them for whatever I thought was valid to me, obviously. But I never-- I don't recall thinking of people in terms-- of course, I know the difference between boys and girls. But I never thought of people in terms of whether they were Jewish or non-Jewish or whatever they were.

That was unusual, wasn't it, for that time? It seemed like the Jewish communities were more segregated--

Well, as I've said, I think that I was raised in a very enviable atmosphere.

Also, it seems liberal, more progressive than maybe somewhere else.

I don't know that I would think of it in along those terms, that it's liberal or something. To me, it was just something this is how it was. And it never occurred to me as-- I remember some people here in Cleveland, just to digress for a moment, where they lived what I consider a ghetto in University Heights. And they had a girl that was going to a camp. And as it turned out, this particular camp was a non, quote, "Jewish" camp. And she was very unhappy because she didn't think she would find somebody that she would like.

I mean as opposed to the way, we were raised it was just not a question that you were or you weren't. Or pretty much people stood on their own. And they took their chances that had nothing to do with anything else.

Did you notice any antisemitism?

Oh, of course. Of course.

But you just weren't real concerned about it.

You were concerned. But that did not mean that everybody that was not Jewish was a rotten person, or that anybody who was Jewish was a marvelous person. Because no matter how you slice humanity, as I've indicated to you before, I became very painfully aware that nobody has an exclusive on anything, whether it's attitude, intelligence, humor. So that you have situations that they are, at least in my term of reference, human beings, and they behave in what I consider as acceptable behavior, or they're not.

After that, if it happens to be, and they have to be, shall we say, identified, whatever they happen to be, that's very secondary. It certainly doesn't take preference.

That sounds good. Did you think of yourself with any special qualities, when you look back, as being outgoing or shy, or assertive?

I don't think I ever thought about it one way or another. I remember our house was the place that everybody came to. In other words, the kids from school used to come to our house. And we used to play football, which is soccer, and whatever, you know, depending on at what point in one's life one is talking about.

Probably the reason for that was my parents encouraged that, as opposed to I remember some people that lived close to us, their house was the kind of a thing that nobody ever went into. Or there were rooms in the house that nobody went into unless, quote, "company" came. That was not the household that we lived in. The house was there to be lived in and that's on.

It sounds like it was a really good background, a nice, pleasant--

I thought so. I mean I was comfortable with it. And I have no feelings at this point that I wish that it had been different.

When did you start to notice things changing in your life or that a war was going on?

Actually, I imagine one was very much aware of things, especially, excuse me, in Europe in the middle '30s unless one was a complete blithering idiot. No, what I'm saying-- OK, even at the age of 8 or 9, and I don't consider myself unusual for the times, but I was aware that Ethiopia had been invaded in '36, the Sudetenland in '38, and so on and so on and so forth.

So even at that age you knew.

Oh, yeah

So you must have been--

So that it became apparent that we were heading towards something. I'm sure that we were all hoping that it would not. But I remember very vividly in September of 1939, there, they don't have Labor Day so that school does not start after Labor Day. It started-- it was the end of August. And I was walking from school to home for lunch.

And there was a store-- it was basically a bookstore-- the means of communication at that time, of course, there was radio and basically newspapers. This is how you got your information. Also, if there was something very, very important, back in this bookstore, they would make hastily a sign and sort of paste it, like letting people know what was going on, in this case was that war, that Germany had invaded Poland. This was September 3, I believe, 1939.

At that time you were 11 years old?

12.

12 years old.

Yeah. The one thing, though, that I remember was that for the first time I couldn't eat lunch that day.

You were really that upset?

Yeah. I didn't know that I was upset. But I just couldn't eat lunch.

Did you kind of have a feeling looking back that something it meant something really bad for people--

Not good.

You knew that. I have to think that you were pretty aware and your family was also because 12-year-old, that's pretty young to take that knowledge and--

It was just-- probably became aware of it or feeling that something has happened, and probably the feeling that before it would get better, it would get a hell of a lot worse.

Did that happen right away for you in Romania or not right away?

Not for a few months, although what had happened shortly thereafter-- and again, little things that happened. Right after the war started, it was a blitzkrieg. The whole thing ended up in a matter of weeks.

And shortly after the start of the war, there were lots of refugees from Poland. And there was an appeal made, I guess probably by newspapers, by the local authorities that if anybody had any extra rooms where they could put people up and that sort of a thing, if they would make these places available. And we had some extra space. And probably something was sent in to the authorities, you know, that there was this space available.

