

I'm Donna Chernin. Today we are interviewing Dan Pavlovitch, a Holocaust--

[KNOCKING]

Hold it. Hold it. Hold it.

Something's wrong.

I'm Donna Chernin. Today we are interviewing Dan Pavlovitch, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland section. Mr. Pavlovitch, right now we were talking about your being in Turkey in the years 1943 to '48 and the life that you had there. And in summary--

And in summary, it was-- most of it was fairly good. First of all, there was not the physical fear that I remember having. As I mentioned before, in Belgrade, after I got out of the camp, the various jobs that I had, one was as an office boy for UFA, which was the German film distributing agency. And my main job there really was cleaning up and getting there early in the morning and setting the fire, the stoves, starting the fires in the various stoves. And I remember distinctly that any time I heard a Gestapo wagon going in the general direction of where we lived, the fear that, yes, they have found out. They came to get us, kind of a thing.

On the other side of the coin, after I came to the States, which to me has given me the peace of mind, that knowing, barring an accident or something that one cannot foresee, that I would come-- if I go away, I come back, everything is going to be there.

That's a real good point.

And without having had the other side of the coin-- it's true, without knowing the other extremes, we cannot-- this may sound maudlin, but one cannot really appreciate the differences without having had the other extremes. And this is one of the things, most important thing to me in this country, is this peace of mind.

Peace of mind? Did you feel you had that in Turkey? Well, you were in Istanbul. Is that right?

Yeah, mostly in Istanbul.

So it was not as bad as Belgrade.

No, because there was always-- I am talking at least up until 1945, the first two, two and a half years that we were there. There was always the possibility that we would have-- we would be faced with the same thing, trying to-- they would be invaded by-- not invaded by the Germans, but that you would have to try to run away and trying to survive and that sort of a thing. Never really felt comfortable about it.

In retrospect, I don't think that I gave it that much thought. Part of it was also because of working for the Office of War Information. And I was making very good money and doing something that really enjoyed. Not most-- all of my friends were considerably older than I. I mean, I was a kid of, by that time, probably 17.

Were you living with your family?

Well, I had to get a small flat by myself because, when I was working in the early stages of the Office of War Information, the listening to the broadcast was being done outside of the city for reception purposes. They had had a building constructed, and they had various antennas so they could point at in the various-- in the various direction, the V-shaped antennas, so they can get better reception and, again, to get away from, probably, static or whatever that was in the city. So this was about maybe a half hour away from the city.

So we would all get picked up at the end of the tram, of the streetcar line, at about 6:00, 7 o'clock at night. And we didn't

get back until-- oh, normally the last car would leave to take back to the-- would go to the downtown probably around 2:00, 2:30 in the morning. And you know, normally if it got done early, you had to wait. And there was no way for me to get to where my mother and my sisters were living because they lived in [PLACE NAME]. By streetcar it would have been about 40, 45 minutes. And after midnight, there was no public transportation.

Nobody had cars in those days. So I had to find something very close to where the car would drop me off. And that's why. So I had my own place. And we had lots of fun. I mean, I enjoyed those-- or most of it was enjoyable.

Well, how then, did you leave Turkey?

Well, it was an idea-- as I mentioned before, I only had six years of formal education. And my mother thought, and I felt too, I wanted to get out of Turkey. I did not feel that I wanted to stay in Turkey forever. So then it was a question of trying to find some school that would accept me because I never had the equivalent of a high school diploma. And there were two schools, among the many that were written to, this was Roosevelt College in Chicago, and there was some military school in Auburn, Indiana, which never considered it for a moment.

Roosevelt was a very interesting place, insofar that it was organized by a group of teachers from the Central Y in Chicago in the mid '40s, who felt that no school should have a quota system, which of course, was prevalent in those days. So they felt that anybody who wanted and could afford an education should have it. So they started it with-- I think it was financial help from Marshall Field in Chicago and some other people. And that's how that school was started.

And were there many survivors of the Holocaust that were there?

I don't recall coming across one. There might have been.

Well then, you were accepted.

I never-- in other words, I never made a point to search.

Yeah. Well then, when you were accepted there, then did your whole family move over to-- emigrate?

No. I came alone in 1940. It was September of 1940.

'40?

'48 rather.

'48, right.

And then--

How old were you then, about 18?

I was 20.

20?

Yeah. And my sister, Coca, came, and she went to Grinnell College about a year or so later.

Where was that, Grinnell? Is that in Chicago?

In Iowa.

Iowa?

Yeah.

Oh, that's well known. That's a real good school in Iowa.

