

Peter Dobias - biography

Peter Dobias was born in Liptovsky Mikulas Slovakia in 1975, growing up in Czechoslovakia at this time Peter felt the full effects of being under communist regime. When Peter was younger he felt the absence of his father a lot, because although he was trained as a nuclear chemist he was sent to work on a farm 1.5 hours away, because of his political stance. As a young child Peter's parents avoided talking about sensitive topics and politics because they were worried he would talk about it with his friends or to people at the school. But as he got older and understood the situation more he was more included in the conversations. In school Peter learned the traditional subjects like arithmetic and spelling but he also learned how to put on a gas mask, and the difference between a chemical and nuclear bomb alarm.

Peter attended a Russian school, where he learned to read and write in Russian. In school Peter focused a lot on his studies, math and the sciences particularly because they were the most encouraged subjects. Peter participated in a variety of school competitions. He even made it to regionals for the math olympics in grade 6. His parents had even promised him if he made it to regionals they would buy him a computer. They bought him a computer from a Tuzex using bony, a specialty store not restricted by sanctions, using a specialty currency that you could only get if you had access to foreign currency. Peter would often stop and look at the specialty items in the store while walking home from school. Peter was not really a part of any extracurriculars and sports. This was because there were few chances to play sports, unless you were playing at a highly competitive level. He did not participate in sports but of course he was a part of the mandatory Pioneer groups. Pioneer groups were organizations that promoted the communist ideology for children.

Peter was about 13/14 when the political climate started changing, and things started to shift. It was very sudden and the situation shifted rapidly. Peter's father had suspected it was changing but Peter hadn't been paying it much attention and had mostly been focusing on his studies. But he did listen to radio Free Europe, like many other people in Czechoslovakia. Radio Free Europe and Voice of America were two independent radio stations funded by the US sources of information. They were very important during the collapse of the Soviet Union/communism (1988/1989) because they brought a different perspective of what was going on outside of Czechoslovakia. Many people including Peter listened because they knew that not everything coming from official channels were true. The US used these radio stations to get anti-communist messages across to the eastern bloc but they were jammed, so generally were of bad quality. Radio Free Europe and Voice of America were so important because they would bring the people in Czechoslovakia news and information that they did not have access to. Aside from the radio stations they only had access to state news. The radio stations helped get the messages of the counter revolution to people. Radio Free Europe reported about the peaceful student demonstration and how many students had been badly beaten with rumors of a death. This information led to more mass demonstrations and general strikes that helped end the communist party's rule.

Peter and his friends never really participated in the velvet revolution. They did not go to mass demonstrations because their parents discouraged it. Their parents did not want to send their 14 year olds where there could be brutal police intervention. Although he did not participate very much in the revolution and in protests because he was young, he was part of the student council and he spoke with teachers and tried to negotiate with them not to punish/penalize the students who went on strike.

After communism fell Peter had more freedom and free speech, he had more options in school and more choice. After experiencing communism and the revolution so young it really shaped his moral values and made him value his new freedom and free speech because it was something he never knew he was missing. After communism fell Peter and his friends made a point not to censor themselves. They enjoyed having free speech and being able to express their political opinions. They debated issues in school and learned that they could still be friends even with different opinions. They learned to state their opinions and argue them.

After the velvet revolution came the velvet divorce. Peter was not surprised by the separation of Czechoslovakia, he had expected it, but he did find it annoying. It split his family into two, and made it difficult initially to visit his family in Czech. In addition Peter was supposed to go to university in Prague and study at Charles university. But After Czechoslovakia separated that was no longer an option so he attended Bratislava and studied mathematics and physics.

Even after the velvet revolution people still had to fight for their freedom when Peter was attending university he and many other students were fighting president Vladimir Meciar because he had led to a lot of self censorship and was suppressing academic freedoms. In response Peter and many other students in Slovakia started opposing him. They opposed him by writing petitions and formally negotiating with the government, although there were a few small-scale protests, they wanted freedom from any political interference at university. Because Peter never was able to participate in the velvet revolution he found it very exciting to participate and fight for his freedom.

After graduating university Peter went to Canada because he wanted to study abroad, and because there were very few opportunities for post graduate studies in Slovakia. When he left to study abroad and continue his studies, he was deciding between two countries, Canada and Australia but Canada gave him the better offer so he went to Canada. Peter initially came on a student visa and moved to Edmonton but he really liked it so he applied for residency and decided to immigrate to Canada with his wife.

Since moving to Canada Peter has visited Slovakia and his family but he found he couldn't really fit in anymore. Peter enjoyed visiting his family but he found he was different now. Peter still maintains the Slovak cultural aspects of his life but he has adjusted to life in Canada and become more Canadian with cultural roots to Slovakia.