And I remember a man coming. And he spoke German because we didn't speak Polish. And he-- yeah, he spoke German. And my parents did too. And--

Did you speak German?

Some. I was raised speaking Romanian, English, French--

Why?

And then I picked up German and four other languages. But that's later on. And there was no question, in other words, of payment for room and whatever in our household. And he asked if we were Jewish.

Huh.

And said yes. Or my mother said yes. And he didn't want any part of it. So to a 12-year-old, that was a little bit strange, because I was aware of-- I mean obviously this particular person could have used a help, you know.

Sure.

It wasn't a question that we were asking for payment for using the room or the meals or whatever it is. It was just something I suppose my parents felt that they wanted to do. And because of the accident in nature that this particular family, ours, happened to be Jewish, he didn't want any part of it.

Oh, my God. So where did he go? Do you know what happened to him?

I have no idea.

You probably don't care.

In retrospect, I don't give a damn.

Don't care is right. That's amazing.

There comes a point that who cares?

Well, so life went on normally for a while at that time?

Well, what happened-- and again, politically in Romania, there were many political parties, which is not uncommon in a lot of the Balkan countries. And there was a group called the Iron Guard, headed by-- his name was Codreanu, who was the head of the party, who was a neo-fascist group.

To give you an idea, they had a newspaper. And on the masthead, like for instance, in Chicago, the Tribune has what is "The World's Greatest Newspaper" or something like that. Anyway, they had a thing which rhymed in Romanian.

But basically, what it said-- and that's a literal translation but it does not rhyme in English-- they were hustling for donations and something, for instance, like if you gave a penny, a Jew died. And if you donated \$1, a kike died. I mean that was-- it was very much out in the open and so on. As a matter of fact, there was a Romanian clergyman that I think was just sent to Portugal. He was an editor of that paper then.

A clergyman?

Well, he came here and he became a clergyman and a bishop in a matter of two years. That's-- so then there was a change in government. And German troops started coming into Romania ostensibly to train the Romanian army.

About how long was this after the beginning of the war?

Let me try to think. My guess this might be several months. This was late in the fall.

And you continued going to school and pursuing your normal--

Not normal. There was something-- things that happened.

Like what?

I was at that time in sixth grade, or the equivalent of sixth grade. The way school in Romania was broken up you had four years of elementary. Then you had a Gymnasium. And then from there you went to the university. In--

Was this a public school? Or was it--

No.

--Jewish?

No, no, no. It was-- there was a tuition that was being paid I remember. So therefore, it wouldn't make it public.

Was it mixed both Christian and Jewish?

It was basically-- I'm sure there were a few-- no, I think there were three Jews in the class.

That's all?

Yeah.

Hmm.

Because I remember when they were having a religion class, we had special dispensation. We could go out in the yard.

So I would think it was unusual for you to go to school like that. And probably most of the Jewish kids were at--

Well, again, the first four years, it was a Jewish school, or it was supported by the Jewish community or something. And when the changeover took place in terms when the Iron Guard became very prevalent in the government, the three Jews that were in the class, we were kicked out. We could not go to that school.

And that, of course, happened to all of the Jewish students in all the other schools. So then the Jewish community tried and organized as fast as they could a school, or in other words, classes above the fourth grade, which was all that they had handled up to that particular time. And they were trying to find space. And as I recall it was back to the building where they had had the elementary school. And this went on for a very short period of time.

There were things I remember. After the German troops came in, there were some of the stores that are owned by Jews, there were the Star of David, you know, soaped or whitewashed with Jude on it and that sort of thing.

Do you think this was done by the Christians in the Romanian community or by the Germans?

I would guess it was probably done by the Romanians. If I were to make somewhat of a generalization, there are probably more people-- this again, and the people that I remember and it's somewhat-- it's very vague because of the time. And the only people that I knew somewhat better were people that were friends of my family.

And among them, most of them-- actually the vast majority of them-- turned out to be very decent, although the tide or the political winds had changed. I'm talking, I guess it would be more significant here, the non-Jewish friends of my family.

Were kind?

They were decent people. I mean so it was not just because the political winds had changed, they did not.

Oh, that was nice. So you had support.

Yeah. I think so.

Well, then what was happening? Then you had to go to a separate school.



Right.

So there must have been a feeling, like rumblings, that there was trouble and it was going to affect you.

