

Pam Makricosta

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Alison Baitz

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Pam Makricosta (b. September 1, 1953, Steubenville, OH) is a lifelong resident of Weirton, WV and librarian at Mary H. Weir public library. Her parents were immigrants of Greek descent. Makricosta has hosted a Greek language radio show out of Steubenville, OH for over 43 years.

EH: Emily Hilliard

PM: Pam Makricosta

00:00

EH: Alright, could you introduce yourself and tell me when and where you were born?

PM: Ok, my name is Pamela Jean Makricosta and in Greek it's Panayota Evenea(SP?) Makricosta and I was born September the first, 1953 in Steubenville because we had just built a hospital here and I was born in Steubenville.

EH: Could you tell me about your family?

PM: Well my mother's family—her name was Helen Koukoulis(SP?) before she got married—and they came from Asia Minor, Palea Fokea Asia Minor, which is an ancient coastal city of Turkey. And people from that city founded 20 overseas colonies all over the world, like mainly in Greece, Spain, Italy, France, around the Black Sea. And the most important one was in Marseilles. They founded the city of Marseilles 600 years before the birth of Christ. And my father's family—his name was Nick Makricosta—they came from the island of Ios(SP?) in Greece, but when he was three, they moved to Smyrna, which is Izmir in Turkey and he lived there until 1922 when the Turkish soldiers were exterminating the Christians and they were some of the lucky ones that got out and the city of Smyrna was burnt by the Turks. And he came to the United States because as a refugee they lost everything, but he was the only son and he had six sisters—and parents—so he had to work to help raise everybody and that's what he did. And then he was the only one from his immediate family that came to the United States. And then he kept taking care of everybody and then he had his own family here.

EH: And what brought your parents to Weirton?

PM: Well my mom was actually born in Weirton. She was born in her home on 4th street in the north end of town. And my father came to visit his uncle that was already in Weirton, working in Weirton Steel. He left—he was working at the restaurants up in New York and he came to visit his uncle. He went to church and it was my mother's mom's 40-day memorial service and they met at church and he fell in love with her and he kept coming back to visit his uncle but really to visit my mom. And then they got married in 1951.

EH: What was it like growing up here in Weirton?

PM: Oh, wonderful place to grow up. There were so many people, the community was very close. We, in our house—my brother Tony and I—grew up speaking Greek and not English because at home, we all spoke Greek and then when we went out to the neighborhood kids, we would pick up English. My mom was born here, so her English was great. But we had my mother's uncle that lived with us and he was very strict. He said 'those kids will learn English as soon as they go to school. So when they're in this house, they have to speak Greek.' and that's what we did. Our church, All Saints Church, has always had a Greek language program so the kids would go to Greek school and they would learn reading, writing, and history and the spoken language. We went to our public schools here in Weirton, and then depending on what grade of preschool you were in — you either went to preschool Monday, Wednesday, Friday for two hours, or you went to preschool Tuesday and Thursday and that was for three-and-a-half hours.

EH: Did you grow up in a Greek neighborhood?

PM: Um, it wasn't... no, it was a pretty diverse neighborhood. But there were people from Greece and Cyprus and Asia Minor, which is Turkey now, so we all know where each of the houses were and the Carnahan(SP?) family lived next door to us and we would go there and we would practice our English. And the other thing we would do there is — she was like a grandparent, she and her husband, and we would eat quote-unquote American food, like chili and fried bologna sandwiches and, you know, not Pastitsio and Staka(?) and lamb and things like that. That's where we used to go for our American food fix.

05:20

EH: [laughs] Could you tell me a little bit about what your family would eat?

PM: Well, because my mother's uncle lived with us and he was pretty strict when it came to food, it was always a different meal at lunch and a whole different meal for dinner. So let's say, for lunch we would have chicken and potatoes, and salads, because we had a huge garden so we always had fresh vegetables and we always had fresh fruits—we had apple trees and plums and peaches and we had a grape arbor. I still have a grape arbor from our original house. Of course, my mom and my dad would make grape jelly or they would use the leaves for the stuffed grape leaves, and I still do that, I still use my leaves to make stuffed grape leaves. And then for dinner, we might have lamb and maybe a side of pasta, vegetables, and a salad. My mom's uncle, because we had the grapes, he would make wine every year. So we had the wine barrels down in the basement. Even as kids, especially Sunday, for lunch or dinner they would let us have like a quarter of a glass of wine that uncle Nick would make.

EH: Wow.

PM: Yeah!

EH: So, a Lebanese man who I talked to earlier today, he said his grape arbor only produces leaves. So yours produces both leaves and grapes.

PM: Right, we have the grapes, which there are two types. One is the concord grape which is the purple and the other one is like a light green or, they call it a white grape. But I use them mostly for the leaves.