It's a fairly good school. Actually, the city of Grinnell, it's a very small town. And there are more kids in the school than there are citizens of the City of Grinnell. And then my mother and Doly, my kid sister, came here in 1952.

Where did they go for those four years?

Oh, they were all over the place. They were in Austria. They were in Germany. They were in Israel. They were in Canada. And then they came here.

How did your mother fend for herself? Did she always find jobs?

Like everything else, she always-- no, she-- either some job or buying things and selling things.

What did she finally do with those last two rings that were [CROSS TALK]--

I think one-- no, I'm sure-- one of them, my kid sister, Doly, has. It was a ring, oh, about the size of-- it's an oval shape that had a small diamond in the center and sapphires around. And Doly still has that ring. The other one probably was sold somewhere along the line.

And did they go to Israel in that period of time?

They were there for a short period of time.

Is that when Doly first--

It was there that my mother told Doly that she was Jewish. Which-- and then talking to Doly later and so on, it was no great surprise or no great shock.

It just didn't affect her that much?

No, not in the least.

Well, it's interesting to me. I'm curious. Did you-- you married a woman who's Jewish. And have you raised your children Jewish?

She happens to be, but it was not by design.

You didn't care that much then?

No.

And what about your sisters? What happened in their lives?

My sister, Coca, married, and she has two children. She's also divorced.

Did she marry a Jewish fellow?

Yes. And my sister Doly also is married, and they have two kids. He also happens to be Jewish.

But it wasn't that they felt--

I don't think so.

It could be, though. You never know.

In my particular case, it was never-- you know, it was not by design.

And you were going to school. Were you feeling separate from the students, or pretty much did you feel--

No.

--comfortable. I felt fairly comfortable. I mean, one of the things that sort of appalled me-- I'm going now back 1948. I was 20. There were a lot of ex-GIs at Roosevelt because it was not an expensive school to go. And they also had lots of night courses, so people could work and go to school at night. But as I mentioned, I said I was appalled at the fact that most people seem to parrot something that they had heard or read as opposed to having any thoughts of their own, which I felt, at least to me, it was a very strange thing.

Well, I'm thinking that you must have acquired, either by watching your mother or also maybe inheriting it, a lot of her spunk and her resourcefulness.

I have one fraction of 1% of my mother's energy.

Did she have a lot of energy?

Oh, tremendous energy.

I'm trying to picture her in my mind. What did she look like?

She looked-- she got a stripe of white hair right in the middle of her hair when she was in her mid 20s. She was a very striking woman, I think a good-looking woman. She looked very much like Ingrid Bergman. I happened to watch recently-- there was a two-hour thing, a biographical thing on PBS about Bergman, showing her from the early days in Sweden up until the time that she did Golda Meir. And there is a striking resemblance.

Well, heads must have turned when she walked places. And so did she get married?

In a way, yes. When my mother walked into a place, people knew it.

Was she tall, imposing?

Not very. No, I would say probably she was around 5' 6".

It was her manner? OK. Yeah.

Yes. Yes.

And did she ever remarry?

No. She felt she never wanted to. Probably it's because she was never sure that my father was dead because we never knew what happened. And I think until the very end, she was hoping against hope that he may show up or show up, something like that. So she never did remarry.

Well, did she live in Chicago with you, or in Iowa? What happened with the--

No, no, no. The only one that lived in Iowa was my sister, who went to school there at Grinnell. And then when she finished school there, she came to Chicago. My mother lived in Chicago from '52 until-- my guess would be in the mid '60s. And then she moved down to Florida with my younger sister, with Doly, who still lives in Florida.

With her family.

Yeah. And she died in-- I think it was 1968. She had cancer.

It had to be a real loss to you. It sounds like she was a remarkable woman.

Yeah. I'm sure it was. But the one thing that, again, I remember at the time of the funeral, of course, there is the sense of loss.

Because how old was she? 64, I think.

64. The thing that was very apparent to Coca, Doly, and myself, that we felt no remorse in terms like wish we had done this. Because we did what we did when we did it, and that was that. I mean, there was not none of this stuff-- that I wish I had done this, and I wish I had done that.

For her or anything?

For anybody. But in that particular case, of course, it referred to her.

It seems like she was very matter of fact. She was a survivor. So she just did what had to be done and kind taught you all to do that by example.

She was a survivor. She found great comfort in religion.

She did then?

Yes.

So in her Jewish religion?

Certainly. Again, going back now to early days in Romania, where I think I mentioned to you my grandmother's-- which was my father's mother's-- attitude towards the dietary things.

Yes.

