

## *The Early Years*

My name is Paul-John Ioannidis, son of John Ioannidis. I was born in Berlin on February 22, 1924. My father was born in Cyprus. As soon as he graduated from high school in Nicosia, Cyprus in 1903, he went to Paris to study medicine. After finishing his studies in 1909, he worked in France for the next decade. That is where he met my mother. They were married in 1920 in Lausanne, and subsequently left for Germany, where he attended post-graduate studies in medicine at Berlin University. My sister Zoe-Ekaterini was also born in Berlin.

My mother, Chrysoula I. Glavani, hailed from Volos, Greece. Her father, John Glavanis, owned a factory that produced farming equipment and tools, and the family, which was quite wealthy, would spend a few months every year living abroad – especially in Switzerland and southern France. My mother died six months after I was born. I don't know the cause of her death, but she is buried in Lausanne, Switzerland. After she died, our father decided to bring us to Greece. Our grandmother on my mother's side and my mother's sister, Despina I. Glavani, raised us. We initially rented a home and lived in Palaio Faliro, a seaside neighborhood on the outskirts of Athens. The year was 1925.

My father did not practice medicine during the first few years after his return to Greece, because he was entangled in an important family court case. He was forced into an endless legal battle to protect my mother's estate. The reason for this was that my mother's siblings had also died – two from Dengue fever, I think, and a third from an accident suffered in Switzerland. Her cousins enjoyed the

trust and support of my grandfather for as long as he was alive. After my uncles died, my cousins took over control of the family business. Back then, shares were not registered and belonged to whoever had them in his possession.

There came a point, however, when my father realized that the decisions of the courts were rigged. One day he stood outside the Ministry of Justice and smacked the minister with an umbrella. The minister's personal bodyguards quickly arrested my father. But the minister, who knew my father from social circles and was aware of the cause of his anger, turned and told them:

“It's alright. Let the gentleman go.”

As a result of the repeated and lengthy legal battles, our family came into very hard times. I remember we would pack silverware into a suitcase and take it to a pawnshop so we could scrape together enough money to make ends meet. Things got much worse, especially from 1933 to 1936. We left Palaio Faliro and finally ended up living in Holargos, a northern suburb of Athens. It goes without saying that we never recovered our family fortune, even though we had tried to reclaim it in the courts. The family estate remained in the hands of our cousins. All my father's struggles were for naught. Those were different times back then.

My sister and I first attended elementary school at the German School located in Pefkakia in the Agios Nikolaos district of Athens. However, since the tuition was too expensive, our father pulled us out and registered us at the local public elementary school. I graduated from the elementary school located on Alopekis Street in Athens.

In 1936, once we came to terms with the fact that the entire family fortune was lost for good, my father got a job as director-general of the Agia Sophia Children's Hospital. My Aunt Despina, who had studied in Switzerland, was appointed director of the children's camps operated by the Patriotic Institute for Social Welfare and Understanding in Voula. It was only then that our finances began to improve. We soon moved to 12 Skoufas Street in Kolonaki, one of the most affluent neighborhoods in Athens. This old house is still

standing today, and it is now a Starbucks coffee house. In Kolonaki, I attended the 3rd Athens High School on Patriarchou Ioakeim Street.

I was very rambunctious when I was a child. I remember once, as I was on my way to school, I came across an organist who was walking down the street with his barrel organ. I gave him some change and told him:

“Look, this morning you are going to play under these windows here.”

Not too long afterwards, my high school principal came outside and was furious.

“What are you doing here?” he asked him. “Leave at once! There are classes going on here!”

“Someone paid me to play down here,” the organist replied.

“Who paid you?” the principal asked.

“A tall fellow who came in here.”

Of course, no other description was needed for the principal to figure out which tall fellow he was talking about. I was very tall ever since I was a child and that always made me stand out. By the time I was 13-years old, I was six-foot three inches tall. That made me sort of a phenomenon for my day and I always caught the attention of passersby. My sister was tall as well.