EH: What are other aspects of traditions from your family that you would do in the home or that were part of the church community?

PM: Well, we were always very close to the church because that was... you know, it was our faith, and it brought everybody together. Even if everybody worked in a different place or you lived in a different neighborhood, you know, still, on Sundays or the feast days, we would be together at the church. And then after church, we would always have a coffee hour so everybody could sit around and talk, you know, what was going on and the kids could get together and play and things like that. We have something special in Orthodox families that we celebrate your name day more than your birthday. My dad would always say 'you know, anybody can be born, but not everybody becomes a Christian.' When you're baptized, you take on a Christian name. So my father's name was Nicholas(SP?) so the big day of the year was the sixth of December, the feast of Saint Nicholas. And everybody that had that name—either a Nick or a Nicholas or a Nicky, a girl's name—we would have open house. So everybody that you knew *well*, let's say, would come to the open house. You would go from one house to the next to the next to the next. Now, it's not as easy to do that, because some of the families are older, these people that always would have you in for a meal or whatever. So now what we do is at the church, since we have the coffee hour after church, all the Nicks, let's say, they'll sponsor the coffee hour. All the Anthonys on, you know, in January. All of the Marys or whoever. And that way, you stand there and you greet them and wish them

god's blessing. And we have icons—the religious pictures—and my grandmother, I never met her, my mom's mom, but she would always use the censor and the incense and she would cense the whole house and she'd open the front door and she would say 'god bless the house, the people that come in, the people that go out. Bring the people to the house that need to be here.' She would do that from the front door to the back door. And my mom always did that, and I always do that. We've always had people—

10:25

EH: How often do you do that?

PM: Everyday.

EH: Smells good.

PM: Yeah! It's... and you're praying. Often, when my parents of course were living, more so whenever we would have the big dinners we would always set an extra plate in the event that somebody came. And at Christmastime, my parents would let us pick a gift and we would rewrap it and we would take it to somebody that was less fortunate. What else can I tell you?

EH: Were there any musicians or dancers in the church?

PM: Always musicians—people that played the clarinet, people that played the bouzouki, not often. Now there aren't as many musicians as there used to be. We have two ladies from our church the (unintelligible) family and they still teach all the children all the dances. Every year at the festival, for example, if you come back for the festival, you'll see all the children from little ones all the way up in their traditional costumes, and every place had their own dance and their own costumes depending on where you lived. But there are some dances that are common across the board in all parts of Greece or the islands or Asia Minor and things like this. We have many artists that belong to our church; they do pastels, they do oils, sculptors. It seems like if someone in the family did this type of art, the genes are there and they do that. And actually, there was a teacher at Weir High School, his name was Robert Hayworth(SP?). He was the art teacher at Weir High from 1932 to 1969, and so many of his students became well-known artists, even international-known artists. Every year our museum honors that teacher, he's since deceased, and every year we pick one of his students to feature and then we invite the other students to come and bring something that they've done. And then we open it to everybody in the community so that even the students that are in school now, to encourage them to keep on with their art.

EH: Are there any 'material culture' aspects of tradition—textiles or making of the costumes?

PM: Many of the previous generation, let's say—they would make their vest and they would embroider it. I made a vest and I embroidered it. We have different people that have made the costumes at our church, and we keep them at the church and they're just used for festivals or for special programs and the like. Now my mother's mom, her name was Panayota, that's who I'm named after, because there was a French archaeologist that was in Palea Fokea, there were three of them actually, and they were excavating, and they were taking ancient Greek pieces of art to Marseilles, because that's where the museum was. They were actively excavating and taking things to France. Well they overheard the Turkish troops that were saying they were going to come down and they were going to expel everybody. So what they decided to do, they wanted to save as many people as they could, and they spoke French, and where my grandmother's from, they all spoke Greek, they had to speak Turkish and they spoke French. So the Frenchmen went into the neighborhoods and they told as many people as they could and they asked other people to warn the people. They said that the Turkish soldiers were coming, that they had to leave their houses, they would never be able to come back and they could take a bundle of things.

15:28

EH: Wow.

PM: Okay, so I still have my grandmother's bundle of items that she fled with.

EH: Wow.

PM: And so what I do is... it's been over 30 years that I go into the schools, I go to various churches, various civic organizations. I just came back from the Jefferson County Historical Society. And they ask me to present my grandmother's story so I pretend to be my grandmother and I tell them what it's like. I show them pictures—because my grandfather was a photographer—so he has pictures of where they lived and where the refugees went and what it was like here early in Weirton. And then after I tell them the story, then I open up the bundle and I show them the items that she brought with her.

EH: Wow. So what are those items?

PM: Well, actually, I have them. So maybe when you come back, I'll show you.

EH: Yeah!