My mother's feelings about that was that the tradition was very important to her because she attributed that importance to her mother's feelings. So it was like a tribute of some sort. So that, for instance, if she went places and they were serving meat, she was not hungry. I mean, as opposed to saying, "I don't eat because--" she just said she wasn't hungry, or she would just have a cracker or something like this. But-- and here again, where the modification came in. Shortly after Patsy and I got married, and we did not practice the dietary laws or any of those things, so that if my mother came, she would always eat something that was not interfering with her dietary beliefs.

But then later on, she came to the realization that it was-- it was more important to her to come to our house and have a meal with us and eat whatever we had, whether it was steak or something like that, than to abide by the dietary laws. So again, it was a matter of priorities.

And the goal-- the effect was the more important.

What became-- what becomes more important. And it was a modification of her beliefs. But she found great comfort in religion.

Now, in thinking about it, when she was doing a lot of her resourcefulness and saying that she was Christian, she was like how old? She was in her maybe late 20s, early 30s?

Well, no. She was born-- let's see. This would have been-- she would have been in her 30s. Yeah.

Amazing. Well, how do you feel that religion places-- is that an important part of your life today?

Basically, to me, not the ritualistic phase of it. I am a Jew. To me Judaism is not a religion. To me it's an ethical way of life. There are certain things that I will do, certain things that I will not do. Very early in bringing up our children, we made it very clear what is acceptable, what is not acceptable. They learned some of these things fairly early. And of course, like labor and management, there were constant negotiations. But there are certain things that they knew that they're just not acceptable.

Do you belong to a temple?

No. I did, and then I found that the pompous ass who was my religious leader was not acceptable anymore. So then we walked out of it. And the-- a 1984, we belonged to a Mr. and Mrs. club. And we received in the mail, "D'Lite Pavlovitch," which I thought was hilarious.

Oh, is that funny. "D'Lite Pavlovitch," yeah. So do-- I almost feel, while we're talking, that you don't identify as much as some other survivors would with having survived. There are groups that are-- there are people that are in groups, in organizations specifically for the survivors of the Holocaust.

Well, couldn't it be possible that they need the support?

I think that's what it is.

I think I've been very fortunate that whatever support I may have needed from time to time, it just came through, in the case of my wife Patsy, we've been married for 32 years, which have been terrific 32 years--

Oh, that's wonderful to hear.

--and a few friends that one has had over the years.

Was she American-born?

Yes.

So she had nothing-- no part of the Holocaust or anything.

No.

In fact, she was saying to me before we began this interview, that she has a stronger feeling against Germans than perhaps you do sometimes.

Well, I cannot and will not have anything other than on a one-to-one basis, for a very simple reason, because every place that I have been, I have found the whole gamut of humanity, from very good to very, very bad and anything else you want in between so that I cannot-- perhaps it takes a little bit more work to deal with people at those levels than to lump people together. But I cannot lump people together because of the things that have happened to me.

Yeah, such a range in countries and experiences.

Nobody has an exclusive on anything.

Yeah. Well, you said something about Israel. Before you mentioned that you don't really feel that much of an affinity towards the country in general.

No. Only because there are things that are going on there that we have all tried to avoid. And I just-- it's not the ambience that I would care to live under.

You mean, the fighting and unrest in Lebanon.

Yeah. And it's not the Lebanon. I am talking some of the things that are prevalent insofar between the various classes that are living in Israel. But again, all it is, they're just people who happen to be Jewish.

And living in Israel.

That's all. It's not any different.

To backtrack just a little bit, when you were studying in the United States at Roosevelt college, what subjects were you studying?

Oh, I suppose I took a number of general courses, anywhere from-- you name it, and then ended up in music.

Oh, music? What were you doing in music? Musician?

Primarily interested in writing and arranging.

And have you worked in that, doing that?

Oh, no. Actually, I gave it up shortly after we were married. Patsy's father was a concert pianist, and I used to study with him. And I used to practice, while working, two or three hours a day. And then it sort of tapered off. In the meantime, our kids became involved.

They've acquired-- yeah, it sounds like your children are the musicians. Yeah. And how did you get to Cleveland from-- was it from Chicago?

Strictly economics. I was working for a packaging company in Chicago. And then I decided to try freelance photography. And I am a good photographer, except that I realized-- or I found out, I should say, the hard way-- that when you are trying to do it commercially-- and I was trying to do it with the ad agencies without having the reputation, shall we say. It's one thing to do what you want to do when you want to do it, if you feel like doing it as an amateur, as opposed to when somebody is paying you for it and you have to do it on their terms, on their time, and so on. And it didn't work out financially.