Eventually, these sorts of antics led to my getting kicked out of the 3rd High School and I then registered in the first model high school of Plaka, a neighborhood under the Acropolis in Athens.

When I was a student, we caused a lot of trouble and engaged in major hijinks. It’s only now that I realize how tough children at that age truly are. When I think back, I am really ashamed of my behavior. I cannot believe how much we ragged on the teacher. The poor fellow used to tell us, “Show me some pity.” Now that I think about it, I really believe we ought to have been ashamed of ourselves.

Jason Rizos, the architect, who was also a handful, was one of my classmates. Sometimes, a ruckus would break out during recess. Someone was always getting beaten up. If the victim would go to the

principal to complain, his response would always be the same, no matter who the victim was: “Say there, my boy. Isn’t there anyone out there who can beat up Ioannidis and Rizos? They decided to pick on you instead?”

Once, I remember that the French teacher walked into the classroom and said:

“Rizos and Ioannidis, leave the classroom, so we can begin the lesson.”

Imagine how much trouble we must have put him through...

On many occasions, the principal would ask me to have my father come down to school so he could have a word with him. But I would never dare tell him! My sister would show up instead and pretend to be my guardian. Once, when my father suddenly did show up at school to inquire about my progress, the principal looked him up and down and said:

“You are this boy’s father?”

My father was shocked and could not comprehend what the principal was saying. That was because at home, I was a perfect gentleman. Our grandmother made all the difference; our wonderful grandmother, whom my sister and I called, “Mummy.” And she remained our “Mummy” until she died. My father remarried in 1950, after we had grown up, and got on with our lives.

As a student, I was very good in math, physics, chemistry, geography, and even history. I could not handle Greek. I barely passed, struggling between a 50 percent and a 60 percent average until I graduated in June of 1941. It was then that I began to think about my future, even though I had made up my mind very early on about what I wanted to do.

I was in love with the sea ever since I could remember. When the time came for my family to enroll me in school, I hid away in a boat somewhere and they spent several hours looking for me. I wanted to become a naval cadet – back then you still had to pay expensive tuition fees if you wanted to attend the Naval Academy in order to become an officer in the Navy. Students were accepted into the academy – after successfully passing entrance exams,

of course – from their sophomore year in high school. But aside from the fact that we could not afford it, my father was adamant that I had to graduate from high school first. He probably figured I would change my mind as I grew up. His insistence on high school, however, never discouraged me. The idea of the sea remained fixed in my mind. I would not hear of anything else.

After my graduation when I was 17 years old, I could not stand to sit around idly day in and day out from morning till night. I wanted to do something. I was looking for a way out. Seeing my state of mind, my father suggested that I get a job as a money counter in the Bank of Greece, which was hiring at the time. Although, I was barely 18 years old at the time, I did, in fact, get hired as a money counter towards the end of 1941. I worked in the basement of the bank, where we would count all the new bills that would arrive in packets from the national printing house. Afterwards, we would put them in stacks of hundreds so that they could be placed into circulation.

The work area was fenced with iron bars as strict security measures were in force. I spent one year working at the bank. It was a monotonous job, but at least I was doing something. But it felt as if I was in prison. And then, after work, we had to face the Nazi occupying forces wherever we went.

By the end of 1942, as I would watch German troops go about their business unobstructed throughout the center of Athens, I felt so bad that it nearly drove me crazy. I decided that it was not the time for studying or working, but for fighting. I too had to do something for my country. I would hear in conversation at home or with the fellows that I associated with, the names “EAM\*,” “ELAS\*\*,” “N. Zervas\*\*\*,” and “D. Psarros\*\*\*\*” – names that referred to the Greek resistance. But I didn’t know who they were, or where and how they operated.

