

Mnemography and the Greek Civil War

**Postmemory, Symbology and Migration Trauma explored
through Creative Oral History, *The Bells Will Toll***

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Abstract

During and immediately after the Greek Civil War, bias, propaganda, fear and stigma led to the silencing of leftist voices. This created an imbalance and compromised perceptions of the truth, facts and historical events. This silencing further led to misconceptions so that rumour and propaganda could proliferate without opposition. Through a creative oral history of my family stories, I aim to redress this imbalance. Using the ancient Greek theory of the four humours as a structure for the creative work, I have written an ancestor tribute which I have termed *mnemography*. Oral history interviews with my relatives and auto-ethnography form the basis of my research.

Silenced voices of departed relatives are heard through the narrating of the difficulties my relatives faced as leftist guerrillas or politically neutral farmers in Northern Greece from 1942 to 1950. The research is motivated by my commitment to honour my relatives' memories and my belief that the telling of these stories will encourage further reconciliation within any community where there are political, cultural or racial differences.

Through Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, I explore the hold the past has on my own notions of self and identity and discuss how my relatives' stories have better enabled me to understand my own place in our shared history. The haunting of the past through intergenerational transmission is explored in the *mnemography* and exegesis. The *ouroboros* is a Greek symbol of renewal and regeneration and I have used it to signify the regenerative process of family stories through postmemory.

In the *mnemography* I use oral history transcriptions which incorporate elements of creative writing practice. The exegesis clarifies how the writing practice I used differs from existing memoirs of the Greek Civil War and how it adds to our knowledge of that conflict. The fine-grained ethnographic detail that emerges from the oral histories reveals how my relatives lived, depicting a way of life now passed. Using inconsistencies in the narrative, I explore how there can be more than one version of the events, and the importance of the multivocality of stories from the Greek Civil War so that there is not only one narrative. This leads to a fairer, more nuanced reading of the past, and, in engaging with the roles played by bias, rumour and propaganda in establishing official histories, allows for more informed judgements to be made about these crucial events.

Keywords:

Mnemography, postmemory, Greek Civil War, propaganda, oral history, migration trauma, symbology.

Declaration

I, Athina Bakirtzidis Singh, declare that this PhD thesis entitled ‘Mnemography and the Greek Civil War: Postmemory, Symbology and Migration Trauma explored through Creative Oral History, *The Bells Will Toll*’ is no less than 18,000 words and no more than 118,000.00 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University’s Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the [VU Human Committee – VUHRE15-050].

Signature and Date:

Dedication

This mnemography, the creative component of my PhD, is dedicated to my parents Harry Zacharias Bakirtzidis and Niki Bakirtzidis. They are the main contributors to the mnemography, *The Bells Will Toll*. I have no words to describe the depth of my love and gratitude for my parents, who sacrificed everything for their children. I also dedicate the work to my uncles and aunts, my grandparents and great-grandparents for living their lives with hard work and honour in the face of many difficulties. I respect their heritage and cherish the stories they have given me. I thank my family for the life they gave me, by choosing to live and struggle for their children, who in turn gave birth to their own children, and likewise I have given birth to my son and give this mnemography to him as part of his inheritance of our shared ancestry. I understand I am one link in a long chain of descendants and honour my ancestors all the way back to Adam and Eve and honour all the future generations yet to come.

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Preface

Old wounds contain energy, energy to reopen and fester and bring about a small apocalypse in order to heal properly and close over completely.

I always felt war was repulsive, a tragic loss of life. A chess game played with real lives. After learning that some of my relatives fought or were killed during and after the Greek Civil War, I began to see war through new eyes: it was closer to home and a part of my history. Love for country, for family, and freedom from oppression were some of the ideals which motivated my relatives who fought. Others were pressured into joining the rebels in exchange for protection of other family members. And others felt they had to take a stance against the injustice in front of their eyes, the starving farmers who had most of their crops taken by the Nazis, and the Italian and Greek armies. They paid with life, blood or exile, so I feel they should be honoured as much as my relatives who did not fight, not because they fought but because they sacrificed so much, lost so much and were loved by family nonetheless.

Living an ordinary life can still be heroic in its own way and worthy of recording and remembering. I left Greece months before my fourth birthday and didn't return until I was twenty-three, so I feel I must record what little I and my relatives remember to fill the void in my life and in my parent's lives and pass on that information to my child and future generations. Being so far away meant that we missed so much, and our own milestones could not be celebrated with our relatives.

One thing appears certain to me: even when they were starving, life for my relatives was brighter, clearer, more brilliant in Greece than my life has ever been in Australia, because they had each other. Shared life experiences make them more special. I understand that it is not so much Greece that I miss, but family connections. I am part of the chain that was temporarily broken, the one who missed out on the love of grandparents and extended family.

The culture of remembering is itself becoming a thing of the past – ancestor worship is limited to cultures which demand it, like the Greek culture or the Chinese. Greek Orthodox tradition asks the immediate family of the deceased to have memorial services forty days, three months, six months, nine months and twelve months after the death.

Then after a year or more, the grave is reopened and the bones are viewed. And upon entering a Greek Orthodox church, one is required to light a candle in remembrance of the departed, usually grandparents or parents. Remembering the deceased is an act of love, reverence, and also an obligation.

Apparently, the way the bones are arranged in the coffin after it is reopened can indicate if the deceased is at rest or is displeased. This is possibly where the expression to “turn in the grave” comes from. Father remembers passing Zervohori village cemetery in the night when he had a long walk ahead to reach his own village. He heard muffled screams coming from the graveyard. He kept going, not sure what to think. A year later the bones of a recently buried villager showed he had turned upside down. Father believes the man had been buried alive in a coma and awoke underground. He regrets he did not stop to offer assistance, but few people would ever do such a thing in a cemetery at night.

My relatives lived in a way which was common in the nineteen-forties in rural areas in Greece. This way of living is now termed “off the grid”. They sacrificed their melodious voices, their talented hands and their minds to tasks like kneading bread, tending the fire, washing clothes, feeding animals and farming the land. Genius comes in many forms: the perfectly baked bread, fine embroidery, abundant harvest and successful trade. Some beauty blooms indoors, seen by few, yet the scent is delicate and pervades through wind and rain. My mother is one of these beauties, as were my grandmothers and aunts. Through this mnemography I honour my parents and relatives. I want to preserve their memories. They are important to me – I who now carry the torch, before I too pass it on to the next generation. My DNA carries the genetic material and inherited memories of countless ancestors. Therefore, I am not I, I am we. I am the sum of them all.

The Bells Will Toll

A Mnemography

Athina Bakirtzidis Singh

Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes

(The Bells Will Toll)

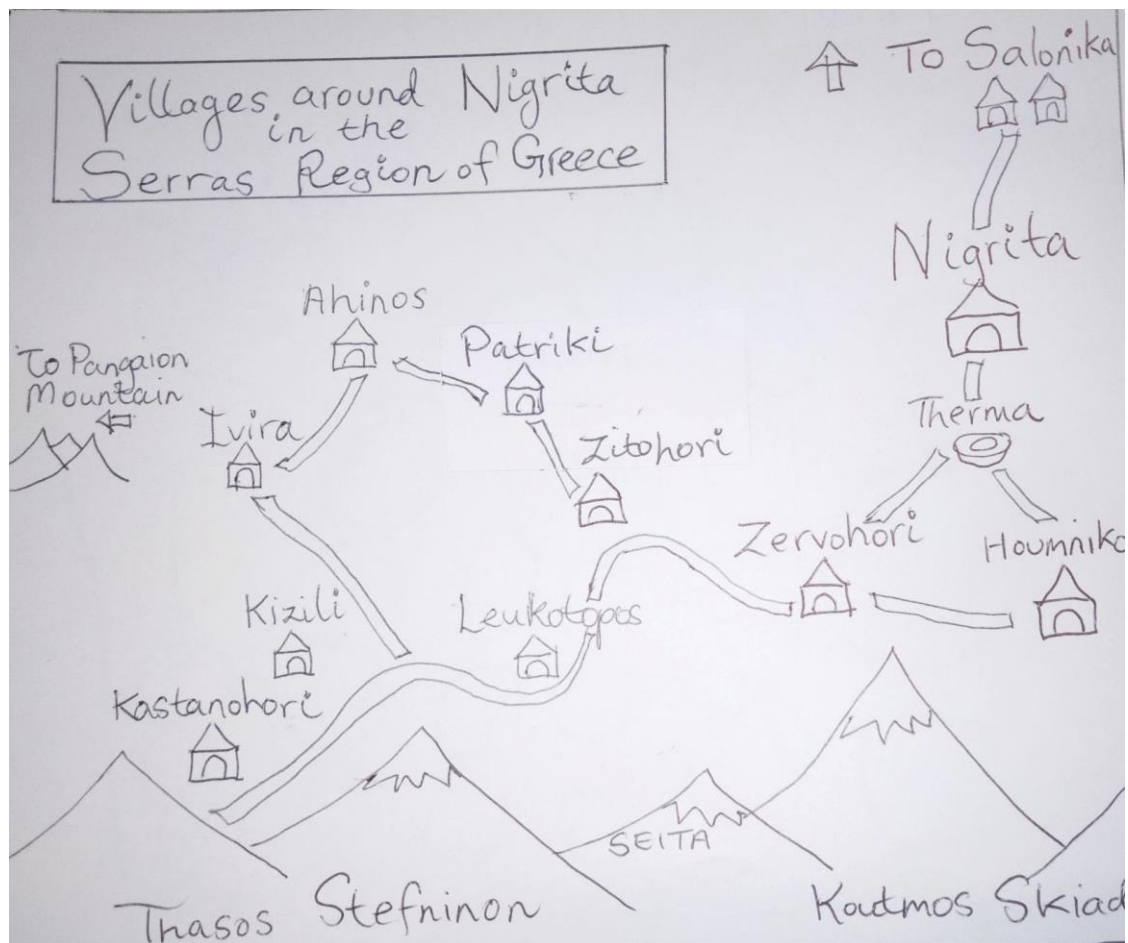
*With so many leaves the sun is beckoning you good morning
With so many flags the sky is shining
And these people behind iron bars, and those inside the ground
Be silent, soon the bells will toll
This earth is theirs and ours*

*Under the earth in their crossed hands
They are holding the bell's rope
They are waiting for the moment,
They are waiting to signal the resurrection
This earth is theirs and ours
No one can take it from us*

*Be silent, soon the bells will toll
This earth is theirs and ours*

(Song lyrics by Theodorakis & Bithikotsis 1966, adapted from a poem of the same name by Yiannis Ritsos and translated by Athina Bakirtzidis Singh)

Map of the Villages around Nigrita



Part 1
Sanguine:
Father's Story

In the Shadow of the Mountains

Few things last for long. They change and change and change again. New becomes old and today becomes ancient. Perhaps the things that last are beyond seeing or touching. For me family has always been important, an anchor in a rough sea. Even those who have gone, are not gone to me. Almost every day my parents and I remember grandparents, and by remembering them remember great-grandparents, great-uncles, great-aunts, and how beautiful life in Greece was. By remembering beauty you also remember the times when life was not so beautiful, just as night follows day.

Remembering is a joy for me, but also a duty. I do not have the same scars that my parents, uncles and aunts have when they remember their childhoods during and after the Greek Civil War. But I have other scars. Time heals many wounds, and others we pretend never happened. I am compelled to remember because life follows a circular pattern, like the *ouroboros* – the great snake swallowing its tail. By remembering, the past is reborn in the present and what is gone lives once more, even if it is only in my heart and mind.

Some of my memories have been borrowed or reconstructed from the memories of my parents and grandparents, told over and over until they became mine and I could not remember when they were not a part of my psyche. To be Greek means to always look into the past, the Classical Age, the Golden Age, the Roman Empire and even through Ottoman rule. It is in our blood, we have so many relics of the past vying for our attention. Through my family history I remember and reconstruct the past in the present. Being Greek in Australia also means to remember the Greek Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship which forced my father to take us out of Greece. Like many other Greeks, my parents chose to come to Australia to begin afresh, but they brought along more than their suitcases. They brought memories.

The pain of separation from family is like death. A living death. Other people my age may have coloured photos of themselves as children with their relatives, but I have old black-and-white photographs from Greece and a pain in my heart for which I thought there was no cure, until my son was born. This is the story of my parents, grandparents

and other relatives, and my yearning to be with my extended family once more. This is the yearning of a three-and-a-half-year-old child who sailed across many seas to the Antipodes, to Australia, to a new life and culture and language. My homesickness remains for a place which is changing. A place which exists in my heart but now it is more in the past than in the present. My older relatives are departing this life as we all must, eventually.

The villages of my relatives sit amongst hills and valleys, surrounded by high mountains in all four directions. They are nestled tight against the earth, clinging to ancient soil, with the roots of hundred-year olives reaching far below. Above, the turquoise sky is dotted with swallows dancing and swooping. The air smells of honeysuckle, roses, violets and ripening cherries, apples and rockmelons in orchards and fields. Ladybirds rest on leaves and bees buzz amongst the feast of flowers. I remember time stood still when I was a child in Greece. And nowhere on earth was as beautiful. My family were loving, playful, and loved practical jokes. I remember my mother's young brother hid me in a sack after we went to collect rockmelons from the garden, near where the donkey was tied and grazing on nettles and other plants within her reach. The melons were ripe and their sweet fragrance filled the air metres away. Uncle wanted to play a trick on my mother so he hid me in the sack. "Where's Athina?" Mother asked, beginning to panic. I leapt out of the sack at the last minute, and my mother laughed in surprise. We ate the melons with feta, Greek salad, olives, fresh home-baked bread and stuffed peppers drizzled with our own cold-pressed olive oil. We had everything, and most of all, we had each other's love.

In winter, I remember we went to Nigrita and visited shops set up in a lower section of the town, on the banks of a river. This was before the council filled in the riverbanks and made the town into one, instead of the original two parts. Mother had photographs taken of my sister and me wearing short dresses decorated with white wavy-ribbon borders and matching flared trousers. The photographer had a tent down in the riverbank. It was warm and pleasant outside; I did not want to be inside the tent at all. My sister and I wanted to play.

We turned and saw older children on top of the embankment throwing large silver glitter spheres into the air so they fell around us like silver snow. I was mesmerised. Later we went to church for the Saturday mass and blessing. Mother made us fast till after mass. A wedding had just finished and people threw rice and sugar-coated almonds into the air.

All the children, including us, scrambled to collect the white almonds and stuffed them in our mouths one by one. They tasted like vanilla and were very hard. It took a good twenty minutes to chew through to the sweet almond centre. I remember mother was beautiful like an angel, her hair tied high in a ribbon, accentuating her soft flawless face and large hazel green eyes. She wore tailored suits with pointy shoes, pleated skirts or tight-waisted floral dresses. She usually dressed my sister and me like little dolls in pretty dresses with wide ribbon sashes that tied behind. I loved playing with my young beautiful aunts, and my cousins only a year or two older than me.

I never wanted to leave Greece. I had no concept of leaving. It was only after we said goodbye to our grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins at the train station, boarded a plane from Athens to Egypt, and then spent a month on the large ship *Patris* which passed through the Suez Canal, that I understood we were somewhere else. Too far away to return. We had gone to the Antipodes.

The Ghosts of the Past

I sit with Father in the living room while Mother is busy in the kitchen making us tea from the leaves and flowers of the *flamouri* tree which grows in our region of Greece and is called ironwort here in Melbourne. Father has managed to plant ironwort in our yard but it is yet to flower. It is mid-afternoon in winter and the heater is on, buzzing quietly. I know Father is in a mood to speak. He is comfortable and relaxed, his feet up on the stool.

“How was life in Greece when you were young?” I ask, waiting for the long story that will follow.

“Times have changed. Life is mediocre and easy now,” says Father. He sighs. “How many good people were lost in the Greek Civil War from 1946 to 1949? Students died in the streets, they ate grass, they protested against the government but only those who went to their villages had food to eat. The cities were like rat dens. Dead people lay everywhere. Money became worthless when food was scarce. There was a huge growth of communism in Greece after World War Two. People wanted equal rights and food. The USA and England took sides with the Greek right-wing fascists against the democrats and communists. The English and the Americans were afraid Greece would align with Russia and become communist, so they put their boots onto our soil and dropped their bombs from the planes onto the rebels, the ones who had liberated Greece from Hitler and the Germans just years earlier. Suddenly, they were heroes no more. Everyone split into two camps, the right-wing fascists licking the arse of the Americans and the left-wing communists who were the Russia lovers. What a time that was!” Father rubs his hand across his eyes.

“There was a hero amongst us,” Father says, “my uncle Eraklis.” Father sits back in his padded pink vinyl armchair; he gazes into the distance and through his gaze I imagine us descending through the mists of time. I hear the wind blowing outside through the trees. The howls of the wind are harpies, waiting to tear people’s hearts and eyes out for daring to listen to what must be forgotten. There is a price to be paid for remembering. Every

time I can see another world and it is real. I start to see the past in Greece through the words of my Father, even though it was a time before I was born.

The sun is rising, just like the day it rose when Christ was delivered to the non-believers. Swallows begin their crisp chirps, “watch out, watch out, watch out!”, but who can heed them?

The birds fly over walnut, chestnut and *flamouri* trees, row upon row planted by the local Greek villagers who escaped the Christian genocide in Pontus further east in Anatolia. A wolf howls; he is near and hungry, coming closer in search of food. Morning stars decorate the sky like silver sequins on topaz and old trees sigh. Some are old enough to remember that the residents of these villages were enslaved by the Pasha over a hundred years ago. Centuries ago, a Greek king lived in a castle outside the village now just ruins. The villagers took the stones to build their own houses. The past is recycled in the present, like the *ouroboros* snake swallows its tail again and again and again. Red cloaks flap behind the morning mist and spears hide behind trees. The trees sigh and creak. Eraklis descends the mountain, sure-footed and dressed in black. Few people visit these mountains, only shepherds, because of the communist rebels – the *andartes* who have taken refuge there. Perhaps it is easier to die for your beliefs if you have no food in your stomach.

Eraklis stops, and listens, and peers through the familiar darkness. He drinks from his flask, which is almost empty. He has a large sack to carry back as many loaves of bread, cheese, onions and olives as he can up to his comrades. Others are higher up in the mountains setting up telegraph wires. Every night, a man must go into the villages for food. Today Eraklis has come down late. They travelled twenty miles the day before, on the tails of the fascists. Some 5000 men are in the mountains. Within one family there could be fascists and communists. Brothers fought against brothers, it was a dirty war.

Eraklis turns towards the river, where the trees grow thicker. It is darker and more difficult to be seen. Few people dare to walk in the dark, as snakes often hide behind stones waiting for an opportunity to strike. Or fascists.

Eraklis remembers his tall cousin Ozur Gianne, a crack shot with the rifle. He could bring a man down 200 metres away. No one dared to touch them in Pontus. Eraklis and his family have given their farm into the safe keeping of the Turkish neighbours, because they did not know if they would ever return. It was safer to flee the growing violence against the Christians. His father Haralambos had tied a belt stuffed full of gold coins around his waist, and with this they began a new life in Northern Greece. Now there was fighting in Greece. Peace was like a bird that flew south for the winter, long gone. If Christ turned water into wine, they should have turned war into peace.

Eraklis finds the marked stone outside the village and lifts it up. Underneath is a note. It tells him the locations of the police and what is happening in the villages. There are good people here in the village. Christodoulis is the farmer who has hidden the letter, the one they call *Kapetanios*. There is no warning in the letter, so Eraklis continues towards the water pump just outside the village. The birds stop twittering, the flutter of many wings ringing through the forest. Eraklis spins around to see who could be there. He can see no one. Tired and thirsty, he unscrews the lid from his flask and fills it at the pump. Water whooshes over the side as it fills. The hairs stand up on the back of his neck. He turns again, starting to retreat. He rests behind a tree for a moment and closes his eyes. Eraklis remembers the sound of the river as it filled the barrels strapped to the giant wheel of their mills. Their seven mills on seven hills near Samsunda. The water moved the mill stones that ground the wheat, corn, barley and other grains for all the surrounding villages. They had been wealthy farmers with many fields and livestock.

Eraklis lifts the flask again to his mouth to drink the cool water, which is sweet with sulphur. Suddenly, there is the crack of a rifle. Eraklis runs. Bullets zing past like angry cicadas. It's an ambush. Staggering, he loses his balance and falls. He's been hit. Death takes its time, and he lies there calling out for help. No one comes. The sun rises higher and higher.

On the third day, the bells of the church ring and call the faithful to prayer in the early evening, and Christodoulis, the good farmer, places a wooden cross made of twigs onto the shallow grave he has dug in the riverbank with his

own bare hands. He washes his hands in the river and they sting, the nails scraped red raw from over an hour of digging. But this is not what makes him cry. He cries for Eraklis, the man he buried. He cries because a good man has been killed and no one would even dare help him or bury him. Christodoulis did this alone, not wanting to involve anyone else and have them risk reprisals. Because he takes the animals to pasture, he alone is allowed the freedom to move through the villages and mountains. Christodoulis stops outside the church, his cattle following behind. He prays for Eraklis and his family and for the end of this terrible war.

This story is made of the memories of my mother, father, Grandfather Christos and Grandmother Fotini, all joined together to form one vision in my mind, even though it happened before I was born. My father loved his uncle very much and he never forgot his loss; he kept his memories of him alive through the stories he told us.

Eraklis had come to get bread from his future brother-in-law, Christos or Christodoulis – which means servant of Christ – my mother’s father. There was always extra food ready in my grandfather Christos’ house, even though he was a farmer with six children. In 1949 when my great uncle Eraklis was ambushed, my mother was only two years old. Somehow it was known who had reported Great-uncle Eraklis to the police. And somehow the news got to the rebels. The next day the rebels came back and found the man who had apparently informed on him. Grandfather Christos tried to save the man, but the rebels would not listen to him. His powers of persuasion only went so far.

Grandfather Christos told me how he buried Great-uncle Eraklis in the soft riverbank. Even decades later, he had cried while telling the story. He looked down at his open palms and said, “I buried him with my bare hands. I said the Lord’s Prayer over the soil first, then dug it with my hands. Rebels were not allowed proper burials. Bodies were often left unclaimed. A priest would not even agree to come and say a prayer, usually out of fear. I dragged him into a shallow grave with difficulty. By then the body had swollen up in the midday sun and the face was almost unrecognisable. I recognised who it was by the halo of dark curls around his head. I covered him with dirt, sticks, stones, branches, anything I could find, so the wolves would not eat him. I made a small wooden cross out of twigs.

I prayed and made the sign of the cross. After doing all I could, I took the cows and buffaloes which were waiting nearby back home.”

The Right and the Left

As a young child, I remember Father muttering *fasistes* and I thought that it must be a swear word. Father used colourful language whenever he was angry, not really censoring his words in front of us children, letting us see what angered him. Perhaps he wanted us to learn by his example of what was to be hated. Of course, we could not understand. He had lived through the Greek Civil War, while we had only heard the stories. All wars interested him and he had comments to make about all of them. He also blamed America for starting most of the wars.

Wars did not interest me until I learned about the fate of some of my relatives. Father mourned the loss of his eldest brother and blamed the fascists for his death. And by Father remembering the past, and telling us the stories, it was as if the dead were resurrected and lived once again for us. Even though I had never met my oldest uncle, I felt that I knew him quite well. It is said that when the bells toll on Judgement Day the martyrs and innocents will be rewarded and resurrected. My father's stories were those bells, were resurrecting the dead in our hearts and minds. I could see them stand before me, pale and silent, the gorgeous dark curls of murdered Uncle Kostas with full pink cheeks, and a flawless complexion untouched by time. He had not died old – he was forever young.

When we joined hands and danced Greek *sirto*, *kotsari*, *tik*, *mal*, *zorba*, it was as if the past, present and future all danced together with us. Father would take the lead with a handkerchief in his hand and leap high into the air, kicking his feet out, and then turn slowly around. We would shriek and laugh, trying to hold him upright with the other end of the handkerchief in our hands. He showed us the feats of his youth, acrobatic somersaults, fast footwork, spins, Cossack leaps. Suddenly he was young again and we watched in awe. Father was an accomplished Greek dancer with strength beyond that of an average man.

By dancing these dances, we kept traditions alive, stepping through the same dances of our grandparents, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents. We were forbidden to speak English at home. That language was only for school. But when we children were

in our room, we spoke English in hushed voices. I understand now that Father did this so that we could hold onto our Greek language and origins. This was how we demonstrated who we were, and that we remembered and honoured our ancestors.

We spoke about the past, our relatives, Greece and also danced to traditional songs – even the previously forbidden ones by Theodorakis. *Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes* – “The Bells Will Toll” – blared loudly in our living room as we leapt about in creative Zorba-inspired dance moves. In Australia we could listen to whatever Greek music we wanted, not like in the Greece we had left during the dictatorship.

All our Greek neighbours were crazy about Abba and sang along to the songs every day. We never tired of Abba. Out in the Prahran streets, cars drove by and half of them had Greek bouzouki music or Abba blaring out the windows. Our neighbours were mostly Greek. There was a large Greek community in Prahran and although we did mix with other nationalities, it was hard to ignore the Greek presence. I understood that I was Australian, but also that I was firstly Greek.

I would become quiet whenever Father spoke about Greece and the past because I was homesick, although at the time I couldn’t understand what homesickness was.

The pain of separation from my relatives and the familiarity of Greece became a little less sharp as I made friends and found new joys in Australia. My best friends were Judy, who was half Polish and half Australian, and Sophie, who was Greek. They were both blonde and blue-eyed. I adored each of them. I never told anyone how homesick I was for Greece, and no one asked. I did not know if I would ever see my relatives again.

Father spoke reverently about the *andartes*, the rebels. His father, Kleanthis, had been one. Father never questioned why his father had to leave the family to go and fight in the mountains. The way he told the story, there was no choice. If you were not Right then you were Left. Fascist or communist.

I began to research the two sides when I was older, trying to understand what had happened in Greece to lead to my grandfather’s exile and my family leaving the dictatorship to come to Australia. I came across the Last Great Speech of Aris Velouchiotis, given from a hotel balcony in 1945. Father would have been five years old then. Old enough to be influenced by talk like this:

Neither did we have the right to implant the stamp on the forehead of the forthcoming generations, our children and our grandchildren, that they originate from a land of eunuchs who agreed to die on the streets from the most vile of deaths — from hunger — instead of dying with gun in hand fighting for freedom.

What should we prefer? The first or the second? We answer a thousand times with no shadow of doubt: TO FIGHT!

Better for everything to burn down instead of us capitulating to the occupiers. (Velouchiotis, 1945)

Father must have listened to much talk in his formative years because he is very stubborn in his political views. He explained that the political turmoil in Greece today is a repetition of the same Left and Right divisions which existed in the 1940s. First the Nazi Germans took all the food during the Axis War and people died in the streets in the cities, while those in the villages prepared to fight them. The hunger lasted until the end of the Civil War in 1949.

“What do you think? They are still the same, the same fascists and neo-Nazi supporters who were around then. Now they are making an even greater racket. With democracy there is freedom of speech and also propaganda,” Father said.

I had imagined that the differences between Left and Right would end when the generations who had lived through the Greek Civil War passed away. But these political differences still exist today. I had hoped to see the rift heal. But if I and others close our eyes and pretend nothing unpleasant happened, what would we gain? What more would we lose? Peace is precious and also easily lost. Difficulties still exist today. Prosperity can be regained through hard work, but life once lost is lost, and can only be resuscitated through memory, even if the memories are second-hand. I do not feel the victory of any political party is ever worth the loss of even one life. But then, I never experienced war and hunger.

Grandfather Kleanthis

Grandfather Kleanthis, my paternal grandfather, fled to what was then Czechoslovakia near the end of the Greek Civil War. After his brother Eraklis was killed, he knew his luck would run out if he returned to fight in the mountains. He could not return to the village, so he fled with the rebels. He had been in former Yugoslavia recovering in hospital from a shrapnel wound in his leg. He had a wife and five children to support when he first retreated into the mountains; then, after about a year of fighting, only three sons were left to him. It is said his beautiful daughter Marianthe, my father's twin, died of the evil eye, falling to the ground in seizure after a visitor commented on the beauty of the children. "What do you feed these children?" the visitor had asked in admiration. Marianthe had been the most beautiful child of the family, with fair skin, dark curls and blue eyes. There were no doctors in the village and so it was common to die of treatable ailments. Father always spoke of his father, and his twin sister Marianthe.

"What did Grandfather Kleanthis do once he left Greece?" I asked Father again, even though he had told me this story many times.

"In Czechoslovakia my father worked as a bus driver for twenty years before being able to return home to Greece. He had the company of other ex-rebels and their families in the city of Brno. Many had left their villages; some took their children with them or asked others to bring them out of Greece. My father learned the Czech language but never forgot his family. He wrote letters weekly to my mother in Greece and often sent money. He was tall and fair-skinned, with blond hair and blue eyes, like his father Haralambos who had left Turkey with his seven sons and a daughter. All his siblings had dark hair and brown eyes. My mother, Athina, looked very different, with dark curly hair, olive skin and brown eyes. She had been smitten with Grandfather's fair looks when she met him. Father remained fit, as did most of his family, and still rode a bike in his nineties. His mother, Vasiliki, lived to 108 and I can remember her gardening till that age. His cousins had lived to over 100 years old. The wholefood diet, limited stress, simple life and homemade olive oil played a part in this longevity. Or perhaps it was genetic. Having

family to help you through tough times and to share joyous times is important. It gives life meaning and colour.”

Listening to Father’s words, I thought back to my first visit to Greece in my early twenties. When I met Grandfather Kleanthis he cried. He had last seen me as a toddler. “Don’t leave me, my child; life is short,” he said. I was optimistic with the ignorance of youth and replied, “But I will be back in a few months, Grandfather.” “No, no you won’t. You will never come back,” he said sadly.

I tried to be hopeful, but inside my heart I knew I was losing something irreplaceable, so precious and rare. I thought I would return again the following summer. But I was too late. Grandfather had been right. He died eight months later. And with him went the stories I would never hear, the truth about his life in exile, about how hard it was for him to readjust to life in Greece.

Voices of Freedom

From my childhood until now, Father told me countless times about his oldest brother, Kostas. He never tired of talking of his brother because he loved him, and by remembering him and passing on those memories to me and my siblings, we got to know something of our oldest uncle. The way Father described him, I felt that I knew Uncle Kostas very well.

“He had tight black curls cascading around his face. He was fairer than me,” Father would say. “You remind me of him very much,” Father would tell me.

“He had the large, beautiful eyes of a poet and a beautiful sensitive nature. But he was not allowed to live.”

Father sighs as he remembers those bitter days, when many relatives had been lost. He hums a song popularised by Mikis Theodorakis, a fellow Pontian who was jailed during the Greek Civil War – *Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes* or “The Bells Will Toll”. This was a song of the revolution, and few people dared to play it in Greece in the early 1970s, but Father was one who did. He looks at the photo on the mantelpiece of Kostas with his middle brother, his mother and himself. Another story begins.

“Those *katharmata*, they killed him. Such a good boy, a *palikari*, and they killed him. Well, they got their punishment. They all died like dogs later from sickness or cancer.” Father looks down at the ground, but I know he is not really seeing anything here in the room. He is remembering and feeling the loss and pain that he tried to escape by moving to Australia.

“In the beginning, the police would open and read the letters my father sent, until they got bored reading about his daily civilian activities. My mother, Athina, paid the price for his departure many times. In 1950 she was taken by the police in the back of an open cart through the village, the way they paraded witches in the sixteenth century so people could throw rotten fruit or vegetables – then jailed her in a one-metre-high cell below the police station.”

Suddenly the story becomes a vision before my eyes. I have heard it many times before but it still hurts to hear it. I can see Greece in 1950 – a time before I was born, a time when Father was ten years old. The village appears dusty and empty in my mind, with a few stray cats and a dog or two lying in the shade. Ghosts of the dead hide behind doorways, awaiting salvation, and good people work in their fields from daybreak till the early afternoon before heading home to be with their families, guarding what little they have, sharing bread, soup, salad and olives together. My grandmother and namesake was young then, around twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. A striking beauty with olive skin, large white teeth and black curly hair. Sadly, no marriage photo remains of her and Grandfather Kleanthis. That photo was another casualty of the Civil War destroyed by rightists. I listen to my father's voice as he tells the story.

The policeman comes to our door and knocks loudly. "Open the door." He knocks again even louder. My mother opens it.

"What do you want?" she asks.

"You have to come for questioning."

"Don't take me from my children. Who will look after them?"

"*Andartissa*, you have to come to the police station to answer some questions," the constable snapped, dragging her onto the cart and tying her wrists with twine. The neighbours didn't do anything to stop her being taken. No one intervened. Perhaps they were even pleased.

"Zacharias," she yelled, "lock the house and feed your brothers and the animals." I often helped her cook, went for groceries or to get firewood while my older brothers worked in the fields. Mother's hair had fallen loose and cascaded down her back in dark curls. Tears streaked her beautiful face. Her blue floral skirt had snagged on the cart and torn slightly at the hem. I boiled with rage watching them take Mother away. I followed behind the cart at a distance, my fists tight, ready to do anything to protect her.

"Where is your husband?" the policeman asked Mother once they reached the station.

“You know where he is, in Czechoslovakia, and if you don’t believe me, go there and see for yourself.”

“The rebel’s wife dares to answer back? You think you are smarter than us, hiding *lires* in your house? Don’t worry, we’ll break it apart and find them.”

“If I had *lires*, why would I be wearing these rags? We work hard for our bread.”

The policeman pushed Mother into the dungeon. First they had made sure they had defecated a few times in there so that the stench was unbearable. There was no sewerage system in those days – people used buckets or holes in the ground – and the cell beneath the station was used as a toilet and a holding cell. She was given no food or water. I cooked some bean soup and took it and a slice of bread to Mother. But the policeman saw it and kicked the plate to the ground.

“*Zagari*, don’t show your face here again.”

Even though I was only ten, I abused him the best way I knew: “*Gamisou* and your family and your mother.” The policeman lifted his rifle and aimed it at me but I didn’t flinch. He slowly lowered his rifle.

I then ran to an uncle who was a fascist but who was also a very good man and asked him for help.

“They took Mother and are hitting her and not giving her food or water.”

Uncle Pavlos went to the police station immediately with a *bastooni* in his hand and said, “Why punish this woman? She is not a rebel, neither are her children involved in this war. Let her go and don’t bother them anymore, or I will make trouble for you.” He tapped the desk emphatically. The policeman saw that my mother had the support of fascist relatives and decided to release her.

Mother thanked Uncle Pavlos and went home to relight the fire and to milk the buffaloes. She had been dragged to the police station like this several

times that year, but after this, the campaign against her ended and she was allowed to bring us up in peace.

However, the anger and bitterness continued after the end of the Civil War. Relatives and neighbours knew that my father was in another country, working for a wage, when they had trouble growing food to eat. Sometimes he sent us money. Mother had three sons left, after Marianthe my twin sister and my younger brother Vasilis died of infected facial burns. It was cold in winter and we all stood or sat near the fireplace, which had a metal screen in front to keep the embers and soot from coming into the room. But the screen became searing hot from the fire and Marianthe and Vasilis fell against it accidentally and got burned on the face. This happened to both of them years apart. There was always a risk of burns. We all huddled in front of the fire in winter. Mother applied chalk to the burns to stop infection but it got worse. There was no doctor. Sadly, my siblings both died of infected burns. But when my twin died, a part of me died too, and I became more boisterous, a trouble-maker. I had to live for the both of us.

We worked hard, collecting our olives for pressing to make oil; sowing corn, wheat and tobacco; taking the goats out to pasture; and collecting oregano, firewood and *flamouri* tea from the mountains. My eldest brother, Kostas, was eighteen when he started trading corn and wheat for a profit. He had a knack for business and was very intelligent and hardworking. Kostas helped Mother open a store in the village. He would tell me, “Just you wait and see, I will make you into a doctor.” I was so proud of him; there was no one else like him in all the villages in Serras. He wore houndstooth jackets, wool suits and pointy-toed shoes in the latest 1950s fashion. Dark ringlets fell in front of his face. His intelligent eyes were large and wide-spaced so that he looked angelic. Having only finished high school he tutored university students in mathematics. He was a mathematical genius.

“How did you learn these things?” an uncle asked. Kostas just smiled. He would explain algebra to his cousin in second-year university. He was very modest. Kostas loved reading books and had studied well at school. He did have an interest in going to university; however, with Father in exile, that was

now impossible. But Kostas was making the best of a bad situation. He was always positive. He would urge me to study and would give me spending money if I did well at school. I adored him. When I misbehaved, he would tell me patiently that I should behave better: he never let me get away with anything. We were all so proud of Kostas. I knew he would walk slowly when he went past a certain doorway in our village; I would try to urge him on, but he would not be hurried. A pretty girl lived there. If she saw him pass she always smiled and Kostas smiled back. A small flower of love was beginning to blossom.

The envy grew and grew. Kostas's life held promise above the ordinary; we knew that he would find a way to save us all from a life of hardship. In a way, he replaced the father we all missed. One morning he loaded up corn and wheat onto the cart of a cousin who was going to Serras. They left early and Kostas said he would be back by the late afternoon or early evening. Kostas did not want to sell the grain in the village and get a pittance for it or on credit. He knew where to sell it for a good price.

In the villages cars rarely passed. Only police or officials could afford a car. Ordinary people used donkeys or mules. That afternoon, Kostas would be returning on foot from trading in Serras. He had taken a lift by cart and had sold our corn and wheat for a good profit. Maybe everyone knew this. He walked home from Nigrita, over an hour away. Possibly, he was imagining ways to improve the grocery store so that he could work there all day rather than slaving in the fields.

I heard rumors that a car came behind him and Kostas turned to see who it was. He must have recognised the people inside, most of whom had political differences with Father. He probably turned his face and continued walking, not wanting any trouble. Kostas would have looked straight ahead; he was only fifteen minutes' walk from the village now. The car revved its engine and swerved close to him before going back to the middle of the road. They were playing chicken with him, trying to make him run for his life, laughing loudly. They came close again, this time missing him by inches.

I imagine Kostas was sweating by now, his mind spinning. He began to run. He could hear the cheers coming from the car. He ran, faster and faster, turning to avoid the car. It veered off the centre of the road, again following Kostas, who ran over a small hill of sand at the edge of the road, expecting the car to turn away from this obstacle. It followed him and hit him in the back of his legs. He fell forward and the car passed over him, striking his head, leaving him for dead.

There were rumours that inside the car were fascist supporters and also a relative. Politics still mattered more than blood, even though the war was supposed to have had ended in 1949. Those who had houses nearby would have seen the car pass, and who was inside it, as one car a day passed on the single road, but they kept their mouths shut. It was common for leftists to be disposed of by car accidents, or road attacks such as Lambrakis in 1963 and Panagoulis in 1976. We knew Kostas was killed because of father being a leftist in exile. No one would listen or help.

I always felt sad when Father told me the story of his brother Kostas. I had read that “the partisan movement was born in Athens but based in the villages, so that Greece was progressively liberated from the countryside” (Smith & Vulliamy 2014). This explains why what was happening in villages mattered to the rest of the country. Most of the rebels came from the villages and a large proportion of them were Greek refugees from Turkey after the expulsion of the Christian populations (ibid.).

Father never got over the loss of his elder brother, his guiding light during impressionable years, when his father was in exile. “That is why I hate those fascists, that’s the type of people they were. Doing things with evil in their hearts. It was 1951, the Civil War had ended, but still private wars continued,” Father said.

“The police investigation was a fiasco. They tried to say it was an accident and that Kostas was probably on the road in front of the car and got hit and killed. No one bothered to explain the tyre tracks swerving towards the side of the road and going up over the hill of sand. Some relatives asked for another investigation. ‘Why,’ they asked, ‘was this case closed so quickly?’ But no answers came. The culprits and their relatives kept their

mouths shut, hoping no one could solve the riddle. The villagers whose houses faced the road and had seen the single car that had passed by that day did not say a word. Another relative spoke secretly of a private confession he had heard, and the news spread along the grapevine but remained speculation.

“I once wanted to take revenge, but relatives pleaded with me to let bygones be bygones because the man we were told was responsible for my brother’s death was sick. I never went back to school after the loss of my eldest beloved brother, who was like a father to me. That dream died with him.

“Kostas had started a grocery store in the village and many villagers owed him money. But after his death, when Mother and I took the ledger to them, they refused to pay and said they had already settled their debts – no one could prove otherwise. We closed the store because no one else could run it. My grief has never ended. Mother was devastated, now she had lost three children since Father had begun fighting. She worked hard to keep food on the table, asking us remaining sons to work on the farm and sell produce, while she spun yarn, made us clothes on a hand loom, knitted, tanned hides to sell and also to make our leather moccasin shoes. It is true that if we had followed Father to Czechoslovakia that my older brother would have survived and perhaps gone to university, along with my brother and I. Staying in the village had been a death sentence for my brother.”

Father’s face always looked ashen when he told this story. It must have hurt him to tell it. I often wondered if telling the stories helped him heal. Father was not afraid of pain. He would grab loose skin from cuts and grazes and rip it right off so that the wound would be free to heal and not get caught on clothing. He also pulled one of his teeth out with his bare hands when he was seventy-five. It began wobbling thirty years after the handle of a jackhammer had bounced back and hit two of his teeth. Father did not want to go to the dentist to get something done which he could easily do himself. If anyone could shoulder the pain of memory, it was Father.

Father could resist pain – physical, mental and emotional – because he possessed the strength of three men. I remember seeing him bend metal bars with his bare hands in his seventies and balancing 200 kilos of plasterboards on his head in his fifties. He built a metal horizontal bar in our backyard by bending a long metal pipe and concreting it in

place. We eventually tied a swing to this bar, but Father would swing with his feet round and round the bar, then somersault into the air and land on his feet. I knew he had stopped going to school at around the age of ten, after the loss of his brother. So, these feats he learned on his own, by watching gymnasts on TV and circus performers in Greece. His physical stamina and ability were extraordinary. I often thought of Samson, who pushed the pillars and destroyed the temple, or Heracles, a Greek hero of mythical strength, and imagined Father's strength was of a similar nature.

When I took Father at about the age of seventy-seven to the hospital to have his heart checked, they found he had an irregular heartbeat. The doctor said this was a common ailment for someone of Father's age. The doctor was surprised Father took no medication for this. "If he's survived this long without any medication, then it is unlikely that medication will help him much more anyway." The doctor ripped the adhesive strips to monitor Father's heart off his chest. Chest hair came away with the strips and Father did not flinch. "They don't make them like this anymore," the doctor said, meaning that Father was a rare breed of man. I agreed. Because Father was stronger than most people and had a high tolerance to pain, he took risks that ordinary people would not take. I feared one day it could cost him his life.

I knew more than anyone how stoic Father was. He would get up to help people in the middle of the night, if their taps broke and the house was flooding, even if they had no money to pay him. Father could do things no one else would do. He was a combination of good Samaritan, activist, carpenter, acrobat, artist and strong man, but also a loving and caring father. He could be tough and expect perfection, but he was also incomparable. I knew if I lost him, I would never recover.

Wandering in the Mountains

Father not only had sad stories to tell, he also had happy memories from his childhood in Greece. His father was in exile and he was not afraid of his mother's beatings when he misbehaved, so he would still follow his heart's desire. He could not be kept at home: the whole world was his domain. And he would do anything to make his relatives happy, no matter what the cost. Father told me of some of his adventures.

I remember how an old aunt would gasp at the volume of wild oregano, *flamouri* tea, olives and almonds I would bring home on the donkey's back. Everyone else in the village was too lazy or afraid to go and gather them from the mountains. I would get my donkey and set out, without a saddle, only a rope – travelling twenty kilometres to the highest part of the mountains. Aunt would call me *Chamlazaros* because I hopped around from place to place, not standing still for too long, unlike everyone else who was content to stay in the village, letting their feet take root where they stood. I was an explorer, even finding the ancient graves of soldiers seven feet tall. Rusty helmets and decayed spears showed they had been warriors. I was too superstitious to touch anything belonging to the dead. It was easy enough to find ancient artefacts in the 1950s in Greece, before it became outlawed. I discovered a few coins in a field. They were given to an important person in the village to deal with, who then sold them to collectors or to the museum and pocketed the money. I had been too young to understand their value. I was free like a bird, nothing to keep me tied down. I had quit school, but I was not idle. I was resourceful and brave and I had time for older relatives.

In 1947 I was about seven years old and had not seen my father for the three years he had been hiding in the mountains. I grew wild and untamed, unafraid of most things. When I was ten in 1950 I found an unexploded shell, probably dropped during the Civil War onto the communist rebels who'd fled into the mountains a couple of years earlier. I came up the mountain with an old uncle and our two donkeys, to collect firewood and also to catch the giant

moustachioed fish, the *goulianos*, which swam in the streams. I was quiet, and while uncle rested under a tree with a fishing rod in his hands, I decided to see what the shell was really made of. I got a long stick and carefully manoeuvred the shell by rolling it a little at a time, until I came to the edge of a cliff. Below was a ravine full of broken stones. I pushed the shell to the edge, gave it a final shove and ran. It exploded and the ground shook like an earthquake. I cowered behind some trees, feeling fear for the first time.

‘What was that?!’ uncle said, waking in shock.

‘Nothing,’ I said.

‘Are you alright?’

‘Yes,’ I said, acting innocent to keep my secret.

The blast was heard in villages for miles around. Frightened, the donkey pulled on the rope so hard that it snapped. The donkey ran away. Not wanting to get into trouble, I didn’t tell anyone what happened.

Along with learning the carpentry trade I began accordion lessons with my brother. In winter we practised together many evenings by the fire, until I became proficient in local wedding songs, *tsifeteli*, *tik*, *mal*, and *kotsari*. I was an excellent dancer of all the Pontian Greek dances. My feet would move lightning fast, while my body was tall, erect, and arms held loose so that they moved in response to my steps. With my black curly hair, olive skin and white teeth, I always got the attention of all the girls who passed my way.

At one dance, I did notice a girl. She had a milky white face with pink cheeks and softly curled hair in a ponytail. She danced moving her skirt around so that her white petticoat was just visible above her black high-heeled shoes. She looked shyly at me once or twice, while I played accordion for her as she danced alone. With a small flash of a smile she turned, then went back to the table where her family was seated. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Demure and shy but with a mischievous smile. After I had a break from playing, I went over to our mutual relatives and found out where she lived and who she was. It was the wedding of my cousin, around 1962.

I tried to talk to the girl but she ignored me. She did not look my way again. I found that alluring. Other girls stole glances at me all the time and tried to catch my attention. But this girl looked only at her family and had the most radiant smile for them. I wanted her to smile again at me. I asked her mother if I could dance with her and she consented. I told her I was on leave from my army service and that when I returned, I might come to ask after her daughter. “Dance with her,” she said. I tried to speak to the girl but she did not say much. She only danced one dance with me. I could not tell if she liked me or not.

A few days later, I saw her walking with an older girl on the main road through all the villages, going back to their village. I walked behind her and she walked faster. I called out for her to stop. She walked faster and faster, but her friend stopped and turned. I walked up to her friend and asked her to tell the girl that I would like to speak to her. Then she did stop and turned with a serious look on her face. “I am not one of those street girls you are used to talking to. I have a mother and a father. If you want to talk to me you must ask their permission first. Now go away.” She urged her friend to hurry off with her, leaving me behind. Now I was certain that I had to speak to her father. I had not met such a girl before. She was an unusual girl, one that had control over her emotions and actions, one who, unlike me, did not let her emotions guide her. I could get angry in a flash, then forgive and smile the next minute.