PM: I'll open it so you can see. Well, my grandmother was the artsy one of all the sisters—every sister had a different job. One cooked, one had a loom and she made the material for the clothes and things and one liked to clean. My grandmother did all of the dowry items, so she did the lacework, she did the embroidery, she did the painting and things like this. So she brought all her dowry items like the sheets and pillowcases and a little outfit for her future baby, because she was just engaged, she wasn't married in 1914 and that's when they had to flee. She wanted something from each of the family members to remind her of them, because nobody knew if they were going to survive. And so she... I have a pillowcase that my great-grandmother made. I have the vest that my grandmother's mother made. So it was great-great-grandmother, great-grandmother, yeah. That's how it goes. And just little items that she packed in her bundle. Of course, everybody took an icon with them. So I have the original icon of Saint Nicholas from our family with me. And then my grandmother kept a journal, so she had her journal in there.

EH: Wow!

PM: Uh-huh. And she loved to write poetry, so lots of poems in there. And pictures. Yeah, those sorts of things that aren't replaceable. And truly, especially little kids, they love to see what's in the bundle—well, everybody wants to see what's in the bundle. I always ask people: 'if somebody came into your house in the middle of the night and said you have to leave and you can never be here again, and you could only take a bundle of things, what would you take?' She only took an extra skirt and a slip because she had made the lace on the slip. And the skirt was from when she was the happiest—it was the dress that she wore when she was engaged.

EH: Wow.

PM: Yeah.

EH: I can't even imagine what I would grab. I mean, I can think of a few things...

PM: A few things, right.

EH: But also just the necessities as well.

PM: Well, they knew they were gonna be robbed as they went.

EH: Right.

PM: So, the great-grandmother, what she did, as everybody else was getting stuff ready, she rolled up as much money as she could. She ripped out the seams of all of the slips and the bodices of things and she put the money in there and sewed it back up. Then she took the soles—the inside soles—of everybody's shoes and she put gold coins in there and put the soles back so that they might have something. Now, my father's family in 1922, they were not as lucky. They didn't know that they were coming. And they only had like, whatever they grabbed. They ran for their life. And like I said, the Turks were burning the city as they ran to the quay, the edge of the harbor there. And he always said there were French, English, and American ships that were in the harbor and they had signed an agreement to go in and pick up all these people but nobody went in. My father always said there was a German, sorry... there was a Japanese ship that was in the harbor and they saw what was going on. They contacted the captains of the ships and they said 'you signed an agreement to take these people, if you don't go in and pick these people up, we will blow you out of the water.' I always thought 'well that's a story.' But then as an adult, I saw this written in books.

20:45

EH: I think the woman I spoke to yesterday said the same thing.

PM: Is that right?

EH: Joanna Gusta.

PM: Yeah, her family is from Asia Minor, also. Antalya, I think. Beautiful place, I got to go there. And... it was just awful; it was just that you were the wrong religion. And it continues today.

EH: Yeah.

PM: And my dad had that survivor's guilt because he saw... he was little, he was seven, and he saw so many people killed. He would always say 'why did I live and those didn't?' I said 'well first of all, you were the one that had to take care of your family, and then *we* wouldn't be here.' God had a plan. What can you say?

EH: Right, yeah.

PM: And what else can I tell you?

EH: Well, so what could you tell me about the Greek community now?

PM: The Greek community now, we have All Saints Greek Orthodox church here, but I had done an informal survey at one time and there were at least 14 different ethnic groups that belonged to the parish. They weren't... in the beginning, it was mostly Greeks, Greeks from Asia Minor, Greeks from the islands, the mainland. Later, there were people that were from Lebanon, from Syria, from Russia, from Ukraine,

wherever. We even have people that have Native American in their background. People that are converts, we have many converts that have become Orthodox, wherever their background is from. Even African-American families that have become Orthodox. So it's not as large as it was before, because many people left and went either to Baltimore, because they had bigger mills there, or they went to Detroit. But everybody still kept in touch with each other. And truly, if there were more jobs in the area, more of the younger people would still be here, because it's a good place to be. I like Weirton because it's a very close-knit area, people seem to not be prejudiced as opposed to... I've been to other places and they are. We have over 50 different ethnic groups and people are still coming, they're still coming here, either for work or for freedom or whatever the reason is. And they've undertaken at the church a half-a-million-dollar project to restore the church building—it's a very unique place. I think it's the only church that has a stainless steel dome and towers. They wanted that to be... to show that well, we are a steel place. They also put in an elevator annex so that it's accessible to people that are handicapped. What else can I tell you? Mrs. Crystal Sanderson(SP?) in the 40s, she started a Greek radio program in Steubenville because we didn't have a radio program here. We didn't have a radio station here in Weirton. In 1950, we got one. So she moved the program from Steubenville to Weirton. She had the program for 25 years. This year, I will have had this radio program for 43 years.