Oh, there wasn't rumblings. I mean you were aware of the problems and that sort of a thing, of course. No, there was no question about it at all. And--

Did it start to get worse after a short period of time?

I would say so probably. Then what happened to my father, who was running this American drilling company, one of the people that he had working for him-- and his name was Caneff. There are certain things that I do not forget-- had a brother-in-law, who was in the Iron Guard. So what they did-- this is-- it would have been in the spring of 1940-- let me try to think. This is 1941. It would have been-- yeah, this would have been in spring of 1940.

Basically what happened, they came, as it's been shown and depicted many times, in the middle of the night. They took my father away. And this is the Iron Guard.

Did they wake you all up or just quietly--

I didn't hear it. I didn't know anything about it till morning. And what they did essentially, they said they wanted him to resign in favor of Caneff. And if not that they would kill his wife and the three kids. So he did.

Now, there is also another little thing, not a complication, but another additional bit of information here. My father was a Yugoslav subject. So he tried to--

Appeal to--

--connect or call the consulate, which is in Bucharest. And they wouldn't let him.

Was he born in Yugoslavia originally?

Yes. And what happened that within the next day, we were put on a train under guard with just a suitcase and the equivalent-- at that time, 200 lei was probably maybe \$5, \$6, \$7 in buying power then, and put across the border into Yugoslavia.

Now, this was in one day's notice?

Yeah.

But he did say-- he did what they wanted him to do.

Sure.

So instead of killing the family they were just going to take you away?

Right. And as I said, they wouldn't let him contact the Yugoslav consulate. And they just-- I mean physically, we were put on a train and this was under guard and put across the border into Yugoslavia.

One suitcase for the whole family or one suitcase per person?

No, one suitcase apiece.

Now, was this happening to everybody who was Jewish in your community?

Well, first of all, the vast majority of the people, the Jews, they were indigent.

Oh.

OK, so this was a little bit different.

So you stood out.

OK, so this was--

I don't mean to interrupt. Was your father actively in politics? Was that causing a problem or--

No.

So it was more that he was prominent or not--

I think the main reason--

--indigent.

--was that this man that was working for him kind of I think wanted a job. And I suppose by putting him across the border that would create less of a potential problem. I never really stopped to think about it more than along those terms.

So then you were en route to Yugoslavia?

Yeah, we were. And then we ended up in Belgrade. And again, there was a problem, of course, of money. And my father looked up a friend of his that he had gone to school with who was a banker. And the bank was in a, I suppose, a relatively new building. It occupied the main floor and then there were 6 or 7 other stories that were apartments. And they had an empty apartment there, which was just-- I suppose would be called today a studio apartment. So we went in there rent free because there was no money.

All your money was left there.

Yeah. There was no chance of getting anything other than, as I said, the equivalent of 200 lei, which was really just a few dollars we had. And then my father trying to find some sort of a job. So it was a pretty rough time.

And I mean even things which were, quote, "new" or novel to us, I remember-- this was 1940. So there was a Shirley Temple movie that come out. I think it was the Bluebird of Happiness. Or was it? I think--

It sounds familiar.

And the other thing that was also novel, it was shown in a place that I had not seen before. Meaning it was a restaurant, you could eat there and watch a movie--

Oh, I had never seen that.

Which was-- right. This was-- but we obviously couldn't afford it. We couldn't go. So it was literally overnight one's, to borrow today's term, lifestyle was changed drastically.

Did you feel that you could go back home eventually and find that money? It was in a bank. Or did you realize then that was it.

No, we realized that was it. That there was nothing more that could be done. Also, my grandmother was still there.

In Romania?

Yeah, his mother, which she came to Yugoslavia about a month, month and a half later.

And did she stay with you?

Yeah, of course.

What about your mother's parents?

My mother's parents, her mother died in 1935. And her father was in Romania. He was born in Romania. Now, also there's a side thing about my mother's father around that time, that is shortly or I'm not exactly sure how many months before we were kicked out of Romania, the Iron Guard had raided a small synagogue, which he was a member. And for, again, I can't possibly think of any reason why other than just because they were Jewish, and they were held incommunicado. My mother tried to use whatever connections and people that she knew. And eventually, she got him out.

Your mother, she sounds like a credible woman.

Well, she is a very unusual person. And I think chronologically, as we move on, as to how we got out, it's quite unusual.

Amazing. So then you were saying you were-- wait, what point were we? We backtracked.

We're back-- at this point in time, we're in Yugoslavia.

Oh, you've lost your money.