I found out from an aunt who had married the girl’s uncle that she lived in Zervohori. I caught the bus from my village to her village and asked a stranger for directions. She pointed to an olive tree and said the house was just after that tree, on the left. I walked to her house and knocked on the door. Her father seemed happy to meet me, as he knew a little of my family background. He did not mind in the least that my father was a communist.

“Good day, my name is Haralambos and I have come to speak to you about your daughter.”

“Good day, I have many daughters, which one are you asking about?”

“The one who is about fifteen years old, with brown curly hair.”

“She is still young.”

“Can I talk to her?”

“I don’t have any objection to you speaking with my daughter, as long as you respect me and do the right thing. We have many daughters to marry off. Our name is everything to us. I will ask my daughter if she wants to speak to you.”

Her father, Christos, called the girl by her name – “Niki!” – but she did not come down the stairs. He went up to get her. I heard them arguing.

“Why did you tell him to come here?” her father asked.

“I didn’t tell him to come here. I told him to go away and leave me alone and that if he wanted to speak to me he must first ask for your permission.”

“Well he’s here now. Why don’t you just go down and talk to him for a little so he can see you are too young to marry and go.”

“I don’t want to talk to him,” Niki said.

“Look, he is not from a bad family. Speak to him for a little then he will leave.”

Niki came down the stairs, her chestnut brown hair softly combed into a ponytail tied with a light blue ribbon. She wore a fitted blue jumper and a pleated skirt which accentuated her tiny waist. She looked like a movie star.

“Your father said I can speak with you.”

“Well, then what do you want to speak to me about?”

“Come outside and we can talk.”

Niki turned to look at her father, who nodded. She walked outside in the yard for half an hour with me, then we went for a walk down the street for a hundred metres before we turned around and came back. I gave her my best smile, flashing my white teeth. I even tried to grab her hand once, which she

pulled away just in time. I liked her and she knew it. By the time I said goodbye to her at her father's door, I was sure she was the girl I wanted to marry. She was a little young at fifteen, but after a long engagement of a couple of years, my father should hopefully have returned from Czechoslovakia for the wedding. I was still a *fandaros* serving my compulsory two years' service in the Greek army, and she was very young.

I remember I had seen her earlier when she was seven or eight years old around 1955. She had been walking with other older girls in Zitohori village, but the other girls had been rude, throwing stones and calling me "*Kafkash*".

In 1962 I also saw her at my aunt's house. She was our common aunt. Aunt had married the girl's uncle and therefore became her aunt as well. She had been my aunt from her first marriage to my uncle Eraklis. So many years have passed since I first met her and we are still together.

I had seen photographs from 1963–64 of Mother and Father during their engagement: a stunning couple, both young and well dressed. Mother with immaculately styled hair piled high like Natalie Wood's and a suit with the pencil skirt above the knee and large ornamental buttons on the coat. She wore pointed slingback shoes. Father wore a dark suit and white shirt. Anyone would have stared at them in the street. I often feel glad that their engagement had been long, because those years were probably the easiest and most trouble-free in many ways. Once they settled in Australia, with four children to support, a mortgage and one wage, it was not an easy life. Father had a prosperous carpentry business in Greece and they had been set to have an easy life there. However, Father had itchy feet, and he didn't like being followed around by the rightists. It was during the last years of the dictatorship that my parents left Greece.

Mother and Father stopped dancing together sometime in the early 1980s. Before then we all danced together as a family at home and at Greek functions and Pontian festivals in Gisborne. I think they were struggling financially for some reason. I remember a storm broke the kitchen window and even though Father was a carpenter he did not replace the glass for months. He mentioned having back pain. Instead of immediately repairing the window he put a polystyrene fruit box into the gaping hole so no one cut their hands.

Then for several days that week we had pasta for dinner every night, which was strange. I knew something was wrong then, because we always had a wide variety of food and fresh fruit and vegetables. Whatever had happened, Father did not tell us. Maybe he did not wish to worry us.

Father often took us with him to houses he was repainting or renovating, to help out and pass him tools or do small tasks. I marvelled at his workmanship and envied the owners of those houses. For many years our house needed repairs, but Father never seemed to find the time because he was always helping out other people, even if they could not pay him. I remember seeing Father carrying several long plasterboard sheets stacked on top of each other on his head. I know those sheets were very heavy, and several people were needed to help move them; however, Father did the work alone. I eventually got bored watching Father work and only passing tools to him, until he let me play with the roll of aluminium sheeting he used for soldering. I cut it with the Stanley knife and made a small house and chairs and tables. Father liked to keep busy and this kept him very fit. I have a photo of Mother and Father dancing at my tenth birthday party. They still looked very much in love. Now they have arthritis in winter, aches and pains and the many complaints of old age. I find it hard to believe they were once so young and carefree.

Tobacco, Mikis Theodorakis and Puppet Shows

Tobacco farming was important for all the villages in the Serras region. I read that the tobacco farmers of Northern Greece were more prosperous than the general population until 1937, earning 19,146 drachmas instead of the national average of 11, 449 drachmas per year. Tobacco harvesting required skills that were in demand because the good workers made a huge difference in the quality and quantity of tobacco production. At the start of the Axis War and Greek Civil War period, approximately 35,000 tobacco workers lived in Northern Greece (Dagkas 2007, p. 4).

Father had many stories to tell about how tobacco farming shaped their lives. However, tobacco farming was only one of their main crops. They also produced wheat, corn, walnuts and almonds, most of which they traded or sold.

“Father, can you tell me how you farmed tobacco when you were in Greece?” I asked.

Father sits back in his armchair and I am so happy he is in the mood to tell me stories again, even the ones I have already heard. Together, through memories, we walk back through the streets of the villages that I have only seen without him. This is our only way to visit Greece together and I cherish it.

I learned to count in another language from a gypsy woman who would come to prepare the tobacco for drying. We had tobacco fields not far from the house and the sticky resin from touching the leaves would penetrate the skin so that it was not long before my head was spinning from the nicotine. The gypsy woman would count as she speared the tobacco on the metal spikes: “*Avalan, matavalan, dos, kus, koovalan, chengil, bengil, dazik, touzik, pirtak, tazik, pochouk, kotchouk, tzikatzak tzoutzouk.*” This was how the gypsies counted in Greece. She also sang songs and told stories. I forget her name, it was so long ago, but I haven’t forgotten the laughs and entertainment she gave us. There were many characters like this, people so full of life, even though they were poor. Often the rich envied them their freedom and spirit, their

internal wealth. There was no television back then; we relied on each other for stories and entertainment, for songs, for news, information and for cures. We needed extra hands to help us with our tobacco farming because there were less people in our family. People with large families were considered very lucky.

The *Karagiozas*, or puppeteer, was a Greek from Constantinople. He made wooden puppets similar to Indonesian shadow puppets. There were no movie theatres in the villages, so he was in great demand. He would travel around the 300 villages in Serras, coming to each village two or three times a year, because the villages were close together. He would ask me to come and move *Karagiozi* for him, while he moved the other puppets – the *Hatziliki*, *Kolitiri*, or the wife. When *Karagiozi* would hit any of the characters, I would move the puppet and the puppet master would slap his thigh and let out a yell. People laughed and loved the show. There were many stories which the puppet master had memorised. The puppet show was always in Uncle Giannis's Kafeneion when it came to my village.

There were many months when there was nothing to do, while the tobacco was growing or after it had been harvested, so the villagers relaxed and enjoyed life. Those were the good times of the year for most people. Planting, weeding and harvesting took up about half of the year. I was the champion of gymnastics and games, learning to swing from a rope between my teeth, swinging on a bar by my feet, followed by a somersault, and Cossack leaps and acrobatics. I spent hours perfecting these tricks when there was no farm work. The young men and I would compete and sometimes during feast days there would be competitions in which we could show our skill. The winner would get a small prize. Once I won a goat.

I went to many weddings in my village and learned to dance very well. Dancing was an important part of most celebrations and feast days for the saints, but especially weddings.

I was the one that villagers came to if they needed someone brave or heroic to do something dangerous. People were too scared to go fishing because of

snakes, but I would grab them and cut their heads off with an axe. Villagers only went fishing if I accompanied them.

I grew to love music and dance, because this was the best entertainment we had. The village would join together as one and share food and be joyful. As I grew older I liked the music of Theodorakis, but the authorities did not like us to listen to this “revolutionary” music which countered the propaganda of the time.

Mikis Theodorakis made an album called *Romiosini* in 1966, just before the dictatorship commenced in Greece. These songs were banned for many years. In the album, dedicated to the poetry of Ritsos, is a song – *Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes* (The Bells will Toll). The dead hold the rope connected to the bells of the resurrection. When Judgement Day approaches, they will ring the bells. This poetry has such strong imagery and was taken up by those against the dictatorship as a song of freedom. Because on Judgement Day the innocents will arise, and there will be a reckoning. This Judgement Day also represented the end of the dictatorship and injustice. Theodorakis was once the only voice to come out of Greece to tell the world what was happening there during the Civil War, of the injustices and the killings. Theodorakis was imprisoned during the Civil War and even buried alive, but he persevered and perhaps he survived because of his musical brilliance and great mind and because he never gave up, no matter what torture he was subjected to. Even the fascists secretly liked his music.

So many good and innocent people were killed by the fascists. When Mikis Theodorakis dies the Greeks will make him into a saint. He did a lot for freedom, for truth and for Greece.

Father loved Mikis Theodorakis, and I understood that he was a kindred spirit, a light in the darkness which never went out, a voice that Father could rely on amidst change, hardship and loss. I grew up listening and dancing to the music of Mikis Theodorakis. It became a part of my soul. The poetry and imagery strongly influenced how I saw life in

this world through the heart, so beautiful and fragile in these poetic songs. Father lost his family and Greece and I lost them too, but we still had the music to listen to.

There is a Greek way of looking at the world which magnifies things, sees them in all their glory, not as mundane and everyday things. Maybe this is because of all the wars and loss and displacement that Greeks have endured, so life is seen as very short and precious. Perhaps it is also because of the Greek Orthodox way of looking at life and memorialising those lost.

The adverse side of this is that all emotions can be amplified, including anger. This is why Greeks usually speak very loudly and passionately. It is part of being Greek. Of course, not all Greeks conform to this stereotype, but many do, especially those of the older generations. I remember being surprised and laughing at the hilarious ways my great-aunts would speak to other relatives, using razor-sharp wit to get to the bottom of each matter candidly, but also to make fun of the situation and people involved. I had not seen people speak like this in Australia, except stand-up comedians, or drovers and swagmen who used to sometimes come to Melbourne during the summer in the seventies. My relatives would make their own everyday events like sagas in *Karagiozi* puppet shows. There was no television when they were born. They had the gift of making life entertaining. Have we lost this art? With social media, television and endless distractions, have we lost sight of each other and such gifts of life?

Easter

Easter is one of the most important times of the year for Greeks. Father always loved Easter and whenever I would bake the sweet, yeasted bread called *tsoureki*, he would comment how much like his mother's it was and how she had prepared her dough, so that I could improve my technique.

"Always use pure butter," Father said. "And let it rise for a couple of hours so that it is light and fluffy." I understood Father loved his mother very much and sought to see her continuation in me, her namesake. Just like I look for similarities between him and my son. Easter and Christmas were a very special time for us. Father did not pay much attention to the other feast days except for the fifteenth of August which celebrates the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.

On Easter Saturday Father would wake up half an hour before midnight when we came to take him to the Greek Orthodox Church in Footscray, the Holy Trinity. Once she turned sixty-eight, Mother would not attend church some years. She said she was not well enough. But Father would always go.

At Easter one year, around 2014, I came to Father's house at eleven-thirty at night with my sister, who I had also picked up on the way with my seven-seater car. I had already called two hours earlier to tell my parents to get ready. I knocked on the door, but no one came to open it. I rang the house phone and again there was no answer.

"What's going on?" I asked my sister.

"I am not sure, let's knock again."

We knocked and then I began knocking on the window of Father's bedroom which faced the porch. There was no sound from within.

"Let's go round the back," my sister said.

“OK. I hope they are both fine.” I was worried about Father, who several years before had two stents put in his arteries, and about Mother’s high blood pressure.

The back door was unlocked so we walked into the dark house. I went into Father’s room and saw him lying in the bed. I shook him a couple of times. Taking a quick breath, he woke up. “Baba, it’s time to go to the church,” I said.

“Yes, *poulaki mou*,” he said and began to get up. In five minutes, he was dressed in a smart black suit, shirt and tie. Mother, though, would not get up. “No, I am not coming, I am not well,” she said. We gave up trying to convince her to come. At the church we bought our candles and had our dyed red eggs ready in our pockets.

When the priest sang *Christos Anesti* – Christ has arisen – we hit each other’s eggs, saying “*Christos anesti*”. This time I had the strongest egg. To have the strongest unbroken egg is a sign of good luck. We kissed each other on both cheeks and waited for the holy light to come our way so we could light our candles. Father met his friend who had emigrated from a neighbouring village to Australia. They chatted while I looked for more friends in the crowd. Usually, my whole family tried to come, but sometimes it was not always possible due to distance or caring for young children. Father kept his candle lit with aluminium foil around it like a skirt to catch any dripping wax while we all got into the car and drove back to Father’s house. We put the burning candle in a candle holder, glad we had brought the holy light back from the church without mishap. Then we had some lettuce soup with egg and lemon. Eggs were allowed after Saturday’s midnight mass. Mother woke up to have soup and crack eggs with us.

The next day on Easter Sunday, as usual, every family member was there. Father would then tell us stories about his Easters in the village in Greece, while we sat down to the family lunch with vegetarian dishes as well as roast lamb and chicken. Father was an expert at making souvlakis on bamboo skewers. He infused olive oil with fresh rosemary leaves and crushed garlic. Then he used a rosemary sprig as a basting brush to put this oil on the lamb chunks before he placed them on the barbeque. He also made chicken souvlaki, and mushroom and vegetable souvlaki for me because I was vegetarian. Easter was always one of our favourite times of year. An hour after lunch we would have the *tsoureki* sweet bread with a glass of milk if we still had room. Then Father would start telling us the stories of his youth.

We had twenty-five chickens and they produced many eggs, which meant lots of eggs for dyeing at Easter and for making *tsourekia*. After boiling the eggs in the red dye, I would find which ones were strongest by tapping them on my front teeth. Then I would wrap them in hay and put them at the edge of the wood-fired oven in our yard to slowly heat for a few hours. Then they became rock hard. It was the tradition that whoever had the strongest egg would collect the broken eggs of all the others. Once I collected so many eggs that it took a month to eat them.

One of our hens was very pretty, with fluffy feathers, and my mother called her *chouchekli*, which is the Pontian word for flower. I caught a hen for my farewell party before going to the army, and accidentally caught *chouchekli* in the dark and slaughtered her. Mother called for her and looked for her but she could not find her fluffy hen. Then she understood I must have slaughtered her favourite hen. “So you took my *chouchekli*?” She was very sad; the other hens did not have such fluffy pretty feathers.

Mother would make eight or nine *tsourekia* for Easter. She would allow the yeasted sweet bread to double in size, then she would brush beaten egg over the top of the prepared bread, which was a long or circular plait, and they would rise high and smell so delicious when baking.

She would mix flour, water, butter, sugar, *mahlepi* spice and eggs with fresh yeast for the *tsourekia*. She also made Easter biscuits from butter, sugar, flour and water, and roll the dough flat, then into cigar shapes. They were so delicious that I would eat ten at a time.

Mother also made couscous. Half of all the Pontian Greek women in the village could make couscous. Few of the native Greek women knew how to make it. It was so delicious that I would lick the oil from my fingers after eating it. Mother was the best cook in the whole region.

She was called *Metenjeva* because she came from *Gemusmeten*, now in Turkey. They had gold and silver mines there, so she was known as the “woman of the mines” or more specifically “woman from Meten”. The girls

of our village would come to learn how to make pasta from my mother, as well as couscous and many other foods such as preserves and sweets.

We would make the red colour for our Easter eggs from onion skins. You could also buy red food dye. Relatives such as Uncle Stephanos and Aunt Kali would come to visit us with their families. We had no electricity and lit the spirit lamps in the evening. There was no television, so visiting relatives was a big part of our life. For Lent we ate *fasoulada* bean soup, all grown in our own garden. Other Lenten foods were lentil soup, couscous and pasta with tomatoes, fried lettuces, leeks and onions, roast potatoes and zucchinis or eggplant. We had to wait till Saturday to go to church and for the holy light to come from the priest before we could break our eggs with family members and kiss each other on both sides of the face and say “*Christos anesti*” – Christ has arisen. Then we ate our eggs before heading home to eat the hot *Magiritsa* soup made from sheep or goat intestines and small meats, onions, garlic and herbs. The next day, Sunday, we would eat roast sheep or goat from a great spit.

We had a giant wood-fired stove which was over a metre wide. One side was an oven and stove, and the other was the heater. It had four legs and made a vibrating noise which we loved to hear as it heated up. I have not seen this type of stove anywhere else. This stove was where we all gathered during winter. We roasted chestnuts on the top of it, which were sweet and soft-centred. Chestnuts grew in the village and in the mountains. I always collected big bags of them. We were a very loving family and even though we did not have much, we had everything.

My dog Liza would race out of the house to find my brother and me when we came back from the mountains. Once Liza was nowhere to be seen when we were eating, which was strange, because she waited below the table for scraps. We called but she would not come, so we looked outside and saw she had dug a hole underground to catch a mole. She dug and dug but the mole got away. Liza would come to find us whenever Mother was worried. She ran home in advance to let her know we were coming from collecting wood, herbs, nuts or tea. We were still young and Mother worried about us.

Life in the villages followed the four seasons. A season to work hard and sow, a season to weed, a season to harvest and a season to rest. The whole winter we had little work to do. Planting would begin after the snows thawed and the morning frost lessened. In late December we sang Christmas carols at all the houses of my relatives in the village and would be given dried carob pods, *karoupia*, to crunch on. They were sweet with a honey-like gel inside. We held a metal instrument like the triangle used in orchestras, but it was actually diamond-shaped and I would hit it to accompany our songs. Our favourite was *Agios Vasilis erhete*, which means “Father Christmas is coming”. We even went to our aunts’ houses up in Kizili village. They gave us nuts and apples. We would spend the whole of Christmas Day visiting, collecting treats and singing carols.

After winter, children from Zitohori would come with a toy bird – a giant *helidoni*, a swallow – and they pulled the wings with strings so it would flap. This was the time when the spring swallows would come in March. Children would wear an intertwined red, blue and white thread on their wrist all of March, then at the end of the month would take it off and place it on a fence or branch so the swallows would use it to build their nests. Everyone waited for the swallows to come. The swallows would go to Egypt to escape the winter then returned in March. They would tire during the flight and often rested on ships before continuing their journey across the Mediterranean Sea. Swallows would always return to the same nest year after year. They built them on the sides of walls, under the eaves of rooves and balconies. To us they symbolised hope, joy, the return of summer, longer days and the coming Easter. Everything in life is a cycle. It goes round and round, Easter follows Christmas, then other feast days for the saints and Virgin Mary are celebrated with festivals at different villages. Each village has their patron saint. The young grow, and then get old. The old die and the new generations come forward to take the lead. I have seen so many generations come forward: my younger cousins, then children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces. Most of the older ones are gone; a few went beyond a hundred years in my family, such as grandparents and cousins or aunts. Long life is a blessing.

Just as Father loved breaking red-dyed Easter eggs, my son, named after him, also inherited this love of cracking eggs. He wanted to crack eggs all year round, not just for Easter Saturday or Sunday. At the age of four, my son saved some of his chocolate bunnies and eggs to be reused for endless Easter egg hunts in our garden year round. Easter was a magical time for all of us.

When we were children in Prahran, Mother would not let us have breakfast before we went to the morning church service at *Constantinou and Eleni* Greek Orthodox Church. This meant fasting till after we came out of the church, which would probably be around eleven am. We would walk up Greville Street to Chapel Street and catch the tram down to South Yarra then walk to the church. I remember in 1976 during Lent we went, and old women dressed in black were lying on the ground, face down, some with arms outstretched like they were on a crucifix. My sister and I ran about in excitement as children often do, and accidentally trod on an old woman's fingers as she lay face down on the cold tiles. She shooed us away and while I was sorry for stepping on her hand, I thought she was stern and scary. When mass ended, the priest would then give us the spiced red wine, symbolising Christ's blood, on a teaspoon after we said our name, then we got a square of white bread, symbolising Christ's body. We ate this quickly because we were hungry. Outside Mother would buy the round sesame-seed crusted buns in the shape of a large zero in the church yard. They were delicious and light, with hundreds of toasted sesame seeds on the outside.

Father never came to church unless it was Easter or Christmas. He was always busy fixing something or helping someone do a home renovation. Mother said he had been different in Greece. He would go and kiss the priest's hand and show respect. His mother had taught him well, but later he turned his back on all of this. I remember Father told me when I was a teenager, "You don't need to go to church to pray. You can pray anywhere, even in the bathroom." Father also told me something which I never forgot and which also helped me never to give up hope. "Even if you are walking through the fire, don't get burned." This fire he referred to could have been hellfire or it could also have been any difficult situation. It taught me that not giving up is a choice. You choose to go on, to not get burned. I wondered from where Father had learned this wisdom, but from his stories, I can see he suffered much, with little support. Perhaps Grandmother Athina told

him those words? She suffered the loss of three children and much more; she could have told him how to keep hope. In my mind she was a light in the darkness. In my darkest moments, when I had suffered yet another miscarriage and was grieving and about to give up hope, those words helped me to keep going forward. I passed those words on to my nephew, because he was the same age I had been when Father had given me this advice. This is what family is about, passing on that which is meaningful, that which helps, that which should not be forgotten, so the future generations can also have hope.

As a child I listened, but now I understand that I must speak too, to pass on knowledge and memories of my own as well as family stories. The *ouroboros* swallows its tail then the story begins again and again and again.

Hail Storm

Hail started pelting the front window and Father got up from his armchair and pulled aside the curtain to check through the venetians. The hail was small and started to melt as it hit the window. “It’s not heavy,” Father said. As a child I would run out after the hail fell to put pieces of it in my mouth and enjoyed the feel of it melting into water droplets. My memory of hail is positive; however, not all of Father’s stories were about happy times in the village. He had some sombre stories to tell as well. The political climate was not the only danger to be faced. Mother Nature could also unleash wild weather on the farming communities, and sometimes death and destruction. I held my breath while Father told me about a hail storm in his village.

I was alone in the tobacco fields in 1958. My mother had been with me but she went home to feed the animals and cook. All the nearby villagers were out in the fields planting tobacco. I had a barrel of water which I used to water the seedlings after I planted them. When the tobacco buyers would come, they often gave us five drachmas per kilo and then sold it for a hundred drachmas per kilo. The price varied but often it was very low.

It was a good day for planting, but then the weather changed. Gigantic black clouds came quickly across the horizon towards the village. We could tell hail was coming. I threw the water out of the barrel and got under it. Suddenly hail the size of golf balls came down, hitting the barrel and almost knocking it off me. I struggled to keep it over me. The poor donkey was out in the hail storm but survived. Crops were ruined; the seedlings I had just planted were all smashed. Any remaining seedlings which were unharmed could be planted later. Fruits were destroyed on trees, vegetables smashed in garden beds, some animals and people killed. It brought on a very hard year, because there was a shortage of grain, fruit and vegetables. The tobacco prices were higher than normal because there was not much tobacco available for the buyers to purchase, as most people had planted early and had their seedlings destroyed. Luckily, we still had a large quantity of wheat stored in our house to feed us

until the next crops were ready. Wheat could save lives during famine. Many people had very little to eat and had to rely on the generosity of relatives or neighbours.

This is why we kept the wheat in a large corrugated-iron drum in one of our rooms. It was to see us through dangerous periods and disaster, to be used for bread flour, replanting or trading for other food. This wisdom came from my grandfather Haralambos, a wealthy farmer who had seven mills on seven hills, which they left behind in Pontus. They always knew how to store wheat. My father had set up this drum and we kept using it. He had learned from his father Haralambos. It was the wheat stores, and generosity of his father and grandfather in Turkey towards all people no matter what their religion, which allowed for safe passage of the family to Greece. The Turkish neighbours rode beside them to keep them safe. Not all relatives were lucky to escape in time. Yet even though we had wheat stores and were generous, this was not enough to keep us safe from the fascists during and after the Greek Civil War.

I would help harvest the wheat by hand from our land with my brother, then after we finished, we helped the other farmers. All able-bodied villagers would gather and be paid to harvest wheat by larger farmers. I was a favourite worker. I worked tirelessly while we all sang traditional Pontian songs, *tik* or *mal*, and harvested the wheat in time to the music. It was like dancing: you swung the scythe in a rhythm. We raised our voices and it carried us forward to battle. I was always ten steps in front of everyone else and got paid more for doing a larger share of the work. The wheat stood about a metre tall, and when it was ready, the golden ripe heads would bow down. We planted it in the spring and harvested it in late summer. I would grab a large fist of wheat in one hand and swing the scythe near the ground to sever the stems and throw the pile behind me so the slower villagers could come along and tie the cut wheat bundles into larger sheafs and put them to the side. Then we would load up the wagons, and donkeys would take them to the sheds to be dried for a few days before threshing to separate the wheat grain from the stems. We kept the wheat stems as food for the animals.

Harvesting and making our own food kept us in touch with the changing seasons and the cycles of life. Youth, maturity, old age, death. Each plant, animal and man followed that cycle. Young were born, new crops sown, people married and had children, then grew old and wise, and then died and were farewelled by those they left behind. As you grow older, this cycle of life becomes clearer when you see the succeeding generations springing up before you, the children and grandchildren or great-grandchildren, nephews and nieces. And all those older than you slowly pass away. You begin to understand the essence of life and what is important in life. And each generation faces the same challenges more or less – finding a trade or living, finding a mate, marrying and starting a family, helping other relatives. There are personal and family duties.

Living in the modern world with supermarkets supplying us with everything has made us lazy and cut us off from each other and from Mother Nature. In the old days, the natural world gave us omens of bad seasons to come, warnings of illness or famine, such as when animals were born lame, or stillborn, or birds flew in particular directions or patterns, when fish died, when snakes came across our paths. Strange events would be discussed and those who had the power to understand such things would explain it to the rest of the villagers. Often their predictions were correct. We would check the moon in the evening to see if there was a white ring or rainbow around it, as this predicted rain or fair weather. Then we would know if we should plant early or late in the day or on another day. Sometimes we just had to get the work done anyway and risk rain and lightning. We did as much as we could each day, because being lazy would mean having little to eat that year. God gave us hands and legs so we should use them and work. I loved to work. But I also loved to have fun.

Father enjoyed making his own dried oregano and growing and pickling his own olives or preserved carrot and cabbage. It gave him a satisfaction that could not be gained from store-bought goods. I often found Father's oregano was more flavourful than ones I bought. Firstly, he had the right variety of wild oregano seeds to plant, then he harvested

them and dried them correctly. The first time I picked olives from Father's tree I noticed they were oily. And when I pricked the skins of the olives to cure them in water, I could see an oily film floating on the water. Olives are full of oil, making them perfect for oil production. Father told me that olive oil was first produced in Greece and some trees are thousands of years old. Greek food requires it. A common snack from my parents' villages is large slices of eggplant, zucchini and potatoes fried in olive oil and lightly salted. These taste best when eaten with crusty bread, or as a sandwich. I found there were many dishes which were quick and easy to prepare, which suited people fasting for Lent or working in the fields. Then there were the elaborate dishes which required more work, such as stuffed peppers or stuffed eggplants and moussaka. Whenever I prepared stuffed peppers my father would say, "You are just like my mother – your peppers taste exactly like hers did, my flower bud." Father often praised my cooking, commenting how much like his mother's it was. He told me, "I love all of my children, but you I love the best." I know he loved his mother very much and in many ways he saw her in me. "You have her hair and look like she did," he often said. I felt sad I did not get to meet my paternal grandmother when I grew up. I only have a few memories of her from when I lived in Greece.

The Village Band

When I was about four years old, we lived in a flat in Highett, and I remember we were on the large common balcony outside our apartment. It was midsummer, and the evening was hot and slightly humid. Perhaps it was 1973, around eighteen months after we arrived in Australia. Father played his accordion sitting on a chair from our kitchen. My sister and I spun around him in circles. My wide skirt flew out and I gazed at the hem as I spun. It helped me to not get too dizzy if I focused on something. Spinning this way was mesmerising and I felt joyous. The light above our front door was on, and I saw a giant huntsman chased by another huntsman run across silken threads on the ceiling. Once they got to the hot light, they dropped down on threads one at a time and we screamed. Father grabbed my teddy bear and hit the spiders. I lost interest in the bear after that and my arachnophobia began. According to Mother the spiders were a bad omen, of two events one after another. I think after this Father broke his leg. For weeks he was at home and miserable. He never liked being incapacitated. This dislike of doctors and bed rest often led him to take risks with his health. He was grumpy for two weeks, then was able to ride his bike to work again. I am sure if this is when a huge nail went through his ankle at work, where he assembled pallets with a nail gun. Father pulled the nail out by himself as he was annoyed waiting hours for the doctor to come. He had no idea about workers compensation – no one informed him, not even other Greeks at work, or the management – and he never claimed it. We struggled for those weeks without an income.

Father played the accordion to feel happy and unite us as a family. He would tell us how he learned to play; it was an important part of his youth and led to him meeting Mother. Although Mother and Father were probably fated to meet anyway.

My brother played the accordion with cousins Georgos on the violin, Kostas on the drums and Mihalis on the clarinet. They would play at weddings and my brother Panagiotis would bring home 500 drachmas and we lived on that for two months. Georgos played amazing violin. It pulled the heart strings. At weddings, the bride and her parents would cry. Before leaving her house for church, the bride would bend down three times in front of the door holding a

plaited bread wreath on her head, then she would tear it up and throw it to the crowd, who would try to catch it. It was good luck to get a piece of the soft bread.

Those days people loved each other and respected their parents. Everyone cried when Georgos played violin because it followed the twists and turns of the heart. He went to Sweden and worked there. He had two boys and one was an invalid and died but the other one grew up strong. Never have I heard a violin played that way since. One popular wedding song was *Orea ine oi nifi mas, orea kai ta prikia tis*, which means “Our bride is very beautiful and so is her dowry”. Then the song would continue with “how wonderful her companions are who think about her happiness; long live the bride and groom”. When this song was played every single person would be crying. It meant the bride was leaving the parental home and a chapter of that family’s life was ending and a new one beginning. Weddings lasted for three days. On a Monday young girls of the bride’s family would come to each house in the village with a small glass of liqueur and sweets or chocolates and tell each villager they were invited to the wedding that Sunday. Then on Friday evening, the groom’s family would dance, sing and enjoy food and wine at his house. The next day there would be dancing and festivities at the bride’s house. Then on Sunday the groom’s family would dance all the way to the bride’s door in procession with musicians and gifts, to take her to the church. There would be games played between the bride and the groom’s family. The bride would delay by saying none of the shoes fit. If the groom’s family gave some money then suddenly the shoes fit. The groom would be shaved by a barber that the bride’s family paid for. This was an important ritual before the wedding. There were songs and festivities prior to the bride leaving home for the wedding and then for when she was welcomed to the husband’s home. Later the next day the bride would return to her parental home once more for a visit as a new bride.

These types of people like my cousin Georgos are rare to find these days. His memory lives on in everyone who knew him. He was a kind and golden man.

I planned to follow him to Sweden, but my papers were delayed again and again by the authorities.

Eventually I learned some accordion too and would play beside my brother or with the whole band at weddings. I learned by imitating my brother as he practised at home. He was a patient teacher. It was at one of these weddings that I met my future wife as she danced alone on the dance floor, her white lace petticoat peeking out from under her wide skirt. She was one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen. She was only fifteen.

Father did not like to talk much about weddings, as his had not been a smooth one. However, his love of family, dance, music and playing the accordion remained. He passed this on to us children. We often went to the Pontian dance events in Melbourne during the eighties. Father knew many people in Melbourne from Greece because he worked in their homes doing renovations. He sighs as he tells me that at least 200 Greeks he knew in Footscray and the surrounds have passed away by 2015, and some of their children also passed away early through drugs or alcohol or illness. The Greek presence in Lonsdale Street has diminished, with shops and restaurants closing. But it is part of the great cycle of life. All that is, eventually changes or fades away, unless we fight for its survival. Then it can continue to exist somewhere else or in another form.

Father stopped dancing for many years after his mother died. “The desire has left me – *then eho kouragio*,” he said. I had to beg Father to play the accordion again. Once in a while he would humour us and play it, then he would play for hours. We lived in Australia, but our hearts were in Greece.

Sweden

There is one story that I found difficult to understand. It is the story Father told me of his parents, brother, sister-in-law and nephew leaving Greece for Sweden. I could not understand which events had led to them leaving in apparent secrecy or why it had happened. Every time I listen to the story I try to get an answer. The explanation Father gives me is not sufficient. I still cannot understand the family dynamics which led to this separation. I wonder if it was all a misunderstanding that inevitably led to us leaving for Australia while the rest of Father's family was in Sweden. Father is always sad when he tells me this story, because he felt abandoned. I remember him telling me that his brother told him, "You are not for living abroad, you should live in Greece." Father did not seem to agree with this, however true it may have been. I listen to Father explain what happened.

Many years ago, around 1971, while we were living in Thessaloniki I got a letter in my brother's handwriting from Sweden. My parents, brother, sister-in-law and their young son had gone to Sweden. *We left secretly without saying goodbye*, he wrote, *because we knew you would have made it more difficult for us to leave*. Yes, I would have asked them to take me with them, to keep the family together or not to leave Greece at all. I felt a deep sadness and wondered when I would see them again. I always tried to include everyone in my plans, so it was a shock to find out that I was left out of this huge decision by them. I had arranged to go to Sweden first but the authorities never signed my papers. I kept waiting. Then my brother got accepted to go.

My father Kleanthis had only been back six years from exile, and now he had gone abroad again. I had lost him when I was two then did not see him properly again until after my wedding in 1964.

I tried to go abroad many times but the local police station would not sign my documents so I could get my passport. I had work at a retired army general's house, and I fixed a door frame and replastered a wall which had cracked. I

was very fair with my prices, and the general asked what favour he could do for me in return. “Sir, I keep trying to get a stamp and signature on some forms to allow me to get my passport, but the local authorities won’t sign it.”

“Why do you want to leave Greece? You have golden hands; you can make a good living here.”

“Yes, sir, that is true, but I have a wife and two children. I don’t have any land in my name yet, and my earnings go towards rent and food. My parents have gone abroad and rented out their fields and house. There is nothing for me here.”

“You are wrong, my son.” The general put his hand on my shoulder, and then he sighed. “However, as you have done such a good job for me, I feel I would like to grant your wish if possible.” The general picked up the phone and called the local police station; he spoke to the officer there and asked why the papers would not be signed.

“Why do you listen to the rumours of other people?” the general yelled down the phone at the policeman. “He is a good boy, of good character and I vouch for him. You can’t find another like him in the whole village.” The general listened to the policeman’s reply, and then he laughed. “Look, times have changed – if you still separate the right wing from the left, then you need to wake up. I will tell him to keep out of politics, now you do your job.”

The general told me that other residents of the village had spoken against me because I was the son of an ex-communist. The general had ordered that they sign the papers immediately. The papers were ready the next day, after two years of trying. I am certain if the general had not spoken to the police on my behalf, I would never have been given permission to leave Greece.

I started getting the visas ready for both Germany and Australia. Since I had gotten permission from the local authorities to get my passport ready, I wanted to follow my family to Sweden. My brother did not respond to my letters. I got my visas ready and all the countries of Europe were listed; however, there was a mark against Sweden. I was not sure what that meant.

My wife told me, “Sweden is barred. You were not given permission to go there.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I said. “Sweden is part of Europe and I have permission to travel anywhere in Europe.” I travelled to Sweden and at the border I was refused permission. They rang the Greek embassy, which confirmed I could not enter. Waiting in Denmark for permission to enter, I sent a letter to my brother to come and help me. I did not hear from my brother. Perhaps he could not help. I decided to go to Germany where another cousin was living. Many of my relatives had fled due to the political climate. The dictatorship was making it difficult for any relatives of ex-communists to have a fair life. To get to Germany I passed through Holland. It was a beautiful country but I was shocked at how young women dressed and behaved. They wore such short dresses and did not seem to mind if their undergarments were visible. I saw many girls lying on the riverbanks making out with young men. I had not seen this behaviour before. I learned a few Dutch words; one was *shra*, which was “scissors”. I bought some beautiful fabric with gold threads woven through it for my wife and she made it into a gorgeous party dress with a gold rose at the chest. In Germany my cousin was kind enough to let me live with him and his wife and child in a small flat. I slept on the couch. It was small and crowded but they were very nice and treated me like family. I worked in a factory. After a few months I began to learn some of the language and I saw how life was there. It was hard and there was racism. In the factory Greeks stuck with Greeks, Turks with Turks, Germans with Germans and often there were clashes. I decided to go back home, but my cousin wanted me to stay. I told him I would go back home and apply for a longer-term visa or residency.

I returned home after being gone for months. I put my fate in God’s hands and decided to go to the first country that granted me a visa – Australia or Germany. I got permission to go to Australia within a month. Then we quickly sold our belongings and packed those we wanted to take with us. It was exciting to have a new beginning in a new country but also sad to leave those we loved behind. I had found the courage to go abroad because of my own family having left for Sweden. If they could do it, then I could do it too. We

first got a train to Athens, then an airplane to Egypt. From there we boarded a ship which would take a month to sail from the Suez Canal around Africa to Mauritius then Australia. It would pass through one of the roughest seas in the world between Africa and Australia, sail past Western Australia, Adelaide then Melbourne and Sydney. We had the choice to get off at Melbourne or Sydney. We chose Melbourne because another family we came to know on the ship were getting off there and encouraged us to do the same.

Further to Father's memories of us leaving Greece for Australia, I remember us being in an open jeep going through a jungle in Africa – maybe it was Djibouti; Father told me we stopped there. Father organised a quick safari while the ship was reloading supplies. He struck up a jovial conversation with the khaki-clad African driver. It must have been in Greek, because I am not sure that Father had learned much English on the ship. Mother told me he threw the English books aside and preferred to talk to other Greeks going to Australia than study and told Mother not to bother going to the English-language classes on the ship. Father made lots of contacts on the ship, which helped him the early years in Australia. The drive in the jungle was exciting for all of us. We found a pineapple plant growing there and the driver grabbed a ripe fruit from the middle of the plant and sliced it open with a huge knife, offering us some to taste. It was wonderfully sweet. We had never even seen one before. There was another surprise – Father purchased bananas. It was the first time we had tried them as well. I liked the bananas just as much as the pineapple. Mother was terrified and kept saying, "Lions or cannibals might attack us in the jungle, let's go back to the ship." I was both excited and scared, waiting for a lion to jump out and surprise us with a mighty roar. The weather was extremely hot and humid once we left the cool shade of the jungle and drove in the open jeep. Father was always brave like this, loving to travel, meet new people and try new things.

Back on the ship, I remember thin African men darkened by the sun wearing white singlets and loincloths carrying parcels the size of a small car on their backs, supported by a white sling around their foreheads. Barefoot, taking small quick steps. It astonished us to see anyone working this way, and how strong one person could be. The men did not look ominous, but we had never seen people of this skin colour before and Mother panicked, pulling us close. We were frightened of these hard-working men after she did

this. Obviously, her actions were due to ignorance and culture shock. I was so distracted holding onto the rails and watching the loading of the ship that my favourite blue thong with a yellow *margarita* flower fell off my foot into the sea. I cried when Mother said we could not get it back and it would float over to the African harbour. This was the first time that something happened in my life which had irreversible consequences. Before then, I usually got what I asked for. The second irreversible thing which would take time for me to realise was that we had left Greece and our relatives there.

A week or so after this we weathered a terrible storm. Mother was lying on a deck chair after dinner. My sister and I had ventured out on deck and the wind pulled our small bodies towards the rails at the edge of the ship. I was only three and a half and my sister was two and a half. The wind and water raged and shrieked like harpies. The black waves which rose and fell beckoned me to come over the edge as I stared at the hypnotic motion. I was afraid of the pull of the waves. The wind pushed me against the rails and held me there, with its invisible force. I called Mother but she just smiled from the deck chair and would not move. The waves became gigantic dark mountains, making the ship rock and roll. I tried to get away, but the wind was too strong. I had to wait for the ship to rock the other way to attempt my escape. When the wind was not so strong, I ran towards Mother. My sister followed behind. I was relieved to get away from the edge of the ship and dared not go out there again. Mother was dazed, lying on the deck chair. I now wonder if she had consumed alcohol and that is why she did not rise to help us away from the rails. Or perhaps she thought we were safe. Mother does not drink, so it is unlikely she was intoxicated. Perhaps the waves had hypnotised her too. My memory of those waves and my fear of them has not faded.

Sometime during the night, the ship rocked violently and I fell off the top bunk. I cried, rubbing my head. Father exchanged his bottom bunk for my top bunk. I learned it was safer to sleep closer to the floor. Initially Father let me have the top bunk because he thought I was old enough. Living on the ship was exciting. There were many other families and we would meet during meal times. Mother told me there were lots of dried black olives provided for the Greek passengers.

One day the ship staff gave Mother a couple of folded pieces of crepe paper, one red and one white. Mother made my sister and I pretty red dresses out of it, with jagged borders like dresses in the Flintstones, and matching red headbands with white flowers sewn onto

them. Later that day there were festivities on the ship and we had a dance competition. The children all held hands and danced. I won the dance competition. However, the prizes – which were dolls or cars – had run out and Mother was upset. They found a consolation prize for me later, a spare doll. Life on the ship was fun; we stayed with Mother most of the time while Father was busy networking. Eventually the day came when we berthed in Melbourne and disembarked. I remember being terrified stepping down off the ship, fearing my leg would slip on the wide spaced stairs with thick rope handrails on the side, that I would end up overboard. Father got a taxi and we went to the Migrant Hostel in Maribyrnong which had been made for newly arrived migrants. There we got a small room with bunk beds to sleep in and store our belongings. Breakfast was served at five-thirty am and ended at seven am, and we found unusual foods there such as baked beans on toast. Father spent time liaising with other Greeks while we were left behind at the hostel doing activities such as drawing. There were also English lessons. I began to pick up words and phrases. After a month at the hostel, Father found somewhere for us to live, in a bungalow behind another Greek family's house in Balaclava, a then working-class suburb of Melbourne.

Photograph

I look at the photo of Father which sits on top of the fifty-five-inch television screen covered with a white lace tablecloth. Before he married, he was only known as Zacharias, but Mother always called him by his new name, Haralambos, given to him when he was rechristened at eighteen in an attempt to avert the disaster which befell his elder brother from happening to him too. Zacharias was a name with communist implications at the time, due to Zachariadis who was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Zachariadis had urged Greeks to resist the fascist occupiers during the Axis War so the Greek government released him from jail. However, the Nazis sent him to Dachau concentration camp. He returned in 1946 after Nazi Germany collapsed and this time he urged the Greek people to fight for democracy, which meant resisting the rightist government. This was one event which contributed to the Greek Civil War. Father could not continue to have that name, so his godfather re-christened him Haralambos, after his grandfather. Everyone in the village, though, still called him Zacharias.

The photo stays the same, but every day I seem to notice something new. I see the dark shadows of the past playing across the faces, the frozen dreams which remain captured by the photographer's skill, and the subjects' lack of ability to make their faces devoid of emotion. There are not many photos of Grandmother Athina, as she refused to be photographed. Maybe she thought suffering was hard enough, without it being preserved forever for all to see.

The photo dates from around 1950. I can see the sadness, strength and pure ideals of an eighteen-year-old Uncle Kostas (months before he was killed by the "car accident"), the resignation and frustration of my twelve-year-old uncle, and the anger and resentment of my father, aged ten. Grandmother Athina looks like a Picasso painting – one eyebrow arched in shock, the other dropping in sorrow. She was forced to bear the cross of the departed rebels.

I long to offer them some comfort, to reach into the past and take Grandmother's hands into mine and give her love and support, but history cannot be rewritten and only God is

ever-present. At Easter I light candles for the departed, who in my mind have never left, but are only playing hide and seek at the edge of my consciousness, sometimes speaking to me in my dreams.

“She had many burdens,” Father says as if he can read my thoughts. I imagine Grandmother lived her life and bore her burdens with dignity, but her heart was broken after losing each of her relatives to illness or mishap, and then losing three of her children. So many people go through life and pass into insignificance once they die. But I cannot let that happen to Grandmother, or Uncle Kostas, or even my beautiful Aunt Marianne – not to any of my relatives. Grandmother was someone to me and those who knew her. A sage, a talented woman, who fought alone to bring up her children while her husband was exiled for twenty years.

I am sad no copy of her wedding photo remains. I was told she was strikingly beautiful. I saw a photo of her cousin Olga when she was about seventeen years old. My uncle told me that Grandmother Athina looked very much like her when she was young. Great-aunt Olga looked stunningly beautiful, like an actress, with dark curls and large dark eyes. I can see the same looks in Father when he was young, and also I have a black-and-white photo of myself at twenty-five in which I also have the same hair and dark eyes. I will have to content myself with these comparisons. I never got to know Grandmother Athina, and only have a few brief memories from my childhood when she refused to take me into her lap because my cousin was crying and needed comforting. We had been in a tug of war over the same toy. “Give it to him!” Grandmother Athina had snapped. I was startled and hurt. I also wanted that toy. I pulled at her skirt, trying to get her to lift me too into her lap but she ignored me. My father explained to me many years later, “You were crying and trying to get Grandmother Athina to lift you into her lap but she refused. She already had her grandson in her lap and in our culture boys are valued over girls. She may not have meant to ignore you, but she did. I got annoyed with her and I picked you up in my arms and left. To me girls have the same value as boys.”

I remember how Father was hoping my middle sister was a boy. There was tension in the air when it was time for Mother to go into hospital; Father really wanted a boy after two daughters. When my sister was born, for the first few months Mother and Father barely spent time with her. I was told to rock my little sister in the pram or cot. I was given a bottle of milk to feed her with. Father eventually got over his disappointment. Several

years later when Mother gave birth to my brother he was overjoyed. The boy carries the family name and is expected to care for the parents when they are old. Following Greek tradition, Father named my brother after his father. However, none of my siblings continued this tradition when naming their children. In the end, I was the one who named my son after Father. It was a duty and expectation that I understood since childhood and knew I had to fulfil. Afterall, I carried my grandmother's name, the person Father had loved the most.

Father smiles and sits back in his armchair near the front window and resumes the story he was telling me about life in Greece before I got distracted by the photo on the mantel.

We worked ten hours a day for three months, June, July and August, threading tobacco onto two-metre metal spikes which we hung up to dry in rows. We would only harvest 300 to 400 kilos of tobacco. Others in our region would produce 1000 to 2000 kilos of tobacco each season. We grew a lot of wheat and made hay for the cows and horses for winter. Mother kept many chickens. Without them we wouldn't have had food to eat. What was there to eat back then? Those days there was no money, only the rich had money. We had to farm and trade for our survival.

I went three to four hours a day to school and sometimes I didn't go at all. It was during the war and even in 1950 and '51 there was still war going on, the final rebels were being chased. I excelled in mathematics. I was also good at Greek history, but in the other subjects ... Ha! ... I had no interest. School was another place of injustice for me, the son of an ex-communist rebel.

We made pasta at home. I can make a *skafi*, like we had then, so we can make macaroni and couscous in Australia. Couscous is the best food, my *poulaki*. We can add eggs, butter, milk, and mix them well, then put them into flour. You will see what couscous that is. Not like the tasteless one you buy from the shop.