So then I decided to go back in the industry in which I had acquired a certain proficiency, therefore commanding a reasonable salary. So I passed the word around, and I was offered two things around that time. One was with Mead in Atlanta as director of purchases, but it would have entailed a lot of traveling, which I did not want. To me, if I am away one day out of the year, that's one day too many.

Well, that's really nice to hear someone say that.

I don't like traveling.

[CROSS TALK] with your family.

Then I found-- there was a job here in Cleveland, which ended up rather on a sour note, without mentioning names. And then I left that about 10 years ago. Well,

When you came to Cleveland, did you go to any social services for help? Or-- it doesn't sound like you needed to do that.

No. Uh-uh.

Have you been back, or do you have any desire to return to Romania?

None whatsoever.

Or Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey?

No, not really. As I think I mentioned before, we took the kids with us on a trip. But this was to England and to France. Patsy likes England, Scotland more than any other place. And that's it. No, I have no desire to go any of these places.

Mr. Pavlovitch, when you look back, do you-- it seems as if your mother was the central force, and perhaps something kept you back.

Oh, if it weren't for her, I'm sure we wouldn't be alive today.

But there had to be things in your personality too. I mean, would you say, if you had to name a few qualities--

I don't-- in so far as-- in going back and considering how old I was, it was just, perhaps, just helping a little bit here and there, but she was the driving force, the motivating force of starting the whole thing and getting out of the camp and surviving and so on.

Do you think about those experiences often now?

Not often-- occasionally.

Are they painful? It doesn't sound that way from listening to you.

No. Not really, because I think they're counterbalanced by-- and I think, again, probably it's a defense mechanism-- by the fact that, A, I am alive, have had a reasonably good life since I have been in the United States. Sure, there's been the loss of my mother, my wife's parents. There are friends who have died. There are that sort of thing. But then again, that comes under the heading of, quote, "life."

Yeah, to everybody.

So I think, for sanity reason, one should try to accentuate the positive, as the old song goes.

That's a good attitude.

Otherwise, I mean, people tend to wallow in things. And it's counterproductive.

Well, do you feel that the experiences affected your life?

Oh, I'm sure they have.

Through the Holocaust and-- do you know how? Or how it's affected your philosophy?

I couldn't begin to tell you. I would have no idea what sort of a person I would be--

Otherwise.



--had I been under, quote, "normal circumstances." You know, been born, died in Ploiesti. I have no idea.

I mean, you're right.

I suspect, though, would have been to a-- or maybe I'd like to believe that would be somewhat what I am now, only because of the environment that I was born into and raised.

Which was unconventional at that time.

For that time, yeah. But as to insofar as to how-- it's one thing I learned a long time ago, not to play the "If" game because it's totally useless.

You sound so well-adjusted. It's fantastic here.

I have my moments.

No, but how could you not. But that is true. How would you really know how you would have been otherwise?

No, you can't.

No way of knowing how you would have turned out. Well, do you feel that-- this is a generalization, of course. But do you feel that the survivors are different from other Jews?

Every person is different from every other person. So insofar as to take that a group of this is different, sure they're different. But how they're different, I don't know.

Well, what helped you to decide to share your experiences in this archive project?

I think I felt it very important that there should be awareness, just on the basic humanities, I mean, that instead of just taking and blindly say that all the Germans were monsters. I know that a lot of them were, but I also found some that were decent human beings. And I think that's important. I don't think that, because life isn't that way, it's not all black and white, so it's mostly grays. And I think in situations such as this, as survivors, I think at least some of them, or most of them that I've spoken to, they have trouble acknowledging that there is gray. It's either black or white, and very little in between, for whatever reason.

And I think that, as human beings, we have to be aware that there is a lot of stuff in between.

But isn't it true that you were-- your family were the only survivors from that camp.

As far as I know.

So that's like a couple people that were just--

No. There were about 5,000 people.

5,000 that were-- 5,000, and four of you survived? So somebody could look at that in another way and say that's real evil. There is nothing more evil than 5,000 innocent people.

Oh, nobody says that was terrific. But I don't-- I don't know where you're going.

Well, I don't know. I guess I'm just-- I'm trying to understand the-- I see what you're saying. That makes sense, that view that there were some people that were helpful. They all weren't bad, and some were following orders of the Germans.

I don't think that I want to start counting how many good and how many bad.

I'm just thinking that 5,000 people were killed.

It's not 5,000. You had 6 million that were killed.

6 million-- but no, just from that camp that you were in, there were 5,000. So I wonder if there were any relatives of those survivors would be able to look at it-- I'm wondering if maybe because you had a positive outcome, basically-- you lost your father.

Yes.