I have to say that my love for liberty and resistance did not come

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\* National Liberation Front

\*\* Greek People’s Liberation Army

\*\*\* Commander of EDES (National Republican Greek League)

\*\*\*\* Commander of the 5/42 Battalion

about from one day to the next. My father instilled it in me. He loved his homeland of Cyprus deeply. When we were children, he used to tell us stories about Greek history, which he would narrate quite liberally. He taught us not to tolerate oppression. My father's great grandfather, John Masouras, was appointed to the Great Seat in Istanbul during the days of the Ottoman Empire and was slaughtered by the Turks on July 9, 1821. That same year, the Turks killed the great grandfather of my father's grandmother, a man by the name of Hadjiadjoulis.

My father was a freedom fighter too. He gave up everything to fight for his island's freedom as part of the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters, known as EOKA, and its struggle for independence from British rule and self-determination. His fellow Cypriots recognized his great contribution by raising a monument in his honor featuring a bust of him in Engomi Square in Nicosia. This monument was officially unveiled on March 31, 2002 by the then Cypriot Minister of Education and Culture, Ouranios Ioannidis, no relation.

My uncle, George Hadjipavlou-Ioannidis – my father's brother, a lawyer, and parliament member in Cyprus – was one of the leaders, or I could say the leader, of the uprising of October 21, 1931, when Cypriot patriots revolted against British rule and burned down the British governor's headquarters. The British captured him soon after, seized his property and exiled him to London.

People in exile in England would typically receive permission to visit any country they wanted, but the existing authorities had forbidden my uncle to enter Greece. Finally in early 1934, he convinced the British authorities to issue a passport to him and he boarded a cruise ship bound for Istanbul. As soon as the boat docked in Piraeus, in July of 1934, however, he disembarked with the help of a police officer by the name of Kolotouros, who was later killed in the December riots of 1944. Not long after, it came to the attention of the British embassy that my uncle had stayed behind in Athens and that he never arrived in Istanbul, so they began to follow him. At first, he lived in the Mega Ethnikon Hotel on Panepistimiou

Street, and soon afterwards he ended up at our home, because there was no longer any point for him to continue hiding out.

Even though I was only ten years old at the time, I still remember that all the newspapers wrote about my uncle back in 1934. I would read the newspapers that my father would bring home, and I would listen to all the conversations around me. Major demonstrations were held in Athens to convince the Greek government not to hand my uncle over to the British. However, Elias Tsirimokos, who was serving as foreign minister at the time, had sent an order to the port authorities at the end of October 1931 that stated: "You are ordered to block the disembarkation of George Hadjipavlou-Ioannidis."

A little later, Ambassador Spyros Pipinelis told my father that the British government had made a demarche demanding that Hadjipavlou-Ioannidis leave Greece at once. The matter went all the way to parliament, and the prime minister of Greece at that time, Panagis Tsaldaris, was compelled to declare the following: "National interests of the highest level are at stake, and I must ask Mr. J. Ioannidis (my father) to advise his brother to make it easier for Greece."

My uncle, being a true patriot, wrote a letter to the prime minister, in which he stated the following:

"I did not come to do harm to my country. I did whatever I did for my homeland and its unification with Greece, and so I might find a bit of relief from the hardships of my exile. I hope that the decision against me will not be implemented against my other fellow Cypriots who are in exile."

And so, he went on his own to the British embassy and turned himself in. They took him and sent him back to Britain at once. He lived in exile there from 1931 until 1947, when they allowed him to return to Cyprus, where he died in September of 1967.

As a result of all this, when I saw the German troops on my home soil, I felt like I could not contain my anger. Despite the fact that I was born in Germany and had attended German school for a few years, the Nazi occupation was unbearable for me. The occupying forces were insufferable.

Of course, by virtue of my father being born in Cyprus, I too had British citizenship. At one point, there was talk that the Germans were going to round up all the British citizens and lock them up in a concentration camp. It was then that we decided that I should go and get my Greek citizenship. It was 1942. We did the same thing a short while later for my father and sister. And so, although my sister and I were born in Germany, our official documents list Athens as our birthplace!!!!