At night we slept. But in winter, one and a half to two months we would gather the dried tobacco and pack it into giant parcels. The state would send buyers to collect them. We did not get much money, only once we got 38,000 drachmas. And that money lasted one year. We would sing songs, girls would

come to work for us harvesting and spearing tobacco and would sing songs in winter to help pack the tobacco. We were poor but Mother would cook everything for us, so we passed through life well enough.

My father's house was the same then as now, only not renovated. I made the new windows, doors, floors, ceiling. Everything. I made a fancy door and carved the ornamental pieces by hand. I put leadlight windows in the top section of the door and painted it green. It was a door fit for a king. Grandmother was so proud of it and showed it off to everyone in the village. Whenever she opened her door she remembered me.

I once caught seven kilos of fish. Grandfather, grandmother, my family, your mother's siblings and her parents all ate of these fish. We shared them around. My mother would bake them in the outside wood-fired oven. She would light the oven with wood, then put in the bread to bake; afterwards when the oven was very warm and running on the last embers of wood she would put in the fish, so it would not burn in the hot flames. The fish were salted and dressed with olive oil, nothing else. They were very sweet-tasting, from pure mountain-river water. The aroma from their cooking was delicious.

There still are some places with fish, but people are too lazy to go fishing. The giant metre-long fish with moustaches, the *goulianos*, are gone now. Tobacco farmers began to spray their tobacco to get a bigger crop and threw cans of pesticide into ditches on the side of the road. When it rained, the remaining pesticide would run into the rivers. Everything died. Neither frogs, nor fish nor snakes remained. Nothing. The water is dead now. There is nothing inside. These damned people. I told them, "What have you done, you killed the rivers!" They didn't listen.

Higher up in the mountains, there still are fish in the clean water. It takes an hour to an hour and a half to go into the mountains. I would go up there on donkey-back to collect firewood. We would not spray our crops in the forties and fifties, so everything was organic. Our wood stove heated the house in winter; it would whoosh out hot air in quick vibrating puffs and we would happily anticipate getting toasty warm, like having a hot bath. We roasted

chestnuts on the top of it and they were quick delicious snacks. We lived close to nature, with septic systems or holes in the ground, not flushing toilets; no electricity, no TV, no telephones except in town and the police station.

Our cousins, uncles and aunts came to visit often, which we enjoyed. Mother would cook on one side of the stove, and she would also make bread, *spanakopitas*, or sweets on the stove-top or oven. We made our own organic flour from our wheat. We would take it to the mill in the next village, Zitohori. I would take two sacks of wheat on donkey-back and get it stone-ground. It would last six months. We had a tall metal silo container made of circular *lamarina* – corrugated iron – inside one of our rooms. When we harvested the wheat we kept it in this silo, and it would last over two years. We had two cats to keep away mice and rats from the house. It wasn't possible for rodents to get into the wheat the way we stored it. Here in Australia our cats are spoiled and lazy. We only fed our Greek cats occasionally with fish heads and scraps. There was no cat food being sold in those days. The cats worked hard hunting rodents to survive.

Those who had lived in Turkey and knew where our house was there, have all passed away. I know the locations; my Aunt Euthemia also knew where they were. My grandfather Haralambos had mills, seven mills on seven hills, one for each son. He had many chickens and giant roosters. He kept good relations with the Turks, as did his father Panagiotis. Great-grandfather Panagiotis had built houses for his family into the side of a cliff and they entered from the roof. The family was about 200 individuals, including parents, grandparents, children, spouses, grandchildren, and uncles and aunts. Houses were built side by side and went deep into the mountain. Growing and milling grain, especially wheat, was their main work, but they also kept animals and nut trees. The Turks and Armenians would come to grind their wheat in his mills. And if they didn't have wheat he would give them some. His kindness saved people's lives in winter, just like his father who gave them *lavash* bread to eat in winter. That's why the Turkish neighbours saved my grandparents and the family during the population exchange when they were leaving for Greece. They escorted the family, two horses on each side of their

bullock cart, keeping other Turks away. They had been our neighbours and we had lived together peacefully until then. People began leaving Turkey in 1914 till 1922. I think my mother's family left in 1921 and my father's a little earlier. It was hard leaving everything behind: the mills, the farms, the animals, the houses, the friends and neighbours, and a way of life that had been theirs for hundreds if not thousands of years. As my grandfather and great-grandfather left their home, my father also left his in Greece for some time, and I in turn left my home in Greece for Australia. It has been a repeated story over four generations, but for different reasons: religious persecution, civil war and political tensions. Through this change, our family has become stronger and closer. My mother was fourteen when she left with her mother and brother. My mother married my father, who was fourteen years her elder, when she was seventeen. The whole village celebrated having such a beautiful and accomplished bride. They danced for days. My mother, Athina, was considered strikingly beautiful in her youth. Sadly her brother died from pneumonia after going out onto a balcony in the winter and getting sick. He had been very handsome with curly black hair and large eyes; he was about seventeen. My mother did not recover from his loss.

During the Civil War in the late forties, my father and other communist rebels burned wood in caves to survive the winter. They would get bread from villagers. They did not worry about wolves. Men and women both sheltered in the mountains. Those who survived left Greece for Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia, all the communist countries. They left in groups and settled nearby each other, with the people they fought alongside. Some never returned to Greece, they died overseas, and their children are still there. There was a lot of money in Czechoslovakia. My father returned alone, his comrades remaining behind. The ones who took their wives and children with them had no reason to return.

Greeks go to church regularly and pray daily. Whenever I go to the church I always light a candle for my parents. There is no power above God, so daily prayer is important. Even if you walk through fire, do not let it burn you. Pray to God and you will be safe, as those who dance on the red coals holding icons

on the feast of Constantinou and Eleni are safe. I believe God heard our prayers and returned my father to us from exile.

There are places near the mountains where no one visits today. *Maimundire* was the place the rebels took fascist prisoners or Nazi collaborators to execute them. It is near a river in the mountains, near the slopes of Seita and Langathi. Around 1946 during the Civil War, the remaining Germans and collaborators had made a deal with communists for protection. The *andartes* would still go into villages at night and capture fascists and collaborators and kill them in *Maimundire* which is two and a half hours by foot from Leukotopos. They say it is full of ghosts and evil spirits. *Maimundire* is a place used to frighten children into behaving. I have seen it several times and it is the most terrifying place on earth. One slip downhill and you are gone into a dark water-filled abyss with no escape.

Even after the Civil War ended I was ostracised. Fascist relatives called me Athina's dog when I went to vote, because I was communist. Mother and my brother and I were banished from our home in Leukotopos in 1948 and taken to Ahino to live because communists would come for bread and food in the night in Leukotopos. The police moved us till 1950, after the war had ended, so we could not harbour or help communists. Ahino had a famous female rebel guerilla fighter, none other than a priest's daughter. Her name was Zaharoula. Her father refused to help rebels or give them food or shelter. One night Zaharoula came to Ahino, to the church, dressed in boots, pants, coat with bullet belts slung over each shoulder and her machine gun in her hands. She yelled out, "Where are you, cowardly priest? It is I, Zaharoula, come out so I can finish you off myself! Don't you know there are young men and boys dying of hunger in the mountains without a bite of bread or a drink of water? And you are refusing to help them! Come out now! Where are you?" The priest hid himself so he could not be found. There were songs sung in her honour for decades. Zaharoula helped many people.

Before we left Leukotopos, one night *andartes* came down from the mountains. Mother and my brother Kostas were sleeping on bedrolls. His godfather Nicholas and Uncle Gianni hid under my bed. They were *Pautzides*

– supporting the English – monarchists, on the far right. The rebels with Uncle Eraklis came by in the night searching for them, and asked, “Is anyone else here?” Mother lied, “We are alone.” The communists would have killed them if they had found them, relatives or not.

In 1948 the *andartes* struck the village, Ahino, where we were living. There was a huge blast; I saw bullets the size of pencils lying on the ground, which could blow a person apart. The *andartes* wanted to pass the river *Strymonas*. Fascists running away ahead of them drowned in the river because it was fast and deep. In the morning the *andartes* left for Ivera village and the national soldiers came with cannons to Ahino and were firing at Ivera. Some of the captains who ordered the firing of the cannons were socialists who did not want to kill the communists and got the cannons to fire wide of their mark. I and other kids would collect the bullets and get unsuspecting kids to throw rocks on the bullet remnants. If there was any gunpowder inside, it would force small shrapnel into your legs and knees and make them bleed. This game was played on me too. That night Uncle Eraklis came with some other rebels and hugged my mother goodbye; she was his sister-in-law, and it was the custom to farewell all leftist-sympathising relatives on the way to the mountains. Father was hiding in the mountains. I used to sleep next to Mother, so I woke and saw them take bread and food with them when leaving for the mountains again. Later that year uncle was killed. Father got injured in his leg and the *andartes* took him with them in 1949 to Vermion, the ancient mountain range in Northern Greece, then to Yugoslavia (Serbia) to get treated in a hospital there. After that he did not return to Greece but went with other rebels into Czechoslovakia.

The *Bafralides* were the most fanatical fascists. One of these was a captain called Gusu. He wanted to kill someone from Zervohori village where your mother is from, and villagers were calling out to Christos, my father-in-law, to save that man, who had nine daughters, but he said, “Why will I go? I will also get killed.” Eventually, he managed to talk to the leader, Gusu, and explained if the father was killed, who would feed nine daughters, a wife and an old grandfather and grandmother? By killing one, they would kill twelve.

That is why my father-in-law was called Captain Christodoulis. *Christodoulis* means a servant or worker of Christ. He could talk to both fascists and communists and managed to save lives on both sides with his common sense and heartfelt logic.

The mountain *Vitze* is nearby and before the Civil War and Axis War there was fighting there with the Albanians. My father-in-law, Christos, fought there too. After that he did not want to be involved in any fighting. There has been a lot of fighting in Greece. It is a paradise, full of lush green valleys and mountains, and everyone wants a piece of it.

When the Civil War began in 1946, Zachariadis was with the KKE. The government then escaped to Egypt with the King. George Papandreos went there with him. The English wanted Greece to be on their side, but worried about communism growing in Greece. Once the Axis War ended and the Nazis and Italians left, Velouhiotis was the ELLAS commander and would not surrender weapons to the fascists. He was eventually betrayed and killed. They told Zachariadis they would give him seven places in parliament, but he wanted control of defence. The government refused and the Civil War began.

Zachariadis went to Russia. The Russians were Orthodox, had a similar alphabet and values, and were closer to the Greek way of life, so many questioned, why should the Greeks go with England instead? The English brought back King Constantine – who deserted Greece during the war to save his own skin. They captured young students, seventeen and eighteen years old, and took them to the island prison Gyaros, where they were forced into hard labour and many of them were killed. Prisoners had to crawl on their bellies and anyone who lifted their head up would be shot.

In 1963 most of the young men of our villages, including me, went to Thessaloniki, an hour's drive away by bus, to see the doctor and anti-war activist Lambrakis speak. It was the most inspiring speech I have heard. We all loved Lambrakis, a man who had achieved amazing things in his life – a champion athlete, then soldier, then doctor then parliamentarian. There were many people and it was very crowded. The police cordoned off the crowd into

sections to keep us under control. My cousins and I were excited after hearing the speech and we began to hope for change. It was starting to get dark, and as we discussed how to go back home there was a commotion. We turned to see what was happening. The police just stood there and did nothing. The fascists did nothing. The police just pulled large ropes up to keep people in place and to stop a riot. We heard a fight start and some people got arrested. Later we were told Lambrakis was attacked and a man jumped on the attackers and fought with them and eventually two people were arrested. They were far-right extremists. The whole of Greece was in uproar. This was a peaceful speech, but it had become an assassination. Lambrakis was in hospital but died five days after the attack. All the villages then had large “Lambrakis parties” in honour of the activist. The police raided these parties one by one and some people got arrested. If you were arrested, there was a chance you would end up at Gyaros. After that it was illegal to mention the name Lambrakis, or to even have anything written by him, including scientific papers. I began attending anti-war and leftist meetings full of young people. I saw that things were not going well and wanted to know more about what was happening and how we could change things for the better. Then there was a military coup and the dictatorship started in 1967. I was chased from village to village by fascist spies and police often came to arrest me for no good reason. They had a file on me and kept track of where I went and what I did.

My cousin Kostas was taken to Gyaros in 1967 by the dictatorship. He survived. Anyone who wrote “I am not a communist and am against communism” would be allowed to go home. If you refused you would be jailed, tortured and possibly killed. The son of Papandreou came from the US and got voted in even by communists, and he removed the persecution of communists and peace eventually returned to Greece.

During October 1968 I travelled from Thessaloniki to my village in Leukotopos to vote. Dimitrios, my fascist friend, told me to vote openly – I think he was told by others to vote that way and to warn me to do so as well. He said, “Things aren’t going well, so vote openly.” I said, “Look, Dimitrios,

you have your way and I have mine. Let me do what I want.” He then left, but one of my uncles who was fascist said, “Look, Athina’s dog has come here to fight us.” I went and complained to my aunt. I did not mention that he called me “Athina’s dog”, but she scolded him nonetheless.

My brother, with a shaking hand, openly voted that he wanted the king and monarchy. But I voted “No”, and the “No” vote was 87% so the king went back to England. His cousin Phillip married Queen Elizabeth. I yelled at my brother, “Why did you vote openly?” He got annoyed and said, “Mind your own business.”

Maybe if we had gone to Germany during the dictatorship, the files stating I was a communist would have followed us, so it is better that we came to Australia. We would have been followed everywhere in Europe by the dictatorship’s spies.

I would travel everywhere in the mountains, even *Maimundire* where people say there are ghosts. I don’t believe in such things. Ghosts are called *phantasma* in Greek, and this means what you with your own mind imagine or create. So ghosts are creations of our own minds and I don’t believe in ghosts.

The villagers are too lazy or scared to go to the mountains anymore. They never used to go for firewood, even in winter, before electricity and gas anyways. I used to go up to the mountain on donkey-back at the age of fifteen; sometimes my brother would come too. I would supply the rest of our relatives with wood.

I wouldn’t go to school much. I was the son of a communist and was treated badly by the fascist teachers. One day a teacher asked me to get him a very strong cane. I went and found a strong straight branch from a *Crania* tree. I brought it to the teacher and he broke it while whipping the palms of my hands. My hands swelled up like balloons and I swore at the teacher and never went back to school. Maybe he thought he had reason to hit me, for wandering off during the class outing, but I didn’t. It was between me and another kid. The previous day I’d punched a boy who was verbally abusing me. I wasn’t

going to sit there and be sworn at, so I stood up for myself and the teacher didn't like it. There was no fairness for the children of ex-communists. If you stood up for yourself you were the aggressor; if you remained silent you got abused. I knew I would be wasting my time going back to school. My hands hurt for a month. I ran errands for the whole village, went fishing, collected firewood and helped my brother with farming. I had so much freedom, free like a bird to fly wherever I wanted. I loved that part of my youth.

The police came to my house to ask why I was not at school. "Until you send that teacher packing, I am not returning." I showed them my hands. The next year that teacher never returned. My mother said, "People like that are not even animals, let alone humans." She was very upset that her child had been hit so badly by the teacher. She thought the degree of punishment did not fit the crime. She saw it as another slight on our family because my father had been a communist rebel.

I'll tell you more about what happened. The school had gone on a picnic to another village. There, two other boys from another school cornered me and wanted to hit me because my father had been a communist. It was two against one. Before they could touch me, I punched one so hard he fell on the ground. The other one ran away. I was only ten and younger than them but I was tough and was used to being singled out. Then I left the picnic and went home, feeling there was no point in staying as the day had been ruined. The next day the teacher asked me angrily why I hit the other boy. I said, "They tried to hit me, so before they did, I hit one of them." The teacher was forty; he was a Pontian fascist. He knew about my father being in exile in Czechoslovakia. Eventually this teacher left or retired. Then a new teacher, Gregorios, came. His wife was pregnant and I would get sour apples for her, and in return no one forced me to go back to school. I did not like school because it was always a place of trouble for me. This new teacher stayed in Leukotopos, I had coffee with him when visiting Greece in 2010. He is a very nice man.

I became a carpenter. At the age of fifteen I went to Serras as an apprentice to learn to make cabinets, wardrobes, shelves and other furniture. The *mastoras* (master builder) would pay me three drachmas a week and I would

use that money to buy beans and vegetables to make *fasoulada*. I would cook for myself and learned to cook well. I stayed at my cousin Levko's mother's house. I lived with a nephew who was learning to be a metal smith, making wrought-iron gates and balconies. He was not as passionate about his craft as I was about mine. At eighteen I opened my own store but people didn't pay me much. They would come and plead with me: "Zacharias, please come and fix my window," or "Please fix the leak in my roof, winter is coming." And I would go because I was kind-hearted and could not bear to see anyone suffering. They would get me to do some work and say, "Here, take this small payment now, and I will pay you later on." Of course, few of them paid anything more, and not wanting to make a fuss, I let it go. Then I left the village and went to Thessaloniki to excel in my trade. There I learned to make doors and windows, as well as do renovation work. I worked quickly with a lot of energy and aimed to achieve what the customers requested. I had pride in my work. My bones became strong from wielding hammers, carrying wood and tools, and digging trenches for stumps. I was very fit and became a popular carpenter. I also started making enough money to support my family.

Tobacco Season

From my visits to Greece, flying Olympic Airways before cigarette smoking was banned on the flights, I remember Greek cigarettes as being stronger smelling and more intoxicating than Australian ones. I would struggle to breathe and the air was grey with smoke, even in the non-smoking section. There was no escaping tobacco smoke on the Greek flights. I was brought up by Mother to dislike cigarette smoke and anything to do with tobacco. Perhaps that had to do with the amount of tobacco farming she did as a child. Father, however, smoked until he was sixty-five, but never inside the house.

“*Poulika mou,*” Father said, “let me tell you about the tobacco farming we did in our youth in Greece. Then you will understand why I wanted you to become educated and not do this type of work.” I sat down on the couch where Mother would sleep in the afternoon after she had completed all her chores. Mother’s feet would swell and she liked to rest her legs. I listened quietly to Father but could not understand why he considered farming lowly work. I felt it was honest work and necessary work, and those who did it provided for their families and others. But I did not say this to Father. I did not wish to interrupt him, and if I had worked in the fields for years perhaps I would have the same opinion as he did about farming.

I would wake at three in the morning to get ready to collect tobacco. In June, July and August we would go with spirit lamps to break the lower yellow ripe leaves from the tobacco plants. Then we went home by eight after five hours of picking leaves. Later we would spear them onto long metal spikes. At the end of the spike we threaded a string. When the spike was full, we pulled the leaves onto the string then hung them up in the sun for a week. Once they were dry we hung them in the attic. The usual rate was five drachmas for one kilo of dried tobacco. A usual day’s wage was around eight to thirteen drachmas per day, but this was not a lot of money. Sometimes we got twenty drachmas per kilo. Before leaving Greece, we got seventy-five drachmas per kilo. My mother took the profits and bought land at Evosmo in Thessaloniki

for me to build on, but the government built a road there, so it was lost. We filed for compensation through the courts, but nothing came of it.

As well as tobacco farming, we made yoghurt and butter, had chickens for meat and eggs, goats, sheep and cows. My mother was intelligent and an accomplished cook. The Greek government gave the Pontians land to build on to compensate for the land they had lost in Turkey. There was no village there before my relatives arrived; they had to build everything from scratch. All the men helped to build a house for each family. Some houses are about a hundred years old in the village. Eventually everyone went into tobacco farming, as tobacco grew well in the valleys between the mountains. My grandfather Haralambos got thirty-two acres of land. They built the village of Leukotopos on this land and all the relatives settled there, married and made houses for their children.

We slept after threading tobacco. We would get sleepy because the tobacco sap went into the skin of our fingers. The nicotine would make our heads spin. We finished at one in the afternoon and would sleep on the floor on blankets and cushions for siesta. After waking, we would care for the animals.

During summer the picked tobacco leaves would dry, and by winter they could be packed into bundles ready for the state buyers. We had to make sure the tobacco was completely dry so it would not rot. For six months we worked very hard planting, weeding, watering and then harvesting and threading the tobacco. Then in autumn and winter we had less work and focused on building up firewood supplies, preserving vegetables and making syrup sweets out of young fruits and baby eggplants. We had to prepare for winter. There were no fridges, so preserving food was essential. Dried fruits and vegetables, pickled olives, herbs, sauces and other preserves were used instead of fresh ones. Onions and potatoes lasted for months, especially in winter; beans were dried and stored. There was always plenty of staples. The buffalo butter, olive oil and herbs made all of this into delicious food.

In the summer we went to fairs every weekend, after we had completed our tobacco harvesting for the day. Each village would have a fair in turn. Agio

Georgiou was one saint celebrated at the village fairs. Each saint was celebrated by a different village. We had horse races, bike races, car races. Musicians played music in small bands and people danced, flocking to the cafes to sit outdoors and sip coffee and look at others in their Sunday best. Souvlakis roasted on spits. There was an air of festivity and celebration. The fair at our village, Leukotopos, was on the twenty-ninth of August, for Saint Ioanou. In the late evening, the whole village would dance and musicians and singers sang late into the night, near the primary school, opposite the church. I loved to dance and had many cousins to join hands with. I always made sure I looked smart for the festivals. I never forgot those rubber shoes and white hand-knitted socks which got stuck in the mud during the Civil War when we were very poor. I bought the best pointy-toed shoes and wool suits and wore them everywhere, even to work.

Once a year the circus would come. They tied a rope between two trees and an acrobat would walk across it. I went to the circus many times, and also to see the *Karagiozi* (shadow puppets). I even learned to carve my own *Karagiozi* then hung up a sheet with a candle lit behind it so I could play my own puppet show at home for Mother and my brother and anyone else who was around.

I learned to cook from Mother and perfected my skills during my two years' compulsory army service. I would help her cook sometimes when she needed help. We had a brick oven outside. We would burn wood in the oven and it would be hot for hours. From September I would start bringing firewood home. It would take about thirty trips with two donkeys to get 1500 kilograms of wood. I then cut these into small enough pieces to go into the stove inside the house to keep us warm in winter and for cooking. During the winter there was no farming, so for three to four months, the whole of winter, I would go to the *kafeneion* to pass time. The only work was to pack the dried tobacco leaves into parcels ready for the government buyers.

Mother made pickled vegetables, *toursi*, from tomato and cabbage. We would slaughter a pig and use the fat for cooking, such as frying eggs with bacon. There was not really any work from September to March. We worked hard

the other six months of the year, from spring till the end of summer. Life was good in many ways: hard work for six months made for easier living for the remaining six months. The only problem was the lack of education. We didn't know how to improve our lives, or where to invest our money properly, just like the land that the government took from me to build a road.

People were kind, loving and supportive of each other. I quit school in the third grade. No one cared for school much during the war anyway. I was intelligent and good at mathematics but I chose to do carpentry. This was the best choice for me.

After I married I would also help out my in-laws. My father-in-law Christos's house had manure from the cows lying in the yard. This made the soil very fertile. Tomatoes planted there grew as tall as the ceiling. I would help my father-in-law with whatever work was needed: repairs, planting, harvesting. He was a good man and always treated me very well.

In the summer, gypsies would travel from Italy to Greece then to Bulgaria. They brought dancing bears and monkeys holding metal cups for coin collection. They mistreated the animals and would hit the bears to make them stand on their hind legs and dance. They also tricked people into parting with money by saying if a bear sat on you, you would recover from any illness. After the bear sat on someone it would not get up. So the gypsy would explain, "In order for the bear to rise, you must give money or a sack of wheat." Once they got paid, they would play drums and little monkeys would dance and the bear would rise off the sick person.

Another example of why the gypsies were feared were the stories local villagers told, which happened several times to different families. The gypsy women would find any honest old woman in the village and say, "Let me tell your fortune." The old woman would say, "I have a lost son." The gypsy would say, "I will tell you where he is." Then the gypsy threw a blanket over the woman's head and her companion would quickly search the house for valuables to steal. The gypsy woman would say, "I see someone with dark hair walking. He is walking a long way." The old woman would say, "But my

son has fair hair, are you sure it is him?" The gypsy woman would say, "Yes, it is hard to see clearly; it is him, his hair is fair." Then the gypsy woman would say, "He is far, far away but he will be back soon." "What can I give you, *poulaki mou*?" the old woman would ask. "Whatever you have to spare." The old woman would take out a hanky and unwrap a coin from the corner and give it to the gypsy. The gypsies would leave. Then slowly, day by day, the old woman would find some of her belongings were missing. Her heart would break each day that her son never returned and her other children would say to her, "Serves you right for letting gypsies in the house."

My relatives were very tight with their money, not like me. When I went to Greece in 2007 my sister-in-law would turn off the geyser after some time, so that the water went cold while I was showering. When I was newly married my father would turn on the fridge for one hour then turn it off again all day then turn it back on again one hour at night, to save electricity. My brother was the best man you could find in the whole region in terms of being well behaved and honest. So it is not surprising he married a fascist teacher's daughter, a very high-profile marriage. It was an arranged marriage, within the Pontian community, so it had the approval of my mother. Mother was very happy with her choice. Back then, the wife had to bring some sort of dowry. I turned down an arranged marriage. I chose to marry for love, and if that was not bad enough, I chose to marry a native Greek, not a Pontian Greek, and I became interested in communism. I did not choose an easy life – I was young and strong and chose my own way.

Communism means we joined to help one another, we fought for Greece. However, some made errors. The leader of the Communist Party made a mistake which led to the Civil War and the rebels hiding in the mountains. I believe Zachariadis should have accepted the places in government given to him, then perhaps the communists could have existed side by side with the fascists in diplomatic rule. But maybe the Civil War would have happened anyway. Some wanted to get more than others through less effort. Better jobs, better pay, more rights. The rich wanted to carve a line between them and the poor. To make it an uncrossable barrier. But the communists wanted a level

playing field, equality as a reward for years of hard fighting for the freedom of Greece from the Nazis. Other Greeks did less but wanted more. That is the way it has always been, and that is not equality.

During the Axis War, the right-wing liberals wanted to stay with England and the royalists. They would let communists into towns and the Nazis would go and catch them. Eighty thousand left-wing students were killed on the island of Gyros. This is how I remember it, from newspapers, pamphlets and demonstrations I attended in Greece. It makes me so angry. So much promise, so much talent, the best of the country were killed. The ones who could give the light of Prometheus to the rest of the population, to see and understand, were silenced, the brave ones. The rest cowered in fear or shut their mouths. I am so glad Mikis Theodorakis survived torture and jail. He was not afraid to speak out, and because he spoke the truth and stood up for it, it nearly cost him his life. Perhaps this is why he survived. Even the fascists loved his songs, poems and writing. He sang from between the iron bars in his jail cell.

Just like now, with the financial crisis, Greece was in a terrible state after the war. Communists took children with them when they retreated behind the Iron Curtain, but they were their own children or the children of other communist relatives who wanted their children with them. I cannot understand how people are claiming they kidnapped other people's children. I only know of communists who took their own children. They wanted to educate their children because the education system in Greece after the war was not very good. Political and social standing often took precedence over academic performance. People with the right connections got their children into university or the best jobs; it was not always the best students who became something. We too should have gone with Father, but he was being pursued by fascists and we did not see him while he was hiding in the mountains, so we could not plan anything. If he had not left Greece he would have been killed sooner or later.

Later when those children who had left with the communists came back to Greece from Russia or the Balkans, they could not get work. Some stayed abroad and refused to return to Greece. One Pontian woman from Tashkent

returned to Thessaloniki with her four university-educated children. They could not get any work, not even as kitchen hands. She got cancer and died from worry.

Why am I a fool to love communism? There is a reason. The youth who remained in Greece often had jobs below their educational background. The rich people's children got all the good positions. Nepotism flourished with fascism. Those with money could make propaganda. Police would follow me around Thessaloniki. I had to report to the police station. I hadn't done anything wrong other than politically lean towards the left. That is why I chose to leave Greece; I wanted a peaceful life.

The Island of Gyaros and the 40,000 Children

Father often told me about the island of Gyaros where some of his relatives were exiled for being leftists. I wanted more information about this and looked online and found several articles stating that 10,000 to 22,000 prisoners, mainly leftists, were exiled to Gyaros during the Civil War. One article mentions that Gyaros was the Dachau of the Mediterranean and was called the “Island of the Devil” (Kokkinidis 2017). It had been used since Roman times to exile prisoners and did not have any natural fresh water source, so was the harshest island on which to be exiled. The prisoners were forced to build the five camps which housed them.

“Could you have been sent to Gyaros?” I asked Father.

Maybe if I had been more involved in leftist activities. I was a carpenter, so I had to work on my trade, but I often went to demonstrations. The island was used again after the Civil War and during the dictatorship till 1974.

My father’s cousins were fascists and would try to frighten me. They would not allow anyone to speak up and give their opinion about the king or the USA. They would threaten to have me killed. If they reported you to the police, you would be thrown into a concrete cell. They would throw water on you and keep hitting you with metal batons. Then when one person tired, another would take over and they would continue until you died. This type of torture was called *falanga* – your skin would soften because of the water and the trauma inflicted by a single blow was worse and more painful. The secret police did this. I was never hit but I was chased many times. My Uncle Eraklis was caught and beaten using *falanga*. He managed to survive and escape into the mountains. My first cousin Kostas was tortured with *falanga* and sent to the island Gyaros. When the government fell he returned. He was leaving for Bulgaria when he had a car accident and hit his head. Often rocks and debris were left on the roads in and out of Greece. Thieves would wait for someone to crash and then would come and steal their money and jewellery and leave

them to die. Kostas survived the accident. He died many years later in 2010. His father had been a rebel and was killed by the fascists. They tried to make people sign a petition stating that they were against communism and they were not a communist. Then they were released from Gyros – otherwise you would be killed. The fascists would come to take your livestock, your food, and if you complained they could kill you.

The communists had women with them in the mountains; some fought alongside the men, others helped cook food and wash clothes or get water. If anyone hurt a woman, he would be tried and if found guilty, put to death. There was brotherhood in the mountains. A general sexually assaulted a woman and she reported him to the communists. Seven rebels came and found him and put him against a tree and killed him.

The grandchildren of communists no longer have the same problems in Greece. After Andreas Papandreou came to power, all political differences were put aside.

Secret files were kept on people of interest. There was a file on me, and wherever I went, to new towns, the file followed me, stating that I was a communist. Villagers who knew what I was doing and where I would be going had the file sent after me, so the police would keep an eye on me everywhere. They would not let me rest, even though I had done nothing to them. One cousin would inform on me to the police and my file kept being sent behind me to various police stations so I would be arrested or questioned. He was one of the people who never let me have peace back then because I was the son of a communist in exile.

My cousin Sakis was called an old communist – *paleo Kommuna* – so he grabbed the man abusing him by the throat and threw him against a wall. Verbal abuse and injustice was common. Once reconciliation happened in the eighties, differences were supposed to be put aside, but if you dig a bit, you will find the same ideologies are hidden at the core of what people still believe.

I was twenty when I became a soldier, a *fandaros*, in the army reserves. We were sent to Tripoli and I was given a machine gun on a tripod because I was a communist. Some Vlachs were made into lieutenants. We got three months' training in Tripoli, and I learned how to clean, use and assemble the guns. Then we were stationed at Veria, near Thessaloniki, for eight months. I was a trumpeter and would play the trumpet in the morning to wake the soldiers, then I would proudly raise the Greek flag and watch it unfurl against the sky. I liked it there and I was well liked by other soldiers. After this I was asked if I wanted to go to Cyprus and I said, "Wherever the nation sends me, I will go." The colonel said, "Bravo, Bakirtzidis." He tested my loyalty due to my being a communist.

We went to Korio, near a monastery in Cyprus. The Turkish army wanted to come to Cyprus in September 1963 but Greece did not let them. Cyprus was a Greek Island and Turkey wanted to invade. I was stationed there for some time, then we returned to Northern Greece. While we were there, someone deliberately put laxatives in the food so everyone had to rush to the bathroom many times. Then they told us to run barefoot in the snow. One of the lieutenants called me aside and told me not to run, but I wanted to run. I stayed back because I had been told to stay back. I was a favourite of some of the seniors there because I was so hard working and dedicated. Later the other soldiers who had run barefoot in the snow had feet swollen twice their normal size and were in so much pain they could not stand or walk. I felt guilty that I had been shown favouritism and spared this torture. I wanted to go and run in the snow so that I could be on the same level as the rest of the soldiers. Twenty-four thousand soldiers had gone to Cyprus during the time I was a *fandaros*. Later the Americans fought the Turks there. The dictatorship in Greece lasted from 1965 to 1973. In Cyprus there was an English air base with tanks and they could see the whole Mediterranean and Egypt from there. Cypriots wanted the bases out so the US brought the Turks there for their own interests. Now the bases are still there and Cyprus is divided in two. I did twenty-four months' service. We were paid thirty drachmas a month, which was enough to buy razors to shave. Service was compulsory.

After I returned from service, that was when my family left secretly to live with my brother who had gone earlier to Sweden.

“Father,” I asked, “why would they leave in secret? That does not sound right. Did something happen? Did you have an argument?” Father looked at the ground and there was pain in his eyes.

There was some minor disagreement, but nothing big enough to justify them leaving secretly. I was their family too. I sent letters later to my parents and told them to visit me in Australia, not only live with my brother in Sweden. I was also their son and I had four children. Mother told me she was very cold and developed arthritis in Sweden, so the climate did not suit her. However, with one excuse or another no one ever came to Australia. Then one by one, my parents passed; no one lives forever, and that chance to be together in Australia disappeared.

Uncle Eraklis was a member of the *Kommounistiko Komma Elladas*, KKE; that is why he hid in the mountains with my father. Uncle Eraklis was good-natured, he would not harm a fly. As I said before, he was ambushed and shot as he came into the village to get bread. For three days he was calling for help but no one came to help him. It is said the fascists went to cut off his head after he had died. Other villagers were too afraid to go and help him in case they were reported as being communist sympathisers. The fascists in Zitohori beat drums and danced into the night to celebrate the death of Uncle Eraklis, the communist rebel. I heard they put his head on a pike and danced with it to drums. It is not known who buried Uncle Eraklis or where.

Fascist supporters became policemen. They did not get paid wages but with food. I called them hungry dogs. In 1948 we had to move from Kavaki, another name for Leukotopos, to a good house in Ahino. We were moved to stop us feeding or helping rebels. Uncle Eraklis was still alive then; he came and hugged my mother, Athina, and asked where my father was. She replied, “In a church in the mountains.” Then the rebels took my brother Kostas, who was only 16, to go get water for them with another man. Kostas did not want to go to the mountains, but because they were older than him, he could not

refuse. They took him into the mountains and he collected water and filled buckets and troughs. There was a break, and he was allowed to rest and eat some bread. Then, under cover of darkness, Kostas ran away and came back home at night and hid in a blackberry bush till morning, until the rebels had all retreated back up the mountains. He knocked on the door and came inside. He was pale and shaking. I felt sad that he had suffered in the cold for hours. He did not want to leave our mother or my brother and me alone to go to the mountains. He was not that type. He was peaceful, studious and kind. Kostas had other plans for our future as a family, to help us all have a better life. He felt the responsibility that Father had left behind weigh on him. He could not leave us behind to fend for ourselves. But perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed in the mountains with the rebels and retreated with Father to Czechoslovakia, because in 1951 the fascists ran him over with a car and killed him anyway.

During our stay in Ahino we lived with Aunt Euthemia. She was kind and shared whatever food she had. She looked after us like family. I had another aunt called Evgenia. She was also kind and a good woman. The fascists killed her husband and she had four sons. They must have felt pressured to also escape possible persecution. One left for Bulgaria but was unable to survive there without his mother and brothers. He could not adjust to life outside of Greece. His family was his life. Exile is not for everyone – there was no returning home to Greece because the borders were closed.

During Lent, forty days before Easter, we did not eat oil, eggs, milk or meat. Then at Easter we ate red-dyed eggs with joy.

Barbagianni who lived across from us asked me to go to Kizili village to collect a lamb. I went and did as I was told. Then I was surprised he slaughtered it and gave it to the priest. I saw the *Despoto* priest eating lamb on Good Friday and got angry because I could not understand why the priest was breaking the Lenten fast a day and a half early. I went home and ate eggs. My mother saw me and angrily said, “What are you doing?” I told her, “Don’t say a word or I will break all the eggs.” Then I told her, “Why should I fast

when that dog of a priest is eating lamb?” Then my mother understood and was also upset with the priest.

From 1952 onwards, Mother would send me to collect bitter greens for cooking, such as dandelion leaves and bitter dock, nettles and prickly golden fleece or reicardia. I would go to a plot of land not far from the church, near the river a few kilometres from the village. We called the greens *rathikia* or just generally *horta*. Not everyone would bother to go and collect these greens; maybe they were afraid of landmines. I wasn't afraid because I knew that most had been found and removed, and I trusted in God. I would collect around five kilos of these green leaves in a sack. Mother would use them in a variety of ways. She would boil them and serve them with lemon juice and olive oil as a side dish with other foods. She would also bake them with homemade ricotta cheese and herbs in pies. She would add them to soups, stews, or salads. People who ate these greens were very healthy and usually lived long lives. The ancient Greeks used them to cure liver and blood disorders. We may have had very little but we always ate well through our hard work and effort. These greens kept us healthy and vigorous. We never got sick. Other villagers didn't go to collect these greens often. They would instead come to Mother to ask for some. “Athina, give us some greens as well, you have hard-working sons,” they would say, although they had sons too. Even back then, few people wanted to work hard. I would go and collect food myself. Even now, when I am not feeling well, I collect the *rathikia* and dandelion greens from my garden and boil and eat them.

It was 1951 when the police came and took Mother and put her in the jail under the police station. Few people were fair-minded and accepting of the relatives of ex-communists. Three years later was not much different. We didn't have our own buffaloes after the war to plough our fields so my brother went to an uncle's house and made the agreement to plough three days for him and then borrow the buffaloes to plough our own fields for one day. After working three days he went to get the buffaloes but the uncle refused and said, “Take your complaint to Stalin.” I found out about this after a boy ran over and told me to hurry because my uncle was beating my brother. I ran over

there and pushed our uncle away and saved my brother from further humiliation. I was fearless and stood up against aggressors or injustice, when my family could not do so. I took his buffaloes and we ploughed our field. An agreement was an agreement.

Another fascist uncle of mine, Giannis Panagiotidis, was my supporter and stopped others hitting me if he saw me being targeted. He loved me and was a very good man. I helped him build a well near his house and since then he was always on my side. He had grenades, guns and rifles in his possession. The fascist supporters were given guns to watch over the ex-communists from 1950 to 1962. My brother was in the army doing his compulsory service, so from when I was fifteen to seventeen I was the only one left to look after Mother and our crops. All able-bodied men in the village had to act as sentries from time to time. The fascist commander told me to pick up a rifle to guard the door of a fascist supporter. I refused and threw him over the bridge into the stream below. He went and complained to the police, and two officers came to arrest me and took me to the police station.

They said, “Do you know what you did?”

I said, “Yes, I hit an *ilithios*.”

“What fool, he is your commander.”

“He told me to pick up a rifle; that is why we fought. My brother is in the army and I have to work so Mother and I have something to eat. I am not going to stand idle in front of a fascist’s door.” I would not have stood in front of anyone else’s door either, but especially not a fascist’s. The war was over.

In 1985 I again saw the commander who had reported me to the police. He was paralysed on the right side due to a stroke. He cried and said, “What did you do that I chased you and reported you to the police?”

I said to him, “Forget it, what happened, happened. Life is short, let us live it.”

Till 1974 there were reprisals against ex-communists. Many were imprisoned in Gyaros. Some children of ex-communists were taken to the Balkans, Bulgaria or Russia. It is propaganda that the leftists kidnapped 40,000 children and took them out of Greece. The fascists and royalists were afraid that the children of ex-communists would also become communists and that Greece could again in the future lean towards communism. Therefore, those who went behind the Iron Curtain took their children and the children of friends and relatives with them to have a better life, a fairer life, without persecution. One child who was taken to Czechoslovakia became a mechanic and also a soccer star. When he returned to Greece he was twenty and more accomplished than many other young men in Greece. The governments in the communist countries looked after the Greek communists and their own citizens. Now the unemployment rate is 38% in Greece. The government should have taken better care of finances. Many young people live off their parents' pensions. When their parents are gone, then what? Who will then return to farming the land to survive? Most families now at least grow some fruit and vegetables for themselves, but tobacco and wheat farming have decreased.

My mother came from Meten, a place now in Turkey which was famous for mines, but which also belonged to Pontian Greeks back then. In 1922 when my parents were expelled from Turkey along with hundreds of thousands of other Greeks and Armenians, my father was twenty-three. Many of these refugees embraced communism in Greece. Another uncle expelled from Turkey would say to me, "I did not see good days, but you will see better days." He was convinced Greece would become communist and that it would benefit most people. However, that was not to be.

In Turkey there were Greeks who lived in Bafra who were forced to speak Turkish only and they forgot most Greek. Later they left Turkey during the genocide in 1922 because they were Christians. They came to Greece, but they were on the side of the monarchists and English. We called them *Paotzides* and *Bafralides*. They were usually far-right fascists, also on the side

of the German Nazis. People feared them because of their loyalties not being with Greece.

My aunt was a *Bafralidisa*. Her parents came from Bafra and only spoke Turkish, even though they were Greek. I learned Turkish from a local woman called Yotsadari; she was also a *Bafralidisa*. Because I spoke Pontian Greek as well as Greek, I could pick up some of the Turkish words. She didn't speak Greek so she only worked for the Pontian Greeks and *Bafralides*, helping with farming work or tobacco harvesting. Later I improved my Turkish in Australia after I met two Turkish men who knew no English. I became their translator and good friend. In some ways, I had more in common with them than with other Australian Greeks who came from other parts of Greece, because of political differences.

During the Axis War in Greece in the early 1940s, the Nazi Germans were gathering Greek Jews and sending them to concentration camps. I was a very young child. Some villagers would hide Jews in their cellars, then let them leave at night with provisions enough for a long journey. They would help them plan their route, usually through Yugoslavia. Dimitrios, my mother's uncle, helped a Jew carry his heavy suitcase to the train. The Jews had been told that they would get work in factories and that the train would take them there. No one knew they would be sent to a concentration camp, otherwise maybe something would have been done to save them. Uncle Dimitrios said the suitcase was full of gold and was very heavy.

The EAM [*Ethnikó Apeleftherotikó Μέτωπο*, National Liberation Front] consisted of Greek soldiers fighting the Nazi Germans during the Axis War. The *Paotzides* and *Bafralides* were collaborators and informers to Germans in order to get favours, guns and food. They would chase rebels like my father. England and Russia carved up which countries they wanted after the war and it was not possible for Greece to go with Russia. There were many leftist fighters during the Axis War and perhaps they could have won Greece over to communism after the war ended. This conflict led to the Civil War and the rebels went into the mountains. England didn't want Greece to go with Russia and the US provided guns, weapons, tanks and airplanes so that Greece was

wrested from the leftists. The leftists had actually saved Greece from the Nazis and were initially heroes. In a complete turnaround of ideology, heroes became criminals. These people destroyed Greece. See how the rich took all the money out of Greece and now there is no money – people are killing themselves or starving, and there is difficulty and suffering. The majority of Greeks now are fascists. The Communist Party is small. The ex-communists joined other socialist parties. It used to be the second-largest party in Greece. Perhaps if Greece had become communist it would have flourished and there would have been enough for all. We will never know.

After listening to Father's story, I thought about those 40,000 children that Father told me were not kidnapped or taken away by leftists by force. I found conflicting information about this in books and online; no doubt some of it is propaganda, which has remained because not enough has been done to clarify this. There are some books written by children taken away by the rightists which contradict the stories told about the leftists kidnapping children. There is more mention in current online records or official history of the leftists abducting children than mention of the queen's camps, where children of leftists were forcibly taken away by the authorities to prevent them being indoctrinated into leftist ideologies. In her memoirs, Queen Frederika wrote: "The main project, at the beginning, was to save our children in the northern provinces from being carried across the borders and from being educated as enemies of the country" (Bærentzen, Iatrides & Smith 1987, p. 127). So, who really took the children away? The government? Was it all propaganda blamed on the leftists because they were the enemies of the government? There is probably more than one answer. Both sides appear to have taken children out of the country: the leftists took their children to save them from persecution, and the rightists to prevent them from being taken behind the Iron Curtain and potentially being trained as communist rebels. What makes me sad is that families were torn apart by the politics of the time.

Karamana and Sahara

One of Father's favourite foods is yoghurt. Sometimes we made it at home. Mother would boil cow milk then wait till it was lukewarm. Then she would put a large tablespoon of good quality yoghurt into the saucepan and mix it around with the milk till it was dissolved. She then poured it into a bowl and covered it with several tea towels and left it overnight. The next day we had yoghurt.

"It is fresh and sweet," Father would say as he tasted it the next morning. "But still, nothing like our own buffalo-milk yoghurt in Greece."

"Buffalo-milk yoghurt?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes, the best yoghurt comes from buffalo milk, as does the best butter."

"Can you tell me how you made it?" I asked. Father smiled. He loved remembering the stories of his youth.

In 1955 we had two buffaloes called Karamana and Sahara. They were good buffaloes, but stubborn. We milked them and made buffalo-milk yoghurt and *ayran*. Mother would have a barrel attached to the ceiling. We put milk into it and shook it till it became butter. We ploughed the tobacco fields with the buffaloes and they both gave us calves to sell. Sahara had a white mark on her forehead and she was better natured. Karamana was very naughty. The gypsy women would come at ten in the morning to start planting the tobacco seedlings, but by then it was too hot and the buffaloes got restless. One time they began running for the pond with the plough still attached. It cut Karamana's leg. I thought their legs would get sliced off by the plough swinging wildly behind them, but luckily it broke in half and they ran into the water with only the top piece attached. I was eighteen when this happened in 1958. Thankfully Karamana's leg healed and got better.

I was inexperienced with buffaloes and took them to work in the heat of the day but was told by a neighbour that I should unharness them after they worked in the morning so they could soak in the pond for a couple of hours during the hottest part of the day. Then they would be ready for work again. We had a barrel of water to sprinkle onto the tobacco seedlings. A gypsy and her two daughters would help us. The buffaloes sat and relaxed in the pond, then they ate grass. By four in the afternoon the gypsies had finished their work and we gathered everything up. My mother and the gypsies got into the wagon and the buffaloes took us home. Mother milked the buffaloes in the evening. She would make a thick and creamy yoghurt from their milk. Then she would put most of the yoghurt into the barrel with the rope attached to the ceiling and would rock it until it became butter and buttermilk. The best butter comes from yoghurt. Cultured butter. We drank the buttermilk to keep cool in summer. We didn't eat much meat. Once a year we killed a pig and boiled the fat and meat in a large copper pot. Mother would cut the meat into small pieces, then put it into a large clay urn or amphora and seal it with wax. Two months later we would open it in winter and fry the fat and ham with eggs. It was sweet-tasting and delicious. Many other villagers did not have the cooking skills of my mother. We ate very well.

Later we got two cows, one chestnut-coloured and one white. They were good cows and gave us milk, yoghurt and butter. My mother made the butter. Sometimes I sold a kilo of butter and got thirty drachmas, and Mother would shop in Nigrita, the main town, for any groceries we needed. Other people did not even have food to eat. There was so much poverty. We were well off in comparison: at least we could feed ourselves.

I was an explorer and found many things in the mountains, such as large snails near the river, called *purnaria*. They were two inches long. The snails of the fields were smaller and sweeter. I was nine and my brother eleven, when we would go and collect ten kilos of snails in 1949 in Ahino, where we were moved during the Civil War. Many people would collect snails back then because they were a source of protein and there was not much meat to eat. Mother would clean them by boiling them in water, then pull them out of their

shells with a fork and cook them with pilaf rice. She would sometimes sauté them in buffalo butter and then crack eggs over them to make an omelette, which we ate with bread. In Patriki there were sweet white snails in the grass near the river, which I also collected. In France snails are now rich people's food, but back then, only the poor ate snails.