EH: Wow!

24:55

PM: I know! Isn't that something? And like, next year, our church is celebrating its 100th birthday and so the radio program is gonna be 44 years old. Originally, only people in the upper high valley(SP?) could hear it, but now you can go to weirsports.com and if you have access to the internet, I mean, I have people in Texas, Virginia, New York, all these different places, that used to live around here that moved away... I have the radio program Sunday mornings from 8 to 9, and then right after my program is the Italian program. A lot of people enjoy the ethnic music. But then again, there are probably more people that don't know the language that listen because they like the music. So I have to do things in Greek and English.

EH: So is it music mostly, or what is the show like?

PM: It's mostly music. We have sponsors that sponsor certain parts of the program. I usually have something about the culture so people can learn about the culture of Greece, and then I'll have a hymn—a song from the church, a hymn from the church—because there's so many people that are not able to get to the services, so I try to talk about 'this is the feast of the week, this is the saint, these are the saints of the week.' Then I put something, a hymn, that they would have heard as they were able, when they were able to come to the church.

EH: Is it a recording from the church or is it just kinda a recording?

PM: Sometimes, it's a recording from a service, because we have a monastery close by—it's only an hour and fifteen minutes from here. It's a monastery with Orthodox nuns, so sometimes it's a taped service or CDs that I get that are available. I try to match it to what's going on during the week or the month or whatever.

EH: Wow. Do you have any idea how many listeners you have?

PM: No! You know what, I don't. But, now that people can hear it, I have people in Texas that will Facebook me or they'll send me an email or the people from New York or the people from Virginia Beach, or from Maryland. They'll say 'it's my father's birthday, can you play him a song?' Or 'it's my daughter's first anniversary, can you play a song for them?' I love that! And I always tell people that.

EH: Cool!

PM: Yeah, it is cool, I think. It's a continuation of the culture, the language, the traditions.

EH: It evolves, changes...

PM: Yeah, but the core is still there. What's nice about, let's say, the festival. People will go by the church all the time and they'll say 'wow, that's a pretty neat looking building.' But during the festival, we also give tours, so people... because people go to their own church or their own synagogue or their own whatever and they don't have time on a Sunday to go to somebody else's service. But they'll see the church, they'll learn about the faith, they'll eat Greek food, they'll see the dancing and the dancers and little children and a lot of families, because they know when the festival is, they will come for their vacation. So that they can maybe help, and they can also see relatives and friends.

EH: Well, maybe I can do another with the bundle next time I'm here.

PM: Yeah, that's fine.

EH: Yeah. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add?

29:36

PM: Oh I don't know. Just right off hand, it was a great place to grow up in. It's a very nice place to live in now. It's close to so many of the larger cities and the way of life is slower and the cost of living is less and the—what's the word I want to use?—crime is less than a larger city. If you want to go to Pittsburgh, you can go to Pittsburgh, you can go to Columbus, you can go to Cleveland, if you wish to go to these places. We're very fortunate that the Weirton Area Museum and Cultural Center is here, because what we're doing—and it's part of the motto—preserving our history for future generations. We try to do the interviews with the elder residents. We are telling people that if, say, the grandparents or the parents are not well and they have to give up their house, say, or somebody has passed away, just pack up whatever you think and bring it to the museum. That's history, part of our history. And we try to do the programs during the year so that people can come in and now we have a little elevator in there, so we're working on the upstairs. It's... things are evolving, things are changing, and I think for some, I think, positive reasons.

EH: Well, if there's an email list I could get on for the museum...

PM: Oh yeah.

EH: Just so I can stay up to date...

PM: You can see all of the old newsletters because Dennis, our president, he does a great job when it comes to every month he would put out a newsletter. You could go to, let's say, the history of (unintelligible) or (unintelligible) for Weirton and you can see what's going on. People come from all over the country and people have even come from out of the country—they moved, like Andreas, I think just, the one daughter, she lives in Australia, and she works there, and she's come back and gone to the museum and things like this.

EH: Yeah, and maybe there's something down the road that we can work on together.

PM: Mmhhh, and I could say this—the people that were from Finland originally, they were the ones that started the Lutheran church, which is right down the street from All Saints, and they had a kindergarten,

which it was before the public schools had a kindergarten, and our families would send us to the Lutheran church to practice our English before we went to first grade.

EH: Aw!

PM: Mmhmm, yeah. So there would always be a couple kids from our church that would be at the Lutheran church for kindergarten and it was a good experience.

EH: That's cool.

PM: Mmhmm.

EH: Well thank you very much.

PM: Oh, you're welcome very much! And if you think of anything else...

EH: Yeah, I'll get in touch.

33:28

END OF TAPE