Which was pretty terrible. But if your attitude, your kind of tolerant attitude is a product of your having had--

I don't know--

--a much more positive--

I don't look at it as a tolerant thing because taking the attitude of being tolerant about something, there are other connotations about it that I don't particularly care because one then presupposes that one is above certain things or is beyond certain things.

Or maybe accepting. I'm probably picking a wrong word. Perhaps though, some of the survivors who have lost more family are more apt to be black or white.

Does that mean, in other words, that losing a father and a grandmother as opposed to somebody lost their father, grandmother, and a cousin, they're entitled to more pain? No.

No, maybe not. No.

No, I don't think so. Because one could take the other thing-- and this is one of the problems that I have with most religions that have-- you know, there is good and there is bad. And there is reward for the good and punishment for the bad. How do you explain to a four-year-old who has lost both parents?

Yeah. If there's a God or there's any reason for it. You're right.

Well, you know-- so insofar as doing quantitative pronouncements, it's-- I don't think that I or anybody else is qualified.

Well, do you feel that there's a need to try to commemorate the memory of those who lost their lives during the Holocaust?

I think it's extremely important for history, which is people eventually, that these things have happened because I do come across people, as I'm sure it crops up in the papers and that sort of thing, that none of these things have happened, that there were hoaxes, and there was propaganda and so on. And I'm sure there's a number of people that believe that, these things have never happened. And it is important that people today, tomorrow, next year, and whatever is aware that these things have happened.

And perhaps by presenting, if one may say, the other side of the coin, that perhaps not necessarily make it more believable, but might give it a little more food for thought. I don't know.

I think that's well put. Do you have any personal message that you'd like to share, apart from what we've talked about?

No. I don't have any particular message.

Or anything else that you'd want to say that we didn't talk about?

No, I don't think so. I mean, I leave messages through Western Union.

[LAUGHS]

I've really found this fascinating, this story.

I'm sure there's many other things that have just been touched or not even mentioned at all. But sometimes it's difficult. And I have not even tried to prepare any sequence or anything like that.

Well, it was done real well, very vividly. And it just seems like it--

Well, that's only because it happened. And I am blessed with a halfway decent memory-- not for yesterday or the week before, I remember things happened a long time ago.

Just feel like your mother was extraordinary. And I would like to--

Yes, she was.

--be able to have met her.

Yeah, she was a very, very unusual person.

Was she bitter or angry about it all, or pretty much the way you are, accepting?

I don't-- no. I think her attitude was somewhat different. She accepted it because it had happened, and you cannot undo it. And I'm sure, like me, I mean, we're not thrilled about it. But she was considerably more subdued about it. Plus the fact is that she had the responsibility of raising three children, at times in not only-- without any money or-- I'm talking, where physically there was the problem of shelter, food, and clothing. On top of that, the constant fear, during the period of living in occupied territory, of just ceasing to exist.

So I am sure that left a mark on her. And I remember in talking to her-- well, I'm talking in the last few years of her life, that she was, like, in her 60s or early 60s, that she did not have the energy, nor could she do and contemplate and do some of these things that she thought nothing of doing in her early years. Because my mother was never happy unless she had 17 million people to worry about or do things for. And she would find people that needed help.

What she was trying to do, and try to find the people that needed help, not the ones that could go out and seek help or go to the agencies or stick their hands out or something. She was trying to find the people that needed help that couldn't ask for help. I mean, she had people-- something comes to mind. She met somebody on a streetcar or on a park bench there was an old man-- this was in Chicago-- who had a daughter who was in a mental institution in Elgin, Illinois. And what she would do-- and again, my mother did not drive. She didn't have any money or anything like that. But she would take this man and take some food to this daughter. I mean, like on a weekly visit.

I mean she always had-- there was a woman named Tillie, who only had one leg, that was being kicked out of an apartment. Every now and then I would get calls from my mother at 2 o'clock in the morning-- come and help Tillie move, and I did-- that kind of a thing.

She had to have someone or something to do something for someone.

She sounds amazing. And she certainly did something for you all.

I guess she did something right.

Gave you life and continued your life.

Yeah. So I think in some ways what I'm trying to do is pass this on to, I think the normal-- to our kids if we can. More than that we cannot do.

Thank you so much.

You're welcome.

And I'd like to Thank you for participating in this important project, in a meaningful project for us. I found it really moving. I have to tell you that. Thank you.

Glad to have been help.

This is Donna Chernin. And I was speaking with Dan Pavlovitch, who's a Holocaust survivor. And the project's been sponsored by the Cleveland Section of the National Council of Jewish Women. Thank you.