When I was sixteen, in 1956, I went alone after rain to get snails. I began to cross the river and a flood came down from the mountains. I was swept away downriver but luckily a tree branch saved me. I sat in the sun for an hour to dry out and waited for the river to slow down to its normal pace. Then I went and gathered big black snails two inches long. I never told Mother what had happened. She had already lost Kostas a few years earlier and I didn't want her to yell at me and be afraid of losing another son.

There were some landmines here and there. Usually, they were near the villages to stop the rebels from coming down the mountains. But the rebels found them and removed most of them. In 1949 or 1950 a man took his sheep over a field in Ahino. The sheep were blown to pieces by landmines. Twenty sheep got killed. He had 140 sheep. Lucky the sheep stepped on the mines, not the people. Many people also got killed. Another man was travelling with his cows pulling his cart and he and the cows got blown sky-high. The fascists, those swines, put the mines there to stop the rebels coming to the villages for bread and left the mines there after the war.

One night in 1948 my godfather and a first cousin of my father came for bread and asked, "Is there anyone hiding here?" Mother said, "No, no one is here, just my children and I." They were fascists, hiding from the rebels who were roaming the streets at night. They hid under our beds, then in the morning, when the rebels were gone, they escaped. They may have informed on someone. If they had been caught, they would have been taken to *Maimundire*. Usually, fascist relatives hid under our beds because the rebels ruled the night.

Many fascists went to Valta, a fertile valley, where anything you plant grows well, and hid in the haystacks. The rebels would yell at the haystacks, "Come

out or we will shoot you,” and the confused fascist supporters hiding in the haystacks would think they had been seen and come out. That was a trick the rebels used, and it usually worked because when you are afraid you don’t think straight.

In 1947, when I was seven, we had a field up near the mountains and built a fence around it for our pigs. The large female pig had eight small piglets and we had to spend the night there with the pigs to keep them safe. We built a hut with a fence around it out of brambles with spikes on them. The pen was also made of sticks and brambles. A huge wolf came to eat the piglets in the night, and we held our breath and cowered in our hut. There was nothing we could do. The sow came out and chased the wolf. Adult pigs have huge tusks that could have torn a wolf to pieces. My brother was nine and I was seven and he told me the sow was missing, so we left our hut and waited with the piglets to keep them safe until she returned. When the sow came back, we stayed in her pen with our arms around her neck and slept like that. She kept us as well as her piglets safe and warm. Later we sold the piglets and bought some goats.

I caught six fish from the river with my bare hands, holding a small piece of bread and waiting for the fish to come between my palms. Then I would scoop them out of the water and throw them onto the riverbank before they could slip away. I cleaned them and strung them together on a twig. When I took them home, Mother baked them with lemon, fresh oregano, tomato, parsley, onion and lots of olive oil. She put them into the brick oven after the bread had finished baking. The aroma of the honey-sweet bread and the fish was intoxicating. I ate joyously, then licked my fingers and the plate to savour every last drop of olive oil.

In some areas till 1945 there were Germans in Greece. We went from one war to another. The Civil War began in 1946 so there was no time for people to recover. No time for animals to be raised again in abundance or crops to flourish.

In 1950 almost no one went to university. Most people were uneducated after ten years of war and teachers had only done two or three years of high school before they became teachers. In those days we kissed the hands of teachers and priests. People would stand up in respect to greet them and kiss their hands. These days that doesn't happen. My older brother Kostas was very educated. He knew more than a lawyer. He only finished secondary school, but he was a genius. He could read a book and remember it word for word and excelled in mathematics. No one could match him.

My first cousin Eraklis went to Italy to study after completing high school and my brother Kostas would teach him mathematics. My cousin's father would ask him, "How do you know these things?" My brother Kostas was very modest and would just smile. Eraklis later became a veterinarian, *haivan* doctor. Now he is in his eighties and is not very well. I have many relatives. Most are very good. His brother is my best cousin; his name is Alexis and we both are very dear to each other.

Those days we did not have money. I would take five or six kilos of wheat and go to Zitohori village and buy halva, olives, dried herrings, and I would eat five herrings in one time. One *oka* is about 1.5 kilograms. Once I ate that much halva after trading wheat that my stomach hurt. Today people do not cook like before. Mother would make couscous out of bulghur which she put into a large bowl of flour. She sprinkled it with water and then took a vine leaf and rubbed the bulghur through the flour until it formed large balls of couscous. These were boiled in water and served with melted butter or olive oil and salt. If you ate one bowl you always wanted a second. Not many people knew how to make it and the village girls would come to learn from Mother.

When she made pasta – *makarina* – she would mix eggs with flour and water. Then she would roll it flat and slice it into large sheets. Later she stacked the sheets when they were almost dry and sliced them like fettucine. They made delicious pasta; everything was fresh and homemade.

Father could build almost anything he put his mind to. It is a shame he saved his inspiration and energy to fix other people's houses, and by the time it came to fix our own house he was tired and would say, "Tomorrow or on the weekend." That weekend never came, and Mother would get annoyed and say, "He makes other people's houses into palaces but forgets about his own."

"My *poulaki*," Father said, "Do you know how much dust I drank fixing other people's old houses? Years of dust, and dirt. And usually, I had to work on my own. Any helpers I had would drive me with the building materials and tools and did little more than pass me the tools. They demanded equal pay. I felt sorry for them because they were in debt or jobless, and paid them."

"Ba," I said, which was my favourite way of saying *Baba* or "Father" in Greek. "Why did you bring them with you?"

Sometimes I couldn't do the work on my own and you were all too small to come and help me. So, in the end, I sometimes was left with little money. I underestimated jobs and any unforeseen problems with renovations came out of my pocket. Some days I made no money at all. I would argue but, in the end, few people would be reasonable and pay for extra work. They got a good deal and I ended up cheated and tired.

I renovated my mother's house when I was younger. I had more energy then. I made the doors, windows, floors and restored the ceiling with the help of an uncle. Our house had been a very poor house, but I fixed it and it became a lovely house, full of light, and Mother loved it. People would congratulate her on the good job I had done, and she was proud. Before it had been a one-bedroom house with a sink to wash dishes, but I made a separate kitchen, living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. I also made the grand front door with a brass knocker and leadlight window. It was the best door in the whole

village at that time. My parents kept it, and my brother only recently replaced it, after sixty years, because the house had been renovated and a newer more fashionable door was chosen.

At first I worked in Serras as a carpenter. I made furniture with the master where I did my apprenticeship. It was all custom-made furniture, as the patrons wanted. This meant we could fit it to the size of the room, for any purpose, with any wood and design as requested.

I remember I worked in Zitohori in a house with a small shop below it and made furniture. Then my future wife and her two older friends would pass by. Her friends would taunt me, calling me *Kafkash*, which means a person from Caucasus. They mistook me for a Greek from Russia and would throw stones at me. I think I was about fifteen to sixteen years old. Then I went to the brother of the store owner to work at his other store as well in Zitohori. When he married, he moved to Thessaloniki, and after I finished my compulsory army service, I went to Thessaloniki too and worked there. I liked having my own trade and not having a boss ruling over me. It was also good for my health to work hard physically. I stayed strong throughout my youth. Even at seventy I could bend a metal pipe with my bare hands, dig holes for stumps or fences in the dirt in minutes, while younger men spent hours trying to do the same job. The only problem was that I later developed arthritis and in winter I could hardly move due to my knee pain. The heavy work in Greece carrying two hundred kilos of plaster boards on my head had taken its toll.

I remembered Father digging holes with a long metal spike called a “digging bar” that concreters and other labourers use. These were for digging holes for my roses in my front garden. My husband struggled to dig one in an hour in the tough clay soil. Father would complete one in five minutes or less; he was like a machine at seventy-two. “*Pos ta kanis afta toso grigora?*” I asked, baffled. “*Aftin tin thouleia ekana olloi tin zoi mou,*” Father said, meaning this is the work he did all his life. No one was better than him; his strength was truly heroic.

On the weekend when I visited Father and he was resting after dinner, I asked, “Can you tell me more about what you did in Greece?” Father put down the bowl of pasta he had just finished and relaxed into his cat-scratched favourite armchair. “*Lipon*,” he said, “*Otan imastan mikra then ihame kai kala papoutsia*.” This meant he didn’t have good shoes when he was younger.

I had rubber shoes when I was ten, made from recycled tyre inners. When they got wet in the rain we would slide inside the shoes. They were very cold and uncomfortable in winter. We wore white woollen socks with these, that native Greeks called *tsourapia*. Mother knitted all our socks and jumpers from wool she spun from our sheep.

When we were forced to go to Ahino in 1949 there was mud knee-deep in that village and my rubber shoes got stuck and remained behind in the mud. This was before proper roads were built, so animals, people and carts churned the roads to mud.

At the age of thirteen, I went into the mountains in winter to cut wood and loaded it up onto the donkey. In Ahino village I sold it, thirteen drachmas for a large bundle. Mother would use the money to buy olive oil and other goods. Luckily, I did not see any wolves. In February the wolves would come out as it was breeding season and they were hungry. In the summer there were hares, rabbits, rats and other creatures for them to eat in the mountains but in winter there was little. One old aunt always gave me fifteen drachmas for the wood, because she was kind. I would say, “No aunt, only thirteen.” But she insisted on fifteen. She also gave me fresh bread with butter because I was very hungry after spending hours cutting wood in the mountains. “*Yavroom*, you are hungry.” She was the kindest woman in the world. I have never forgotten her. She would say “*Yavroom*, if you cut wood, come to me.” It was hard work cutting the wood and not everyone would go there. She was from Caucasus. I always came by her house with bundles of wood. *Yavroom* means “my child” in Pontian Greek. My father called me that. It’s been a long time since I was called *Yavroom*.

Some Vlachs would say to me, “Hey *Kafkash*, how much is the wood?”

“Twelve drachmas,” I would say.

“Come on, we will give you eight.”

“No,” I would say. The usual wage was eight drachmas for a hard day’s work, but I had to travel far into the mountains and risk wolves. I needed more and I knew how to bargain. Mother was depending on me to get a good deal.

One fisherman would travel from a half-frozen lake a hundred kilometres away to our village to sell fish in February. He came several times. A pack of hungry wolves chased him and his horse. They tried to eat the horse but the horse kicked both his hind legs behind him. Eventually the horse threw the rider and he fell to the ground and the wolves ate him. Only his tough leather ankle boots – *arvilles* – were left, his feet still inside them. They were later found by a search party.

The first time I saw a wolf was when I was engaged to your mother.

“Come, let’s go to your house for dinner,” I said to her and we caught the bus to her house. We had a nice meal and I chatted with her family. By the time we had finished telling stories, it was after midnight.

“You must stay the night, it’s too late to go,” my father-in-law, Christos, said.

“Wolves might be out, it’s not safe,” my mother-in-law, Fotini, said.

“No, we will be fine, we will walk quickly and be there in no time. I want to introduce Niki to some aunts and cousins who are visiting tomorrow. It will be better if we are there.”

I had a thick black coat on, and Niki wore her maroon fitted wool coat and gloves. She wore high heels, so we were slow in walking to my village, which was about forty minutes’ walk away.

It was one o’clock in the morning and as we rounded a bend, under the light of the moon, we saw a huge lone grey wolf waiting on a mound, watching us. His eyes gleamed. I realised I should have kept a large stick with me. If the whole pack was there, we would have been in trouble. This wolf was the size

of a large calf, taller than a dog, with thinner legs. Niki pulled on my arm, panicking.

“He will eat us,” she whispered.

“Stop, don’t show fear or he will jump on us,” I said. I made Niki walk by my side instead of behind me. I locked my eyes on those of the wolf and bent my head down a little to show I was not afraid to fight back. Only when we were ten metres past the wolf did I break eye contact.

Often in summer the wolves slept in the corn. They were so hungry they would even eat the corn cobs. Corn rows are huge and tightly knit. One woman went in the morning to collect corn and the wolves attacked her and ate her.

Later, an army soldier who took leave to visit his mother caught a bus into the villages at night and stopped near Houmniko village. It must have been between six and eight in the evening. He walked towards his mother’s house, not far away, but a pack of wolves surrounded him and ate him.

One June, in summer, my brother and I were harvesting tobacco leaves before daybreak, and we had our donkey with us. Suddenly the donkey made a noise. We thought it must be a wolf. Then two men with a rifle came near us and asked, “Have you seen a wolf?”

“No,” we said. “But it must be in that pile of grass over there because the donkey was disturbed.” They looked there and found the wolf and shot him. Mother would come around six o’clock with our breakfast, when it was daylight. It was usually safe by then; all the people were out in the fields working by six.

My cousins left a donkey about a hundred metres from an aunt’s house in Kizili. After their visit when they went to get the donkey to ride home, they found it dead, half eaten by wolves.

Wolves were not the only danger. Another time I was taking our cows to the cowherd and passed cliffs with holes in them. Birds with long bills made those

holes to build nests and laid eggs in them. On the way back I decided to put my hand into a hole to get an egg. But my hand touched a snake. I froze. I visualised clenching my fist around it and hitting its head on the ground. I did this exactly as I visualised, then took my shoe off and used my sock to pull its fangs out. Later I hid the snake in a box as it was now harmless. It must have been eating the bird eggs.

Our neighbour Barbagianni asked me, “Zacharias, do you have any cigarettes?” He always asked me for them.

“The cigarettes are in that box, take one.”

He opened the box and the snake came at him. He yelled and ran off.

He went to Mother and complained, “That son of yours!”

“What do you mean?” Mother asked him.

“He is no good.”

When I got home Mother asked me, “What did you do to Barbagianni?”

“Why?”

“He complained about you.”

“I was tired of him asking me for cigarettes, so I told him to look in the box for them, but there was a snake in there that I had captured.”

“Don’t do things like that! It is not good,” Mother yelled at me. She even beat me several times. But I never learned. I did what I wanted most of the time, and I liked pranks.

Mother could not count and after trading I would bring her the money back but sometimes kept some for myself, but she could not tell I had done so.

“Count the money,” she would say to me.

“One, two, three, four ... fifty drachmas,” I would say.

She would look at the notes and try to memorise how many there were, and remembered that there were fifty drachmas there, but in fact sometimes there may have been sixty drachmas, but I had not told her so. Then when she needed something, she often gave me too much money, thinking it was only fifty drachmas, so when I came back with new shoes or a woollen suit she would be mystified how I had done so. Eventually she and my brother worked out that I had kept some money for myself.

“*Kati tha ekane*,” Mother and my brother agreed. And they were right. But, I was the youngest, so I was spoiled. Everyone called me an *omorfopedo* or good-looking, so I had to look good. I got my thick, dark, wavy hair cut like Elvis Presley, and people stared everywhere I went. After a childhood of wearing rubber shoes, I made sure I always had nicely polished leather shoes and wool suits on. The best wool was cashmere which came from North India, or from Lahore. People would gasp and say, “Is that *Lahori*?” My suits were tailor-made and I was a very sharp dresser. When Father returned, he was very tight with money, but by then I had commenced earning from my carpentry work so I could be generous with my family and buy them gifts and goods. I was not like my Father; I spent my money.

I was well loved by my relatives and by my Father also. I can tell you now, that once your parents are dead, no one in this world can love you the same. You will see that too, no one will care for you the same when we are gone.

“Yes, Father,” I answered. “I know that.” I knew one day would come when Father would be gone and my world would crumble around me.

Part 2
Phlegmatic:
Mother's Story

Grandfather's House

“Mother,” I said, “Tell me about your childhood in Greece”.

“Wait while I make tea,” she said. Mother would sometimes be in the mood to tell me a story or would tell me to wait while she got me to do other chores first. She was not as ready to tell me a story as Father was; she changed like the weather. Mother was very houseproud and worried if anything was out of place or needed to be done, such as getting the washing in from the line, then when she was good and ready she would tell me a snippet or two. And if I dared question what she said or ask for it to be repeated again she would snap back, “You have a poor memory, don’t you remember what I just said?” I always remembered what she said but wanted more details and sometimes that was too bothersome for her. The story was hers to tell as she wanted and no one was going to change that.

I remember when I was about three years old in Greece, throwing cushions off the couch all over the floor in our house in Thessaloniki and jumping on them with my two-year-old sister. Father came home and yelled that the place was a disgraceful mess and he said “*Ptou sou*” angrily and spat on the floor and left. I think it meant something like “shame on you”. I was confused if it really was Father or another man, because he did not look at us or say hello, he was just furious and not like my father at all. I don’t think I had seen him angry like that before. Young children recognise people by the love they give to them, and the sweet words they use, not just by their appearance. I disliked angry words and severe facial expressions.

From then on, Mother always tried to clean up any mess we made quickly in case visitors came. She explained to me, “In those days a woman was judged by the cleanliness of her house.” A woman had to be industrious, working from day to night to keep house, clean, cook, feed, clothe and bathe her children and feed animals in the yard. If your house was messy you were called many terrible names and gossiped about. Mother said, “Visitors would deliberately come early, to see if the beds were made and the table clean. Being a lazy woman was almost as bad as being a prostitute.”

Even in Australia, if visitors arrived unannounced, which is common among Greeks, Mother would quickly tell us to put dishes away, pull the carpets back into place, put cushions on the sofa, remove stray items from the floor and, most importantly, make sure the beds were all made. This was difficult when we decided to use them as trampolines several times a day. An unmade bed was scandalous. By the time the visitors came from their car to the front door, the house was usually in a presentable state. Mother had four of us bouncing all over the place, so it was not easy for her.

“Athina, boil the water for the tea and get the teacups ready,” she said.

Sometimes I was even given the intricate task of making Greek coffee. Mother and sometimes Father would tell me how to make it. Two teaspoons of black coffee, two teaspoons of sugar. Then bring it to the boil in a *kafiliki* full of water, making sure the froth did not run over the side, because that froth was the best and creamiest part of the coffee. Sometimes my coffee was good, sometimes it was bitter and burnt. I hated it, it tasted foul, but the smell was divine, like dark chocolate, while I was preparing it in the small copper *kafiliki*.

By remembering the past, Mother relived the joys of her childhood, which abruptly ended at seventeen when she married and left her father’s house. From then on she was a visitor, taking us with her to play with our younger aunts and uncle who were still unmarried. I remember climbing the fig tree outside Grandmother’s house when I was three and picking the unripe figs and eating them. The white sap blistered my lips and made them swell. I did not realise that only ripe figs were to be eaten. I loved figs, watermelon, cantaloupe and cherries. These were my favourite fruit and grew in abundance in our orchards. Ladybirds waddled across leaves in our gardens and swallows swooped under the roof line to their nests. If there was a garden of Eden, this was it.

I was terrified of the black-and-white dairy cows which towered above me. Whenever they came in from pasture and mooed in the yard around me, I panicked, screaming for Mother to pick me up. Mother would delay, telling me, “They won’t hurt you. Don’t worry, just walk back to the house.” I could not understand how such large, powerful animals were harmless, but eventually I noticed they preferred eating the hay and grain in the troughs than looking at me. I raced back to the house and waited till they were back in the sheds.

Mother and Grandmother's food tasted the same, with the same herbs and energy in the food. It was something I marvelled at when I returned to Greece in my twenties and ate lentil soup at Grandmother's house. It was exactly like Mother's. Grandmother was an older and smaller version of Mother. I felt as if I had never been away. Grandfather Christos was kind, good natured and very funny. He would tease and poke fun at anyone and everything, even himself.

"*Ti ekanes Kale!*" Grandmother would say in mock surprise when Grandfather went into the small internal bathroom. There was no lavatory inside, only a wash basin and tub where heated water was poured. Grandmother worried he had made a mess splashing water onto the floor.

I made a video of my grandparents in the living room and played it back through their TV screen. They were pleased, saying, "Look how much younger we appear on TV." My grandparents had no telephone, so my uncle, aunt and cousins had to visit several times a day to check in on them to see if they needed anything.

Grandmother's house was old, but it was magical, with whitewashed walls, sky-blue painted cobblestoned floors, stone steps leading up to the two upstairs bedrooms. I remember my uncle Pericles telling me that most of the stone blocks which were used to build the village houses had been taken from remains of a castle nearby. He later took me to visit the remains and not much was left, just rubble.

"We are descendants of the people who lived in that castle," Grandfather Christos said.

"How do you know that, Grandfather?" I asked.

"I know, and we have some old things with us."

There were old family heirlooms and trinkets that may have been part of the reason, but I only ever saw a bronze vine-leaf bracelet Mother had taken to Australia, which later got stolen from their suitcase after they showed it to other Greeks in Melbourne. I wanted to know more about the castle and who had resided there but could not find any information.

Grandmother's house had some marble and stone blocks which came from the castle. The curtains on the windows were crisp and white, with hand embroidery and lace work. I never wanted to leave; it was as if I had come home to a wonderland where love and

beauty existed in abundance. Outside, flowers bloomed in the garden and bees buzzed around industriously.

Mother would tell me about my grandparents' cottage many times. She would sometimes explain how it had been made.

The livestock lived on the ground floor of the stone cottage, so the heat of the dung rose up and warmed the living quarters above and filled our house with the smell of a stable. The whitewashed cottage had been remade after the Germans had shelled it a few years earlier. The top floor had two bedrooms, each with windows placed to take advantage of the sunshine, but to also avoid the savage winter winds and snow. It had been repaired by my father, Christos, and his brothers. They used large stone blocks and thick wooden beams. Door frames and windows were made of smaller planks of wood or smoothed tree branches. The inside and outside walls were whitewashed. The floor was tinted bright blue like a midsummer sky. Inside, everyone wore slippers, leaving muddy street shoes near the door. Later we built sheds for the animals and made the downstairs into our kitchen, living room and washroom. Our house became beautiful.

The patriarchal home of my father was in Zitohori. It was well built and large, with many rooms for the many children – uncles Sterios, Nestoras, Dimitros, Pascalis, Panagiotis and my father, Christodoulos. My grandmother's name was Panagiota, and my grandfather was Antonis. An amazing garden and orchard surrounded their house. The sunshine would come straight through the front windows. The house was divided into two parts, the double-storeyed side for two sons and the single-storeyed side for another two sons, which eventually went to Uncle Pascalis and his family. In the double-storeyed houses animals, tools and grain stores were kept on the ground floor. We would often visit it as children. Eventually my uncles and their families moved to their own homes and when my grandparents died the houses fell into ruin, overgrown with trees and vines. I had never imagined that my parents' cottage would end up in the same condition.

My mother's father was wealthy, and he owned most of the land in my village, which eventually was sold off to other villagers. Cousins and uncles bought land in the village and built nearby our house.

A few years after the Civil War ended, the stable was rebuilt in the yard, near the chicken coop and lavatory. Downstairs was made into three rooms, a bathroom, a living room and kitchen, which had a day bed and storeroom. It was a bright lovely home surrounded by roses, lavender, chrysanthemums, violets, mint, a fig tree and many other flowers. But it was a humble home, not modern and large like other newer homes in the village. It was traditional and for years had no proper lavatory. Even when my mother died, no phone had been installed.

Neither I nor my sisters wanted the house as an inheritance, preferring larger modern homes. "You can have the house," my elder sister told me a few years ago. "*Nai yia*," I replied. As children we all fought over new clothes, the nicest coats or skirts, passing them down year by year to the sibling below us once we outgrew them. We all wanted a nice modern new home, not an old cottage in a village. There was little sentimentality about the cottage for us. Only my mother had not wanted to leave that house when she was old, but after my father died it was impossible for her to stay there alone without a phone. She went to live with my brother and his family. They had all lived in the cottage, including the two grandchildren, until my brother built his modern two-storey marble-floored house, with marble steps and high grand ceilings. My mother could not climb the stairs, so she lived downstairs where a small flat was installed for her. The rest of the downstairs section was used as a storeroom for drying tobacco leaves and stacking tobacco parcels ready for collection when the buyers came.

Old age is a part of life and when it comes, it is not easy. It is like the four seasons or the four humours. Some winters are bitterly cold and savage, making one's bones ache and creak. Health can change like the weather. I had been strong, energetic and young, bouncing up the stairs with a full laundry basket when I was newly married; now I can hardly bend to take the clothes out of the washing machine. This is my warning to you: take care of your

health when you are young; every little thing counts. Getting overworked and tired will rob you of your health when you are old. You will then pay the price. I remember how strong and able my own parents had been and how feeble and weak they became after struggling for years to make a living, farming the land, bringing up six children.

My father was an important link during the three years from 1946 to 1949 when the rebels hid in the mountains. Being a good and honest man, he stayed neutral, neither on the side of the communists nor on the side of the fascists. He took his goats or sheep, whatever flocks were available to him at the time, to pasture into the mountains, planted and harvested crops, and engaged in trading. He later bought some cows and focused on dairy farming.

Every day during the war he placed a note under a rock for the rebels to find. His cousin, nephew and two nieces were with the rebels and he worried about them. His nieces had been taken by the rebels to help carry water and cook food or do laundry as well as to fight. They became soldiers too. One got married to a rebel and they lived in Czechoslovakia for many years, without word. Everyone feared she had died in the war. Then one day she sent a letter and later returned. She had grown-up children by then. They were not kidnapped but had been coerced or convinced to come to the mountains by the leftists. The notes my father placed under the rock were to keep them safe. This way they knew how to avoid ambushes, and learned of births, deaths and marriages in the village. Father played a big role in preventing many clashes between the rebels and the fascists. When he took the animals into the mountains, the fascists would ask him if he had seen any rebels pass by; he would point them in the opposite direction. When the rebels asked him about where the fascists were, he would again do the same thing. He wanted to protect people and avoid fighting. Later, planes dropped napalm bombs in the mountains, causing raging fires. The rebels dispersed. Many went into Czechoslovakia because it was a communist country; others went into Bulgaria or Russia – Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan – and to the previous diasporas of Pontian Greeks who had fled Turkey.

Captain Christodoulos

“Tell me more about Grandfather Christos,” I asked Mother.

Mother was more than happy to remember her beloved father again. She lay back against the cushions on her bed and pulled the mink blanket over her legs. I sat at the foot of the bed and listened to the buzz of insects outside in the summer afternoon. Mother began to tell me more about her father.

Although my father, Christos, was not a very educated man, his heart was pure gold. “The same sun shines on all of us,” he would say, meaning that if nature did not discriminate, why should people? He resented injustice, ingratitude and waste.

Taking his cows and goats to pasture, he stopped to collect the neighbours’ animals as he went, so the flock grew by the time he left the village. Others were too afraid to go into the mountains, but Father had many rebel cousins and uncles in the mountains, and he knew the land. If he did not take the animals out to graze, no one would have milk. Even his brothers refused to pass through the barbed-wire fences and gates to brave mines and possible crossfire. Father was the sole farmer who still took his and everyone else’s animals out of the village. The fascists on duty would open the gate and Father would pass through with all the animals; they would ask when he would be back and he would give an approximate time. There was a curfew and he knew he must be back before then or risk being mistaken for a rebel in the dark and being shot. People stayed indoors during curfew and could not leave their houses till the next morning, not even to go check on the animals in the shed. Opening your door and walking in the dark was dangerous. Those on duty would probably shoot you. The rebels still came. They hid behind bushes near the wire fences and then cut holes in the fences and came through at night. It was not possible to keep them out entirely.

People from five villages had been gathered to live in Zitohori and the whole village was fenced in. My father would milk the sheep and goats and later the cows, and give most of the milk to the police in Zitohori to ration between the villagers so the children and babies would not starve. He only kept enough for us. My father also sheared the sheep for their wool, which the women in the village used to make socks and jumpers. There was no food in the mountains so often he disguised food, or said it was for his dogs, but took it to give to the rebels as they could not come into the village easily. He would mash feta cheese with small pieces of bread and tie it into the corner of a tea towel and then twist the ends together so that it formed a small tight circle of bread and cheese which held together. These were bite-sized pieces and convenient for travelling. Father called them *psomakia*. He would also say these were for his dogs and instead give them to the rebels. Father had two tall sheep dogs, Aslan and Kaplan. They wore a collar of brambles so the wolves would not choke them in order to get to the sheep.

To find suitable pasture for the animals, Father ventured into the highlands, where the wild oregano grew. He wore a small dark cap over his chestnut curls. His hazel eyes shone with kindness. As he urged the animals further and further, he would sing silly songs and call their nicknames: *Malloura*, *Katsika*, *Mitzos* and *Kitzos*. The animals responded, as if they knew Greek, licking his hands and nuzzling his leg. As he crossed the hills one afternoon, something whizzed past him very quickly, leaving a loud crack in the air. He was caught in the crossfire! The animals began to stampede. He fell to the ground and crawled under the sheep. “*Stamatisete!*” he yelled, but the bullets would not stop. Almost a third of his herd were killed by the time the battle ended. He stayed where he was for half an hour then stood upright.

“Why did you come so high?” the approaching rebel commander yelled at him. “Don’t you know we could have killed you? And don’t go down the other side of this hill. It is full of landmines.”

The rebels dragged off the dead sheep and goats and roasted them on spits made from tree branches, while my father retreated back down the mountainside, leaning on his staff, and calling to the remaining animals still

crazed with fear. He had survived but the animals had trampled him, bruising and cutting his shoulders, arms and legs with their sharp hooves. Losing animals to the war was nothing new, either by force or accident. He sang a lament which carried down the mountain ahead of him, and the tree branches tossed and turned as if agreeing with him. The cow bells were his only accompaniment. The grey sky above threatened a thunderstorm. Father knew he must hurry, before the track became wet and slippery and before curfew began.

At home he warmed his hands by the fire while my mother, Fotini, set the table with *faki* soup, olives, homemade butter, bread and feta cheese. After my sisters and I had gone to sleep, Mother patched Father's trousers and jacket. I heard them whispering and discussing what had happened. Father did not want us to hear. There was no better place in the world than our own home. I was warm and sleepy in the evening with the fire crackling below and Mother's and Father's voices lulling us to sleep.

The next morning Mother made *trachanas* soup with olive oil and salt, and we slurped it down quickly. This was our favourite breakfast, light and tasty. A couple of years later after the end of the war, school began again. It was right next door, so we jumped our fence into the schoolyard. During recess we jumped back over the fence again to grab a slice of bread and Mother asked us to sweep the yard and feed the chickens. Then my older sister and I went back to school. When school finished Father was back with the sheep and goats and he put them in their pens so they could eat hay and drink water. Father bathed, then sat with us playing silly games and singing songs while Mother cooked us dinner.

I never thought those days would end, or that I would one day lose my parents. They were my world and my village was the universe. How strange that one day I would marry then leave to the opposite side of the world. I missed Father and Mother. They always knew best and taught us to be honest and hardworking people. "The only things worth having are those you achieve by the sweat of your brow," my parents said. "All the riches in the world cannot

buy honour,” they told me. In Australia I was alone with my children, while my husband worked. I was far from my parents. It was another life.

Kalikanzaroi

“Do you remember much from the Civil War?” I asked Mother.

“No, not much, not as much as my older sister. But I remember we suffered, with few luxuries.”

“Did anything happen that frightened you?”

“Yes, there were several events that frightened me. Let me tell you the story of when the rebels came to our door in 1949.”

The sound of thunder echoed like the rattle of an empty tin through the valley; far above the mountains, lightning etched across the blackening sky like a giant crack. Soon it would be raining. Fat drops fell against the ceramic roof tiles in a quickening staccato. A knock came at the door, and my mother, Fotini, held my baby sister to her chest more tightly.

“*Thie mou*,” Mother whispered, looking at me, making the sign of the cross.

It was said *kalikanzaroi* (goblins) roamed the hills in the evening and night, beating their little drums and carrying off unsuspecting travellers. Who was waiting at our door tonight? Mother was often alone all day doing household chores with us children at her feet. My father had still not come back from the mountains with the cows and goats. Mother hushed us and locked us in the bedroom before opening the front door. A man stood there expectantly.

“Some bread, some food for the rebels, good woman?”

“I am alone with the children. My husband is not home, you can’t come in.”

“*Endaxi*, we know Christos, he told us we could come here for food.”

“Wait there, I will get you some bread,” Mother said, turning to get it. The dozen or so rebels behind the leader entered the house and went past her,

lifting the tablecloth, looking in cupboards and poking large cane baskets of dried tobacco leaves with their bayonets.

“Who else is here?” the leader asked, looking up at the roof. “Lefteri – go up there, see if anyone is hiding.”

“*Ma re, pios tha ine etho mazi mas?* We are alone!” Mother came to the bedroom door where we were hiding, blocking their entrance.

“Why don’t you join us – become an *andartissa* – we have need of strong women to help us,” the leader said, placing his hand on Mother’s arm. She shook his hand off angrily.

“What help can I give you? I have three children crying for bread and one at the breast.” Her green eyes flashed defiantly. She went and picked up our baby sister from the bed, singing a lullaby, “*Itane mia koukouvaia*”, while we older daughters clung to her skirts. Up above, the rebels combed the roof, poking the corners with their bayonets.

“We don’t like it when people leave us, preferring to fill their stomachs and sit at home like buffaloes.” The leader turned and threw whatever food he could find into his sack: bread, olives and cheese from the cupboards. Mother bit her lip, forcing herself to be quiet as they took everything. Tomorrow she would have to grind more wheat by hand between two round stones and bake bread for the week, a task that took half a day.

Satisfied that no deserters were hiding in the house, the rebels left, leaving the door ajar. As soon as they were gone, my sisters and I started crying.

Mother closed the door and listened to make sure the rebels were gone.

“They have gone,” she said loudly.

Up above in the darkest corner of the roof, potato sacks rustled. Antonis, her brother-in-law, and his son Nikos came down the narrow whitewashed steps, their faces ashen.

“Where will we go now? On one side the fascists are after us, and on the other the *andartes* are wanting us to fight – they will eat us! I don’t want to leave my family and starve in snows among lice, dirt and wolves, fighting a war we cannot win. God help us! I won’t become like Anastasia.”

Everyone knew the tragedy of Anastasia, the beautiful golden-haired schoolteacher who ran off to the mountains with a young rebel she loved. They both died of cold and hunger within a week. The fascists hunted them into the deepest snows. Antonis had seen their corpses, two bodies tightly entwined beneath a *flamouri* tree, with only a thin blanket between them and two metres of snow and ice. A few *andartes* had made it into Yugoslavia, with American planes on their tails, but the young lovers had been too slow.

“We will not go back. I have seen enough. We’re going to Serras. Maybe we can find some work there.” Antonis paced up and down the small room, rubbing his hands like he was trying to wring a wet cloth.

“Wait for Christos; he will have important news for you. The roads are dangerous, you never know if you will meet Thanatos or the Devil, and if you go through the mountains, the rebels will catch you for sure.”

Mother went to the stove and threw more wood onto the fire. Then she put tea leaves in the pan with sugar and water. There was no more bread left, but beneath one of the stones in the floor of the kitchen she drew out a pot of yoghurt and some raisins. We children gathered around the bench next to the wood stove and dipped spoons into the pot, our tears dried and forgotten.

Sheep and Wolves

Mother and I sat back on the couch and drank tea. It was late afternoon and Father was not yet back home. All the chores were done so I knew Mother might want to talk about her childhood in Greece.

“How did you live in Greece when you were a small child?” I asked.

Mother smiled. I was glad she was in the mood to talk.

“Life was not easy when I was a young child. I did not have the opportunities you did. I did not even like the taste of most of the food we had. If I’d had biscuits and ice-cream, tasty cheese and white bread, I may have grown taller and been fatter. I was just a skinny little thing who always wore a hood on my head because I was cold. My father said, ‘When you were little you were a *mixariko* then you grew up into the most beautiful of all my daughters.’ At the age of two and three I would not eat unless my cat ate with me. I would bring my cat next to me and give her a spoon of milk then I had a spoon of milk, otherwise I would not eat. If the cat became distracted I hit it on the head with my spoon to get it to pay attention and have spoonfuls of milk with me. I was a fussy eater.”

“How was life difficult?” I asked.

“Don’t you ever listen,” Mother snapped, getting cross at me for daring to ask a question and interrupt her. I smiled and let Mother continue.

Snow began to fall and school closed for winter. My father Christos would throw hay to the livestock and only take them out of the barn for a short time, so they could exercise in the yard. Many neighbours gave their sheep to him to look after during the winter so the flock was huge. The fences were made of wooden posts with barbed wire strung across to keep the animals in and the foxes and wolves out. His brother, Panagiotis, would come over and help him clean out the barn and bring fresh water for the animals, made from snow melted over a pot on the fire. They would milk the cows, and also walk into

the forest to collect firewood. One night a strong wind brought the sounds of howling wolves from the mountains. Father lit fires in the yard near the barn to keep them away in the evening and he kept watch from the door, but he could not stay in the doorway. At midnight he came into the house and bolted the door.

At two o'clock the sound of animals moving noisily in the barn and wolf howls woke him up. It sounded like there were fifty wolves outside. He put on his winter coat and took the lamp with him. He saw blood in the snow. The wolves had jumped through the barbed-wire fences, unafraid to get their hides torn in order to eat the sheep. One side of the barn had been torn apart. The wolves had dug under the snow and pulled aside the planks of wood with their teeth. Several sheep lay dead in the snow. Father opened the barn and saw the animals huddled in terror. Some sheep had bite marks on their necks or faces. When a sheep came to him to lick his hand, he withdrew it in fear. Wolves and wild dogs carried rabies. He pulled a water trough in front of the gaping hole in the side of the barn, then closed the door and went back to bed.

The next morning when Uncle Panagiotis came to help him, they discussed what was the best course of action.

"We will have to kill all the sheep," Father said. "We can't wait to see if any of them have rabies or not. By then it will be too late for us or anyone else the sheep have come into contact with. A couple of sheep already licked my hand. I don't want to kill them, most of them have not been harmed by the wolves, but the twenty or so that have been bitten could be turning rabid now."

"How will we kill them?"

"We will have to shoot them. If we cut their necks it will take too long and their blood will spill everywhere and could pass on rabies to us and others."

"There are two hundred sheep. If we kill that many it will take days to bury them. Others will have to help us."

Father and Uncle Panagiotis spread the bad news about the sheep and everyone agreed the sheep should be killed. No one wanted to risk getting

rabies. Ten men gathered and helped dig a huge trench in one of the disused fields. One by one Father and Uncle shot the sheep, including their favourites who came when called by name. Father had tears falling down his cheeks as he pulled the trigger against their skulls. It was a rotten job but no one else could do it. The sheep trusted him and his brother Panagiotis. They would have to rebuild their flock from scratch and give the newborn lambs to the neighbours who had also lost their livestock.

Uncle Panagiotis would still come to help Father with the remaining cows who had been away from the wolves and sheep. At least we still had milk. This was distributed amongst the neighbours, who in turn shared whatever they had: bread, olives or cheese.

“Remember how *Matakos* would run up when we called his name?” Uncle Panagiotis asked Father.

“Yes, he was the funniest sheep I have ever seen. I am sure God meant for him to be a dog instead.”

“He was so smart, he would wait at the gate for me every day at the same time. He knew when I would be coming,” Uncle Panagiotis said.

When the snow began to melt, and new grass sprang up, Father and Uncle Panagiotis would take the cows back up the mountainside. The rivers were swollen full of icy water. Their hands would freeze when they cupped them to take a drink. One dusk, when they were headed back down to the village, Father was sure he heard the sound of drums.

“Did you hear that?” he asked Uncle Panagiotis.

“Yes, was it thunder?”

“It sounded more like drums to me,” Christos said.

“Drums? Who would be playing drums out in the mountains?”

“Gypsies? Thieves? The rebels?”

“It must be *kalikanzaroi*,” Uncle Panagiotis said, half in jest.

“Let us get back quickly, there is mischief in the air.”

Father and Uncle urged the cows quickly down the mountain as a fierce storm started lashing the trees behind them. The animals began running back home to avoid the rain. Hail stones began pelting them and they knew rain would come next. To shelter under a tree was dangerous as lightning often burned trees in the forest. Breathless, they made it home just as the raindrops began to fall more heavily.

“Come inside quickly,” Mother said when she saw them. She had already heated pots of water on the stove so they could bathe in the small tub in the bathroom under the stairs.

Dinner was brown lentil soup with carrot, garlic and potato, with homemade bread and dried black olives. Father dipped his bread into the side of the bowl, mopping up the olive oil which floated on the top, enjoying the warmth of the soup.

“We heard drums in the mountains,” Uncle Panagiotis said.

“Drums! You must have been followed by *kalikanzaroi*. Look at this storm, I am sure it could snap a tree in two.”

“It was just thunder and lightning,” Father said, looking at me and my sisters peeking from the top of the stairs. He did not want us to hear worrisome stories of goblins before bed.

“The fields will be nice and soft in a day or two after this rain,” Father said.
“We will have to sow the tobacco early this spring.”

“Two of our daughters are old enough to come now,” Mother said. “The third-youngest can care for her younger sister.”

My sisters and I whispered amongst ourselves in the big double bed where we slept.

“I don’t want to go to the fields,” I wailed.

“What can we do?” my older sister asked.

We knew it would be hard work in the morning before school began. My older sister pulled the wool doona up over everyone.

“Shoosh. We have a lot of work to do tomorrow. Go to sleep.” I twisted and turned but found lumps in the mattress I had not noticed before.

Before the sun rose we got up with Mother and Father, leaving the two youngest sisters asleep. The fields were soft and damp, yet weeds had already begun to grow. We had to pull the weeds out and throw them out of rows that the plough had raised. Then we scattered seeds and sprinkled soil over them. At midday we sheltered under a tree and Mother gave us bread, feta cheese, olives, tomatoes and spring onions for lunch. I found a goat hair in the feta cheese and refused to eat it. Dessert was water in which sugar had been dissolved. I sipped this eagerly, licking my lips.

At eight-thirty the next morning I and my sisters gathered around the kitchen table eating hot milk with torn bread pieces and sugar. This was our favourite breakfast, nice and sweet, with the bread softened into delicious morsels which we slurped eagerly. Mother quickly pressed our clothes with an iron heated on top of the wood-fired stove.

“I want the blue coat today,” I said.

“No, I want the blue coat,” my younger sister said even louder.

“Mum, they’re fighting again,” my older sister said, drinking her *flamouri* tea with honey.

“I explained it to you all last night,” Mother said. “We are not rich enough to buy you all a new coat. The eldest got the new red coat, so her old blue coat will go to Niki for this year, then the next youngest will get it a year later and so on. So the younger sister will wear Niki’s orange coat.”

“I hate orange,” my younger sister wailed.

“What can we do, that is the way things are. Just be grateful for what you have. Your father works very hard even for this much.”

“And who will get the brown coat next year when it is too small for me?” my smallest sister asked.

“Maybe there will be a new baby next year,” my older sister said.

“Really? I want a little brother to play with,” my youngest sister said. Even though she was two and a half years old, she cried when I and my older sister jumped over the fence into the schoolyard next door. She would watch from the yard as she threw breadcrumbs to the chickens and listened to the songs and laughter. School was fun.

In a year her wish was granted. Our little brother finally arrived to keep her company. They were known as the flowers, or *loulouthia*, of the family, all bright and cheery with their own sweetness.

Then, after little brother, another baby was born four years later, a little girl. My older sister scolded Mother when she had found out she was pregnant again.

“How will you feed us all?” she asked. “You are struggling to feed us now, and yet you keep having more babies.”

“Don’t worry, God has a plan for all of us, and he will find a way to provide for us.” Mother understood there was a reason God had given her another child.

Once our baby sister was born, my older sister fell in love with her. She would hug her and sing her lullabies, and when she smiled, she would bite her dimpled plump cheeks. At twelve, my older sister could care for us younger siblings.

Father bought a doll for the baby when she was one, because she was the youngest child. However, it was hard for me and my other sisters because we had to make do with knotted rags for dolls.

“I want a doll too,” I sobbed, gazing longingly at the doll with its pretty ruffled dress.

“Me too,” my other sisters chimed in.

“She is the youngest, so she got the doll. I didn’t have enough to buy dolls for everyone, we are not that fortunate,” Father said. We understood but could not stop crying. When you have longed for a proper doll all your life, it is hard to see a younger sibling get one.

Mother and Father worked day and night to give us all that we needed. But we had each other and loved one another. We never really fought. Maybe by having less we had stronger family ties; there was nothing else better than that. We sang together, cried together, laughed together, teased each other. Our best resources are often family.

Mother's Childhood

Mother and I were dancing *sirto* together in the living room. My son joined in, kicking his little legs out and not really knowing the steps. We laughed. Mother got a handkerchief and he grabbed the other end of it and she danced down the hallway with him in tow. I gulped down some water and sat on the couch. Mother danced back into the living room and gasped. She was not as fit as she had been. She sat on the other side of the couch. My son continued to spin around in circles.

“Please tell me some more about when you were a child,” I asked Mother.

I remember many things from those difficult years – not much from the end of the Greek Civil War, but more from the dictatorship.

Even in 1962, the children of ex-communists could not get work. Not all suffering ended with the war; difficulties continued. It gradually eased for the majority. For a few, there was no reprieve. From the Civil War to the dictatorship, every time there were elections, planes would fly down twenty metres above the houses in the villages. They were frightening to see. We always ran and hid. I think they were there as warnings to any leftists or rebels.

During the Civil War, many rebels died from malnutrition. The Germans took all the wheat, animals and money during the Axis occupation. They gave food to the Nazi collaborators, the *Bufralides* or *Paotzides*.

Sometimes whole villages ran to the mountains in fear from the Germans, but many came back. Only the old people were left in the villages. My grandmother, Loula, never spoke about her family in Kastanohori; she apparently came from a very wealthy family there. We assumed they were killed by the Nazis. We heard all the men of that village were killed by the Nazis. She also would not look into any property that she may have had from that village, even though she would have inherited it. We did not ask why this

was. In those days even travelling a few hours by horse cart was too far for most people.

Another cousin saw a photo of Papandreou and said, “May you live long,” and the police arrested him and cautioned him not to say such things in future. Even praising the opposition was a crime.

But your father was not afraid of the police: he would speak out against any injustice he saw and was often taken in for questioning. Whenever there was voting, police would arrest communists and their sympathisers and beat them as a warning for others not to vote for the Communist Party. They also demanded all communists vote openly, so they could see what they chose, and thereby discourage them.

Even in 1960 to '62 young men would guard the villages at night. They were called TEA. Your father had been a TEA. Sometimes if they got bored, they would go looking for ancient tombs in the middle of the night. I heard they found skeletons with giant spears and bronze shields. It took a lot of courage to open a tomb from the ruined castle in the night, and they would dare each other to do so. This eventually became outlawed and antiquities were protected.

The Greeks have some practices which do not always make sense. Some villages did not talk to each other and even in the 1950s people could get stoned for passing by a village of the opposite political party. Once a woman and her father were travelling the main road in a bullock cart and the whole village came out to throw stones, yelling “*andartissa*”. The woman’s arms were bleeding from cuts the stones had made.

When I was in primary school, I was often sent to camps to fatten me up because I was so thin and disliked most food. The teacher took us camping and some fascist children put a snake in the fire below our chicken-soup pot. It sizzled and smoked, and we were upset by this and cried. The food smelled so inviting but we could not imagine eating it after that. I think your father was one of the boys responsible for this prank. He and several other teenagers were kicking around a ball with their rubber shoes strapped onto their feet

with ribbons cut from hessian sacks. This was to keep the shoes on their feet, instead of flying off each time they kicked. They galloped through the muddy field like horses. I was afraid of them because I was a smaller child and they towered over me. I remember a tall girl yelling, “Harilia, throw me the ball.” I think she was calling your father.