Spring of-- yeah, there was hardly any. So I said, overnight literally, we changed from a very comfortable life to one where really one did not know where the next meal was coming, which was a little difficult. But again, maybe it's because of the inner strengths that had existed in the family and so on, I did not worry about it. I don't remember worrying about it. My father found some sort of work. I mean he was generating a little bit of money.

And historically, then what happened in the spring of 1940, the Italian forces were having a very rough time in Greece. So the Germans wanted to send some forces down south through Yugoslavia, which at that point was neutral. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was on his way to Berlin to sign some sort of agreement allowing German troops to flow south through Yugoslavia to help the Italians in Greece.

And then there was the military coup, bloodless. What had happened, Paul, who was the king, but he was a minor, so he had his uncle, who was a regent. And then with some of the military people, they took over the government. And they didn't want any part of it in terms of allowing the Germans to-- basically, the country and most of the politicians were pro-Allies, as opposed to Romania, which was predominantly-- they were pro the Axis, the Germans.

And I remember-- this was March 27, 1940-- everybody thought that we were going to get bombed by the Germans. It didn't happen until April 6 on a Sunday morning, early. And they overran the country within a matter of 10, 12 days. The city was badly bombed.

This was Belgrade?

In Belgrade, yes. And there were an awful lot of buildings that had burned because they dropped a lot of incendiary bombs. The building we were in was untouched. And they had a vault in the basement and so on. So then--

Were you in the basement-- when they were bombing, where were you?

Upstairs sleeping.

Upstairs.

I mean this was Sunday morning. But then we went down-- again, you have to remember that in Europe from the '30s, from the mid '30s and so on, the thing had been building up to the extent everybody knew about air raids. Everybody had gas masks. I mean, it used to go through this thing in school. You would have air raid drills, that sort of thing. So you were pretty much aware of what to do.

And as some of the buildings surrounding this particular building were either destroyed or burned or something, there were more and more people coming into the basement of this building. So again, in a matter of 10, 12 days, the whole country was overrun. And--

And your building was safe?

Pardon?

Your building was untouched?

It was untouched.

Huh.

Things also became drastically much more difficult because there was-- for a period of time, there was no electricity. There was no water. There was no power. So you would have to go in places, try to find where they were wells. And it's a wonder that we didn't die.

Because when you have a well that probably services a small number of people, and then everybody and his brother goes trying to take water from it, God knows what the condition of it. And of course, you don't think about these things. You just needed water.

And I remember there was wine. There was plenty of wine. The problem was just for the kids something to drink because the kids were little. And contrary to-- well, perhaps in France, the kids still drink a lot of wine. But there was a question of just finding something for the kids to drink. And by summer, my father was put in a labor camp.

Now, was this happening to other people around there? Where there many people that were hiding out like you?

We were not hiding out. We were out in the open. I mean we were not hiding at that point.

He was put in a labor camp, a place called Topovske Supe, which probably might have been some sort of a military compound. And to this day, we don't know what happened to him.

Never--

My mother tried to--

When you said goodbye, did you know he was leaving?

No. No.

Was it at night that he was taken--

In other words, what happened, they were just-- as most things were in Europe, you had to register with the police. So there is a record of who lives where and where you are and so on, even in neutral places like-- to digress for a moment-- in Turkey where I lived from 1943 till 1948 when I came to the States--

Oh, really.

--if I did not sleep at home one night, I had to inform the karakol, which is the police precinct, where I would be.

Now, was this--

That's inconceivable I mean to most Americans.

It is inconceivable. But was this for all people living in Turkey?

For non-citizens.

People who were not born or didn't--

Right. Because eventually what happened, and I'll go over that later on, we stayed in Turkey most of the time on a stateless basis, which I will tell you about as we go on.

So you had to register. So your father had to--

No, no--

Were you wearing badges--

No, my father-- where?

Were you wearing badges in Yugoslavia?

In Yugoslavia? Oh, yes.

So--

No, they were stars--

Armbands?

--here. Not armbands. There was front and back.

Was that only--

Yellow stars printed in black with the word Jude.

Was that in Romania too? Or just Yugoslavia when you got there?

No, just in Yugoslavia.

So then how did he get sent to labor camp?

All males had to report and they were put into a camp.

Every day they had to report? Or like said, there was a notice up--

No, they lived there.

Wasn't he living at home with you?

Yes. But there was a point that was-- my guess is probably June, July-- all the adult Jewish males were put in this camp, this work camp. And they were going out during the day doing God knows what. And they were coming back. And there was no communication.