The Saint Sophia Children's Hospital, where my father worked as director-general, was transferred from Goudi to the PIKPA children's camps in Penteli due to the bombings. During a visit to see my father one day, I ended up striking up a conversation with a nurse who came from the village of Dadi in central Greece. She told me that there were partisans hiding out in the villages of the region. In November of 1942, the railway bridge over the river Gorgopotamos was blown up during one of the biggest acts of sabotage in World War II.

"Things have been on the brink ever since," she told me.

I decided to take to the mountains and join the resistance without saying anything to my father – because there was no way he would ever have allowed me to go. But I was determined not to miss this opportunity for anything in the world. I convinced the nurse to make arrangements for me to go to her village to meet up with someone who would then take me up to join the partisan forces.

I even sold my bicycle so I could have some pocket money handy.

And so it happened.

## *With the Resistance in the Mountains*

During the first days of 1943, I hitched a ride on a truck to the village of Dadi. I spent the first night at the nurse's home, and the next day her connections took me up a nearby mountain to meet the resistance fighters. As soon as I saw them, I asked:

“Who is here?”

“We are from ELAS,” they answered.

Their captain was a man named Nikiforos, an officer from the Evelpidon Military Academy, whose real last name was Demetriou. He was a brave young man and a remarkable person. A short while before I had arrived, he had orchestrated an attack on the prison in Livadeia. The Nazis were holding Greeks captive there, including his father. The resistance fighters freed them all.

Two political commissars, Plato and Diamandis, accompanied Nikiforos, the military commander. Diamandis was the boss and the one who made decisions about “who was with us” and who wasn't.

One day, two bandits were captured as soon as they climbed up the mountain. “You can either join us,” the ELAS partisans told them, “or if we ever catch you looting around these parts again, we are going to kill you.” What choice did they have? They joined ELAS.

One of those men was the infamous Karalivanos, and the other was named Bafas. These men were a frightful sight. When you would look at Karalivanos, you'd think he was a wild beast. He wore a traditional white Greek kilt – *foustanella* – that had by then turned gray due to the living conditions. Still, he was a tremendous lad. He took part in the operation to blow up the bridge at Gorgopotamos.

Bafas wore the traditional black outfit of the Vlachs with chains around his chest and a black hat, known as a *kalpaki*.

Karalivanos' wife used to accompany him. Wherever we would go, she would carry all their belongings on her back. It was an entire pile, which I once tried to carry myself and was unable even to lift it. But she would lug it up on climbs as if it wasn't even there.

We would go to the villages and enlist men. "We are cleaning the area from traitors and reactionaries," Platon and Diamandis would tell us. We would usually sleep in coffee houses, schools, or anywhere else we could find. Sometimes, we even slept in the villagers' homes. Of course, it was evident that I was from the city. The people at whose homes I stayed would end up asking me: "Hey there, young man. You tell us, since you are from Athens. Are these guys here communists?" "No," I would answer.

But in fact, I knew who they were from the songs that we would sing:

*Thrones are falling, being toppled  
and Greece is moving on...*

But I have to say that at that moment, I didn't care what their political beliefs were. All that mattered to me was that they were fighting to drive out the Nazis. That's what mattered to me as a 19-year-old man. Once, they made me beat a man with a rawhide whip in a village whose name I no longer remember. They told me: "This man here is betraying our struggle and he needs to be punished." They brought him out to the village square so we could beat him in front of all the people. When you are young and believe in the struggle that you are fighting for, you adjust quickly and do everything with a youthful callousness. Nothing stands in your way.

But time passed without us seriously engaging the Nazis as we went from village to village. We controlled the area of Livadeia – Davleia – Amfikleia in central Greece. We survived on whatever the locals would give us. We would load the supplies onto our mules and leave. There must have been around 70 of us.