Pontian Greeks and local Greeks did not intermarry in the 1940s or '50s. I first saw your father throwing rocks our way in Zitohori with a group of other kids. I quickly hid and thought he was a troublemaker. His widowed aunt later married my widowed uncle and that made it possible for us to meet and eventually marry.

When I was engaged, I was approached by the mayor and asked if I was a communist, as the police from your father’s village had arrested him for attending protests. The mayor said, “Pardon me, but I have to make enquiries.”

“I am not interested in politics at all, neither right nor left,” I said.

Another time, after I had suffered miscarriage and was recovering at home, the police came knocking on our door, asking to see your father.

“Where is he?” they asked.

“He is at work in his shop,” I said.

“You have to come with us for questioning.”

“I can’t come with you, I am not well.”

“You are well enough to stand in your door to talk with us. Come with us now.”

I resisted as much as I could, but they made me come to the station. There they asked me about your father’s interest in demonstrations and which ones he had attended and if I had attended them too. I started crying. I could not stop. I was feeling so tired and drained and they were interrogating me like a criminal. I tried to answer as much as I could but I just did not know the

answers to the questions they kept asking me, such as when the next demonstration or political meeting of the leftists would be.

“She does not seem to know much,” one of the policemen said.

Eventually they let me go. Your father was furious when he found out. But he still did occasionally go to a demonstration. He made sure never to tell me, though.

Once in primary school the teacher asked me to sing a song I knew, so I sang a song that I had heard at home:

“Heroic rebels
Marching on the road
Are bringing freedom and victory
Slavery oppresses them
Forward, fight hard!
Fight the fascists,
For freedom.”

The teacher was shocked and asked who taught me this song. I told him my mother. The teacher advised me never to sing that song again.

Another song I learned to sing at home was “Forward to war, file by file, fight the fascists, for freedom”.

My father was called *Kapetanios* (Captain) because he would put letters under a rock, explaining where the fascists were, telling the rebels not to come down from the mountains so they could save themselves. He had relatives fighting with the rebels and wanted to keep them and everyone else safe. He did not believe in war.

He was happy to have your father as a son-in-law because he was a communist. He did not want a fascist son-in-law, but he was not a communist himself. He was a friend of Kleanthis, your father’s father, and before the Civil War began they would sometimes take animals out into the mountains together.

The animals needed to eat vegetation to survive. Police took the milk, but my father requested some be rationed to each child in the village. Everyone was scared to take animals out to graze because there were landmines, guns and fighting, so father took all the animals of the village with him because he needed to feed his animals anyway and cared about all animals. He had the gift of healing ill animals. He could tell what weed they had eaten which caused bloating and how to fix it. He had many remedies for different ailments and diseases the animals suffered. People called on him to heal their sick animals and he would go to help. He let the communists in the mountains take one or two of his sheep now and then so they could survive. Who would bother to count his sheep when he returned? He took cheese and bread and gave it to them too, and told the fascists it was for the other people's sheep dogs so they would not attack him, but he gave it to the *andartes*. He left bread and cheese in designated places and the *andartes* knew where to look for it, that is why they called him *Kapetanios*. Father negotiated and changed the outcome of situations. He was fair and didn't want anyone to get hurt. Father had fought in Albania just before the Germans came to Greece, and he knew what it was like to fight a war. Father was awarded a medal and certificate in recognition of his service but didn't receive this until after he had died. In Albania he got frostbite, as did many other soldiers. When they took their socks off at night small pieces of skin and flesh would come away with the sock, usually from the toes.

Father slightly preferred the communists to fascists because he did not agree with what the Nazis were doing. Many fascists were Nazi collaborators. Widows of fascists were given a pension, but the widows of leftist rebels who died were not given a pension. This was part of the reason leftists left Greece, to receive the same rights as others.

As a child I remember being lifted up by the soldiers of the National Army coming through our village. They were yelling, "The war is over, the Civil War has ended!" People yelled for joy, women ran with unbraided hair from their houses to join the parade of soldiers, and children ran behind. I was about three years old and ran along too. A soldier put me onto a wagon with other

children. They gave us dry chickpeas (*stragalia*), sultanas, and large dry biscuits (*galletes*) which could last a long time. They marched with us in their arms for a while. We were all so happy. But the parade continued out past our village, past Houmniko village, and when the soldiers put me down, I was crying. I had no idea how to get back home. I managed to find a neighbour to take me back home. Everyone was so happy the fighting was over.

Songs of Resistance

Mother told me how much she enjoyed school. What surprised me the most was how close it was, just over the fence!

“What was your favourite subject?” I asked.

“I liked singing the most, and geography,” Mother said.

When I was about eight years old, I loved school. We had a wonderful teacher from Peloponnesus who taught us many songs. Some songs were from 1821 when Greece became independent and liberated from Turkey. He asked us to sing songs and I volunteered. I sang “Mother Makedonia”, then I sang “Frederika of Greece”. We still had a king in Greece and Frederika was his queen. A female teacher would visit us once in a while and she taught us songs and dances. When Queen Frederika came past our villages, I was chosen to give a bouquet of flowers to her. The school and villagers waited on each side of the road for what seemed like two hours. My bouquet of flowers started to wilt and I was getting tired and restless. Eventually the queen came and stopped at our village. I gave her the bouquet of flowers and she seemed pleased. The queen proceeded to go through all the other villages, including your father’s.

There were sixty-two children in the school, from grade one to grade six. The grade six children were up to fourteen years old. The older children came earlier than the younger children. There was a boy in our class who had a Bulgarian father and the borders were still closed, so they could not leave. No one could leave or enter Greece. That is why my father-in-law could not return for over twenty years.

When I finished primary school, the teacher asked everyone what they wanted to do. Some children went on to further studies. I also wanted to go to high school, but school finished just before the *kapna* – tobacco – had to be bound

into parcels. Father explained to the teacher that we were needed to help on the farm and with housework as he had no sons. I then did not think of further studies, but I had been good at school and loved going to school. I liked it more than the back-breaking tobacco farming.

Father would take a satchel with apples, figs, bread and cheese with him when he took the sheep or other animals to the hills. Mother and Father were both Godfearing and devout Christians. Father would stop by the church on his way back from pasture, greet the priest and stand at the back and make the sign of the cross and pray. He gave donations to the church, even though we didn't have much.

He would say, "Take this, *Pater*, and give it to these women who are needy so they can feed their children." Widows and other women worked in the church and got a small wage. Father refused to go into the church because he smelled of sheep after being with the animals all day. Not only my father, but others who worked with animals smelled of animals until they bathed. Everyone said my father was a good man.

Nearby us, a beautiful dark-haired woman lived with her son. When she was newly married she tried to stop the Nazis from taking her husband. She was pregnant and loved her husband very much. Later she gave birth to a son. The Germans forced her husband out of the house and the wife stood in their way, then a soldier hit her on the head with his rifle butt. After that she turned a little mad. They killed her husband, a tall handsome man with curly hair. She nailed metal sheets onto her windows and doors and refused to go out or see anyone. She blamed the villagers for informing on her husband. We were afraid of her, but she never did anything to us. Her husband's name was Christos, the same as our father's. She lived across from our house. All her sisters became widows, their husbands and sons killed during the resistance. Sometimes Father would take her son to teach him farming skills, how to plant and harvest food, and he would come into our house. The woman would call Father if she needed something. He would help her and her son, Kazamia. Kazamia now is a grandfather living in Thessaloniki. Whoever visited our

village would go to my godmother's house and to this woman's sister's house. They were very popular in our village.

Bafralides were strong, tall, warrior men who could be hired or used to fight the rebels. We feared these people and it was considered a bad omen to see them on horseback during the Axis War and Civil War. Who knew what trouble they were going to stir up? They could inform on people for the slightest of reasons, then the Germans could arrest and kill you. This started to change after the Civil War ended in 1949. However, many of these fascist collaborators still got favours from the authorities.

I was born in 1947 during the height of the Civil War. I remember a little from the war. One night, when I was two years old, bullets were fired into our house. My mother, sister and grandmother, who was dragging the baby, and I had to crawl on the ground into the cellar, and as the cellar door closed it slammed shut loudly and more bullets came flying in. They passed straight through the wooden walls, leaving gaping holes. I thought the whole house was collapsing around us. We were terrified. Then eventually the bullets stopped.

We only came out of hiding when Father came home and called out to us. During the Civil War we avoided even looking out the windows. It was better to pretend no one was home.

Mother would make everyone get up at five in the morning once we were old enough to work in the fields, because the sun rose at six. The tobacco leaves turned soft and floppy after being in the sun for a few hours, so they had to be harvested at dawn when they still snapped crisply. Tobacco was first planted in our region when Mother was a girl, maybe in the mid-twenties. Before then, tobacco was not grown widely in Greece. We stacked the leaves into large baskets on the backs of two female donkeys. Father said females always helped the family. Male donkeys were stubborn and aggressive. We collected the leaves in bunches and put them under our armpits, and when we had too many to fit under our arms, we stacked them in the baskets. We returned home by nine, washed our hands and ate breakfast. Then we fed the

cows, chickens and cats, and swept the house clean. After lunch we would spear the leaves, which were soft and pliable by then, onto large metal spikes. These were then hung onto a metal frame in rows to air dry. Tobacco sap gathered on our fingers and itched. We rolled it into balls and scraped it off. The nicotine absorbed through our fingers and we felt very dizzy.

Often lunch was zucchini fried in our own olive oil, and a salad of tomato, onion, black olives and cucumber with thick slices of homemade bread. This food I liked, as sometimes eggs or homemade feta would make me nauseous by the strong animal smell I imagined it had. I remember my older sister yelling from the bottom of the stairs, “Niki, come down; we are all hungry and want to eat.”

I was upstairs admiring myself in the mirror and combing my hair a hundred times. I said, “I am not hungry.”

“Please come down, we can’t wait anymore.”

“Just save me a slice of bread,” I said. I planned to eat it with some olives and olive oil and a tomato. That was enough for me. Because I had a small appetite I did not grow as tall as my older sister, but I was also very slim with a tiny waist. I looked into the mirror imagining my wedding day and how I would wear my hair, if it would be up or down, and what sort of man I would marry. I daydreamed like this often when I combed my shoulder-length curly hair. I gazed out of the window into the dusk and made out a strange dark shape under a tree across the road. It looked like a huge black dog with pointy ears, with yellow phosphorescent eyes. I panicked. Was it a wolf? I was not sure if it was even of this world. I jumped down the stairs so fast it felt like I floated all the way down the whole flight of stairs. I told my older sister about what I had seen. She went up but could not see anything. I climbed back upstairs to check out the window and also could not see anything under the tree anymore.

The next morning we had our usual breakfast – *trachanas* soup, which was a salty and sour porridge. Sometimes we had boiled milk poured over pieces of broken bread with sugar sprinkled on top, which was delicious. Rarely we

had large homemade couscous boiled in water with golden fried breadcrumbs and salt sprinkled on top. We ate a lot of halva, homemade from semolina or *bobota* (corn flour), or store-bought sickly-sweet halva made from sesame-seed paste and honey, which damaged our teeth. We did not have toothbrushes back then, and by the time we were teenagers, many of our teeth had to be removed. My upper teeth had mostly been taken out and I wore a partial denture. My older sister had false teeth too. We also loved to eat sweets Mother made from grape-juice paste over feta cheese.

We made yoghurt and left it to set while we went to school. Often Mother would still be in the fields when we went to school, depending on the time of year. We jumped the fence and arrived at school. It was very convenient having it next door.

When it was time to sow and tend the tobacco fields, we covered our heads with thick cotton scarves to prevent heat stroke. We erected huge cotton tents to cover the metal spikes of drying tobacco leaves because any moisture would cause the tobacco to rot.

In March we planted the seeds, weeding all around them through April. Once the plants were tall and began to flower, we began picking the leaves in order, largest ones first from the bottom. We would lastly pick the flower heads, which would have the seeds. We dried these and reused the seeds for next year's crop. Father sometimes gave a couple of flower heads with the fine leaves around them to any friends who were smokers. These had the best flavour and were in demand. The schools closed in June at the beginning of summer, till August.

I was actually born in Zitohori, my father's patriarchal village. We were moved into the next village, Houmniko, for safety during the Civil War. We shared the house with other families. I remember my mother saying, "I never want to live in a share house again. I will take the children and go and live in a run-down house. I want my own house." Later we moved to Zervohori. The house was damaged with no doors or windows or roof tiles.

Father hauled corrugated-iron sheets onto the roof and nailed them in place. Then he nailed metal sheets onto the open windows so the wind would not come in and we lived there. My mother was pregnant again. I had delicate health. The schoolteacher wanted to adopt me as they only had one child, called Mitsa. The teacher made pasta with butter and called me and my sister to eat whatever was left over from their lunch. Then she gave me a bowl of chickpea casserole to take to Mother. My grandmother, Loula, was still alive. She would comb our hair and bathe us. We jumped all over the furniture. She was not well and would lie down most of the day. We would never listen to her when she told us to stop. Then when she died, we cried.

Grandmother Loula was from Kastanohori, a village on the mountains full of chestnuts. The church in her village was surrounded by chestnut trees. She was from a very wealthy family who owned a lot of property in Kastanohori and Zervohori and other villages. Her husband, our grandfather who we never met, was said to have been very handsome and tall. His name was Petroulis and he was older than grandmother, and he died young of dysentery or some gastroenterological condition. They only had one child, my mother, Fotini. My mother's relatives told her to marry a good man to look after her and my grandmother, who was ill. When she was eighteen, she found my father, Christos, a prosperous twenty-nine-year-old farmer. They married in 1943. The next year my older sister was born. Mother dressed her like a doll, in organza dresses with matching handbags. Mother wore lovely dresses with cap sleeves, buttons down the front and a fitted waist. The dresses were below the knee and flared out slightly. She was a beautiful young woman with emerald-green eyes, pale skin and chestnut-brown curls. My father did most of the farming work in the fields and cared for the animals. Mother helped him sometimes and she would leave my sister with Grandmother Loula. Father sold sheep's milk, cheese, yoghurt and wool to the army and made a good living from this. They had money to buy a few small luxuries.

Then the war changed everything. In 1946 Mother gave birth to a son, but he was sick and kept crying. They named him Stellios, to try and anchor him to this life, but he died. Mother got pregnant with me and they left the house in

Zervohori to go to Zitohori. Bullets were being fired down from the mountain while we were moving villages. My other sister was born in 1949. By then there was disease, hunger, poverty, lice. The army passed by the village singing patriotic songs when the war ended in 1949.

I remember at school some older teenage girls were told by the teacher not to come to primary school with the smaller children anymore but to go to the high school. Children of all ages were coming to the school. I was very quiet and reserved up until grade three. Then I would ask the male teacher what chores needed to be done. He would ask me to fetch water, wipe the blackboards. He also gave me some poems to recite, as I had a good memory. I was also given a part in the school play to memorise.

“My mother went into the chamomile,” I sang. Then my voice froze in my throat. I was embarrassed.

“What happened?” asked the schoolteacher. “Your voice is clear, and you sing well.” But I still could not speak. So, the teacher said, “OK, this poem is too long for you.”

Another girl started menstruating in the classroom and was sent home. The rest of the class also could not speak in front of the others when they were asked to recite their parts, so the school play was abandoned.

I remember one poem I learned was of a woman being bricked up inside one of the piers of a bridge to stop it falling down. It was a lovely poem and I had wanted to recite it at school, but that was not to be. My friend in school was called Maria. She was quiet, like I was most of the time. We would confide in each other about all sorts of things, such as small gossip about other schoolchildren who had not been doing their studies or had been away ill. We also discussed what was happening at home and compared the best food we had eaten during our holidays.

Grandmother Loula lived with us and had dark curly hair, green eyes, fair skin, a small waist and large bosom. Mother looked very much like her. None of us children listened to Grandmother. She was an invalid. There were four

of us then, and she had cared for all of us. She made sure we didn't run onto the road. In two weeks, Grandmother died of some illness. There were no nearby hospitals or doctors.

Grandmother's surname was either Nikolas or Moratidis. She loved all of us and cared for us when Mother and Father had to work in the fields or go to town for supplies.

Grandmother got a fever from food poisoning and also water retention. Her body puffed up with oedema. Father was looking after sheep for the village and was far away. Mother went to get water from the well. We were jumping all over the place, on top of her bed. I thought she fell asleep, but she was sick. She was a good-natured woman and didn't yell at us. Grandmother called out, "I can't take anymore, I can't take anymore." She told us to be quiet. "*Ah aman,*" she said. She had been brushing my hair and stopped. My older sister saw she was not responding and called out to her. Then she ran out of the house to get the neighbours. Grandmother had died. We all cried.

We bathed her body, combed her hair and dressed her in her best clothes. We had a wake in the house and had *koliva* at home, the boiled wheat with cinnamon and sultanas covered in white icing sugar with a cross on top to symbolise eternal life.

After Grandmother's death my older sister had to do most of the cooking because Mother was busy with chores and working in the fields. Once my older sister was old enough to work in the fields we began to save money for fixing our house, for furniture and dowries. Then as we all grew and could contribute to work in the fields we became well off. People who had sons made money more quickly, but because we were many children working we could also make a good income.

Forty grooms came to ask for my older sister's hand in marriage when she was fifteen. We would tell the men to stop coming but still they came. When she was eighteen her future husband saw her in the market with Father and he got word to my Father that he wanted to marry my older sister. He was recently out of the army. Other relatives offered to give him money so he

could marry. I saw him and thought he looked old. He was twenty-seven years old and solidly built. My sister yelled at me that he was not old after she had been introduced to him. She liked him. I was fifteen and anyone over the age of twenty-five looked old to me.

Everyone cried for days whenever a girl was leaving her parent's house. We knew we would never have the same time with my older sister again, that she would have to keep house, cook, clean in her husband's home and only visit us occasionally. She would enter a strange house and have to live there, while we were all missing her terribly, and no doubt she would be missing us and crying too.

The Long Dress

The native Greek women wore long dresses. The widows wore black, the other women wore green, blue or maroon. They were made of fine knitted wool and weighed several kilos. They could break a washing line when wet and had to be spread carefully over two or three lines to dry. The bodice was straight or fitted, with long sleeves and a circular neckline. The skirt was gathered at the waist and fell straight to the ankles. The women wore their hair in a bun or long plait under a small, embroidered scarf. Some made the fabric on a hand loom; others who could afford it bought the material and had a tailor stitch it for them. The women who were not widows had long white petticoats embroidered with red and black flowers which peeked out from under the dresses. The heavy-weight fabric was for the cooler months. The lighter wool fabric was for summer. They wore half sleeves during the summer; no one wore sleeveless dresses.

My mother got married in a pink organza dress and white veil, the colours of the almond blossom which signified the bride in Greece. The pink must have showed off her emerald-green eyes, fair skin and rosy cheeks. The dress had embroidery on the neckline, a bow on each hip and was calf length. Father bought the fabric for the dress, which was taken to a dressmaker. In those days the wedding dress and jewellery were the responsibility of the groom. Mother and Father married in 1943 and a year later my older sister was born. This was before the Civil War began in earnest. There was a brief respite after the Germans left and my parents had a little prosperity.

Girls were usually married by nineteen. At sixteen, families with boys would view prospective brides. Under the age of twenty, no dowry was needed to marry a young girl. But that changed once a girl was over twenty, or worse, over twenty-five.

The Pontian Greek girls did not work; they would keep the household, cook, clean and live in the in-laws' house. If a family had several sons, they would bring several daughters-in-law into the house to ease the household chores. The sons would then go into the fields and work. This is probably why the Pontian women lived till 100: they did not do the back-breaking work of the native Greek women, who would work as hard as

the men in the fields, and sow and thread tobacco. This is why our family would bring in 2000 kilograms of tobacco a year, and your father's family brought in 300 to 400 kilograms. All the girls in our family worked.

If for some reason an engagement got broken, the girl could not marry anyone after that. She was regarded as tarnished, as an engagement was almost the same as a marriage. Women usually got married quickly after an engagement and were not allowed to go out after the engagement to protect their reputations. A woman who was widowed would usually never remarry, especially if she had children. They were fiercely protective of their children. Few men would adopt existing children as their own in a second marriage.

We had to wait for Father to come home to eat dinner. He said grace at the table and then we all ate. Today people grab food and stuff their plates without waiting, without giving thanks for what they have to eat. But we remembered times when there was less food on the table.

A year after the Civil War ended, in 1950, we started to have money again for nice dresses. By 1958 we got dresses stitched with cinched waists, wide pleated skirts with white lace petticoats showing beneath. My dress was white with red tulips and I wore green sandals. I had a red coat to wear with it. My older sister had a dress with red roses. The fabric was shiny and slipped through the fingers. I copied the fabric and dress from Zoe, a school friend, and we posed in front of Gerakina's Well, near the school, both in the same dresses. In the photograph, Zoe said I looked more beautiful and tore the photo in half. I was very upset by this and have no copy of the photo. That was the price I paid for copying her lovely dress.

Your father pursued me in 1962 when I was fifteen. I refused to speak to him in public or be seen walking with him, because it was not considered proper conduct for a young woman and tongues would wag. I told my cousin to keep walking, but your father came over and insisted I speak. I told him, "I am not like one of those girls from the street. I have a mother and a father and am from a good family." We left but your father came to my village by bus and stopped in front of Midghalouda's house. She showed him where my father's house was, near a large olive tree.

Mother asked me, "Who is that man coming here?"

“I don’t know,” I said. But then I looked closer and recognised your father and ran upstairs to hide.

When he knocked on the door and asked to speak to my father, I refused to come down, but my mother kept asking me to come down. His mother also wanted to come and see me. She sent a trader who was also a match-maker to ask if I wanted to marry her son or not, because I had not given any sign or said anything about my proposal. My father told him to come back when the dowry or *prika* was ready. I was still getting my embroidery ready: tablecloths, table-runners, bed-linen, curtains and carpets. The *prika* would go on display on Friday before the wedding. It was almost like an arts and craft exhibition. The whole village would marvel at the quality of needlework, the fine lacework, the handloom kilims and carpets. It would take a girl a good ten years to complete the work. So, they usually began at the age of eight. We had to wait for my future father-in-law to come back from exile in Czechoslovakia before we could marry. It was a long two-year engagement and in the end we had to get married to stop rumours of the engagement being broken, then my father-in-law returned two months later from Czechoslovakia.

My father went to the prospective groom’s neighbourhood to ask about his family and what sort of boy he was. The neighbours told him not to marry me to that boy. “He will give you trouble,” they said. “And he has another girl in Athens.” My father confronted the groom, and he became furious when told what the neighbours said about him. He went to fight with them. Of course, he denied everything they said.

The Soboro

Mother loved visiting other Greek women or having them come to our house. They would chat about anything and everything over tea and *tiropita*, cake or sweets. This was a side of Mother that always surprised me. Mother never spoke like that to us.

“*Yiati kostobolevis?*” I would say, looking annoyed.

Mother would smile and say, “I am not gossiping, we are just talking about things. That is what women do. We talk and try to help each other or give advice.”

“Why do you have to talk about us?” I would ask.

“*Then ipa tipota kako,*” Mother would say.

“We get embarrassed if you talk about us, even if it is something good.”

“I only have visitors a few times a year, not like in Greece where the women talked every day about everything.”

I was not sure if I liked this way of talking but maybe it was because I was often the subject of those talks when we had visitors. Mother then started telling me about how the women would talk daily in Greece.

The women would do their chores quickly, then by mid-afternoon they would call each other by name to meet in the common yard, for the daily gossip, *soboro*. They would sew, embroider, knit or crochet, and talk about family friends, relatives and neighbours. My mother would take a while to join them as she had six children. They would yell at her, “Come on, Fotini, haven’t you finished yet?” Women had to do laundry, knead and bake bread, sweep the house and yard, and make breakfast. Those chores took three to four hours. On Saturday, Sunday and feast days, they had more time for the *soboro*. In winter when the sun warmed an area of the village, they would all meet there to get warm. Older children would mind the younger ones. They

usually met after lunch from twelve to three. There was no siesta in winter, only in summer. Neighbours, soldiers and visitors would all come from the next village, Houmniko, or Therma a little further away, and would promenade on the road. Engaged couples, parents and their children walked arm in arm. Few cars passed so the only road through the villages was used for walking. People would greet each other, and prospective brides and grooms would be appraised as they passed by.

As relatives passed each village they would pass on news and gossip about whose husband had beaten which wife, who had become engaged, separated, who was ill or pregnant.

Around 1955 to '56 I remember what a woman nicknamed "Footoosh" said as another woman approached: "*Na mia kokona me ta skata sto gona.*" That meant "Here is a fancy woman with shit on her knees". This was a nasty way of saying that she thought too highly of herself while slaving away at dirty chores all day. The other woman snapped back, "What shit on my knees, do you see any?" She was a very clean and fastidious woman. The other women in the *soboro* said, "Don't listen to her, she always finds something."

I would sit near the women to listen secretly, but they would always discover me. Mother would embarrass me by saying, "You're big now, do you want to suckle my breast? Go and play nearby."

Everyone complained I was too thin and told my mother to give me goat milk. My mother explained, "You don't know how fussy she is! The cow milk smells of cow, the goat milk smells of goat, the eggs stink of chickens. I give her milk and she feeds it to her cat. She only likes the powdered milk they give in school."

"What is this," the women said, shocked, "she likes powdered milk and gives real milk to her cat?"

"She likes yoghurt and cheese," Mother said to show that I at least I liked some good food.

My schoolteacher told Mother to send me to a fat camp.

I went to the fat camp for a week and gained two kilos which was a lot for me. They had food that I liked there. White bread, honey, butter, jam, pasta, rice, chicken, fruit and some cake. I liked simple food and also sweets. Because I did not eat much, I did not grow as tall as my older sister. I am only five foot two and she is five foot six. She had a healthy appetite. Mother would beg me to eat more every day. But most food had an unpleasant smell for me, especially meat, milk and eggs. I could still smell the animals it came from. And feta cheese often had a goat hair or two in it from the milking. Mother would hide food that I liked for me to eat secretly, because at least I would get to eat a little more. I had to wear caps most of the time to stay warm. I was very slender, maybe forty-seven kilos, and my figure suited the sixties' tight dresses. I would comb my hair 100 times a day so it glowed. I gazed at my reflection in the mirror, trying to guess what sort of man I would marry and if he would find me beautiful. I never really wore makeup or moisturisers; my skin was always clear and soft. I would pluck my eyebrows a little, and use an eyebrow pencil on them, like the movie stars. I used the eyebrow pencil on my beauty spot in the corner of my nose. I liked to wear my hair up in a high ponytail tied with a satin ribbon. When we went out somewhere, I would use red lipstick – that was my simple beauty routine. People stared at me wherever I went, especially when I was engaged and would have my hair done at the hairdressers, arranged high over my head, with a long fringe swept to the side. I had dark green eyes with hazel flecks in them. In Nigrita men would say, "Here comes the movie star." In Thessaloniki, I visited a cousin there with my older sister and we promenaded on the harbour, walking past the White Tower. I wore a small, peaked hat in the latest fashion, and everyone stared at me there too. I was happy then, always smiling. After I was engaged, a film producer asked if I could star in a movie, but my future husband refused. Later when I would visit Nigrita with you and your sister, we were always well dressed. I had a large white hat and a white suit with a pencil skirt and people would ask, "Is she from Paris?" But time passes and people change. Flowers bud in the spring and bloom all summer, then fade away. I got old and changed.

Clouds of Destruction

I took Mother for a walk often later in the day as she liked the cool evening breeze, which made her feel better and relaxed her anxiety. One afternoon dark clouds were on the horizon and the wind blew them overhead.

“Let’s go back now. It will rain and maybe hail,” Mother said uneasily, pushing her walker more quickly on the footpath.

“No, it won’t rain,” I said. “The news said there would not be any rain in our area.”

“What do they know?”

“OK, if the rain starts to fall, we can walk back home.”

Mother looked at the sky and turned to me to tell me another story.

Whenever I see dark, large clouds gathering in the sky with white, thick, fluffy clouds like snow hovering in front of them, I know it is going to hail and that a very bad storm is coming. I remember my mother’s warning and what happened in 1955 in our village, midsummer in July.

I had gone with my younger sister to help Mother harvest sesame seeds in the morning. The sesame plants were one and a half metres tall. They are not like the sesame you have here, pale and tasteless. It was dark brown and had a strong taste, ripened by the sun. If you did not dry the sesame properly it turned mouldy. In those days it was safe for children to roam through the fields on their own. The combine harvester was used to collect wheat for those who could afford it and the others cut it by hand using scythes.

We took a large sheet to shake the sesame on and separate the seeds from stems and leaves. We then gathered it into sacks. The sesame plants had been tied, four or five plants together, halfway up the stems, so the seeds were on the top all grouped together and easier to cut off when ripe. The sesame leaves

were medicinal and used as a poultice for skin complaints, sprains and even broken bones. Most people also brought cotton tents with them to shade under while eating lunch and to store their sacks of wheat or sesame while they worked, in case it rained.

As we worked, the sky began to darken. Some very large black clouds formed in the sky, dotted with thick, white clouds like snow. The sky looked angry and dangerous. Mother said, “I don’t see a good day coming; it is going to be a wild day. May God only bring good water down. You rush home now and bring everything inside, lock up the chickens and goats in the sheds, and close all the windows and doors, and I will come home soon. Pray to God that you are protected. Cover the mirrors or turn them upside down.” I am not sure why we had to cover the mirrors, maybe to protect our eyes from lightning or for another superstitious reason. Mother wanted to get all the sesame sacks onto the donkey before she followed us home, so the seeds were not ruined.

My middle sister and I ran home. We put the chickens and goats inside their pens and locked the shed door, propping some sticks outside it to keep it closed if there was a bad storm. We also locked all the windows and brought in any tools or buckets which were lying around in the yard. My older sister had been at home caring for my youngest sister. We put logs against the door to keep it closed and huddled together inside the house. Hail the size of golf balls started to fall, thundering down onto the roof, bashing against the roof tiles and cracking some. We waited upstairs, looking anxiously through the window for Mother. My sisters and I moved away from the windows, hugging each other and crying as the hail smashed the windows and rain started to come inside, running into the flour bin which had just been filled with newly milled flour. We cried in fear but also for Mother, who was still outside in this weather, and worried she and the donkey would be killed.

Mother had started going home when the hail began. She was very lucky to find a bus shelter which protected her head but not her body and arms. The hail hit her at very high speed. Only half of the donkey fitted under the bus shelter, but it survived. When we saw Mother coming home walking slowly after the hail had stopped, we cried even more. Her arms and body were dark

purple from large round bruises where the hail struck her. It took two months for them to heal. We ran around her, crying. She went upstairs and saw the flour had water in it and tried to salvage as much as she could. “Why didn’t you pull the flour bins away from the windows?” Mother asked. “Now what will we eat?” We had been too scared to go near the windows and the flour bins were too heavy for us to move. Mother removed the wet flour and used it to make bread, as damp flour would mould and not last.

The church bells began to ring once the storm was over. It was a sign for the village to meet at church. We went to church for mass, to thank God for protecting us and to pray for those who had not been so fortunate.

It was the middle of summer and a few lucky people had managed to harvest their wheat early. Others lost everything and famine began. Watermelons and cantaloupes were full of holes. Wheat was flattened and scattered. Animals were killed. Hay was destroyed. People were killed. Those who had wicker baskets, barrels or wagons had managed to hide under them and survive. People who only had tents for shelter died. Everyone had been out in the fields working, so many people were hurt or killed. Vegetables were smashed to pieces. The Strymona river flooded, destroying further crops and low-lying houses. People starved.

Later we heard a man had been killed in the next village, Zitohori, by lightning. Each day we learned more news of the storm’s destruction. Mother told us if we see this type of weather again to make the sign of the cross and pray.

A widow came with her two children and a donkey; their house and fields had been destroyed in the storm and they had no food. They walked slowly by the roadside and gathered mud, dried it in the sun, then sieved it to collect wheat grains that the storm had strewn along the road. It took a long time, but she managed to gather four sacks of wheat, enough to last the winter. Bread was the most important staple. You could live on bread. People had pitied her, but when they saw her efforts had been rewarded by sacks of wheat, they said she was very lucky.

Tobacco fields had been destroyed that year, so the selling price of tobacco was very high for the lucky few who had harvested early.

Another time, the donkey bolted with Mother on its back and she was thrown. She broke her arm and was unable to work. We had to hire girls to help at home and in the fields. Mother would spread a cotton tea towel on the table and place boiled sesame leaves on it and a thin strong stick to use as a splint, then she would place her forearm on it and wrap it up. After a week of this poultice her arm was no longer red and swollen. People had to treat themselves because there were no doctors in the villages. Life and death were in the hands of God and fate and ancient home remedies passed down in families.

I remember another time I went to a festival in Nigrita with Mother. She put me on the back of her saddle on the donkey. It was the Saturday before Easter. We went to get groceries and thousands of people were there. We passed the village of Therma where the hot mineral springs were used for healing and miracle cures. I could see steam arising from the springs. Mother had taken 600 drachmas with her, which was a lot of money in those days. I think she had intended to pay some outstanding bills to shop owners and the blacksmith. Another woman had come along with us on her donkey. We had large black donkeys which ran very fast. They were shod like horses.

We got down from the donkeys just after Therma to eat rissoles, grapes, olives, bread, and to drink water and rest. We also relieved ourselves in the bushes because there was no toilet nearby. Mother was very slim, and she wore a fitted green dress, which showed off her brilliant emerald-green eyes. She was still a young woman, perhaps twenty-six years old, already a mother of four. It was warm so she took off her jacket while resting.

We then got back onto the donkeys and rode to Nigrita, which was separated into two sections by a small creek passing through the town. People had to go down the steep banks to cross over to the other side. Later this was filled in and concreted over, then roads were built over it. The city was a lot bigger

originally when it had the two sides and market stalls covered the lower sections of the banks.

We went to a place called a *hani* where people took their donkeys to tie them to a trough with water and hay. You took a token with a number on it for your donkey and could come back to collect it when you were ready to leave. A blacksmith was nearby. Donkey hooves grew very long and needed to be filed and shod with metal shoes.

We left our donkeys and went to a grocery store where Mother ordered cheese and other goods for Easter. When it was time to pay, Mother could not find her money. First she looked in one pocket, then the other. Then she checked her bags, her dress, her jacket, in the tablecloth which we had spread our food onto, even the saddlebags. It was nowhere to be found. The other woman shopped but mother could not pay for her groceries. We went to the stable to get the donkey, but the money was not there either. Mother cried and cried. Father was away working at Ivera. Mother had only dyed the eggs red at home and was preparing to make the *koulourakia* cookies and *tsourekia* sweet bread. Now we had no money for special food for our Easter celebrations. The debts in Nigrita could not be repaid in time for Easter, so the shopkeepers would be unhappy and also in difficulty during their own family celebrations.

Someone took word to Father later that day that we had lost the money in Nigrita. The Pontians at Ivera heard of the misfortune and gave cakes, food and money to Father.

We visited my *nona* (godmother) in Nigrita and she gave a gift of money to me as she usually did when we visited, so we managed to pass that Easter period without too much suffering. I think Mother may have lost the money at Therma while we were resting for lunch. She had taken off her jacket and the money had been in the inside pocket near her chest.

My mother stroked my head and said, “Now you have become worried, little one.” She was not happy that our fun-filled outing had turned out so badly for me, with no treats to buy in Nigrita. So, on another day, not too long after Easter, Mother took me again with her to Nigrita. The neighbour came along

again on her donkey. This time we went to a restaurant to eat. The neighbour talked about an amazing dish she had eaten there called *giros sarmathes*. To be polite, Mother ordered a plate of this dish for us too. When it arrived we realised we couldn't eat it. We gagged when we tried to bite a piece. It was lamb cut off a spit and wrapped in vine leaves and boiled. The meat had become tough and tasteless. I had wanted roasted herb potatoes only and Mother had wanted fish.

"Please take this dish back, we haven't eaten it," Mother said.

"No, once food is on the table, we can't take it back. Please try to understand," the shopkeeper said.

"But then I can't order my fish," Mother said. "Give me one serve of herbed potatoes." I ate the potatoes and left a few for Mother, who looked a little hungry.

Garden of Eden

My mother told me another story of her youth. I knew how beautiful the natural environment was in Greece from my own childhood there, but there were small differences.

During my childhood, in the late forties and fifties, the world was full of creatures – cicadas, birds, ladybirds, and frogs – full of song and life. Now few of them remain. That beauty of life is not so obvious. I remember Mother once sent me to get water from the well, but it took me two hours to return. I chased the tadpoles in the water with my hands, trying to catch them. Worried that I was late, Mother sent my sister to look for me. She too began playing with the tadpoles and we still didn't return. Mother then asked the neighbour's daughter to go and see what had become of us, and when she joined us at the well, she also got distracted by the tadpoles. Just like a fable where people keep getting sent to find the previous person, and no one returns, we all played, and it took us two hours to return from a twenty-minute task.

I loved the red poppies which came up at the end of spring and all through summer. Their strong colour gave me joy because I knew the best season of the year was approaching. Warm weather lasts for nine months a year in Greece. Winter was very cold and some years a lot of snow fell. But once spring arrived, there were long days of sunshine after cold mornings. I loved to see butterflies in our flower garden. Mother planted many colourful flowers: pansies, purple lavender, red and pink roses, white lilies, yellow chrysanthemums, and maroon and yellow marigolds. I delighted in the snapdragons, which we called *skilakia*. We would pinch the flower in the middle and the top would move up and down like a dog barking. I inherited Mother's love of flowers and have planted many flowers in my own garden. All through late spring and summer the smell of the flowers came through the windows and front door into our house, heavenly and honey-laden.

The bees buzzed around outside, birds chirped and flitted from branch to branch. Our yard had chickens, lambs, goats and later also cows. I never tired of admiring our yard in the village. Even when I combed my hair, I would stand near the upstairs window and gaze down below. Life was always more beautiful and pleasing when surrounded by flowers. The starkness of winter was gone. Persephone the Goddess of Spring returned to the Earth from the underworld and the Earth, her mother Demeter, responded with joy.

Mother sometimes let me stay at home and take care of the house when the rest of my family went into the fields. I was thin and caught cold if the weather was not warm. I cooked soup or stews, using mint or basil from the garden. I often made bean stew with carrots, celery and onion. I swept the house and yard and fed the chickens and goats.

When my family returned, they would call me to come down from the upstairs window and eat. I did not have much of an appetite. I only liked to eat some foods, like potatoes and sweets. I would instead comb my hair and sing songs upstairs, admiring my tiny waist.

I gathered poppies in the fields and made wreaths for my head. I loved going to church with Mother and my sisters. There we were well-behaved and quiet. The wife of the priest and another older girl befriended me. I was asked to carry the icon of Saint Katherine around the village on some feast days. The saint was painted on black velvet and embellished with small stones and crystals. When the church got a larger icon, I was allowed to keep the original one. My sister recently gave it to me when I visited Greece. It helps me to remember my childhood in the village whenever I pray.

Earthquakes and Tornadoes

“You don’t know what hardship we endured. *Tyrania*,” Mother said.

“Didn’t it end with the Civil War?” I asked.

“How could it end? It was not until the sixties that we began to have some prosperity and a better life. We had to work and earn money to change our lives for the better. But other natural disasters still occurred.”

In 1959, when I was twelve, we wore white petticoats like ballerina tutus and would dance and leap around like the actress Alikì Voulouklaki. I was outside in the yard with other girls from our village when the ground began to shake. I grabbed onto a neighbour’s wrought-iron gates and they moved two feet right and two feet left, pulling me along with them in my fancy white petticoat. People ran outside of their houses to save themselves from falling buildings. Our wall fell down near the staircase. Some houses completely collapsed. Father had to get help to rebuild our wall. Our uncles in Zitohori came to help whenever needed. The church bells rang after the earthquake and the village assembled for mass. We prayed for salvation and assistance. We prayed for God to spare us any more misfortune, because there was no hand mightier than God’s.

People had started to use insecticides on their tobacco crops by then, to get a higher yield. We hired a man to spray our fields in June or July prior to harvest. It was recommended by the *geoponos* who was in charge of agriculture in our area. I remember it was called *Systok*, and that was a scary-sounding name. We didn’t like picking the tobacco leaves after they had been sprayed because it gave us a rash. Already our heads would spin from the sticky tobacco sap full of nicotine. It would collect on our fingers and we rolled it into balls to remove it from our hands. This is why we hated tobacco and never smoked – we never liked the effect it had on us. The younger

generation who didn't have to collect tobacco smoked a lot more than the older generation did.

Another time it rained for forty days and there were tremors and small earthquakes. Women in our neighbourhood cried and said Judgement Day was coming. There was flooding and people could not work in the fields and many crops were ruined. Villagers gathered in the church each time the bells began to toll and prayed in earnest. There was no telling what the next day would bring. The church brought the community together and we found courage to face our trials through prayer and through each other.

My grandmother, Loula, who died in 1951 or 1952, told the neighbours about a tornado which came through the area in 1900 when she was very young. It lifted up people and donkeys and killed some of them. There was destruction and famine, trees were uprooted, and buildings flattened. The tornado passed through Kastanohori and Ivera where Grandmother came from, further up in the hills. People laughed at her and did not believe that could have happened. But she was adamant it had happened. Perhaps it did happen. The villages were very remote then, and communication was limited. News travelled by word of mouth and through the tolling of the church bells.

Then much later, a violent hurricane came through Halkidiki, a peninsula approximately 200 kilometres away from Kastanohori, in 2019 and this was completely unprecedented. It was on the news and some people died and hundreds of trees were uprooted. Perhaps destructive winds could come every hundred years or so to Northern Greece. I believe what Grandmother told us was true.

August Feast Day

Mother loved going for walks. She loved to chat to me as we walked around the block once or twice.

“Look at these flowers,” she said in admiration. Then Mother bent down and cut off a stalk near the bottom of the yellow black-eyed Susan flowers. I knew she would try to plant it and grow it in her garden.

“The roses are nice,” I said, trying to smell a peach-coloured one. It had no scent, unlike the deep red roses Mother had planted from a cutting from the original rose I had planted over our old dog Toby’s grave. Those red roses were strongly perfumed.

“We had to walk everywhere when I was girl,” Mother said. “When most of the harvesting was done, by the end of summer we had time to enjoy ourselves. This was also when many fairs and festivals were held.”

In 1959 on the fifteenth of August, which was the feast day of the Virgin Mary, we went to Patriki, near the Sterna where they watered crops from the well near Zitohori. I was thirteen years old and wore a white silk shirt embroidered with hats, umbrellas and flowers. I was a dressmaking student and made my own pleated green skirt and secured it with a very tight belt around my waist. I wore a lace petticoat under my skirt.

We walked to Patriki. Mother had warned us, “Before the sun begins to set you must start walking back home. It takes one hour to walk home, otherwise if you delay the buffaloes will come out to return home and raise dust in the dusk.” My older sister was sixteen years old. We had fun in Patriki and went to the church to light a candle, then I bought ice-cream and made sure it did not drip on my shoes. It was very hot and humid.

When we were returning home, another group of girls was also walking on the road through the villages with their brother Takis as an escort, a

cavalliero. He also became our escort and our groups merged. There were older boys in Patriki and they would admire modest girls who were too shy to talk. A group of boys wanted us to stop so they could talk to the older girls who were sixteen or seventeen, but our whole group ran away. The older girls ran and left me and Takis behind. My older sister yelled, “Run, those boys will kill you!” We came back home breathless and tired, and the villagers scolded us. “Why are you back now? The festival is still on and the sun is still high.”

“What are you saying?” the older girls snapped back. “Those boys wanted to chase us; they were eighteen or nineteen years old.” A girl of marriageable age could not be seen talking to men or older boys who were not her relatives in public because it was seen as a sign of loose character.

Then the villagers laughed at Takis. “What would those boys want with you, Takis? You at least could have stayed.” Takis too had been afraid of the older boys and was not confident enough to tell them to go away and risk a fist fight.

What had started out as a lovely group outing turned into a worrisome event.

“We’re not going back there again,” the girls said. And that was that.

The feast day of the Virgin Mary was a large event and most people tried to go to the festival in Patriki to enjoy the souvlakis, gyros, roast nuts, fruit drinks and ice-creams. There were small icons of the Virgin, souvenirs, religious tokens and gifts also available for purchase. We went to the festival again the following year, but this time with older male cousins as our *cavallieros*.

My father was called *Kapetanios* because he saved many people by asking others not to harm them. He could persuade others and save lives. He fought in Albania, and he suffered frostbite while in the army, so he knew the suffering of soldiers and was against war. According to Father, there was always a peaceful solution to everything. I learned from Father to avoid fighting and to be courageous when speaking the truth.

My mother's mother was a widowed invalid, so my father came to live with his mother-in-law and wife in Zervohori. They had sheep for milking and shearing, and occasionally hired shearers. The fleece would be spun into wool or sold as it was. The milk made wonderful thick yoghurt. They were well off until the Civil War began. The whole village was moved to Zitohori. Seven villages – such as Langathi, Houmniko, Zervohori – were moved to Zitohori where soldiers were stationed. We moved there in the cold winter, and there were three families to a house. There was lice and little food. The Germans had taken all the food and animals. In summer villagers worked the land and stored some food, but winter was very hard. There were two to three metres of snow in the mountains. Few animals were left and some sheep were kept in sheds. Three of Father's nieces were taken into the mountains by the rebels. Hariklia, Antonia and Bouziota were their names. Bouziota died at eighty-two; she was a lot older than me. They were my older cousins. Hariklia went to live in Czechoslovakia with a rebel she fell in love with and married. They would come down from the mountains to get food. Father gave them food – he tried to help as much as he could.

After the Civil War ended people were told to move back to their villages. All the houses were in ruins and needed to be repaired. There were still communist rebels in my village, so fighting continued for a couple more years. Most rebels had left Greece and retreated to communist countries. A few rebels remained and proclaimed themselves communists and others tried to kill them. Even Eraklis, your father's uncle, had not left. That's why they killed him. Your grandfather Kleanthis left for Czechoslovakia, so he survived. When I went to primary school in my village, they brought large billboards with photos of the communist refugees leaving line by line behind the Iron Curtain. Many people didn't want to see those pictures and would begin crying. They didn't want to remember days of hunger with holes in their shoes and deprivation. It would affect them deeply. Even my older cousins who had been taken by the rebels to work in the mountains did not want to remember what they suffered. My older sister and another cousin also named Bouziota had hidden and were not taken by the rebels. But those who had been taken, or had lost loved ones, did not want to remember the Civil War.

It is possible that some people who were reported killed were not killed, because no one would search for them if they were already assumed to be dead. It is possible that they went out of Greece a lot later, around 1952, after hiding for some time and changing their names. Then after settling in the Balkans they may not have wanted to return. No one knew if my cousin Hariklia was alive or not. She settled in Czechoslovakia and married a rebel there. After many years she sent a letter stating that she was alive. People began to return to Greece after 1972, but many did not want to come back and did not want people to know they were still alive. They did not believe that people would leave them alone after being communists.

Land mines from the Civil War were a hazard for many years. Cousin Nikos was on a donkey going to the fields with Cousin Bouziota, who was very beautiful and had long dark hair. The donkey stepped on a mine and died, but Bouziota got thrown far and Nikos had his leg blown off. He only died this year, in 2015. We had many cousins. My father had five brothers. Sterios might have been the eldest; there was Nestoras, Paskalis, Dimitros and Panagiotis.

All children from the age of six had to go to school. My older sister went to school first. When she was in grade three, I was in grade one. Our teacher was Basilios Achilarios. We were given textbooks to learn the alphabet and how to read and write. Then we learned a few songs in first grade. Some older children came too, who couldn't go to school during the Civil War or when the Germans were in Greece. They wanted to learn to read and write, then they left at eighteen to go to the Greek army for compulsory service of two years. The bigger children did chores at school.