They stayed at the camp?

Right.

So--

And then within a matter of two to three weeks, they were all-- like they all evaporated. They were sent someplace, no-- to this day, I don't know where.

You don't know what happened?

No.

It's like one day--

My mother tried. And eventually, when we got to Turkey, where at least we were in neutral territory, and time wise it wasn't that far. I mean it was from 1940 to 1943. And there were organizations-- don't forget this was still in the middle of the war. And there were some neutral people that were trying to get information and that sort of thing. They never found out where these people were sent from Topovske Supe.

Were there a lot of people?

Well, again, the only thing that I can-- I'd have to make an educated guess. In the camp where the women and children ended up, there were probably-- my guess is around 4,000 people. So that would probably mean between 1,500 to 2,000 Jewish males, adult males.

And they all disappeared.

Yes.

Oh, jeez. And those were-- these were mostly Jewish people?

They were all Jewish.

OK.

Oh, yes. No, that--

So he just disappeared. And you never heard. And your mother tried. And then what happened? Then you were living without him.

Then what happened? I remember, again, things that are pick spots, as it were--

What spots?

My mother was trying-- you're picking spots--

Sure, that's how you're remember it.

My mother in the process of trying to find out what had happened to my dad, her husband, there was also a curfew. So that-- that was probably getting September, October, because I remember it was 7 o'clock, and it was dark. And she should have been home by then, and she wasn't.

And, of course, things that ran through one's mind, usually it's a multitude of things. Number one, worried, afraid of what had happened to her. I am sure anger that here I am with two young kids. What am I going to do? I mean I was all of 13. So a combination of all of these things. And then fortunately, she did come. But it's well past curfew.

So you were really afraid.

Yes.

Understandably.

However, the point that I felt a greater fear than that comes much later, which I will tell you. And this came when we got out of the camp. And a long time after-- actually, when we were crossing from Bulgaria into Turkey in 1943. But I'll tell you about that later--

Later. OK, talk about-- you had more fear than that.

Yes.

So she came back late. And was she-- because she was looking for your father?

Right. And she was never able to find anything. The only thing she found there was a note written, something that if you come or something that I'll be all right, don't worry, that kind of a thing.

Well, then you just kind of fended without your father for a while.

Right.

And did life get worse or stay similar?

It was pretty lousy at that point. So there comes a point where lousier isn't that much worse--

Lousier.

Right. Now there comes a point where-- although it possibly-- and there were rough spots. But once they fall below a certain level, they have to get very, very bad to become noticeably worse.

And so then at one point, it had to get noticeably worse for your living situation to change.

Yeah, well, shortly after that, we were put in a camp. This was in December of 1941. As a matter of fact, it was the day before Pearl Harbor. And we were dragged into camp. This was the women and children, the Jewish population of Belgrade.

Overnight you were taken?

Yeah. And everybody had to report to a port-- it was like a park or something and just with a suitcase and that was that. The thing that's interesting, after having lived in Romania under very open antisemitism, in the Belgrade area where we were, it seems that the relationship between the Serbs and the Jewish population, which was rather modest in terms-- my guess is the population of Belgrade at that time might have been 250,000-- 300,000 people. But there were only maybe, my guess is 6,000 Jews. That is women, children, and men. So it was not a large Jewish population.

Small kind of.

Also, the vast majority of them had been there for a long, long time. In other words, they were not transients. Their parents had been, their grandparents and so on. Most of them were Sephardic. And they were the offshoots of the Inquisition. So they had settled there for a long, long time.

And the interesting part about it was, as opposed to the way that they were thought of in Romania, in Romania you were a Jew.

You were born there--

And then you might have been a Romanian citizen, but you were a Jew first. There in Belgrade, the Serbs, who were predominantly Greek Orthodox, thought of themselves as Serbs of Greek Orthodox religion. And the Jews were Serbs of Hebrew religion. But they were thought of first as Serbs.

Interesting difference--

As a national--

Instead of Jewish.

Right. They were not. In other words, the fact that they were Jewish was secondary.

Secondary, right. That's really interesting.

And again, for time and place, that was very unusual.

That's unusual to notice that too though at your age. You were only a teenager at that point.

Yeah, I was about 13.

Well, let's take a little break. And then we'll pick up right where we were talking about your leaving and being sent off.

This is Donna Chernin. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Dan Pavlovitch. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland Section.