My mother made *flamouri* tea in the morning and sometimes put chamomile in too. *Flamouri* comes from a large flowering tree in our region, usually in the mountains. She would boil milk, but I didn't like it. I couldn't stomach milk, but I drank this sweet herbal tea and ate bread with honey or jam and a piece of cheese for breakfast. I liked *trachanas* in the morning. My mother would boil water and throw in cornmeal, and she would stir till it thickened. She would add honey or *pekmezi*, which was like a jam from grapes. She

would then throw toasted sesame on top but we didn't like it. We had many types of *trachanas*, sweet and salty. I liked to eat the thick pasta noodles she made at home, or bean soup. At midday school stopped; we went home for lunch and siesta, then returned again from three to five.

From the age of five or six I remember I had to help Mother in the fields. We were all young children and wanted to play but Mother would ask us to help her. We pulled weeds from the tobacco fields. This lasted a month. There were no buses in the villages; people travelled by donkey or horseback. Very few people had a tractor or lorry. Cars were a rare sight. My father didn't have horses or cows when we were smaller, so he would pay others to plough our fields. He traded milk for wheat or other goods. When we grew a little bigger, he bought cows to plough our fields for wheat and tobacco crops. Then we had our own wheat to make our bread. Most people worked the land or had animals in order to survive, but we never wanted our children to do that work. That is why we always wanted our children to be teachers or doctors. Those who worked the land had a harder life, and lived by their sweat and hard work, but teachers and doctors sat in clean rooms out of the dust and could wear nice clothes not soaked in sweat. They were more respected than farmers.

A Good Man

My mother told me about her father. She loved talking about her parents. She had married and left home at the age of seventeen, and then at twenty-four she left for Australia. Her memories of home became my memories of my grandparents.

My father got married around the age of thirty. When he milked the sheep, he would hear the church bells and make the sign of the cross and pray. When he passed the church, he would greet the priest and again make the sign of the cross. He didn't have a son, so he had too much work with his flock and would give some money, milk or cheese to the church. The church would give some to the widows who worked in the church cleaning and lighting the candles, filling the oil lamps. I remember Father said, "The house of a good man is never closed." And he also said, "Many good people can live together but bad people cannot live with anyone." He had many words of wisdom about people and the world.

Christalia, the widow near our house, only spoke to Father and he helped her and her son. She felt many villagers were to blame for the loss of her husband and would lock herself in the house and avoid everyone. It is possible she was partly right. People informed on neighbours so they could escape some calamity or gain some benefit from the Germans. Later her son got married and they moved to Thessaloniki.

Father's sheep dogs, Aslan and Kaplan, were white and chestnut-coloured with long legs, and were very obedient. They controlled the sheep, so none strayed too far. Father got them after the wolves had attacked the sheep in winter. They kept the wolves away.

Not only people but animals too loved my father because he was kind and good-natured. He had patience to wait for the weather to change, for times to change and people to change. He was not too quick to judge. Father and his

brothers had all worked very hard in Zitohori with their father. Their house is now in ruins, because all of the brothers moved to other, fancier homes when they married, and the old house was left unattended. Pascalis had built another home next to his parents' house out of stone near the road. Eventually that also was abandoned. Now it is covered in vines and ivy. My father's house is now also in ruins in Zervohori, as none of us wanted to remain there in the old stone cottage. We all wanted modern conveniences and larger houses.

Father had not cared to have a larger, fancy house; he was content with what they had, as long as it was clean and pretty, with lace curtains and fresh whitewashed walls and steps. Our house was very, very pretty, like something out of a picture in Santorini, painted bright sky-blue and white, decked with hand-loom kilims Mother had made, and lace curtains. But it was an old-fashioned cottage with a metal wood-fired oven.

Father would go to heal the neighbours' animals if they were sick. Usually, it was from eating some type of unfavourable weed. He would instruct the neighbours about a warm concoction they had to make to feed the animals, to settle their digestion or get rid of the bloat in their stomachs, or he found any small stone in their hooves making them lame and removed it. He was as good as a vet. Unless they lived in large cities and were rich, people had to heal themselves and their animals, and build their own houses with the help of neighbours or relatives.

One Good Deed

Mother warned me many times, “Often, by trying to do a good deed, you will in turn receive ingratitude or a bad deed. I pitied someone and tried to help them, then they yelled at me too. Sometimes you have to let people learn their lessons on their own.”

“Why, what happened?” I asked.

Mother said, “If I tell you I will be accused of being a gossip. But I will give you the example of my own father, who always helped people.”

Once Father was returning with cows from the mountains and a cow slipped and fell into a ditch, and Father couldn’t get her out. He was late returning and everyone in the village was complaining, “Why is he so late?” The other cows went back to the village alone. Father stayed with the injured cow so it was not eaten by wolves, until he felt it was safe to go back to the village for help. Then he returned with other people to get the cow out. It had broken its leg. The owners of the cow blamed him and said he might have pushed the cow and it fell. Father got angry. He said, “I do so many good deeds for you, and you cannot understand and you complain. From now on I will only take my cows out to graze, not yours.” They were complaining why his cow didn’t fall down and theirs did. After some time, the other villagers did not take their cows out anymore or stopped keeping animals. They would beg him to take their animals again, so they were not tied up all day. My older sister didn’t want Father to take the cows of others anymore and be a cowherd or *tsobanos* for the village. He was a farmer and family man, not a cowherd. So, after that, he only looked after his animals because he had no son to care for them instead. Father grew up with animals, and understood how to care for them, and heal them. People called him when their cows were ill. The cow that fell was stubborn and would graze far from the others. Everyone had cows for ploughing and giving milk and transport. They were a necessity.

The villagers built channels from the river and made a large concrete water container that was very deep, to hold water so they could use it for irrigation. One villager was taking his cows past there and one of them fell inside. No one could get it out. They called Father and he said there was no way to get it out. Then a vet was called, who also said the cow could not be lifted out. So, they slaughtered it. The villagers then understood that my father had not deliberately pushed the other cow into the ditch and apologised to him. My father did not want to take money for looking after their cows; he did it as a good deed. Other people's cows knew when he would pass with his own cows and ran out of their yards to join his herd to go into the mountains. He could not shoo them away because he loved animals.

Once my older sister and I were walking along a path towards the mountains, whacking the green heads of wheat growing around us with sticks in our hands. Our work was over and we had some free time to roam and explore before dinner. We heard the jingling of cow bells approaching. The cows were coming down as it was getting late and they saw the green wheat shoots in the fields and started stampeding to eat the wheat. They nearly trampled us, coming from all directions. We were terrified. We lifted our wooden sticks and prodded them as they ran towards us to keep them away. It was a terrifying incident and we returned home shaken.

Many people knew Father because he travelled past several villages. One man who was a Vlach had a mule and tied it in the outskirts of our village to go shopping. Vlach people are described as having originated from Romania and went into Northern Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Croatia in search of better pastures. Often the Vlach would stop by our house on his way home, as he knew Father and Mother and would drop off letters, news or parcels. Mother gave him food and something to drink. One day in December there was a wild wind. The Vlach had dinner at our house, after stopping while returning from Nigrita, the main town. Father tried to make him stay overnight as it was very bad weather. He refused, and said, "My wife will be too worried." He said, "I will go slowly." He wrapped himself in a blanket and my mother gave him a cape. As soon as he left it began to snow. He

passed Zitohori, then Leukotopos; then there was a bridge over a frozen river. It was a dark night and somehow the horse slipped on the ice on the bridge and fell into the river and broke the ice. They both went into the freezing water. The horse died from hypothermia. The man's wife searched for him and eventually a man came to see Father, asking about the Vlach. Father told him he gave him food and a cape and he left three days earlier. Then a hunter was passing the bridge and saw the horse in the water. He found the Vlach shivering under the bridge. He took him to a house and they gave him brandy and put him near the fire. He got pneumonia, but he survived. The bridges through the villages those days were very bad. Often we had to splash through water to cross to the other side.

The Snake

Mother feared snakes when we went to the park in summer. We never really saw one, except one run over by a car in the carpark.

“They won’t hurt you if you leave them alone,” I said.

“That’s what you think,” Mother said. “Snakes are very clever. They can hide and sneak up on you and drink your blood.”

“Snakes don’t drink blood,” I said, laughing. I had heard of bats drinking blood, but not snakes.

“They do: one drank my father’s blood.”

Father often went fishing and the fish were sweet-tasting as they came from the pure mountain waters in rivers through the valleys.

Once when he was fishing, he fell asleep under the shade of a tree. It was a beautiful bright blue sky, with no clouds, and the buzzing of the bees and insects by the river induced a trance-like sleep. He woke to feel a cool sensation in one leg, like his life force was draining out of him. He lifted that leg up and saw a huge snake was hanging off it, drinking his blood. He grabbed it by the belly and flung it away from him. He saw the triangular bite marks on his leg so he got his knife and cut a piece of flesh out, so the poison would drain away with the blood. Then he tied his leg tightly to prevent the poison moving up his leg any further and went home.

The doctor came to examine him and said he was very weak. He told him to eat bitter greens (*horta*). These were dandelions, bitter dock and purslane. Father did so and his blood pressure dropped. He started to feel a bit better, but after a few days he was again too weak to get out of bed. We were terrified and began crying near his bed, which worried him and Mother. The doctor came back from Nigrita.

“I told you to reduce your blood pressure, but I didn’t tell you to kill yourself. Get some beef on the bone and boil it with garlic and drink the soup and eat a little of the flesh”, said the doctor.

Father did this and got his strength back. We cried for days looking at him sick in bed. We worried we might end up without a father, like our mother was at the age of nine. He was our hero, our protector. If he was gone, we would all struggle. It made us happy to see him working with the animals again, taking them to pasture, and farming. We all feared snakes and avoided long grass. After that, Father did not go fishing very often and was very careful. Fishmongers did pass through the village, but you could not be sure how fresh the fish was by the time you bought it because there was no refrigeration. People always preferred to catch their own fish.

Mother combed her long fringe and called me over.

“Cut my hair for me – it is too long now, it goes in my eyes.”

“Why don’t you dye it?” I asked.

“I can’t be bothered. What does it matter anyway? I am old now.”

I had become better at cutting her hair and eventually she liked it. She went to the hairdresser in the past, but once her anxiety became worse, she did not like to go out much.

“When I was young, I was always in front of the mirror combing my hair and admiring myself. Now I never look in the mirror,” Mother said.

A local boy who was two years older than me began to admire me and would play his guitar below my window, gazing up at me combing my hair. My sister’s clothes would hang off me. We still had to wear the clothes of our older siblings and passed clothing down each year, after we outgrew them. But sometimes Father would make enough money to buy beautiful fabrics and ribbons for us so that we could get the seamstress to make us all dresses. I liked to tie my hair up into a ponytail with a big ribbon. I often would daydream who my husband would be and what it would be like to be married. Perhaps I spent too long gazing at the mirror in those days. I never really used moisturisers, so after sixty, my skin aged. But in my youth my skin was perfect. Everyone called me a little doll.

Just as Mother was offered a role as a singer, which she declined, I also declined to be in the limelight, even though I was offered a role in a movie. Mother had a very melodious voice and she knew all the old songs, some from the 1800s. Her mother had taught them to her. We had no radio at home, so we all sang when we did chores or worked in the fields, to make the work

lighter. We also sang as a family after dinner, in the winter. Most of the songs were sad, about heartbreak and death, but also about what could happen to a girl's reputation if she made any mistake. "She sought success, but she only brought disgrace" were the lines of a popular folk song. In those days good women did not want to be in movies or sing in clubs. Men would fight over women, and knives would come out. One beautiful singer got a knife thrown into her leg accidentally because two admirers fought over her at a club. She was slender with beautiful legs and wore short sleeveless dresses. That type of life in clubs, theatres and restaurants was scandalous, and still is today in parts of Greece.

Your Father bought me a yellow bikini and I did not like to wear it because it was so small and showed my bellybutton. I preferred to wear one-piece swimsuits, so he got me one with cut out sides and metal rings holding it together. Even that one I did not like to wear much. I preferred a more modest red one-piece swimsuit. In my youth we went to the beach often. I was married at seventeen and it was four years before you were born. Once I even had a lovely summer tan and wore short-sleeved dresses to show it off. I was very slim and loved to wear high slingback pointy heels. I had a photograph of me sitting next to my mother-in-law under a tree, and I was slim and tanned and she wore a dark dress. She did not like that photo and usually did not let anyone photograph her.

When I was newly married, your father's relatives took me to visit an aunt who was always critical of thin brides. "You got burned!" she would exclaim to the groom. "That girl is too thin, look at her tiny wrist, what work can she do?" In those days women were expected to work as hard as any man, do heavy lifting, knead tubs of dough to make bread, hang bucketloads of heavy sheets on the line after pummelling them clean with her hands. Of my wedding photo my mother-in-law complained, "Look at your tiny arm, like a twig next to the best man's wife's arm; she looks like a strong woman." Statuesque women with muscle were greatly admired, even if they did not look quite so slim and fashionable. It was a bit like purchasing livestock: you always went for the big strong cows, not the slender ones.

However, when we got to the aunt's house, she did pinch my wrist, as was expected. "What a tiny wrist!" she exclaimed, but instead of saying to the groom, as she usually did, "You got burned!" she actually said, "What a beautiful little girl, like a doll, such an amazing complexion, beautiful soft hair and face, figure like a model. What are you all complaining about? Where will you find such a perfect bride?"

I smiled and felt relieved. I knew that I was not everything my mother-in-law wanted. And I had not brought the dowry she wanted either, nor was I a Pontian Greek bride, and most importantly I was not her first choice – it was a love match.

The bride my mother-in-law wanted was a Pontian girl from a rich family. She was actually nine years older than your father but Mother-in-law thought that was a good match because she would pull your father into line. I was seven years younger than your father and he told me what to do. The other girl had a huge dowry. I remember meeting her once. I was called to the house of the rich girl by her family, and they asked me, "Who are you to Zacharias?"

"I am his fiancée," I stated. Then I heard the other girl wailing from a back room; she peeped at me from behind the door, her face streaked with tears and her bouffant bob hairstyle messy. She was very pretty, in a cream knitted jumper and pencil skirt, but she was a woman, and I was a girl. In the end, I got to marry your father. It was a long and difficult engagement. Your father's relatives did their best to dissuade me and him.

Even on the day of my wedding the drama did not stop.

"Where is the groom?" everyone asked. "Is this wedding going to happen?"

"Send them away, Father," I called down from the stairs. "I don't want them here."

"Who is that raising their voice?" my mother-in-law said.

I fell silent upstairs and tried to stop tears falling down my face by fixing the veil for the tenth time over my hair. It had been immaculately styled up by

the hairdresser earlier that day and I wore a long, slightly flared, lace dress with lace sleeves and a very long lace veil. I wore bright red lipstick and eyebrow pencil. Eventually the groom arrived, with fanfare, people cheering and calling out. He was two hours late. When he came in, he said, “What’s happening here?”

“The wedding was about to be cancelled.”

“Seriously? Come on everyone, it is a happy day.”

I found out he had gone to visit a cousin on the way to my house and got held up until another cousin came to find him and told him, “Hurry, the wedding is going to be cancelled.” Then the groom hurried and made it to the wedding before it was too late. In the end I got to marry him, and three other girls were crying at my wedding.

My Sister's Marriage

I never knew Mother and Father faced so many obstacles prior to their marriage. I always assumed they had a very happy courtship and wedding from their gorgeous photos. But it seems I was wrong.

“What happened when you were newly married?” I asked.

My mother-in-law always wanted to choose a Pontian Greek girl for your father to marry. I tried to learn what was expected of me. I remember I laughed a lot when I was newly married. The handle in the door wobbled as I tried to turn it and I laughed.

“What are you laughing about?” my mother-in-law asked. I was too shy to tell her the reason, but my brother-in-law said, “She is a bubbly girl who likes to laugh.” I was only seventeen years old, still a child, and small things made me laugh. I was shy and nervous, so I laughed.

Still in the 1950s to 1970s girls in Greece had to be married young or they could remain spinsters. A few men would marry older girls who had money. Most marriages were arranged by relatives; however, girls could meet their future husbands at bazaars, festivals and weddings.

Before I got married, my father would say to my older sister, “Look, you are a poor girl; now that you are young and everyone wants you, choose someone for a husband.” My sister always found fault with every man who would come to ask for her hand in marriage. She refused to see them and would say to their relatives who came to view her, “I’m too young and not interested in marriage.” Eventually she met a man that she thought was a good man.

Once it was agreed that she would marry, Father suddenly became very sad. He would cry secretly. He would go out to cut the firewood and be outside for hours, then come back inside without firewood. He would go to the well

to get water and come back empty-handed. Musicians came for her engagement party and my sister cried a lot. The musicians played very sad songs and the whole village cried.

Part 3
Melancholic:
Relatives Remember the Civil War and Beyond

The Feminist Aunt

I never forgot my promise to my Grandfather Christos, Grandmother Fotini, Mother and Father that I would write their stories. All my life I felt a burning desire to know my history and to return to Greece. I would have preferred to return to Greece with my family, but I had to go with my husband and son to ask my relatives about what they could remember. While my parents told me most of what I know about our history, my aunts, uncles and grandparents also told me stories. I asked one of my aunts about our history and she smiled, and agreed to tell me some stories.

My beautiful aunt sat across from me at her kitchen table. It was after lunch and we had some spare time before it would be siesta time. The sunlight streamed through the open window. It was quiet except for birds chirping outside. My husband and son had already retired for a siesta. Aunt was a strong woman. I admired her perfectly styled hair and neat appearance. “Please, Aunt, could you tell me something about your childhood and the Civil War?” I asked.

“Yes”, my aunt said. “But I don’t know very much.”

“Whatever you know is enough,” I said.

My aunt smiled and began.

I am 71, and I am called PK. I was born in 1944 in the village Zervohori. I don’t remember much about the Civil War. From my parents I learned my father fought in Albania, then when Albania fell, Italy invaded. My father, Christos, came back and married in 1943. In 1940 Greece had said “No” to German occupation, then Germany invaded with Italy and gathered all the food – animals, grain – and took it out of Greece. People got scared in 1941 and went into the mountains to hide. Germans would forcefully go into family houses and occupy a room there. They had their own rations and food but the locals did not have food. Germany did not have much bread so they took grain from Greece. The soldiers would molest young women in villages or even in

the houses they stayed in. Therefore, many people escaped into the mountains to avoid this behaviour. The resistance fighters had given up all their weapons. Greece became enslaved; its people had little to eat. Then after the Nazi Germans were expelled from Greece by the rebels, the American planes came and cleared out what was left of the Civil War and Greece fell into extreme poverty. There was a lot of snow. Women would take mules into the mountains with food to feed the rebels. People were barefoot in the snow. The people who joined the Germans got food; they committed atrocities against fellow Greeks. Those against the Germans hid in the mountains and ate wild dandelions, fruits, nuts, berries and small birds. They came down at night to ask for bread from villagers. Apparently, England threw *lires*, gold coins, into the mountains, but people had no food, so what would they do with *lires*?

After the Americans came to end the Civil War, the rebels escaped behind the Iron Curtain, got killed in the mountains or escaped to other areas. We were told a majority of women were left in Germany as many men were lost during the war, especially after Russia attacked Germany. This meant German soldiers' lives were protected by any means possible by the Germans. Germans were strict with Greeks: for every German soldier killed in Greece, they killed thirty locals, so Greeks avoided killing Germans in Greece.

Your grandfather Kleanthis escaped to Czechoslovakia to survive. One of my first cousins also escaped out of Greece. She was in Czechoslovakia too. She could not send letters or come back. The borders were closed. Later when things changed, our relatives could travel there to see her, and letters could get through. She had married and had children. She said she only wanted a velvet skirt and jacket as a gift from Greece. Living under these conditions was called exile, or literally "thrown far away". Now my cousin is back in Greece.

The Germans had cannons near Gerakina's Well in Nigrita, and they burned houses there. Some collaborators said that traitors were meeting and hiding in those houses, so the Germans came and burned a house and shot a son. This was done out of malice, and that family was left walking in the mud.

We were a family with parents, five girls and one boy. I am the eldest daughter. We had only one grandmother, as the others died earlier. She looked after us very well. We all graduated from the Zervohori primary school. When we grew, we married and had children and grandchildren. I married in Nigrita. I have been married fifty years. I have two married daughters and four grandchildren, three boys and one girl.

I remember we were moved during the Civil War in 1948. I was born in 1944. We moved from Zervohori to Zitohori. My father was originally from Zitohori. The smaller villages were all abandoned due to the Civil War. At Zitohori my third sister was born. Men were given weapons to guard the villages from rebels. Young men and women hid so the rebels would not take them to the mountains to fight with them. Rebels came down from the mountains for bread. People hid in haystacks, in cellars. Those rebels in the mountains rounded up the youth to fight with them.

I remember Mother was boiling milk in a big *kazani* in the yard and once the sun was beginning to set we had to quickly put out the fire and get inside and close all the doors. If you did not do this, you were seen as harbouring rebels and there would be trouble. There were wire fences around the village so no one could enter or leave. Or so they thought. I would wake up early and find papers on the ground outside. I would gather them in my apron and play with them. I was about five and could not read. They were dropped in the night by the leftists. Rebels still came into the villages regardless of the barbed-wire fences.

The Zitohori guards sent Father to guard Houmniko village at night. Mother, Grandmother, sister Niki and my newborn sister and I walked to Houmniko from Zitohori with our belongings on the back of a donkey. Father had sheep, so we usually had to take houses near the edge of each village. In the first house in Houmniko we had one room. We had hay, animals, cows and sheep all in one room. The Zitohori house had been one room with tobacco drying above, hay and sheep. Three families lived in each house, keeping one room each. At Houmniko the animals were in the yard with a fence. Next to our room the Greek army came and stayed for a short time. They spoke Pontian

Greek and Turkish. Some of them had been Greek refugees forced to leave Turkey. My sister Niki and I saw they made a huge bonfire and had a celebration. They sang and danced with their arms raised. Mother warned them the chimney had caught fire, but they could not understand her. Luckily, they eventually realised what she was saying and put it out or the house would have burned down. They gave us part of their army rations, pasta and beans, until they left a short time later.

I was five years old then and saw many soldiers passing by on horseback. There was only one road through the villages all the way to Thessaloniki. They greeted me and my sister Niki, and gave us handfuls of sultanas from their rations. We liked sultanas very much. We later moved to another house at the edge of the village due to our sheep. It was abandoned: the owners had gone to Nigrita or Thessaloniki. The first night we lit a lamp in there, and the watchmen guarding the village saw the light and assumed rebels were inside and they fired bullets at the house. Father was at the opposite side of the village, so he could not tell them to stop. The house was wooden, and the bullets passed straight through. We were sleeping on the floor and bullets flew above us. Mother and Grandmother Loula were very afraid and dragged us quickly and quietly by our clothes along the floor into the cellar, which was made of stone. The cellar door slammed shut, and more bullets came in response. One bullet ricocheted through the first room into the cellar and hit a pot in the sink which had water in it. It penetrated the copper lid and copper pot and ended up embedded in the earth below. We were lucky God protected us from disaster that day, as that bullet came very close. Then Mother heard the voice of one of the watchmen from Zervohori say, "Listen lads, tonight the Nodoulis family came to stay here, stop shooting." They stopped shooting at us. I still have the pot to remind me to not take life for granted.

Later, after the war, when things got quieter, we went back to Zervohori. I was seven or eight years old. I went to school there. Again, we lived with two other families in a house, one room each. The soldiers had destroyed some houses and several families were homeless. The municipality fixed four houses for families to share until the others could be repaired. We lived there

for a few years. My fourth sister was born there. Our brother was born during the repair of our own house. Able-bodied women and men cleared roads to get rid of trees which had grown in the way during the war because the roads had been used less. They laid pipes and waterworks. There were two taps set up with storage tanks where people came to get water.

When Mother went into labour with my fourth sister, the girls who lived in the adjoining room of that house made fun of her birth pains and groans. The girls were around nineteen and twenty years old and kept laughing at each groan they heard, imitating Mother. Mother had no option but to give birth in that environment. She was embarrassed and distressed. However, for the birth of our brother, Mother refused to give birth in that house again and went to our half-built home to labour there. Only one room was properly built. It still had corrugated iron over the doors and windows. We stayed there and a builder, a *mastoras*, came to finish the repairs.

Two years later, Grandmother Loula died. Four years after that, the youngest child was born. We were a loving family. The oldest daughters watched over the younger ones. Father took sheep to the mountains, as they needed to graze to get enough food. Later he sold the sheep and got cows, which he also took to the mountains for pasture. Mother worked with me and Niki in the tobacco fields and our third sister cared for the babies, cooked at home, swept the yard and looked after the house.

Those years in Zervohori were passed in great poverty. Not only the villagers but everyone in the whole district was not allowed to work. We got milk rations, cheese and butter from the school. We brought pots or cups from the house to collect the rations in. We were so poor, Mother kept rusty food cans discarded by soldiers in the mountains to collect the milk and butter rations. I was embarrassed but there was nothing else to use. The milk was made from powdered milk. The teacher ladled it out to us and we drank it with a slice of bread at school. This went on for two years. The remaining rations were shared amongst the children and they took it home. We were very thin then, but in the end even those years passed.

We ate *fagita katochis*, staples such as *bobota* from corn instead of wheat bread – food for survival during the war and famine. Mother had twelve kilos of corn meal as a dowry in 1943 in those poverty-stricken times.

Bobota was made by kneading corn meal with oil and water and rolling into flat *pides* which were baked. As a sweet we roasted corn meal in a large flat pan, added water and sugar, and topped it with *petmezzi*, a jam-like preserve from grapes. We gathered wild greens, poppy leaves and dandelions from outside and made food like *spanakorizo* with rice, which we called *borani*. It was nice with lemon juice squeezed on top.

We played games in the yard all day, such as hopscotch with rocks or fir cones. When we met our girlfriends, we made a pinky promise with our little fingers: “*Fili fili karo fili, oti ehis na mou dinis, oti eho tha sou dino.*” (“Friend, friend, dear friend, whatever you have you will give me and whatever I have I will give you.”) And then we shared what we had. Some days we only had bread and we cut it into two pieces. We said, “*Apo ena heri to psomi, kai apo to alo to tiri.*” (“From one hand we have bread and from the other cheese.”) But we had bread in both hands. We said it to forget our hunger.

We got a few parcels from the government of randomly gathered clothes and shoes, like many other villagers. It was potluck what you got. I had to wear a man’s coat until it became so threadbare it fell apart on me. I felt ashamed every time I put it on. I wanted to have pretty things to wear, like when I was younger. I wore it from grade one to grade six. Initially it was like a dress on me, tied around the middle with a belt or ribbon, but it became shorter as I grew. Mother embroidered it in places where it had torn or needed mending. She was a brilliant seamstress and weaver. My baby brother got woollen pants, which we tied around his waist with fibres from nettle leaves. The pants were so scratchy they made him itch and get rashes, especially in hot weather, but there was nothing else for him to wear. There were no nappies, so we had to wash his clothes every time he soiled himself, and in the summer he wore very little. Before we got the clothes parcel, we clothed him in our own baby dresses, so he looked like a girl. It was many years before Father could afford

to buy fabric so Mother could sew us new clothes. By the time the youngest was born, those times had passed. She was not alive then to see this poverty during and immediately after the Civil War.

Before we moved to Zitohori during the Civil War, I had eight dresses and a pair of red shoes. We had pigs, honey, sold bread, cheese and butter, and were well-off. But later we were so poor. People were not allowed to work their fields during the Civil War. Landmines were hidden in fields and it was not safe. Curfew was at sunset and people kept a few small vegetable gardens near the village or sowed small tobacco crops near their house. Larger fields were left abandoned. Every home had at least one fruit tree or lemon and olive tree for daily use. Everyone planted potatoes, tomatoes and herb gardens in their yard.

Later Father bought us fabric and ribbons from Nigrita and we sent them to female tailors to be stitched. We made dolls from the rags of our old clothes. Our family was poor but loving and we still love each other, even the grandchildren. From this despair and poverty, we all built our own houses, got married, and our children got married. We worked hard and became successful in our family life. I hope I never have any other experiences like those again and neither do my children or grandchildren.

I asked Dimitris, a friend of my cousin's mother-in-law, about the Civil War and how it affected him in Nigrita. Dimitris agreed to discuss the Axis occupation and the Civil War as he remembered it.

Dimitris sat in his lounge room decorated with fine prints and paintings of Greek themes, white lace table runners and crochet rugs. It was very much a Greek home.

"Sit down. Would you like an orange juice?" Dimitris said.

"No thank you, but I would like water," I said.

Dimitris poured a jug of water into a tall glass and sat down in his armchair. He began telling me his story. His eyes had a faraway look in them. I could see that he was again reliving those experiences.

1940 the Italian war started, then in 1941, in April, the Germans came, you understand? Until September 1944 the Nazi Germans were here. Again, Papandreou brought more fighting to Greece. The *Paoutzides* burned and destroyed everything, they finished up the work of the Nazis for them. The *Kipapou* burned villages, they burned Kerdilia, and Nigrita, they destroyed so much. Then in 1945 the *Emfilios* – the Civil War – began and lasted till 1949. The rebels were in Zervohori and Houmniko villages. The authorities packed the villagers up and took them into town. The villagers were all here in Nigrita, but then in 1950 they all went back to their villages. It was over then, but the rebels still roamed, a few last ones here and there.

In Zervohori everyone was told to go back to work. Then people began to work but there were so many disasters. The Bulgarians and Germans left in September 1944. Those Germans brought the army from Bulgaria in 1943 till 1944 to watch over us. They had us under control here. From then on in 1951, people moved around but then everyone returned to their villages. They

worked the tobacco fields again. Greece lived off tobacco. The tobacco prices dropped, and everyone fell into poverty in Greece. The occupation destroyed us. Ten years of occupation and war from 1940 to 1950.

In 1949 we were freed from the Civil War. There was government from 1945 after the invading armies had gone, but everyone fought like dogs. Then in 1950 there was food on the stove. The last rebel in Northern Greece was from Houmniko village. In 1951, when I married, they caught him, on the twenty-eighth of May. Ziros was his name, the last rebel of Greece. He killed people in authority in Zitohori and Houmniko. He had grenades hidden. They tried him and sentenced him to fourteen years' jail and then Papandreou came and freed him. Then, he died.

In 1949 on the twenty-eighth of August, Grammos fell as the Americans deployed airplanes with napalm there. That finished off the Civil War and the Americans left Greece. And those are the facts, my dear biographer.

“Did you fight in the war?” I asked.

I never fought. The Bulgarians caught me three times. I was taking food up to the mountains for the Greek army. Then when Omarhis Apostolos was killed they caught and killed fifteen educated people from Nigrita as payback. The others got captured by the Germans in 1944, here at Agio Thomaio Church. Then here in Nigrita in September 1944 the Germans burned 100 houses when they were retreating. They stopped at Tassoloi, near Zervohori, on the way to Thessaloniki. At Tassoloi, they fought the Greek army and blew up bridges. This is what the Germans did. The Bulgarians left eighteen days earlier, when Russia told them to retreat. When the Nazi Germans burned Nigrita, the Bulgarians weren't here to stop them or to witness the depraved acts they did. They did these things along with the *Paoutzides* – the collaborators. The Germans took some of the collaborators with them when they left.

The collaborators wanted money and to steal, those *Bafralides* and *Paotzides*, the ones who were themselves Greek refugees from Turkey, hardened from years of fighting.

After Omarhis's murder, they burned the Second Dimotiko School with people imprisoned inside. They killed a few, they sent some to Germany to concentration camps. Around thirty boys were killed in Nigrita.

They also hung Captain Michael. He was a Kirthilios. They caught him and hung him in the plaza square in Nigrita in 1942. There was a giant gallows here in the square. They caught him in Zitohori and hung him in Nigrita. They hung two more near Therma on the way to Zitorohi. The bodies were left there for a while as a warning to others not to oppose the Germans.

Only at seven in the morning would people go to work then come back before sunset. The *Bafralides* would steal and destroy things, come and take the grain. There was a real fuss. We worked tobacco and wheat fields secretly, going to the fields on the outskirts of Nigrita, or tending secret gardens. Nigrita had 2000 horses and 1000 donkeys but they are all gone. You know that? *Aman*, each house had a donkey for work. Zervohori and Houmniko had cattle, sheep. People would gather tobacco leaves and carry it back on donkeys.

While we went to work, the *Paoutzides* would come and stay at Dimitritz. The Germans only stayed here in Nigrita. Bulgarians were here as an army, and as guards, but they did nothing, didn't harm anyone. The Bulgarians did no harm. And that is the story.

"How did the war affect your family?"

"My family? We were not involved, as I said; we just survived and kept going."

I respected that Dimitris had said what he wanted to tell me, and that any other parts of his story would be his alone. I thanked him for his time and generosity and went outside into the warm sunny street where my cousin was waiting for me at her mother-in-law's house.

Mr Fournalis

My cousin Maria agreed to ask her father-in-law if I could speak to him about his memories of the Greek Civil War. He agreed to speak to me at his home. The house was actually two houses, one for Maria and her husband and children, and the other for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. The houses were separated by a concreted courtyard and small garden. Children's bikes dotted the courtyard. They had a spotted dog in the yard, which tried to nip my ankles as I climbed the steps into her father-in-law's house.

"Welcome, welcome," said Mr Fournalis. His wife sat on the couch nearby. We sat in the kitchen and Mr Fournalis began his story in his quiet and gentle voice.

The *Emfilios* here – the Civil War – what can I say? No one knew why they were fighting, brothers against each other, father against son. Many things happened which shouldn't have happened, you understand? *Omathikes ekthiles*, the rebels, came down from the mountains. There could be a brother who was a rebel and a brother at home in the village. The *andartes* would come down from the mountains at night to look for food, whatever they could find, and if they found young people, they would take them with them to fight alongside them in the mountains.

We had some wheat and staples in a shed. We had a donkey which was pregnant. My father was hidden in the saddlebag on the donkey. The rebels wanted to take the donkey, along with the saddle and saddlebags to load up the supplies. Luckily my mother told them it was pregnant, and they left it. Because if they took the donkey, they would have taken the saddlebags and also my father with them. So, my father escaped being taken by the rebels to fight with them in the mountains. This is what I remember about my family. At a village nearby, they gathered some forty men and took them to a mountain and put them to work. A lot happened. They burned houses. So much more happened. The islands were full of people imprisoned and exiled who had relatives who were rebels or had protested. At night the rebels would

come down and burn the houses of collaborators, traitors or fascists who they had issues with, and even family members they were fighting against. Many houses got burned here. Many mistakes happened. Many things should never have happened because they were fighting brother against brother, not strangers. I don't remember much more, the rest is only what I heard.

There was no wheat flour in our house or for sale anywhere. We ate corn flour – *bobota* they called it. Whatever you could make in the house, corn bread, lentils, beans, pulses, that is what we ate. If you had a chicken, a pig, a lamb, a goat, whatever you had that is the only meat you ate. People did not eat much meat.

I went to school in 1949 when the war finished. The worst happened in Athens. There many thousands were killed. They had ship cannons which fired into the city. They killed many rebels, *andartes*, there. Anyone they caught they imprisoned. And before this was the Nazi German war. Greece was a mess after 1950. It had no economy, nothing. After 1953 they made the Marshall Plan. We got a bit of aid from America, but again it wasn't done properly. This again was eaten by the few – the ones who got favours. Until 1963 there was great poverty. After 1963 some people had a bit of a life. After 1965, with the Junta, there was a bit of life for people, loans for stables, cows, grains, and from there people began to make their life. In the cities they had work. The population grew from one million to five million people in the cities. After 1963 villagers would leave to go to the cities for work. From 1950 to '60 there was still great poverty. I had one pair of pants and it was patched and I went to school with that. There was no food, no clothing. Greece did not have proper rulers. It had opportunities such as in 1953; with the Marshall Plan and the money it got, it should have done better and been a proper part of Europe, not as it was. But always the elite get everything. They have the power and the ways.

It is mostly true that there were gold coins thrown into the mountains by the English. The captains were all in on it – they and their children took the coins. Those who were involved in the fighting up there, the fascists and the communists, they got them. We had no bread but the captains built houses

like you have never seen. How did they find time to work and make these houses in such a short time after the war? Even those who disappeared after the war and were in exile, they returned and found the gold coins, *lires*, they buried in the mountains – now they have apartments in the city. Now is it truth? Is it fiction? Those gold *lires* that everyone talks about that were thrown into the mountains? Who knows, no one knows how they got their money. Gold had more value than paper money. So, most people relied on gold. Some people made so many businesses. Apparently, some gold was looted from Agios Oros monastery as well and carried away on donkeys and hidden to be used later. Who knows what happened and how some people managed to become filthy rich in such a short time?

A German was killed in Therma, at Agio Nikita. Then the Germans thought he was killed in Nigrita so they rounded up men from Nigrita to kill them in the square. Then a translator told them it was not in Nigrita and they went up to Agio Nikita and collected men to kill there. That was the rule then, twenty Greeks for one German life. I am not sure how many they killed. This is why they made the small church, St Nikita's, and have a feast day there to honour the dead. This relieves the pain of the suffering inflicted by the Nazi Germans.

Some Germans did desert and ran away, but the Greeks were punished for that too. How can you find the answer for that? How can you convince the Germans their soldiers had deserted, not been captured and killed by Greeks? The *kapnomagaza*, tobacco factories, were working before the war till 1940; they had work for many people. Nigrita was the tobacco capital of Greece. Nigrita had seven tobacco factories, and work for thousands of people, some from other countries – Bulgaria, gypsies, anyone that wanted work. After the war, all of them closed. First of all, there were no animals to plough the fields; no one had money to buy seeds or seedlings. If someone had an animal, they used it to plant grain for their own bread so they could eat. Tobacco almost disappeared. The tobacco fields began again after 1950. People slowly began buying a horse to plant their fields.

During the war the soldiers took all the animals to carry their weapons, or to eat them. My father had one horse, an old horse, from before the war. He

ploughed the fields, carried water, planted grain with that horse. Then during the war, it was taken. My family had no money for food, how would they buy another horse? We had to ask to borrow the neighbour's donkeys, or any animal that could pull a plough. Otherwise, we had to do it all by hand. That is why it was easier to grow corn grain, it needed less work. We all hated corn bread. It was not soft and light like wheat bread.

Part 4
Choleric:
Return to Greece

Journey Back to the Beginning

I was born in Greece but came to Australia at the age of three and a half. I was homesick and I yearned to return to my relatives and life in Greece. I remembered aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. My relatives, like my parents, were my world. I did not realise what it meant to leave for Australia. It was just like any other short trip with my parents. Except it turned out to be a lot longer.

“I want to go back,” I would tell my parents. They would smile knowingly and say, “Not yet.” Then another couple more years passed, and I somehow forgot everyone and stopped asking to return. My parents would ask me, “Do you want to go back to Greece?” “No,” I would say, a little worried that my newfound security would again be snatched away from me. Leaving the familiar again would be painful. “I am studying here now, and if I went to Greece I would have to study in Greek.” I had done Greek lessons after school and it was not fun. The teacher had a huge wooden ruler with which he whipped our palms if we did not do our homework, which unfortunately for my sister and me was more than once. We were in the small group of children who occasionally forgot their homework and got bruised red palms as a reward. We feared our stoic and officious schoolteacher in old grey tweed suits with a Byron-like fringe across his broad face. He commanded the respect of the whole community. By then, returning to Greece for me meant having to deal with strict teachers daily instead of only after school on Wednesdays.

Sometimes strange “memories” came to me, of soldiers standing in a doorway in silhouette after kicking the door open with their boots. Memories of searching for hiding places, of hiding in the dark. Were these the memories of my grandparents or parents? There were definitely some images in my head that I could never have seen. How had I seen these things? Had the stories my relatives told me become images that I could not tell were fact or fiction, mine or theirs? Could memories jump from one generation to the next? I felt the fear, saw the images as if they had happened in front of my very eyes. And those feelings, thoughts, memories, consumed me.

Their stories became my stories. I had been reborn in many ways in Australia. I began dreaming in English, forgot all the Greek nursery rhymes and the faces of my grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. But some things could not be forgotten. They were hidden and later resurfaced, obscured from my conscious mind as images that mystified me.

In Greece I had been spoiled, surrounded by love, with so many relatives vying for my attention. It was my paradise. In Australia no one knew us, and we were alone. My parents did not speak the language and worked to make a living at the Holden and Ford factories. I didn't like this new life, not for a long time – it took years to settle in. In the 1970s Australia was not very ethnically diverse. It was hard being part of a minority who were seen as foreigners who ate strange food and spoke a strange language. I even wore lace dresses with satin ribbons to school while other children wore jeans and T-shirts. My mother had only packed our best clothes to take overseas. Now I had to wear those clothes every day. I had cried to go back home, to the comfort of the familiar and the love and acceptance which was now lost. But eventually I began to fit in, and then even do well in school.

By the time I was eight or nine, Australia was no longer a terrible place for me. But for my parents, being Australian was a greater sacrifice because they only saw their parents in Greece a couple of times before they died. However, the stories of home were with us every day, and I felt my grandparents were always a part of my life. Their stories became part of me, and part of my search for identity and truth. I learned from the lessons their stories taught – that you can never blindly trust that others will always do what is best for you. And, if things are going well, appreciate it because all can be lost through calamity and war.

Sooner or later I had to go back, to see my relatives. I knew there had been a war, where brother fought brother and neighbour betrayed neighbour. I wondered how the beautiful Greece that I knew had once been such a frightening place. There still are some terrible places, hidden and remote, where no one goes, such as *Maimundire*. People still feared undiscovered landmines or ghosts. I had to return to see for myself.

Arrival on Good Friday

It is after sunset by the time we arrive in Nigrita and my aunt and cousin are ready to go to church. “*Yia sas*, welcome,” my aunt and cousin say.

“*Yia sas*,” I say and hug them.

“Quickly, get changed so we can go to the church,” my aunt says.

We drag our large suitcases into their spare room. I place my son in my aunt’s arms and my husband and I quickly get changed into something more suitable for church. I wear high heels, expecting a short walk to the church followed by sitting down in the pew. I am mistaken. It takes thirty minutes to walk there, over old cobblestoned roads, and then before we make it to the church of St George, the *epitafio* from the church passes us, followed by a procession of hundreds of villagers. We join the procession and go back into the village square. My feet are blistered and ache. Black-clothed youths raise the *epitafio* and carry it around the square. It is intricately decorated with white lilies, marigolds, carnations, roses and chrysanthemums. The lilies hang out over the arches of the *epitafio* in a modern design. Then the competing *epitafio* from St Bartholomew in nearby Terpni arrives. This *epitafio* has Byzantine arches and is classical in design, with white and red roses. The two groups chase each other around the square, holding their *epitafio* up high and quickly turning it around in unison to drums. Eventually one is declared a winner.

I ask Aunt where the villagers are going now, because it looks like the revelry has just begun.

“They will go and eat goat on the spit and drink for hours.”

“But it is Good Friday,” I tell her, shocked. Aunt does not seem to understand my confusion. All my life I had been taught that one cannot eat meat or animal products on Good Friday, and not even Easter Saturday, because we had to wait for mass at midnight on Saturday, the blessing of the priest and the holy light on our candles first. After we

broke the red eggs and said *Christos anesti* (Christ has arisen), then we were allowed to eat the boiled eggs. Here, there is some loophole in the rules I am not aware of.

Apparently after midnight on Good Friday, some people eat meat. I am unsure why the rules are different here. After observing the Lent fast, are they unable to wait one more day? I later researched this online and found that those strong enough to do so are expected to not eat anything at all on Good Friday until after greeting the *epitafios*. However, the ill, nursing and expectant mothers, children and old people are allowed to eat food, but not meat. I could not find anything about being allowed to eat meat on Good Friday. Perhaps those who were eating it were elderly or had a medical condition. I could not find any explanation for this. Because I am already vegetarian, I have to find something else to give up, usually sugar, eggs and dairy. There are some days when olive oil and wine is allowed in the traditional Greek Lent. But there are also days when one is expected not to eat or drink anything at all and that is something I had not been aware of earlier.

In the shops only Lenten foods are served: vegetarian pizza, pasta, and other foods. The cake shops have Lenten biscuits and cakes. However, some restaurants still serve meat to travellers or those not fasting.

Aunt buys chocolate and orange-flavoured Lenten biscuits. They are amazingly delicious. Like me, Aunt is still fasting.

The next day we prepare to go to the church of St George in the evening and Aunt has already purchased our decorative beeswax candles. When we arrive at the church before midnight it is full, and we have to stand outside. My son sleeps in his pram. At midnight the priest comes out and brings the holy light out for everyone to light their candles. Men with collection baskets come past and my aunt puts in money for us, not letting me contribute anything. We break our eggs together and say, "*Christos anesti*." I find it difficult to keep all three candles burning and push the pram; when one of the candles goes out, we put it under the pram. My cousin greets many of her friends from her women's dance group. We meet her in-laws and greet them. A few of my cousins from Zitohori and Zervohori turn up late. It is a lovely family atmosphere. My aunt wants us to go into the church.

“The paintings just above the entrance are 200 years old, and inside the royal doors and frescoes are 300 years old,” she says.

I peer past the painting of St George on his horse spearing the dragon, and the biblical scenes painted in fading bright colours. The paintings are very much like other Byzantine paintings in Greek Orthodox churches, but in some places the figures have worn away. There is something special about this church, I am not sure exactly what, but I vaguely remember visiting it as a small child. It was part of my life from the beginning. When I go inside, it is so beautiful that I hold my breath. I feel as if I am in the realm of saints and angels. The young priest is kind and helpful, even knowing who I am when Aunt tells him, “This is Niki’s daughter.” We are allowed to take flowers from the *epitafio* for good luck. I light candles for my relatives and pray silently.

We walk back to Aunt’s house at around one am with our candles lit, so that the holy light can come home. My aunt tells me to keep my large beeswax candle so that I can relight it in my home in Australia.

“That way the holy light can come into your home,” she says.

I had not known that the candles could be relit. I thought that once the holy light went out or was extinguished, it was not the same to relight the candle with any other light. The holy light came from the priest on Holy Saturday. However, I listen to Aunt and wrap our three candles to take them overseas. Aunt even gives me another candle for Mother.

The next day I help Aunt prepare for the Sunday feast. She roasts a small turkey which she slaughtered weeks earlier and kept in the deep freeze. We also make stuffed peppers and tomatoes, salad, rice and roast potatoes. She makes a special dish out of zucchini slices covered in breadcrumbs and garlic, and drenched in olive oil. It is roasted in the oven and is delicious. “This is a classic dish from Nigrita, popular a century ago,” Aunt says. “I won a medal for this dish at the local show in Nigrita.” I am proud that my aunt won the competition; she is a great cook.

Aunt, Uncle, my cousin, her husband and sons all gather in the dining room with us. The sunshine comes in through the glass sliding door, bringing with it the smell of flowers from the front garden. Uncle says grace and blesses us all before we start to eat, very

much in the spirit of Grandfather Christos. It is a beautiful day and we enjoy our family meal together. My son likes the fruit and the soft fresh bread.

In the late afternoon, after we arise from our siesta, we walk to Gerakina's Well not far from St George's church. It is an old bluestone well. I remember what Mother told me about Gerakina. *Gerakina* in Greek means "she-falcon" and was the name of a beautiful young bride. She had been married for only a month and had gone to the well dressed in her wedding finery: a bright wool embroidered dress, gold bangles and necklaces. She was dizzy and sat on the edge of the well to recover, then fainted and fell into the well. The men of the village tried to save her, but she was weighed down by her jewellery and heavy wool dress, so she drowned. It is said her young husband, Triantafyllos, brought her out of the well. Heartbroken, he became bedridden then grew weak and died a month later. This is a true story, from around 1870 in Nigrita, so my great-grandparents would have known this story quite well as the local Romeo and Juliet story.

"Gerakina died of the evil eye," Mother told me in explanation. "She was in love, newly married and possibly just pregnant and experiencing morning sickness. She became dizzy after walking to the well and had to rest. She was too happy in love and had on her wedding dress and gold, which attracted the evil eye; that is why she died." I wonder if my great-grandmother Loula had told Mother that.

Later Aunt takes us to the Folklore Museum, which has items donated from the people in Nigrita, such as hand-woven goat-hair blankets and kilims, hand-crocheted lace tablecloths, bed sheets, old traditional clothing and jewellery, spirit lamps, mortars and pestles, jugs, crockery and furniture.

"Your Grandmother Fotini's tablecloth is here," Aunt tells me, and I feel proud that my family contributed to the museum. I look at the lovely tablecloth with cut-out patterns and white embroidery.

We see a mannequin wearing clothes in the Gerakina style, with a cropped black jacket lined with fur at the edge. There is farming equipment, old pots and pans, and lace curtains exactly like those my grandmother had in her cottage. A pair of owls who came into her house ripped the curtains to shreds after Grandmother died.

Aunt's house has some hand-woven kilims made by Grandmother Fotini, as well as the intricate wool carpets with flowers and birds that Aunt painstakingly made on a giant hand loom when she worked in the local carpet shop before it closed down.

Mother had brought one kilim and two goat-hair blankets with her when she came to Australia, but nothing remained, all lost from moving house several times or being lent out to Father's friends and not returned. Now they are extremely expensive and difficult to find.

"These are the tobacco factories," Aunt points out. I look up at a whitewashed stone building. It has four levels with low ceiling height. It must have been stifling hot in there in the summer. We pass by the main supermarket and Aunt points out that it also was a tobacco factory. Now it is a two-level supermarket. We enter the supermarket, and I am pleased to discover wholemeal and rye bread. We make a few purchases for us and for Aunt. She protests, "You are the visitors, and you are feeding us?" However, we refuse to listen; it is still a tough financial climate in Greece, and we do not want to be a burden.

As we walk back to Aunt's house, we take the scenic route and she scolds me for slouching when pushing the pram.

"Stand upright, like this." She demonstrates, taking the pram and holding her body erect. For some reason, slouching that way is not a good look in the village. Perhaps it makes me look too casual, lazy, even weak and sick. One has to look industrious and alert in public. She also complains about the hem of my dress.

"Let me cut it a few inches for you, just below the knee. It will look better; no one wears such long dresses here."

I like my floral maxi dress and have no desire to cut it so that I can conform to the local dress standards. My cousin and aunt also brush my hair back and clip it tightly behind, leaving half up and half down. They think it more flattering than the simple long ponytail I often wear. I allow them to show me what the acceptable Nigrita style is.

The streets are picturesque, with many houses decorated by red, white, yellow and pink flowers in pots, and on trees. The delicate scent makes the walk very pleasant. I think it would be nice to live here in the town and my husband agrees. "We could retire here," he says. I allow Aunt to show us several houses for sale. It is difficult to work out the real

cost of purchasing a house there. Aunt tells me we have to leave the water and electricity on all year, as it is expensive to disconnect and reconnect it. Then there is the *foros*, or taxes, much like the rates we pay at home. In the end, we decide against buying a house or apartment. It is too much of a risk in that financial climate, and the taxes are very high.

The Mountains

The green lush slopes of the mountains near Kizili look inviting, especially for a keen bushwalker like me. I ask my youngest aunt how far they are. It seems approximately ninety minutes' walk away. And perhaps another two to three hours to reach the top. The slopes remind me of the Grampians National Park in Victoria.

Aunt eyes me warily and says, "These mountains look close, but they are too far. It will take you four and a half hours to reach there, even with a car. And then the slopes are very steep. If you slip and fall or break a leg, no one can reach you there. No doctor will go there."

I think about this new information. How could those slopes be so far away? I have heard the rebels had hidden in them and came down every night for food. How was it possible that they could walk so far, then go back up overnight? I am not convinced.

"They look closer than that," I say.

"Yes, they do look closer; once we went there and it took hours by tractor."

My aunt turns away and I understand it is the end of that discussion. I feel disappointed. I am getting stir crazy in the village, spending all day at home while my aunt and uncle are working in the fields, and cousins work as painters and plasterers in a nearby village. The mountains would be a good distraction, a day trip by foot, a picnic on the slopes under the trees, something to look forward to and reminisce about later.

I hold my seven-month-old son against my chest and rub my cheek into his soft hair. He is so sweet. I am ignorant when it comes to local politics and taboos. I have some idea that the mountains are avoided by the locals, though exactly why is a mystery.

Back inside the house, we sit on the floor to roll fresh vine leaves, which have been lightly steamed, into cigar shapes stuffed with rice. My aunt calls them *sarmathakia*. She shows me how to half-cook the filling and rub handfuls of dried mint into the rice. My rolling technique improves as I learn to squeeze the *sarmathakia* so they retain a neater shape. I

do little all day except look after my son, so it is lovely to spend time with my youngest aunt. She has changed little in the seven years since I last saw her, and my cousins have all grown up. My cousin Maria got married the previous year and her daughter is eleven days older than my son. It is great to compare notes about what our babies do.

Later that evening we go for an evening stroll to the village square in Zitohori. Many locals sit in the *kafeneions* and watch as we approach. They ask who we are, then welcome us, stating they are relatives too, great-uncles or second cousins, or cousins of my parents. One man says he is Mother's second cousin and then asks for some money for cigarettes. I tell my husband to give him something. We give him ten euros and he says he would have preferred twenty. I feel disappointed my husband does not give him more money. Some people in the villages work hard and make a living, and the rest somehow exist. Their way of life is mysterious to me. All around the villages many fields lie abandoned. Working the land is back-breaking work and now considered the domain of the ignorant.

The following day is hot, and my aunt and cousins leave the house early to get work done before the siesta. We put on hats, take my cousin's pram and put the baby in it, walking up the deserted streets. We go to visit my grandmother, who is actually a great-aunt.

Grandmother tells me how naughty Father was as a young man. "He loved me more than the other relatives. He would come here and give me grapes, tea he picked from the mountain *flamouri* trees, oregano from the slopes, and he would say I could give some to the other relatives, but I never did. I kept it all for myself. He was popular with the girls. Instead of chasing them, they chased him. He came here one year with one girl, then the next year with another, and when I asked if it was the same girl, he would say, 'Yes, aunty, she is the same one, you have forgotten.' But the reality is that I had not forgotten; my mind is still sharp and was sharper then. I knew it was a new girl. The second girl he brought was your mother. She was very beautiful."

The poultry van comes down the street and Grandmother yells out, "Pretty boy, pretty boy, stop! Where were you all afternoon? I was waiting for you."

A young man comes out of the van and opens the back doors, revealing boxes of chicken pieces in different containers, one with thighs, one with necks, wings, giblets, gizzards. Grandmother asks the prices and gasps in mock horror at the cost. She gets a good deal, with gizzards and giblets for free along with some drumsticks. I carry them into the

kitchen for her and she tells me to put them in a large plastic bowl and fill it with water so she can wash them well later and cook them into a casserole. I hold my breath, not wanting to smell the chicken pieces, overcoming my vegetarian distaste for meat in order to please Grandmother and do some chores for her.

Later Grandmother tells me she did not believe her first husband Eraklis was dead.

“Well, during the Civil War, when people were telling me he was hiding in the mountains with the rebels, he was actually hiding at home, with me. So if they did not know where he was then, how could they know if he was alive or not? Maybe he did not want to be found.”

I think about this; it is a precarious one and a half hour journey from the mountains into the villages, some of it through open fields. Perhaps rebels were hiding close by in safe houses from time to time during the war?

The next day my cousin takes us to the next village, Leukotopos, where Father’s brother lives.

Grandfather Kleanthis’s house has been renovated in Leukotopos. A brand-new white shiny door covers the entrance. Father’s handmade green door with leadlight windows and brass doorknocker has been removed. I feel sad: that door is almost sixty years old; it is an antique. Once it was the finest door in all the nearby villages. Father made it for his mother, Athina, as a gift of love when he had completed his carpentry apprenticeship.

Swallows swoop under the porch, carrying mud and dried grass in their beaks, building their nests over the doorway and above the windows. Uncle has allowed the base of one nest to remain but keeps sweeping the new damp mud off the house, to prevent an extra five nests from being built. However, the swallows never give up, and keep flying in and building the foundations of the new nests again and again. I wonder if he will eventually give up fighting the birds. Their nests are on almost every façade in the village, and across the street, in the collapsed double-storey bluestone house, they build numerous nests without interruption. Cats also stalk the empty windows of the abandoned house. The curtains are torn to shreds and blow in the breeze like rags. It is an eyesore, but the owners have not bothered to come back to fix the house that once welcomed Queen Frederika. The owners live in an apartment in Thessaloniki, closer to their work, and never have

time for a trip back to the village to repair the patriarchal home. It is the house of Barbagianni, the man Father told me about in his youth. “When Queen Frederika passed through the village, Barbagianni told her, ‘Come to my house or I will break your head.’ I don’t think the queen understood what he had said to her as he was speaking Pontian Greek.”

I sit in the verandah with Uncle while Aunt brings us refreshing cold water to drink. It is almost as if I have never left. Uncle is as calm and generous as ever. We are shown to the room with a double bed, soft quilts and featherdown pillows.

In the afternoon we walk with Uncle towards the end of the street which runs through the village. He shows us the huge water pump called the *bastooni* where the tractors fill up with water before watering the seedlings as they are automatically planted. Mountains spring up in all four directions, some bigger than others. One towards Turkey, the other before Bulgaria, another not far from the village, and another separates the Greek Macedonian region from the rest of Greece. It is as if this valley is in the centre of the world, well-watered by many streams and rivers. Bears and wolves would come down from the mountains into these fertile valleys. I have heard Mount Pangeon holds many gold and silver mines, most disused now, and also an old lepers’ colony. The local mountains near Seita hold something more sinister, something I will not find out about until I return to Australia.

We spend many days doing very little and go into town with Uncle and Aunt to shop, eat generous lunches, have siestas, take evening walks around the village and discover it doesn’t have many shops, and half are closed. Several buildings have collapsed from disuse. The population is dying out: the youth leave for other towns to escape the rural life that I admire so much. Trees are everywhere. Walnuts, almonds, figs, olives, cherries, ironwort and linden trees. Almost every home boasts one or two climbing roses in full bloom. Fat cats sleep in doorways; pigeons coo from treetops. Every morning and afternoon, the vendors come with their vans and small trucks, selling everything from meat to carpets, shoes, or vegetables. We run towards the fruit and vegetable van. I see a nice fat melon and promptly choose it, before asking the price. It turns out that one watermelon and one cantaloupe costs fifteen euros, more than double the price in Australia. I feel guilty, having chosen the most expensive fruit in the truck. Uncle refuses to exchange the fruit for smaller or cheaper ones. Uncle and Aunt are well-off compared

to many other relatives. Fifty old olive trees and a few lemon trees cover the majority of their block. The front has flowers of every description and a pretty vegetable patch. I wonder if these olive trees have been planted in the late twenties or around 1930 when the original house was built by my great-grandfather for his son Kleanthis, my grandfather. Apparently, he built five houses in this village for his sons.

Not everyone has the desire to look back into the past, especially when it is crowded with people who are now absent. But I have been looking at the past all my life.

The sky is azure blue, dusted with a few wisps of cloud near Mount Pangeon in the distance. I gaze around me in a circle to take in the view, marvelling at the way the mountains are positioned like protectors in all four directions. My husband and I take turns at holding our seven-month-old son. He wears a cotton cap to protect his head from the sun. On either side of the road are orchards and fields, each bursting with fruit trees, herbs and vegetables, or just ploughed and waiting to be planted. Thousands of cherry trees laden with red fruit stretch out on the left, and tobacco seedlings are on the right. A man is ploughing a large field with his tractor as we pass. We walk towards Kizili, but the mountains do not really appear any closer. We joke that we might walk all the way to the foot of the mountains and back again. After one kilometre, we change our minds and decide to walk back. Along the way we wave at the man in the tractor; he gets out and waves back then drives his tractor closer to us.

“I am planting this whole field with oregano, then on the other side I will plant tobacco. I also have cherry trees near the water pump. If you like you can walk in and pick some cherries. One whole tree is yours.”

“Thank you, Uncle.”

“I spent a lot of time with your father. I was ten years old when he left. He still remembers me.”

I look back at the mountains. They are no longer looking so beautiful and inviting. Rather, they look like a mousetrap set with bait, awaiting a foolish traveller to enter their realm.

My husband carries our baby and we turn and walk towards the village. I begin to feel claustrophobic in the village, as everyone knows who I am, without me knowing who they are. People keep their distance, going about their work, but also aware of me, my

husband and baby passing by. The late afternoon sun makes the shadow of the pump look like a gallows. It is unnerving. I decide it is time to move on.

Anxiety begins to pull at me; the mountains look dark and oppressive. There is no internet, few shops, and very little to do except work the land and spend time with family and friends over long lunches, endless coffees and conversation. It feels like every eye is on me, gossiping about me, watching my every step. Did Father feel like this as a young man? Is that why he felt the need to go into the mountains, roam here and there, and eventually move to Thessaloniki to set up shop somewhere more cosmopolitan, where there is anonymity?

That night I wake to light footsteps on the road. Light as feathers. It sounds like someone has entered the verandah and is trying to open one of the metal shutters. I close my eyes and try to sleep, hoping to block out the soft noises. But it is a full moon and the moonbeams slide through the small cracks in the metal shutter and float onto the bed. I remember Mother telling me of her father's warning: "Only evildoers roam about on a full moon, stealing, killing, doing bad deeds." I hold my breath and lie still, holding my baby to my chest. I also remember Mother telling us stories of the *kalikanzaroi* who roam at night. And I remember the unease my relatives show whenever I ask about the mountains. Do they fear the dead? Ghosts? The horrendous acts which occurred there? Suddenly my desire to remain here in the village evaporates. After some time, I fall asleep, not knowing if someone had been prowling in front of the house, or if it has just been the cats.

On the drive back to Nigrita, the car runs over something on the road. I turn to see what it is. Something long like a tree branch lies on the road.

We have injured or killed a huge snake crossing the road. I see it as an omen. Perhaps I have made the right decision to leave the village. Or perhaps it is the sign of a lost opportunity to discover the secrets of the past.

Maimundire

When I am back in Australia, I ask Father, “If Grandfather Christos had buried Uncle Eraklis and seen his head and what remained of his face, how could the fascist supporters have cut off his head and danced with it in Zitohori, beating drums the whole night to celebrate the death of a communist rebel?” Father does not seem to hear the logic in my question. He says, “Yes the fascists cut off his head and danced in the village with glee, as if they had caught a lion.” I try to point out they couldn’t have his head if he had already been buried and Grandfather Christos had been the last one to see him. Father does not hear me. He is lost in his thoughts.

This is the type of conflicting information that all my relatives have about several events. One person says one thing, and another says something else. Which is true? Are they both true somehow? Or is one rumour and the other truth? Are the disappearances attributed to fascists or communists also not always true? Have people fled in secret, leaving their families behind to escape being taken to fight in the war?

Father tells me that the rebels were partly feared and hated in the local villages by those who had something to hide. There were many reasons people would inform the police about neighbours or others they knew, such as envy, fear, hatred or revenge. If someone had more food or animals, that was also enough for others to envy them. Any suspected communists were reported to the authorities by those with grudges. This would then lead to arrests, interrogation, possibly violence and death. However, the person who had been the informant was also in danger of revenge from the leftists. The rebels would come down from the mountains in the night and take men and boys over the age of sixteen to fight with them. Usually they approached relatives and friends, but sometimes it was other villagers. Few people wanted to leave their families and fight in the mountains, risking their lives for a cause which was outlawed. The rebels also took traitors in the night, dragged them from their beds and sometimes threw them into *Maimundire* where they perished in the cold dark water. Father explains to me that the name *Maimundire* is Turkish and it means “deep place”. It is a very steep, small valley with a river passing through it. Once you were thrown in, there was no escape. It was the execution ground

the local leftist rebels used to deal with fascists, enemies, collaborators and informers. It was also used during the Axis War to dispose of collaborators.

Father explains how people feared the night during the Civil War. “One night the rebels came to our house. In the middle of the night, they knocked on the door. Mother answered and they came into the house and searched it for any hidden fascists. They were looking for an uncle and cousin who were rightists; because they had not found them in their own homes, they came to our house. However, the uncle and cousin were hidden under my bed, the one place they had not searched. I had pretended to be asleep. Mother did not like to lie, but she also felt that she should protect innocent relatives sought by the rebels because of their political beliefs.”

“Did the rebels come often to your house?” I ask.

“Yes,” Father says. “Another time Uncle Eraklis came and took Kostas, my eldest brother, with him to help load the cannons and machine guns in the mountains or carry water. Kostas was only sixteen, he had never stayed away from home and was frightened. It was dirty, cold and dark up in the mountains, full of lice and disease. He went with Uncle, but it was clear he was not happy to go. At the first opportunity he got, on the way to the mountains, he absconded and hid under a bush. Uncle assumed he had gone ahead with the others and so did not try to recapture him. Kostas came back home around dawn; his arms and legs had been scratched from hiding under bushes, and he was shaking with cold. He stayed indoors for a few days afterwards, so he was not seen. I pitied him then, seeing him sick from hypothermia and the stress of trying to evade capture.”

Blood Ties

Sitting in a city-bound train approaching North Melbourne station, I am lulled by the slow rhythmic movement of the carriage. My mind goes blank then wanders freely, daydreaming in the moments before I fall asleep. Suddenly I begin thinking about Grandmother Athina. I think how I have not seen her since childhood and how perhaps I should visit her. Then I think, what if she is ill, or worse, what if she is dying? I feel sad at the possibility of never seeing her to make a new connection and repair our relationship. Then a bright light comes towards me and I feel my grandmother is speaking to me, telling me she is sorry for not being there for me, and for not having a relationship with me. She tells me she loves me. I feel she is asking for my forgiveness and I feel a rush of love and forgive her. Then the light fades and I am sad. When I get off the train, I decide it was a dream. The next day, Father gets a telegram stating that Grandmother Athina died the day before. I feel sadness and regret for what might have been and can now never be. But it teaches me how precious time is with parents, grandparents and all relatives. Life is limited: it starts and it has an end.

Father comes to speak to me the day he learns of his mother's death. He tells me, "Now you are my mother." I am not sure if he means because I was named after her that I have to step up and fill the gap somehow, or if it is a cultural thing, which is part of the reason children are named after parents. Since that day something has changed. I feel responsibility for Father and in a way it is as if I have become his mother. I want to shelter and protect him and look after him.

My bond with my relatives is strong, because when Grandfather Kleanthis dies, I feel ice-cold lips on my cheek at night, during a dream, kissing me goodnight and also goodbye. My heart fills with inexplicable sadness. The tugs my heart has been feeling for six months, the calls and farewells, have finally come to pass. His spirit has been calling me to him and I feel it on some level. I wanted to go and visit Grandfather, but I do not have leave from work, and I am still saving for my trip. The next day I find out from Mother that Grandfather passed away. She had a phone call that morning. It is a huge blow. I

promised him that I would return. If we lived in the same country, I would have been by his side often. But living in the Antipodes means separation and pain.

When my Great-aunt Euthemia passes away I see an olive-skinned shadowy figure come towards me, trying to tell me something while I am alone doing overtime in the evening at work. I think it is a trick my tired eyes play on me because I need to go home to rest after staring at the computer screen for eleven hours. There are rumours at work of a ghost in the building, but I think it is a joke. I decide the dark shadow is the result of exhaustion. Then at night I feel cold, wooden lips kissing me goodbye again on my cheek as I fall asleep. The next day I am told of Great-aunt's death by Mother.

Living in Australia is wonderful, but it also led to separation and irretrievable loss for me and my parents. The loss of family members and cultural capital cannot be replaced. I resolve to be near my own family always. Being on the other side of the world is hard.

I think of the Tree of Life, a majestic tree, with large limbs and branches shooting off into smaller branches. Each branch is separate but part of a whole. My older relatives are the lower branches of the tree and I and my siblings and our children are the higher branches. To me, we are all one: one blood, one heart, one mind. Like a chain, we go all the way back to Adam and Eve. One day I will also become a lower branch, and the future generations will be the higher branches. That is life; it must go on. Family must go on. Life must go on. But the bonds which link us, past, present and future, transcend time and space. In the Pontian tradition, I kiss the eyes and hands of my ancestors and kiss the foreheads of the future generations. Love never ends; even when it seems to, it goes on forever.

Myth

Mother looks at the branches of the almond blossoms she has brought in from her yard. They are delicately scented and so beautiful. She starts telling me a Greek myth, one I have not heard before. It is about Demophon, the son of Theseus who married the Thracian princess Phyllis and then departed to help his father. He told her he would meet her at the same place again within three years. She waited and waited for him, returning endlessly to the place near a tree where they were to meet. Eventually, when it was almost three years, she gave up hope and became pale and weak, and died. She became an almond tree. After three years Demophon returned and searched for her everywhere but could not find her. Then when he went to the place they were to meet, he saw an almond tree which suddenly raised its branches as if to embrace him and burst into white flower. He understood that Phyllis had become the tree and embraced her.

When Mother reaches the end of her story, I see there are tears in her eyes. I remember a black-and-white photograph of her standing on the lower branches of an almond tree in bloom. She must have been fifteen, wearing a white sweater, cardigan and fitted skirt, with flat ballet slippers. On the back was a short sad verse, something like “this body you see is an illusion”, meaning that the soul is immortal. I think this photo may have been given to Father as a keepsake during their long engagement. The myth of Phyllis reminds me of this photo and the stress Mother must have felt while waiting for her father-in-law to return from exile so that she could finally marry. Mother told me many times of the trials she had to endure while engaged. She would endure anything to save her reputation and resolved to marry Father no matter what. “*Ekini itane oi mira mou,*” Mother said, meaning that was her fate.

Mother had always waited for Father, for him to return from work, to do the shopping for her when she was too unwell to leave the house, to bring her news from abroad because he visited Greece more often than she did. She grew used to waiting for him, but Father did not like to wait for Mother. She had always been at home and any absence was difficult for him to tolerate. He had grown accustomed to her always being there when he needed her. I never imagined that one day Father would have to wait for Mother. I

remember the colour of Grandmother Fotini's wedding dress, pink organza with a white veil, like an almond blossom. The almond blossom symbolises the bride, her wedding dress, and her purity and fidelity. The almond blossom symbolises my mother's love for my father. I look at the almond blossoms in their yard in spring. They are special. Softer and purer than a red rose. I understand Mother has great patience and that when she was young, her purity of mind and heart along with her physical beauty would have made her captivating. I look at my parents' engagement photo on the wall. It is still one of the most beautiful photographs I have ever seen.

Epilogue 2020

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Matthew 24:35)

I visit Father and Mother with my son on Saturday, twenty-seventh of June 2020. I am shocked to see Father’s hair has all turned white at the back. He used to have some dark grey or black strands. It is like he has aged overnight. There is a white aura around him as if he has been whitewashed. I look at him with fear in my heart. Is it time for Father to die? Father is distant; he does not look me in the eye for long and does not spend much time with my son. Does he know something is up? Has he met with someone with flu-like symptoms and know he is at risk?

Father does not say much but he mentions the dream he had just before he broke his arm five weeks earlier. He dreamt that he was painting walls white but then when he turned around, they were all black. He was disturbed by this dream and assumed it was about his brother in Greece. He called his brother to check on him, but then the arm of a wheelbarrow under a tarp in the backyard tripped him up and he fell and broke his arm.

“I thought the dream was about my brother, but it was about me,” Father says. Broken arm or not, Father resumes going out five days a week to shop or go to the bank. He does not wear a mask or gloves. Because he is physically strong, he is complacent about coronavirus.

My son is playing on the trampoline in the backyard. Father comes out to see us; he looks for a moment at my son jumping up and down, then turns around and goes back inside. This is strange behaviour for Father. He is so quiet, so withdrawn, so lacking in life.

When we go back inside he is sitting quietly in his armchair. He may be in pain from his broken arm. The weather is cold and he has the heater on. “Let’s give Papou some prayers for his broken arm,” I say to my son. We both go to the side of Father’s armchair and hold our hands several inches away from Father’s shoulder, near where the break is. After a few minutes, Father relaxes a little. Because I feel uneasy, I know we cannot stay long.

Two days later Mother tells me on the phone that Father has flu-like symptoms. My heart sinks. On Tuesday he calls my brother to come and take him to the hospital. My brother tells me he does not feel like coming because of the risk. He calls an ambulance instead.

The ambulance rings me to interpret for them. “He may just have a nasty flu,” they say. “If he takes Panadol and brings down his fever, he might feel better then. If he feels worse or has trouble breathing then he can call the ambulance again.”

“But he said he can’t sleep or eat or drink and his face is numb,” I tell them, annoyed that they are just brushing off Father’s illness.

“Well look, if you really want, we can take him to the hospital but then he might just be sent back home. It could just be the flu.”

“Baba,” I ask Father, “what do you want to do?” Father says he will try the Panadol and see how he feels. The next day his fever breaks, and he gets up, gets dressed and goes out. I am not happy that Father has not stayed home to rest.

“I am fine, the ambulance told me it is just a flu,” he says. I am disappointed that the ambulance has apparently made that judgement; Father has not been tested for coronavirus.

I say to Father, “Please be careful; stay home. You have a heart condition and chronic lymphocytic leukemia; you are at risk if you get coronavirus.”

“What heart condition?” Father scoffs. He seems to be forgetting he had two stents put in about eight years earlier. I feel helpless – I want to shake Father and wake him up to the risk for himself and Mother, but I do not know how to make him listen.

All his life Father has roamed freely, like an eagle flying high above everyone else, untouchable. I pray for Father. I pray and pray. Then I have a dream. In my dream a voice says, “Who do you want to save? Your mother or your father?” “Both of them,” I reply.

“No, you can only have one,” the voice says.

I have been praying since childhood that they both will live a hundred years.

Now I sit in a state of shock.

My chest feels as though someone has kicked the breath out of me. I have been robbed. Father is gone. He got coronavirus and passed away last Wednesday. I have not slept most nights since then, and hardly eaten. I pray for his soul at night when I cannot sleep.

I am the second-last person in my family to see him alive. The ICU calls me to ask if I want to come in to see Father. Previously all visitors were banned. I am surprised by this change. I am not sure what state Father is in; he has been there away from us for eleven days. I know he is extremely ill with pneumonia. I ask the nurse in the early afternoon to call a Greek Orthodox priest to read prayers for him. The nurse tells me that Father smiles while listening to the prayers.

I arrive at the hospital a few hours later at ten past four, with a scarf covering my hair. I am given a face mask and told to wait to be escorted to ICU. A woman comes to collect me. I go up the elevator and am given a gown, face shield and a different type of mask which blocks out air from all sides, and gloves. I dress and go to Father. He is breathing shallowly, propped up on pillows; they have sedated him. I pray for him to live. “Please, Baba,” I say, “keep breathing, keep trying to get better. I don’t want you to die. But, if you can’t keep going and choose to die, Jesus and the angels are waiting for you to take you to the highest paradise. Do not be afraid.”

I hold Father’s hand; it is cold like ice. I ask for another blanket from the nurses. I am upset to see that he is dressed only in a thin blue robe open at the back, with a single sheet over him. Father has always felt the cold. But he is unable to speak or ask for anything. He must be in so much pain and suffering. All this time in ICU he has not spoken. The ventilator stopped him speaking, and now that it has been removed, without warning by the doctor, he is unconscious and sedated. The nurse sedated him when I arrived, so I am unsure if Father could have spoken to me or why he was sedated exactly at the moment I arrived.

I stroke Father’s head. “I love you, Baba,” I say. “You are the best, best father in the world. Don’t go. Don’t leave me alone.”

I massage Father’s legs and rub his feet. Father does not get any warmer, even when I put the extra blanket on him. I look at his perfectly manicured toenails and elegantly shaped toes. These are not the feet of an old person about to die. When I worked as a theatre technician and wheeled old patients around, I noticed that they had gnarled toes with grey twisted toenails. Father looks in perfect health compared to them. I pray again to Jesus to save Father. “Jesus, you raised Lazarus from the dead, please save my Father.” I put a large gold diamante-encrusted crucifix in Father’s hand and perform his last rites. I wash

his hands and feet with holy water and make the sign of the cross on his forehead. I had taken that holy water from the Church of the Miraculous Crucifix in Rome the previous year. Mother and my sister call on video chat separately to speak to Father and say their goodbyes. Mother is still sick in the Covid ward, but she is recovering.

I think I see in my mind's eye a shimmering eight-foot angel with gigantic white wings descend through the ceiling and come to the foot of Father's bed. Maybe grief has made me delirious. I imagine Jesus also coming to Father's bed and blood from his stigmata falling on Father's chest. I pray for Father to be healed. A miracle is what I want.

The phone rings and someone speaks to the nurse on duty. "The security guard has called to say someone should escort you out of the building." My two hours are up. "Have you done what you need to?" the nurse asks. "Say your final goodbye." The nurse begins to take my protective gown and mask off. I do not want to go, but realise I have no choice. If it was the other way around, Father would have fought tooth and nail to stay by my side. He would never leave me the way I am being forced to leave him.

I will not be there to see Father breathe his last. Even this is being stolen from us. I run back and place the small bottle of holy water on Father's chest. "Father, I have to go now," I say. "They are asking me to leave. You will now be taken to see Mother."

Father opens his eyes. Has he heard me all along? "Father, it's me, Athina," I say and take a couple of steps forward. "I have to go now. You will be taken to see Mother soon. I love you very much, Baba. Goodbye, bye, bye." Father's bed is wheeled around to the side by the nurse, but he keeps looking at me from the corner of his eye. He has the tiniest hint of a smile on his face. I want to run to him and kiss his face and hug him but it is too dangerous and I am not allowed back to his side since my protective gear has been removed. I still wear my scarf and face shield. I don't know how, but I force myself to turn and walk away, feeling numb inside. I want to run back, but the nurse is waiting for me up ahead. This is not fair. Not for me or my family or Father. I always kissed him on both sides of the face and hugged him. He must be confused about why I am turning my back on him in his moment of need. The loving circle we have is so strong, I always expected it would never end.

Giant sobs and wails come out of me and shake my body as I walk back to my car in the dark winter evening. I chant prayers all the way home, still hoping for a miracle. When I

get home my husband opens the door for me and tells me to dump all my clothes in the laundry basin and walk straight into the shower and wash head to foot. I feel a heavy feeling of dread come over my heart. When I come out of the shower, I call Mother on her mobile. “Your Father is dead. He is dead. He just died now. He looks like he is sleeping.”

I scream. “Baba, Baba,” I wail and collapse, holding onto the wall. My husband lifts me by my arms and holds me, but I am shaking uncontrollably. “He was such a strong man,” he says. “I never thought he would die before a hundred. But if he can die, anyone can die.”

I am led to the bed where I curl up and wail. My son comes and hugs me. “Mama, don’t worry,” he says. “I will take care of you.” I kiss him and say, “Thank you, my beautiful boy, Papou’s beautiful boy.”

My parents have been the biggest part of our lives. I love them so much. But the reality is, this life is temporary. I remember my aunt in Greece saying, “What is man but a breath of air?”

When the bells of the Resurrection ring on Judgement Day, everyone will give account of their sins and good deeds. I know Father will go to Heaven, because he is a pure, innocent soul, magical and inspiring. I pray that he will reside in Heaven for ever and have everlasting peace.

I remember when Father explained to me the symbology in the song “The Bells Will Toll”: “The deceased hold the rope of the church bells in their hands under the ground. Then on Judgement Day, they will pull the rope and bells will ring.” Father’s eyes shone with appreciation of the beauty in those poetic images. Though Father was not very religious, he believed in God and he believed in salvation. Father never liked to speak of death, or his own death, but a little over a year before he died he asked me, “Make me a beautiful marble gravestone. You will, won’t you?”

“Yes, Father,” I said. Father understood I would make sure his wishes were carried out.

In March 2021 the grave monument is in place, and my family and I hold the third required memorial service. The priest comes to say the Trisagion prayer. My husband has decided to pull the rope of the church bell near the graves. The sound of the bell is loud

and authoritative. I shake as the sound vibrates through the air. I know Father can hear it from beyond the grave.

I light a candle by his picture and burn myrrh incense on coals. Father was born at the beginning of the Axis War in Greece, when Italy and Nazi Germany invaded. He had lived through the Greek Civil War and he died during the world war on coronavirus.

Father is holding the ropes of the bells in his hands and I am waiting to meet him again. I know he will be there. He has gone ahead to greet us when our time comes. I imagine I see his face in the shadows of the room before I go to sleep at night, watching silently. “Goodnight, Baba,” I whisper.

The bells will toll. The bells will toll. Hush, they are about to ring. The bells will toll.

Mnemography and the Greek Civil War

Postmemory, Symbology and Migration Trauma

Explored through Creative Oral History

Introduction

This PhD thesis consists of two components: the creative work, *The Bells Will Toll*, and the exegesis. The creative work presents qualitative research in the form of oral history interviews translated and adapted into a unique form of creative oral history that I term *mnemography*. The exegesis explains the aims of the thesis, the research questions, and the difficulties, challenges and insights encountered in the writing of the mnemography. As a creative oral history, the mnemography contributes to various fields of study, including postmemory research, memory studies, oral history, migration trauma and our knowledge of the Greek Civil War. Also, the mnemography has the potential to enhance reconciliation by presenting new information which offers alternative narratives of the Greek Civil War to the predominantly rightist memoirs published in the English language.

My mnemography offers a creative oral history of the experiences of my relatives living in the Serras region of Greece during and immediately after the Greek Civil War. This account of their experiences enhances the historical record, by offering minute ethnographic-type detail about the daily lives of such people, and also clarifies the way my relatives traversed strong differences of political opinion within the family and society at the time.

More than this, though, this thesis captures the way the memories of my parents and grandparents recorded in the mnemography have come to inhabit and haunt me. This transfer of memory is often best understood in terms of trauma, in this case the intergenerational remembering of trauma experienced through times of war and financial crisis perceived through the further trauma of the rupture of migration.

The first of these traumas is discussed below in relation to historian Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory (2012), while the second is explored in terms of historian Joy Damousi's work on migration trauma (2015).

The stories were a part of my psyche, a part of my memories of Greece, and I could not forget them. My parents and I spoke often of their stories and those of our relatives, and they asked me to record them. I felt I needed to do this before our older relatives passed away and that opportunity was lost. I wanted a family record for myself and my son, nephews and extended family.

I felt unsatisfied and disappointed when I read memoirs of people who had lived through the Greek Civil War, most of which were rightist in orientation. Various rightist, collaborationist and leftist groups existed in Greece from the Axis War and persisted through the Greek Civil War and in some form during the dictatorship. Leftists were silenced and subjected to ongoing persecution until the end of the dictatorship. There cannot be true and lasting reconciliation if there is only a single narrative. My mnemography adds another strand to existing narratives and highlights that not only rightists suffered at the hands of leftists, but leftists and their families were also persecuted, perhaps to a greater and longer lasting extent than rightists, as the government and later the dictatorship was mainly rightist or far-right fascist.

Historians Nikos Marantzidis and Giorgos Antoniou claim that there are still taboo topics in research of the Axis War, Greek Civil War and the dictatorship. This is primarily "the issue of participation, the issue of previous ideological, cultural and ethnic identities, and the issue of violence" as well as the participation of women (Marantzidis & Antoniou 2004, p. 229). Aspects of these taboo topics are addressed in my mnemography, such as the forced participation of Mother's female cousins in helping leftist rebels.

Originally, the stories that relate to these and other topics took the conventional form of oral history transcriptions, with additions from my own memory, though not enough for the text to qualify as a memoir. As it developed, my manuscript came to occupy an in-between space, hovering above and between the genres of ethnography, oral history, creative nonfiction and memoir. The unclassifiable nature of my project led me to inaugurate a new sub-genre of life writing that I have called “mnemography”, a form of creative oral history. The term *mnemography* means “memory writing” in Greek, and as such it comes close to capturing the way that the memories of my parents and grandparents became stories that were passed onto me, almost as a form of inheritance, thereby becoming a cultural memory that we shared. In this way, my mnemography is an expression of the intergenerational transmission of cultural memories and practices.

One element of what my immediate relatives transmitted to me was experiences of trauma visited upon them by the Greek Civil War and its aftermath.

Hirsch uses the word *postmemory* to describe not only a “personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness, but an evolving ethical and theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory, and intergenerational acts of transfer” (2012, p. 2). Postmemory refers to inherited intergenerational trauma from the memories of parents, grandparents and other relatives which still have a traumatic impact on the next generation and are “inherited memories”.

Hence, my mnemography is an expression of postmemory because it registers inherited memories from the previous generations that are having an ongoing impact on the next generation – the inherited memories have become my memories as well. I contend that, as a genre, mnemography is a form of creative writing that records these kinds of

intergenerational transmissions, preserving stories that would otherwise be lost and forgotten or reduced to myth, about which future generations could only speculate.

Mnemography is written by family members of the second or 1.5 generation immigrants because they have a living connection with those they are writing about. The 1.5 generation are those born in the country of origin; in terms of postmemory they have a living connection with their relatives or are child survivors (Hirsch 2012, p. 15). Second-generation family members may have a living connection but were not necessarily born in the country of origin of the preceding generations. I belong to the 1.5 generation in my family, as I was born in Greece and lived there for almost the first four years of my life during the dictatorship. Had I been born in Australia, I would have been second generation.

This living connection with my parents, grandparents and other relatives in Greece facilitated the intergenerational transfer of their memories to me. I was haunted by their stories, and by my own memories of my brief childhood in Greece, which ended with the traumatic rupture of migration to Australia three months before my fourth birthday. The desire to return to Greece never left me, but it was not so much Greece that I was homesick for, but the family relationships that were so severely disrupted through migration.

The mnemography that emerged from my recording of my relatives' memories reveals how those memories morphed into approximate memories of my own and exist in a third state in my daily life. In this way, my mnemography is an expression of both postmemory and migration trauma, while also being a means of honouring the memories and ways of life of people and times that have now passed.

As a new sub-genre of historical life-writing, mnemographies are creative works that capture something of the transfiguration of memories from one generation to the next.

Mnemography does not necessarily have to include traumatic war memories or migration trauma, but these do facilitate a stronger intergenerational transfer of memories to the next generation, such as between me and my parents and grandparents. My immediate family's migration was another form of trauma caused by the ramifications of the Civil War, as it was largely a result of the continued harassment of leftists and their relatives. My father said files on him were sent to wherever he was working, by rightist relatives who harboured ill feelings against him and his ex-rebel father in exile. To escape the constant questioning of police and governmental authorities, Father decided we should leave Greece.

Postmemory and my mnemography share similarities in that they can deal with traumatic memories of loss, war, and displacement or migration. However, mnemography includes fine-grained ethnographic detail of everyday life, including joyful memories and accounts ways of living now gone, and does not have to include traumatic memories of war and migration.

While postmemory can refer to memories supported by photographic archives, posters and written works, mnemography is a creative oral history allowing silenced voices to speak again and, in doing so, honours the memories of those forebears. Audio and video records of these oral histories, as well as letters and journals, can form part of the mnemography archive.

My mnemography is a repository of family memories. It is postmemory filtered through the traumatic experience of migration, time and distance. As these stories began from my early childhood, they became a part of me. Many of these memories were traumatic memories, but I accepted them in my hunger for family connections. Eventually I was unable to tell which parts of the memories were entirely my own and which parts were

those of my parents or other relatives. I have visions of events which occurred before I was born, which is another element of inherited intergenerational trauma.

Damousi clarifies that the need to remember means that family memories must be passed on (2015, p. 2). By remembering my relatives and their stories, my parents and I would “return” to Greece. In a second we could once again “inhabit” those places, times and relationships that were so distant. Memory has power, and by remembering often intergenerational transfer of memories occurs more completely. Damousi further upholds that living through war creates traumatic memories, “not just for those who witness them but also for future generations” (2015, p. 1). She describes these memories as “a perennial challenge to those who experience them, and to those who attempt, long after, to fathom the enduring depths of past human violence” (2015, p. 1). Much like Hirsch, Damousi also contends that traumatic memories “often haunt individuals, and the effects of this continue to ripple outward from these individuals to families and communities for decades after” (2015, p. 1). This “haunting” of memories is evident throughout my mnemography.

Moving to Australia resulted in my parents’ memories of Greece being “frozen” from the 1940s to the beginning of the 1970s. They were both young children during the Civil War and experienced severe hardship. They left before the dictatorship came to an end in the early ’70s, so for them Greece would always remain a different place to the Greece my relatives lived through, because it was neither contextualised nor diluted by the social and political developments that followed.

My longing to return to Greece and recapture extended family relationships would also remain trapped in time, through the experiences of my three-year-old self, even though most of my relatives in Greece appeared to have moved on from longing for us to return.

I had not understood how much my parents and I were trapped in time, even when Grandmother Fotini told me in 1996 that *o xenos fevgi* (“a stranger leaves”). For my relatives we were “gone” and had become strangers, but for my parents and me, our relatives were forever a part of our present.

Damousi further explains that “memories of deprivation and violence have haunted these post-war Greek immigrants and shaped them in ways that were not readily fathomable to Australians” (2015, pp.107–108). My parents and I had no one else to share these memories from Greece with, neither our Australian neighbours nor other Greek friends. There was no place for this. Whenever there was a political discussion with others outside the family, it often escalated into a full-blown argument, such as when Father had a fist fight with a fascist Greek taxi driver in Melbourne when I was ten, several years after the fascist dictatorship fell in Greece. I felt embarrassed by the incident, sitting quietly in the back of the taxi, unable to understand at the time why Father had retaliated in anger. The reconciliation happening in Greece was slow to arrive to the diasporas in places like Australia. As stated earlier, my family and migrants in general are “frozen in time”, keeping alive the memories and ideologies of the time of our departure.

The possibility of future retaliation for past events is one argument nonfiction writer David Rieff makes in his book *In Praise of Forgetting* (2016). By not remembering all trauma from the past, we possibly eliminate retaliation years or decades later. He warns that “too much forgetting is hardly the only Risk. There is also too much remembering” (p. 19). Too much remembering could reopen old wounds and find a new way to cause harm. In the case of my mnemography, there is no desire for retaliation. Only the desire to remember and reconnect persists, and the hope that peace will remain.

The motivations and methods for the writing of my mnemography are discussed in the first chapter of this exegesis, including the production of the oral histories. The second chapter discusses in greater detail how mnemography is an expression of postmemory and the third chapter explores how mnemography contributes to existing knowledge of the Greek Civil War. The fourth chapter explores the symbology used in the mnemography. This is followed by the conclusion.

Chapter 1

The Bells Will Toll: Motivations, Method and Form

This chapter explores the methods used to record the oral history interviews in order to create the mnemography *The Bells Will Toll*, and discusses the ethical decisions I had to make and difficulties encountered in the research and writing process.

I will begin with a discussion of why it was important for me and my family to record our family history. I can remember hearing the stories of my parents' and relatives' lives from Greece and the Greek Civil War all through my childhood, especially after being displaced by migration which forced us to see ourselves as "other" in a new environment that demanded assimilation. What was normal in Greece became foreign in Australia. There was no avenue then for my family to share our stories more widely, so we kept them to ourselves. These narratives helped us maintain our Greek identity while negotiating a new assimilated identity in Australia.

Psychologist Jerome Bruner explains that we have "no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of a narrative" (2004, p. 692). My father in particular was very skilled at telling stories. His narratives always had a beginning, a middle and an end, and were not mere anecdotes. He used these stories to inform us of our family history, and life lessons he had learned. We combated our sense of separation and homesickness by remembering our past and our relatives in Greece. These stories became a part of my life in Australia, a way for returning me to those we loved overseas.

The form of narrative which is most relevant to *The Bells Will Toll* is oral history. Oral historian Valerie Yow states that "narrative is a strength of oral history" but advises us to also consider "the limitations of the life review and how to use these limitations", as it can result in "a picture that is narrow, idiosyncratic, or ethnocentric" (2005, p. 17). Such

limitations could relate to what is left out of the oral history interview. Obviously not every detail can be included in the life-history account, as this would require hours and hours of interviews with specific questions asked by the interviewer, some of which the interviewee may not be able to answer, and even then, it would be impossible to cover everything. An example of this limitation of oral history is discussed again at the end of this chapter, about how I had to do research to come up with my assessment of what unit of measurement an *oka* was. Yow advises that oral history also “offers the benefit of seeing in its full complexity the world of another” (2005, p. 23).

As discussed in the introduction, mnemography is a creative sub-genre of oral history. While oral history records the telling of past events, my mnemography records how past events have become a part of me and have entered my present. The memories of my relatives have, over time, merged with my own, becoming something of a third entity. I feel I am honouring them by inhabiting and sharing these memories.

Interestingly, this practice of negotiating our Greek identities through story and memory is not unique to my family. In writing of Greek migrants in Australia, historian Joy Damousi notes that their stories “have not been easy to integrate into the new narrative of assimilation in Australia” and “have been passed down to subsequent generations as ways of forging new and retaining old family identities”, adding that this “served to reinforce this generation’s own sense of Greekness and separateness from mainstream Australia” (2015, p. 108).

Our family memories stayed at home until now: there was never any avenue for them to be shared externally. Although they have always been present to me, the stories of my family’s memories did not fully haunt me until I went back to Greece and my grandparents asked me to write their stories down. For Derrida this type of haunting of

the past in the present reveals how the dead can be more powerful than the living cited in Fowler 2005, p. 199). I had kept journals since my teen years and these memories of Greece would occasionally creep in, but I tried to keep them out of my writing as a teenager as I focused on my new life in Australia. Greece receded into the past and I began to bury my longing to return there.

When I did finally return to Greece in my early twenties, it became apparent that my ties with my birthplace were still very strong. Being there felt like having a long drink of water after being thirsty for a very long time. What was unfamiliar quickly became familiar again, so that once I was back in Australia, my memories of my rich and connected life in Greece crowded in and the homesickness returned.

My parents' and grandparents' requests to record their stories eventually resulted in me taking on the project and enrolling in the doctorate. After obtaining ethics approval, I began the selection process for the interviewees. My task was easier than for those conducting conventional oral history wherein potential interviewees must be solicited through newspaper advertisements or similar means (Yow 2005, p. 80), as I already knew who my family members were. I initiated contact in regard to the project first by telephone, then by email to one of my younger female cousins, who acted as the main contact between me and my relatives in Greece. Her English was reasonably good so I sent the informed-consent forms and information for the participants to her. She translated these into Greek for me as she also worked as an interpreter, and I sent them for ethics approval. When I visited Greece, I gave hard copies of these documents to my relatives who expressed an interest in participating.

Very few relatives wanted to participate. I knew it would be difficult to get participants because of the subject matter, as not everyone wanted to speak about the Greek Civil War

or their memories of difficult times in the past. Yow advises to write up a tentative list of participants, but that “you will probably want to add to the list as the interviewing project goes on” (2005 p. 81). My list, however, did not grow. It might have, had I remained in Greece, as others heard about the project and wanted to participate, but my family members did not want to act as intermediaries.

I am most grateful that the main participants in the project were my parents, who were happy to participate and gave many interviews over several years. Yow advises to “choose narrators who were involved in pivotal events” or “lived in the community the longest” (2005, p. 81). In this context, the narrators were my relatives born prior to 1948 – before or during the Greek Civil War.

Oral historian Patricia Leavy explains that oral history is a data collection method used mainly by anthropologists and sociologists, or by feminists interested in recording the subjugated voice (2011, p. 5). And while it is true that oral historians draw on the experiences of marginalised groups for inclusion in social research (Leavy 2011, p. 4), I had the dual aim of not only highlighting how some of my relatives were harassed for being leftists and how they suffered during the Axis War and Civil War, but also of creating a family history to honour my relatives both living and deceased.

I have used oral history for the purpose of creating a record of family memories, which are the conduit through which postmemory transmission of intergenerational trauma has occurred and as a way to honour ancestors, to allow silenced voices to speak.

I propose that oral history is a method that can have uses in other areas of the arts, not just the social sciences. One such use is in the creation of mnemography as a creative oral history, which is essentially different from a biography, testimony, ethnography or memoir, as it is a group oral history with creative elements.

I visited Greece three times to conduct the interviews, beginning in 2015, then 2016 and 2019. I met with relatives who had agreed to participate, and we had short interviews recorded either on my mobile phone or a small video camera with the lens pointing away from the participant. I took notes to back up the interviews, in case there was a technical error. In my last visit there was a technical error so I had to recreate that interview from my notes.

Yow warns that family history is a “high-risk endeavour” and that researchers need to be aware “of what our intervention into this small group can do” (2005, p. 255). While I was aware at the outset of ethical considerations to be taken into account, no amount of research into ethics would have prepared me for the changes in family dynamics induced by my project.

I went to my parents’ villages with the intention of conducting ethnographic research, taking notes, observing, and to “not challenge the accepted customs and value system ... [and] to merge into the background, recording and noting” (Oliver 2010, p. 53). However, this was not what actually occurred. It was impossible to separate myself as the niece, the daughter, the cousin, the grandchild, from myself as the observer and impartial researcher. Writing a family history required a different approach. Sitting in a corner and writing quietly would have been seen as strange and anti-social. I had come from afar to meet my relatives, and time was limited and therefore precious. So, I needed to be myself, spending time with my relatives as normal, eating with them, living with them, walking, talking, going to church, and then speaking to them honestly about my research for the mnemography and accepting what information they were comfortable sharing with me.

The oral history interviews were all recorded in Greek and I later translated them into English. I decided to include other relatives’ stories, not just those of my parents, because

my grandparents had asked me to write down their stories. The interviews were generally twenty minutes to one hour long. I had to go back to Greece several times to interview my relatives, but only two relatives gave me more than one interview. Out of seven aunts and six uncles, only one aunt chose to participate. Most of my relatives in Greece refused to participate, and I respected their choice. The other participants are in-laws or neighbours of my Greek relatives, and of course my parents.

I understood my relatives' hesitancy in participating. In theory, some ethical issues around family history can be covered by formal approval. However, even the use of the informed-consent forms and information to participants did not prevent misconceptions. Relatives who did not use computers misunderstood the information to participants, assuming my declaration that the final public version of my mnemography and thesis might appear on the Internet meant their recorded voices would be available for anyone to hear on YouTube.

Another key factor in the decision of many of my relatives to not participate was their concern that, given the political and financial crises in Greece at the time, their involvement would draw attention to themselves and possibly result in some form of future persecution or punishment. Interestingly, a similar fear of persecution is mentioned in Allan and Wendy Scarfe's collective memoir, *All That Grief* (1994). The Scarfes found that many Greek Resistance fighters who had settled in Australia refused to speak about the past, for fear that a change in government in Greece back to the right could mean imprisonment or torture for their relatives or themselves, should they return (p. 13).

Oral history narratives also include everyday events, the story of what, why, and how we have done something or had something done to us. Oral historian Lynn Abrams states that oral history narrative is "not only the content of the story, but the telling of it ...

including silences” (2010, pp. 106–107). This is something that featured in my oral history interviews. I noticed that my parents were most candid in their interviews, but at times they were silent – for example, where my father had a flash of understanding of past events but refused to share it with me. This silence is discussed further in Chapter 3.

After obtaining the oral history interviews, I struggled with ways to use them to create something that was more than just an oral history. Given that I felt I had no right to tamper with the original oral transcripts, and that I wanted the authentic voices of my relatives to speak out, it understandably took a couple of years for me to find the creative form I was looking for.

The narrative form came about through trial and error, initially comprising oral histories with the last part, my story, as an auto-ethnography. I used remembered dialogue my parents had told me to recreate scenes. I had to find a way to meld these elements together. In time, the mnemography emerged as a creative group oral history.

Wanting the voices, feelings and motivations of my older relatives to shine through, I tried to keep the final narratives as close to the oral recordings as possible. My love and respect for my family enhanced the way I wrote about them. Of course, this is also a bias, and might constitute a wearing of rose-tinted glasses, but it is the best type of bias a writer could have for their subject. In discussing the nature of his relationship with his biographical subject, Werner Pelz, Roger Averill entertains the possibility of “love enhancing vision rather than inducing blindness” (2012, p. 22).

Initially I chose a different framework for organising the chapters, but found this did not reflect what was in the narratives. I then created a framework which was more relevant, one based on the four humours, a humour for each of my two parents, my relatives and myself. This ancient humoral mode of thought still informed the way my parents and

relatives thought and spoke. Growing up, I was often called a *choleric* by Mother, as I was too energetic and impatient for her *phlegmatic* disposition. So, one creative aspect of the oral histories was in the ordering of the four parts. This humoral framework is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Two chapters of the mnemography, “The Ghosts of the Past” (Pt 1.2) and “Kalikanzaroi” (Pt 2.3), could best be described as expressions of postmemory as they blend my parents’ memories with my “visions” of these events as if I had “seen” them. There are many other sections of the mnemography where I have visions of the events even though I did not witness them.

Dialogue in *The Bells Will Toll* is recreated from what my parents remembered. My visits to Greece as an adult helped me remember in greater detail how the houses and rural landscape, as well as the city of Nigrita, had been in my early childhood during the dictatorship. Nigrita had been split into two sections separated by a small river, and many shops and market stalls were on the banks of the river. Once the city was united, and the riverbanks filled in, the city’s perceived size diminished. My memory of the old layout of the city was confirmed by my aunt during my second visit for the research.

The creative licence I use is mainly limited to the above-mentioned areas – adding dialogue and descriptions of settings if these were not provided in some of my mother and father’s stories. Rather than being fictional, these additions were based on memories, oral history and ethnography. The use of symbols and myths is a blending of my parents’ interpretation of events and my own metaphorical inferences, typical of a Greek from the Serras region. Symbolology is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Oral narratives set the scene, provide information into character types, and include idiosyncrasies of speech and local culture. According to Abrams, “[o]ral history can be

seen as one way of liberating personal and group memory and in the process providing for a collective reinterpretation of the past” (2010, p. 160). This reinterpretation of the past is inevitable. My fascination with my family’s past is most likely due to being physically removed from Greece. My parents also viewed the past more nostalgically than our Greek relatives, who had to leave the past behind to move on from it. In contrast, my parents and I repeatedly returned to the past to remember those we loved overseas and to remind ourselves of who we were.

By writing narratives and re-reading them, a deeper understanding of events emerges, and new links are made. When oral historian Luisa Passerini began using primary sources to research the anti-fascist press in Italy and France, she found it “radically changed her attitude to history at a time when unofficial history was not seen as valid” (2011, pp. 243–244). She also found that “abandoning the direct practice of oral history” (that is, interviewing those who are in the location of the events to be investigated) allowed her to bring history and memory together, especially when looking at European history, which includes diasporas (p. 248).

Like Passerini’s, most of my stories come from my parents, who live in the Australian diaspora, and their views of events and memories are slightly different from relatives who remained in Greece. Perhaps my parents remembered more because they remembered the past more often as a way of reminding us of our origins. There is a “time capsule” of information frozen in the diasporas which may not be so apparent in the country of origin.

Oral historian Paul Thompson believes that oral history makes connections “between social classes, and between generations” (1988, p. 21). This connection between generations is apparent in my mnemography, especially between my grandparents, parents and myself. The narratives also deal with the political divisions of the right and

left. Because my mnemography challenges previously widely-held misconceptions that all leftist guerrillas were the aggressors and other propaganda around events from the Civil War, it differs from information held in an official history.

Oral histories of the powerful are different from the oral history interviews of ordinary citizens. Abrams notes that few of those in power have been silenced or marginalised (2010, p. 161). She also suggests that powerful interviewees will often try to take control of the interview (p. 162). There is obviously still a political agenda to contend with when interviewing powerful people.

Interviewing an “ordinary” person, however, is an entirely different process. Some of my relatives had no vehicle for telling their stories. They were certain that the events which occurred were tragic and needed to be told but were unsure how to do so. Rightist and leftist rivalries still existed in the background with the older generations, and speaking of grievances would not be well received. Families on each political side had their own grievances. I think this is another reason why my grandparents and parents asked me to record their stories.

I initially felt I needed to keep my questions for the interviews out of the narrative, as I did not want to taint the information from the oral history interviews. However, by not adding them I created narratives which were not linked into a flowing sequence, but rather appeared as separate disjointed anecdotes. Later I decided that including my questions would help remove the perception of what Leavy (2011) calls “ghost writing”. She states that “[r]obust methodological disclosure” accounts for the potential issue of “ghost writing” (p. 102). The inclusion of the researcher’s questions and comments address this issue by making it explicit why the interviewees answer in a particular way, and dispelling the sense that it is merely the interpretation of the researcher (p. 102). The inclusion of

my questions added context which had been missing from the narratives and they began to flow better.

My general questions guided the interviews. I would begin with questions such as “Do you remember anything from the Greek Civil War?” However, these questions were usually answered in a few sentences and did not make up the bulk of the interviews. Some interviewees preferred to tell the stories chronologically or as they remembered them. Sometimes they skimmed over whole years, without pausing to give much personal information. My parents, in contrast, gave me detailed information about their lives in Greece.

I wanted to describe colour, taste, sight, smell and touch so the stories could come alive, but this impulse created an internal conflict in me. Did I have the right to add to the narratives, to add my own creative touches? I felt I was qualified to do so because I had seen the villages, the houses, the mountains, the flowers, the birds, and had tasted the food: I had lived with my relatives there. These embellishments would not be lies, but still, they would be embellishments, my additions. It took months and many redrafts for me to give myself permission to make these types of small additions to some of my parents’ stories. My parents had given me these descriptions over the years but not all had been recorded in the oral history interviews. These embellishments were in fact very few and most of the stories are as recorded at the time of interview.

Oral history can take on a mythical aspect when a whole period of a person’s life is disclosed in a short time. Archetypal stories can be discovered in life stories and help to teach through real-life example, not fairy tales, how to deal with crises. These life stories are our heritage and, I believe, one of the most important possessions we have.

There is a choice to be made between using transcriptions exactly as they are or telling a good story based on historical fact. The result of each choice would be a different product. I chose to keep the oral histories as the basis of the stories. The advantage of this is that the stories are more authentic as the voices of the narrators shine through. The disadvantages are that I cannot use characterisation or plot to create a more engaging work like a novel. However, my primary aim was not to create something engaging, but to record our family history to honour my aging relatives.

Ronald Fraser declares that his oral history of the Spanish Civil War:

is an attempt to reveal the intangible “atmosphere” of events; to discover the outlook and motivations of the participants, willing or unwilling; to describe what civil war, revolution and counter-revolution felt like from inside both camps (1979, p. 29).

He admits that memory can be “notoriously tricky”, and he had to omit information that could not be verified, unless it was part of the atmosphere (p. 31). I too chose to omit information from my mnemography which was purely based on personal opinion and which was difficult to verify or served little purpose in the story and was therefore not very important.

There are many ways to write family history, including adding varying levels of fictionalisation. Names, places, descriptions can all be changed if need be. In pursuit of truth and authenticity, a writer can focus on the message and present that in a way that the interviewee agrees with. I contemplated changing names and locations but decided I would then be writing something which my son and future generations would not benefit from in the same way, as it would not speak so directly to their family’s past. Ultimately, I decided it was important for my family that real names were used where possible, but

that relatives who had not signed consent forms were de-identified. I also chose to de-identify my oldest aunt because she wished to be known only as “P.K.”.

The creation of personas, or characters, is another issue which will come up when using oral history interviews to write creative nonfiction. I did not want to fictionalise or romanticise the characters, even though this may have occurred to some level subconsciously. As explained further below: I selected how I wanted to represent each character by using information provided in the oral history interviews and my knowledge of how my relatives thought, spoke, and behaved.

The translating of the original recordings into English brought up another element of power imbalance and an increased margin for error – I was the one selecting the correct translations of meanings and words in the oral ~~histories, and~~histories and understood the language difference could possibly alter the meaning. I had to trust my knowledge of the two languages, my family culture, dialect, history and individual personalities to make these types of decisions.

I translated the oral histories from Greek into English as accurately as I could. While there are many words with similar meanings, the emotions implied by the narrator at the time of the events, sometimes by the way they said a word, and my knowledge of how my relatives spoke and what they meant, helped me to choose the best English equivalents.

Yow describes this difference of interpretation between the narrator and the oral history researcher:

[C]orrect representation of the narrator’s meaning is necessary, and this requires attention to words ... In qualitative research, errors are not so easily checked. Rereading the documents to see whether the transcription was accurate and whether interpretation was on the mark is one way to prevent misrepresentation (2005, p. 143).

I translated the interviews from Greek into English and feel my translations or interpretations are more accurate than they would have been had I used a translator who was not a relative. I have experience of how my relatives speak and I know what they mean when they use certain words. I understand local idiosyncrasies. For example, the village of Zitohori was called “Tzintzou” by my grandfather Christos and most of my mother’s relatives. *Tzintzou* is a way of saying “cicada” in the local dialect. Apparently, there were many cicadas in Zitohori. I had also used the word *tzintzou* to call my son a little cicada, as I remember Mother called me a small cicada or *tzitzikaki* when I was a child.

Through interviewing my relatives, I realised that I needed to consider what is described as an “implicit trust provision” not only with the deceased, because they were not able to give written consent for the use of their stories, but also with all existing relatives. This involved considering if there was any information they would not wish to be revealed or if the way they were portrayed would be against their wishes. I also considered the possible impact on people’s reputations in a small village, where there would be no anonymity as afforded by larger towns and cities. Writing about small Greek villages affected what questions I could ask and what information I could record.

Another example of how to present oral history interviews is found in Patty Loew’s *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics: Voices of Wisconsin* (2014). Loew interviewed one subject for each chapter, with a brief introduction followed by their story in the third person. The interviews are ordered chronologically, and the writer uses her skill to express short life-histories as clearly as possible. I toyed with employing a similar technique in *The Bells Will Toll* until it became evident that there would be gaps that no one could fill because the interviewees could not remember some details of their past and were often

annoyed when asked for more information. I could not get enough participants to make this style of oral history successful. Instead of short histories from many participants I ended up with only five contributors, the main two being my parents. I deleted the story of one ex-guerrilla fighter because he could not sign the consent form due to infirmity. I was not sure he had given me verbal consent or even if that would have been enough.

When I asked people to recall dialogue, all the interviewees became annoyed, as they could not understand why a dialogue would be different from them just telling the story. However, they did sometimes include dialogue they thought relevant. As discussed earlier, much of the dialogue in the mnemography has been re-created from remembered snippets of conversations and in that way still contains the essence of what was said. Sometimes the interviewees could not remember which person said what. For example, in recalling minor events, sometimes Mother could not be sure which of her four sisters said something or did something. In relation to more traumatic events, however, her memory was sharper.

Dialogue is important because without it breaking up the slabs of narrative, *The Bells Will Toll* would be more difficult and tedious to read. In his work *Writing Family Histories and Memoirs*, Kirk Polking suggests that “the look of a printed page that is solid text turns some readers off. They want to hear the characters themselves” (1995, p. 136).

While researching the mnemography I considered using different points of view. The dialogue was based on remembered conversations and changed the look of the text on the page. I tried to show what characters were thinking without writing it down; however, this was a mnemography based on oral history, not a novel, so the inclusion of this technique was a challenge.

In negotiating the difficult terrain between fiction and creative nonfiction, Polking advocates the use of the words “allegedly” and “supposed to” before dialogue attributions (1995, p. 138). The dialogue in my mnemography has known sources, but not all the characters have names as they may have been a neighbour or a soldier.

If interviewees can remember the main parts of conversations, then dialogues can be reconstructed. A mnemography is different from a novel in that readers are expecting to read about real-life events and, preferably, real conversations.

Bill Roorbach (2008) explains that when writing, he allows for some leeway, especially when events occurred twenty or thirty years ago. He advises that while nonfiction dialogue uses the same creative devices as fiction, there is the “added burden” that it must really have been said or be “representative” of what was said (p. 27).

The dialogue between characters that appears in *The Bells Will Toll* is mostly based on brief descriptions from the narrators. Unless there is some written or taped record, they are based on a few remembered sentences or words, and the general feeling the effect of the exchange had on the narrator or those around them. An understanding of the nuances of how that person spoke and behaved, and what they would likely say, helps in the construction of dialogue. I developed the dialogue in “Kalikanzaroi” (Pt 2.3) from snippets of conversation that Mother remembered. For example:

“Some bread, some food for the rebels, good woman?”

“I am alone with the children. My husband is not home, you can’t come in.”

“*Endaxi*, we know Christos, he told us we could come here for food.” (p. 109)

I took small creative liberties with this but stayed close to the dialogue my mother remembered. While I wondered if this creative technique would work for the rest of the

mnemography, some stories insisted on being told firsthand, in the first person, word for word as in the interview. Their power would be lost otherwise.

In *Writing the Art of Memoir: From Truth to Art*, Judith Barrington explains that she had to reorder events to make a story work and approximate dialogue that she could not recall word for word:

At the same time, while taking these liberties with factual truth, I feel honour bound to capture the essence of the interaction in the events as I order them and, in the dialogue, as I recreate it (2000, p. 66).

As the adoption of a first-person voice and viewpoint would not add to historical authenticity, when there was little basis for knowing what the protagonists were thinking because I had not been told, a third-person viewpoint was more valid and appropriate. I found that when the interviewee narrated in the first person, it was easier to write in the first person. However, when discussing general events that happened to the family, I wrote in the third person.

In the interviews, family members sometimes told stories in the first-person past tense about themselves, but in third-person past tense about others. I chose to tell some stories in first person to add immediacy. For example, the dialogue in “Kalikanzaroi” (Pt 2.3) gives the sense of immediacy:

“Why don’t you join us – become an *andartissa* – we have need of strong women to help us,” the leader said, placing his hand on Mother’s arm. She shook his hand off angrily.

“What help can I give you? I have three children crying for bread and one at the breast.” Her green eyes flashed defiantly. She went and picked up our baby sister from the bed, singing a lullaby, “*Itane mia koukouvaia*”, while we older daughters clung to her skirts. Up above, the rebels combed the roof, poking the corners with their bayonets. (p. 110)

My mother told me this story in the past tense, but the dialogue was in the present tense, because she was recalling the conversations of that time. This dialogue influenced my choice to create the scene this way.

Historian William Stoney states:

Unlike writers in other disciplines, historians write almost everything in the past tense ... Writing in the past tense helps historians to place people and events in an intelligible chronological order (2004, p. 88).

Chronology is one difference between *The Bells Will Toll* and an official history of the Greek Civil War and the dictatorship – there is no strict chronological order to the mnemography, as interviewees reminisce about their lives in amongst a more general narrative, occasionally creating repetitions. This is the nature of memory and oral history and, therefore, of mnemography. Interviewees switched from main narratives into minor anecdotes, and between stories and timelines.

My interviewees looked back from the present into the past. There are a variety of tenses used in the mnemography, and this could be confusing. Because I already understood the stories and the timeframes they occurred in, I needed someone outside my family to read the work and pick up discrepancies in the tenses that I could not see. Robert Graham advises that:

the distance from which a narrative is pitched is more significant than the choice of viewpoint ... First person invites more direct engagement from the reader (2005, p. 108).

Accordingly, the passages of the mnemography narrated in the first person are more engaging than the other passages.

I had years of stories from my youth which I could draw on to supplement those told in the interviews. I had seen the colour of the curtains in my grandparents' house; I had

descriptions of what sort of toys my mother and her aunts played with. I could add these extra details into my mnemography without each interviewee mentioning them at the time of interview. In the end, the people I knew most about, my parents, would feature most prominently, like two founding pillars. They guided my early life, so of course they would make up the largest part of my mnemography. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs explains that:

from the moment that the family is the group within which we pass the major part of our life, family thoughts become ingredients for most of our thoughts. Our Kin communicate to us our first notions about people and things (1992, p. 61).

This concept of our notion of who we are stemming from family is furthered by language:

the language of the family, the language of the body: nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the form of symptoms (Hirsch 2012, p. 34).

For me, these symptoms included homesickness, nightmares, a feeling of unease and marginalisation increased by the overt racism of 1970s Melbourne. This was part of the intergenerational transfer of memories and trauma from my parents and relatives being harassed during and after the Greek Civil War. This, then, qualified me more than anyone to write about my family because I understood the nonverbal language of my kin. Even so, I had to consider the way I chose to tell each story, so that the closest meaning to the original interview could best be conveyed.

While finding a wider audience for the stories is something my family and I are considering, my initial desire to record them was to prevent them from being forgotten or lost in time. I wanted our family's future generations to have a record of our history and to know and understand what happened to their predecessors. Life lessons are useful in any form. I wanted to record the voices and memories of those I loved who have since passed away, as a tribute to them, so that when I too am gone, something of them will remain outside of my memory. I have since realised that my account of these remembered family stories also forms part of the record of my own life, and as such will inform my son's cultural heritage.

The political writer Tom Zoellner gestures to the capacity for the written word to preserve something of what is lost in the inevitability of death: “when we are gone and dust, we can still touch with our words” (2007, p. 12). So, while the people are lost, something of them remains – the story, the lesson, the memory – in the minds of those who read them. Zoellner also states that “ordinary people built the world with trillions of acts of obscure heroism lost to common memory” (p. 7). My mnemography is an act of defiance against such forgetfulness, providing, as it does, a record of how my older relatives lived through a particular period of Greek history.

Expanding on this theme, Zoellner claims that the stories of our parents and grandparents are most primary to us, and that “they gave us the color of our hair and the shape of our tempers, they move with us in our muscles and eyes” (p. 7). This vision of us being compound beings, echoes of our forebears, resonates deeply with me and supports my reason for wanting to write my mnemography as a family record celebrating the lives of relatives now gone but into whom my memory still breathes life.

My relatives were simple farmers living in rural villages between twenty and thirty kilometres from the nearest town. They were ordinary people who lived extraordinary lives in the way they responded to political crises, loss, death, sickness and tragedy. Their lives were heroic on a small scale, and they shared their stories with me so that tragic, happy and everyday events alike would not be forgotten. When discussing their past, my parents had reverence in their voices. My father in particular did not despise working the land, collecting wood from the mountains. He was physically strong and capable and helped his older relatives.

One reason my parents and grandparents asked me to record and write their stories was so that events that were ignored and silenced during the Civil War and the dictatorship could at last be brought to light. These memories would thereby add to the existing records of predominantly rightist memoirs. Speaking about events that occurred so long ago was a release for them, a possible avenue by which their stories might reach a wider audience. My parents and grandparents saw me as the family “writer” from a young age after a story I wrote was published at age eleven. When asked, I felt compelled to write their stories. Their stories were precious to me, even the stories of relatives who had passed away before I was born. If they were important to me, then I felt they may be

important to other family members. Making a more lasting record in the form of *The Bells Will Toll* was another way I could honour my relatives and their memories.

The connection with place is important when writing a family history and this was strengthened by my being in the location of the stories for most of the research. The stories began to take their place in time, in reality, not just in the imagination, and this influenced the writing. Cynthia Banham explains this phenomenon of being in the location of the stories, how for her, arriving in Trieste:

had felt strangely like coming home ... [S]omething awoke in me then or was given form. Trieste was no longer a place that only existed through other people's stories (2018, p. 53).

My first return to Greece as a young adult had a tremendous impact on me. I saw my three surviving grandparents, my aunts, uncles, cousins and their partners and children. I visited my grandparents' houses and saw where my parents grew up, and the places I had visited as a young child. I felt happier and more complete than I had since our migration. Suddenly I had a place, a history, and I belonged somewhere, instead of just being a child of Greek migrants in Australia, someone who was neither here nor there.

The Bells Will Toll was a way towards understanding my family and myself, a way of placing myself and my family in history. It is very difficult being a first- or 1.5-generation migrant. I had to negotiate ways to fit into a new society and also to understand how I still fitted into the past and the culture into which I was born, all the while knowing that I can never go back to being the person I would have been had we remained in Greece. I kept noticing ways in which I changed in the diaspora, yet I could never be fully integrated because one part of me remained locked in the past and overseas. I often wondered how it must feel to have continuity in life, no disruption between the past and the present, a past not broken up by absences, distances and cultural differences.

My own life is clearly demarcated between the time before immigrating to Australia, and the time afterwards, trying to fit in during the 1970s and 1980s when multiculturalism was still in its infancy and there were sharp distinctions between who was a migrant and who was an "Australian". When I was in primary school, a second-generation migrant born in Australia was higher up the social hierarchy than a migrant born overseas. Being

a migrant meant you had to engage in the complexity of renegotiating identity at different times of your life.

As I grew older, I became more successful at accepting who I was as a migrant in Australia and understood I could never completely adopt every aspect of the mainstream culture in terms of ways of living, family relationships and values. I was still Greek in many ways and suddenly this was acceptable. Multiculturalism had progressed and my search for my family history gained a legitimacy that was absent in my childhood.

Having more than one cultural background and engaging in assimilation can be an asset, helping a migrant to adapt to new environments and develop new perspectives on people and their histories. One way that migrants bridge the gap between their culture of origin and their adopted culture is through narrative. These narratives will contain aspects of migration trauma, fleeing war, the challenges of assimilation and in my case, extreme homesickness. This is an area of research I will endeavour to research further in the future. Damousi states that war narratives point to the way that traumatic memories remain and resonate in families (2012, p. 84).

Narrative truth is easier to achieve than historical truth. It has been suggested that “holding memory accountable to historical truth is typically impossible and fatally flawed” (Owen et al. 2013, p. 112). ~~In regard to~~ In regard to my research, I decided that it would be more accurate and consistent to actually write what was told to me rather than try to assemble it into timelines and chronologically match it with historical records. There is a process of repetition, of going backwards and forwards in time, in the oral histories that I have allowed to remain in *The Bells Will Toll*. Through the research process I uncovered gaps in the narrative and mysteries which could not be answered – and will remain unanswered, because even when asked about these inconsistencies, there was silence, disagreement or assumptions from my parents and relatives.

I considered how continuing to ask the questions my relatives did not want to answer could bring up past trauma and decided not to ask my father why Grandfather Kleanthis had to go and fight during the Axis War and the Civil War. I wanted to ask my aunt how our leaving Greece had negatively impacted my maternal grandparents. However, I heard a few comments which I did not want my mother to know, about how her mother had

mourned our departure for so many years. I decided some things are best left unsaid and unknown.

My perception of history changed significantly throughout my research, as the stories of my relatives enabled me to better understand how historical events had affected their lives. I could no longer accept only one viewpoint, one source or official history as being the only narrative. Rather, I came to see them as different versions of events. My mnemography became my family's version of historical events: personal, culturally biased, colourful and multivocal.

My respect for my family ties and my desire to follow ethical guidelines informed my decision to remove stories after my relatives requested them to be withdrawn. There were differences between my ideas of what comprised a good story and those of my relatives. For example, stories of poverty and difficult circumstances were, for me, poignant and honoured their powers of endurance, but were embarrassing for them. My aunt laughed nervously while telling me aspects of her childhood. I realised it was hard for her to relive the humiliation and to remember the pain. Unlike my aunt who had lived the experience, I was amazed that she had overcome so many difficulties, and the stories of hardship only increased my admiration for her.

I respected the refusal of most of my family to participate, and yet felt guilt in my desire for their stories, which may have been extremely traumatic or embarrassing for them to recall. Life writer G Thomas Couser states that:

the closer the relationship between writer and subject, and the greater the vulnerability or dependency of the subject, the higher the ethical stakes, and the more urgent the need for ethical scrutiny (2004, p. xii).

This ethical scrutiny led to my decision to discard some stories. There were many reasons behind these decisions, including to reduce the risk of any negative repercussions, or of causing further trauma or ridicule for those involved, and to avoid writing down, and thereby making "official", personal gripes between family members.

The main stories became clearer and clearer as I collected supporting narratives. Some narrated events appeared to be fabrications, mysteries, or misconceptions. My need to discover the stories came from wanting to comprehend my family history in a more complete way. I began to recognise how my story fitted into my family history. My story is inextricably woven into the stories of my relatives. I see it as a continual line of progression, which will go past and through me into the future.

Initially living “outside” the community was a strength, as I was not perceived as being a threat to the balance of family ties in Greece. But slowly, something began to change. Because I visited two consecutive summers in 2015 and 2016, suddenly my presence was no longer seen as a temporary pleasant interlude. Not all of my relatives were comfortable with my desire to write and continue to interview for the mnemography. Those who had initially been happy to participate seemed less enthusiastic. I heard from my mother that she was told my cousins wanted to write their own versions of the stories. It seemed I had stirred something up. My interest in the past, in the stories they had previously thought of as best forgotten, problematic, or not to be spoken about, had led to some sort of change of perception.

While it has been discussed that participants are vulnerable, it is also true that the researcher is vulnerable. Kathleen Gilbert claims that the researcher must “become part of the research instrument”, and through “their emotions, enter the world of the research participants” (2001, p. 4). This is even more true when writing about one’s own family. Emotions stirred up by recalling events can impact those narrating the stories, as well as the researcher. I found I became more emotional when I was constructing the narratives from the interviews than at the time of the interviews, when I was focused on recording the stories and deciding if I needed to ask more questions. Once I was transcribing the

stories in Australia, I found deeper meaning in the recorded words, and had time to think about them, so the impact on me was greater.

One such story was when Mother told me about the time she and her family moved to a new house and those on guard against rebel guerrillas fired bullets at them. My aunt describes this story slightly differently to my mother. However, the emotional truth of the story was the same in each version: the fear of death, the need to escape into the cellar, the house falling apart around them, the bullets entering the cellar. Mother would have been around two years old at the time of the event, and her sister was five. When Mother told me the story initially, I thought that it was the Germans who were firing at them. And she told me of the low stone walls of the half-demolished house offering little protection from the bullets and how they had to crawl along the ground to escape. My aunt described the event with slightly different details:

We later moved to another house at the edge of the village due to our sheep. It was abandoned: the owners went to Nigrita or Thessaloniki. The first night we lit a lamp in there, the watchmen guarding the village saw the light and assumed rebels were inside and they fired at the house. My father was at the opposite side of the village, so he could not tell them to stop. The house was wooden and the bullets passed straight through. We were sleeping on the floor and bullets flew above us. My mother and grandmother Loula were very afraid and dragged us quickly and quietly by our clothes along the floor into the cellar next door, which was made of stone (Pt 3.1, “The Feminist Aunt”, p. 172).

It was a horrific event and it greatly affected my grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt and mother. So from the two versions of this story that I have, what is most similar is the emotional truth. The factual details vary slightly regarding whether the house was wooden or stone, about the state of the walls and who was firing the bullets. I have found this to be the case with other family stories – the emotional truth of the story is consistent and intact over time, even though small details are described differently. Barrington explains

that the emotional truth is most important when telling a story and is more accurate than focusing on small details which different people may disagree upon (2000, p. 66).

The exact chronological order of events was not as important to me as the separating out of the different voices into four distinct parts. Each section has its own message and supports the other sections in multiple ways. The jumbling of chronology happened as each relative told me their stories and this mirrors the fragmentary way that the past, through memory, exists in the present.

The length of the stories varied, with some containing shorter memories or anecdotes, while others were longer, with a clear start, middle and end. Initially I kept all these stories with various lengths as separate chapters in each of the four main parts of the mnemography. Then, finding that some stories could be grouped together according to common themes such as marriage, harvest, cooking, time of year, I then gathered them into longer chapters. This happened in my parents' chapters because they were the only contributors to give me enough stories to be able to group some into themes.

Some stories, though, were difficult to group and remained on their own, their original emphasis and meaning staying intact. This was not a conscious process of selection. I went with what "felt right". This conformed to the process employed by memoirist Patti Miller, who writes of wanting to "construct each story as self-contained, each one complementing the others but able to be read alone as well" (2007, p. 82).

Barrington's point about factual truth versus emotional truth is further advanced by Leavy's separation of oral history stories into impressionistic and analytical (Leavy 2011, p. 96). The impressionistic style of writing is essentially the "writer-as-storyteller" taking priority over factual information, but Leavy urges the writer to remember they are also a

researcher. She suggests that the initial outline you devise for your research will define the conceptual framework and how the sections of the research interlink with each other.

If, however, as in my *mnemography*, the structure of the writing is mainly impressionistic and narrative-based, then a rough outline will help to guide the research (Leavy 2001, p. 96). My initial outline was very basic, and chronologically based so that the narrative could follow the Axis War, the Greek Civil War and then the dictatorship. However, as my collection of stories grew, I found this framework no longer worked. I had to separate the stories into four parts to honour the four main voices, which each had their own essence and version of events. I eventually came up with the symbols of the *ouroboros* and Ancient Greek alchemical system of the four bodily humours, discussed further in Chapter 4. These symbols helped me envision a deeper structure for the *mnemography*. Symbols like the *ouroboros* of rebirth through retelling, and of the four humours for the four parts of the *mnemography*, became an integral part of the writing as it developed.

This change and development through research is described by Leavy, who explains that working with oral history is:

a process not an event. The practice of oral history assumes that the meaning is not “waiting out there” to be discovered, but rather that meaning is generated during the research process (2011, p. 8).

Leavy explains that researchers actively participate in the knowledge-building process and that there is no one way to do oral history research, but rather it is fluid and adaptable. Procedures can change throughout the research (p 9).

This is exactly what happened with my research. I learnt through the process of conducting the interviews which approach worked best. I also had to learn that I could

not dictate the direction the interviews took, as that was ultimately at the discretion of the participants.

I understood that my being a younger relative of all the interviewees meant that they tried to shield me from the unpleasantness of the past, not wanting to be detailed and specific about the hunger, the deprivation, and the lice plagues. In the past they mentioned these things, but, until I began researching my mnemography, had avoided narrativising them.

As the memories of my relatives have become my memories, there is a blurring of the lines between them for me, and it is often hard to remember when I first was told of a story – it is almost as if I had always known of some events, as far back as I could remember. There is an aspect of collective memory in *The Bells Will Toll*, as themes, ideas, ideologies and events are repeated in each of the four parts.

Collective memory plays a large role in oral history stories. The individual story sits inside the larger story of the community, the state and the country. Philosopher Jeffrey Barash describes collective memory as:

the matrix of cohesion of the remembering group, however vast it may be, through which its continuity in time is at once attested, consolidated and reaffirmed (2016, p. 87).

He further explains that the “web of remembered experience shared by groups is interwoven in a given present and recalled as common experience” (p. 88). Given this explanation of collective memory, my family memories are collective memories for my relatives and me, and by remembering the past the memories continue to exist in the present.

The title of my mnemography, *The Bells Will Toll*, is taken from a famous Greek song composed by Mikis Theodorakis, based on a cycle of poems called *Romiosini* by the

Greek poet Ritsos, who was a member of the *Ethnikó Apeleftherotikó Métopo* (EAM), the National Liberation Front, during the Greek Civil War. His poems and books were banned after the Civil War until 1954. The song, *Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes*, translated as “The Bells Will Toll”, was a soundtrack to my childhood memories; the words in translation are reproduced on page 2 of the mnemography.

In the late 1970s and 1980s Mother would dance with us in the living room to this song and others sung by Theodorakis. It is an anti-war song that hints at reconciliation, and which honours the dead through the image that they are not dead but sleeping and awaiting resurrection on Judgement Day. This song was deeply embedded in my psyche from youth and was one of Father’s favourites as well. I could not have chosen another name for my mnemography, and I chose it before commencing the oral history interviews and the writing the manuscript. It was played endlessly during my childhood, and it brings back many memories of family unity, togetherness, the seemingly endless possibilities of the 1970s, the freedom of youth – a feeling of immortality and happiness.

Growing up, “The Bells will Toll” song held special meaning for me. Although I did not fully grasp its reference to the exiled and incarcerated Greeks from the Greek Civil War and dictatorship (see Chapter 4), it still had an aura, a special meaning. For me, that song was the essence of what it meant to be Greek, where the departed “still owned this earth” as they lay buried in it; it was not just for the living. Hence, the stories in the mnemography not only belong to the living, but to the departed; it honours the memories of as many family members as my relatives have told me about and that I can remember. I had to write my family history and felt I had to find my own way there, not find another work to emulate. I followed the small whispers of my intuition as there was no guidebook which could show me how to write my mnemography. I had to get there by trial and error.

The repetition and changes to events in the mnemography come from the description of the same event given by other relatives or by the same relative at a later time. One example is in “Voices of Freedom” (Pt 1.5), Where the death of my Aunt Marianne as a young child is described in two different ways, by seizure and by infected facial wounds. Once I even heard my father state that she died at an older age of a different disorder. I found this very perplexing. I decided to ignore this, as most relatives agreed she had died of infected facial burns as a young child. Was there some secret which had to be hidden? I always got strange looks when I asked about these discrepancies. Most relatives did not even know what she looked like, but Father remembered. She was his twin. She was his opposite: blue eyes and fair skin. But they shared dark curly hair. Some things were obviously not spoken about by my relatives in Greece who had to continue to live there, and they accepted what they knew or had been told.

I expected my relatives in Greece knew more about the past than my parents did, but during the course of my research I found that it is the other way around regarding some events. My parents and I remembered the past often and spoke about it as a way to reconnect, while my relatives preferred to focus on the present. I felt sad that some information has been lost about the past and my relatives, and those who could answer my questions are now gone.

Helen Kliger describes the “overwhelming sense of loss” which accompanies finding information about loved ones, because “there is so much that will stay unknown” (2018, p. 42). This sense of loss was felt by me from the moment I left Greece as a child and all throughout my search for the memories and stories of the lives of my relatives. I understood I was racing against the clock, trying to find time to visit relatives and gather information and spend time with them to make new memories, before it was too late.

There are numerous issues involved in using oral history for the purpose of writing a family history. Underlying them all are the notions of “truth” and “authenticity”. For the purpose of my research, the “truth” is based on the oral history interviews I have conducted with my parents, uncles, aunts and other relatives. These, though, include conflicting stories. I am aware of the possibility that personal views, rumours and propaganda colour testimonies told by others to my relatives, hence my reluctance to use those stories. The eyewitness accounts I do not question as much. This layering of eyewitness accounts adds uniqueness and authenticity to my mnemography; it captures something of the political and social climate of the time.

Historian Richard Terdiman advises that:

What we call the past is always already and irretrievably a profoundly altered or attenuated version of the contents that were potentially available to consciousness when the past was present (1993, p. 22).

So perhaps each person remembers what was important for them, at the expense of other balancing elements. This does not make the memory untrue, but there will always be a bias of some sort. My aim was to write a family history, not necessarily an objective or official history, if such a thing is possible. How do you separate stories from the times and the political climate in which they arose? Even the propaganda of the time is relevant, as long as the discrepancies are highlighted. Sometimes it is impossible to separate factual events from stories fabricated at the time.

One example of this is the story of my Great-uncle Eraklis. Grandfather Christos’s eyewitness account (see Pt 1.2) differs to the rumours my father and other relatives heard about him being decapitated (see Pt 1.14). It shows how rumour or accepted beliefs about what happened can be different to what actually happened and how easily some people

accept what they are told, while others refuse to believe any version of events not seen by their own eyes.

In *Essays on Life Writing* (1992) Marlene Kadar explains:

Life writing includes many kinds of texts, both fictional and non-fictional, though we tend to focus on the latter because they appear more “true to life” (p. 152).

Life writing is considered more factual than fiction; however, facts and events backed up by historical evidence from the public record can add further authenticity to the stories.

For me the greatest conflict came in choosing some versions of events over others. Sometimes, out of respect for each relative’s story, I chose to include all the different versions of a given event. There are stories which are told three or four times in my mnemography in different ways. This reminds me of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s famous magic realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970), wherein the same events are told from different perspectives, and how this leads to a layering of stories, adding to and changing the initial story. However, while *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is fiction, my mnemography is based on oral history and the repetition was an organic part of the interview process, not contrived as part of a narrative structure.

The different and repeated versions of events in my mnemography are cyclical. I could not remove the repetition as it was cultural for there to be repetition, just like in my childhood when the same stories were told over and over again. I saw it as adding to the complexity of the stories rather than creating confusion.

In the writing of mnemography, relying on family memories to weave stories into place may involve timelines based on the year of a natural disaster or death of a relative. This is just as momentous as an exact factual date. An example of this is from “August Feast

Day” in *Plegmatic: Mother’s Story* (Pt 2.12), where she remembers the feast of the Virgin Mary on the fifteenth of August when she was twelve years old:

The older girls ran and left me and Takis behind. My older sister yelled, “Run, those boys will kill you!” We came back home breathless and tired, and the villagers scolded us (p. 151).

Mother remembers what she wore on that day and how old she was because the fear she felt while running away from the boys etched it into her memory.

Barrington recommends researching historical facts on the public record to make sure that the dates of key events are accurate. She points out that being sloppy with facts such as the direction you are travelling when going from one city to another will result in letters from readers “who know if it was east or west” (Barrington 2000, p. 66).

An example of difficulties with measurements occurred in my mnemography, illustrating one of the limitations of oral history. My father described the measurement of one *oka* as two kilograms, then later as one and a half kilograms, because he was not sure. Whatever it was, it was a lot, because that is how much sweet halva he and his friend ate in one sitting, making themselves sick. I considered that it could be a pound, which is about half a kilogram, but if two hungry boys were eating half a kilogram of halva between them, that would not be enough to make them sick. One and a half to two kilograms would be enough to make them sick, so that would be around 750 grams to one kilogram each. So, I decided that an *oka* must have been a kilogram and a half. Initially I was unable to find this measurement through research, so could not check if I was correct or not, but made my own decision based on Father’s memory of the event. Later, I found out this was from the ancient Greek metric system and that one *oka* was 1.280 kg, which was very close to my calculated guess of 1.5 kg. This illustrates that using the memories of narrators carries

with it their version of the truth and this version of truth may be very close to facts, directions and measurements.

By researching some facts in official historical records, I have been able to verify when many events in my mnemography occurred. It helped validate aspects of the stories for me. While it may not be important for others to know details such as what comprised one *oka*, for me it was important. I wanted to understand more of my relatives' lives and how they lived.

As we have seen in this chapter, oral history contains elements of collective memory, and often links in with official history, but includes cultural nuances and repetition, and can reveal ideologies, mysteries and propagandas in use during the time being narrated.

As oral history is a narrative mode, it is the main narrative mode of my mnemography. The difficulties and ethical considerations I encountered during the interview process, and the methods for writing my mnemography have also been discussed in this chapter.

I have accounted for why I decided to leave out some stories and why I chose to use both first and third person and the past tense. I have also discussed the benefits of a family oral history but also how there is a danger that it will, perhaps permanently, alter family relationships.

Mnemography, being made up of oral histories, also reveals how these stories can be passed through intergenerational transmission and how this is an expression of postmemory. This is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

The Sub-genre of Mnemography as an Expression of Postmemory

My manuscript *The Bells Will Toll* occupies an in-between space, above and between the genres of ethnography, oral history, creative nonfiction and memoir. The unclassifiable nature of my project led me to inaugurate the new sub-genre of life writing that I have called mnemography.

The focus of this chapter is an exploration of the ways in which mnemography is an expression of postmemory. In *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), Marianne Hirsch explains that the remembrances of the past of victims and survivors of a trauma are transferred to the generation which comes after, who identify these as a form of memory. These traumatic memories continue to resonate in the proceeding generations, and these are termed postmemory (Hirsch 2012, p. 3). Mnemography, being made up of the memories of relatives, is an expression of postmemory.

As discussed in Chapter 1, mnemography is created from oral history narratives. Because mnemography is a group oral history, this separates it from other life history narratives such as biography, auto-biography, memoir and auto-ethnography. Valerie Yow states that, through oral history, family history – if thoroughly researched to confront and deal with serious concerns in an honest account – “places the individual family in a wider historical context [that] can be enlightening” (2005, p. 254). She adds that there is something compelling about studying families, and that critics in the historical profession have become interested in individual family histories. These critics previously looked on family history with disdain as many were “laudatory accounts, skimming the surface of serious issues” (p. 254). Mnemography, based on oral history accounts, will include trauma where there has been trauma and life struggle as narrated by the interviewees.

There is an honouring of the whole aspect of life history, and no need to focus only on happy and joyful events. Mnemography is inclusive of all types of remembered life experiences.

Mnemography is a creative oral history, which separates it from oral history transcriptions. It differs from a memoir as it is made up of several oral histories and is multi-vocal so there is no main protagonist.

Mnemography is also distinct from auto-ethnography because it is made up of the oral histories of relatives rather than unrelated social groups, and is a narrative method of recording relatives' memories with integrity and respect, as a tribute to ancestors. Mnemography may include sections of ethnography and auto-ethnography, where the researcher can include their insights, but the bulk of the narratives comprise oral history accounts, which can include creative elements.

My mnemography, *The Bells Will Toll*, does have elements of auto-ethnography in “Myth” (Pt 4.6) and “Epilogue 2020”; however, the rest is made up of creative oral histories. I aimed to capture family memories which I treasured and to create a narrative monument to celebrate my ancestors. This is the cycle of the *ouroboros*, stories being reborn into the present each time we remember the past. Remembering is a way of going home. Revisiting the past, including joys and traumas after separation from family and homeland due to migration, was necessary for my parents and me. The original home is always in the past, in another geographical location and never in the diaspora. This feeling is echoed by Christos Tsiolkas when he states:

All of us who have experience of growing up in migrant or refugee communities can bear witness to how the migrant's sense of origin is made traumatic by the past, and how the conception of homeland is seemingly

embalmed by memory and history. Home is always the past and never the present (2018, pp. 67–68).

I am still trapped in the past and it takes every effort on my part to stay in the present. I have noticed my younger siblings born in Australia do not share the same level of homesickness that I do. They did not know Greece as children, having been born in Australia. Perhaps it is easier for them to navigate their ethnicity. I am the only child in my family who has felt the need to visit Greece on a regular basis.

As a mnemography is created from the memories of relatives, it necessarily includes elements of intergenerational transmission of memory, and of trauma, if some of these memories are traumatic. My mnemography captures the way that my relatives' memories have come to inhabit and haunt me, making it an expression of postmemory. Hence, there is more than one line of familial postmemory transmission and affiliative postmemory transmission explored in my mnemography.

Having described mnemography above as a narrative monument, it is important to recognise that it is also an ark of shared memories, a collection to be saved from the floods of forgetfulness. As Hirsch states, perhaps one intention of remembering trauma is to “keep the wounds open” so as to warn against forgetting and oblivion, to underscore the injunction “Never again” (2012, p. 19). While my parents and grandparents wished to pass on such warnings against similar trauma occurring again, my main aim was to preserve and honour family relationships and memories because they are subject to change and loss over time, and because these memories are valuable in understanding one's background and concept of self.

Damousi explains that for many Greek families “the experience of war is an important aspect of family history which should not be forgotten” (2015, p. 84). This is the case for

my family history where memories of war and the dictatorship have not been allowed to be forgotten. These memories are usually passed on orally between generations and therefore may be subject to loss and change over time. In written form they become static, and as culture changes it becomes a record of a past way of life.

Mnemography carries this oral tradition into written form. And with it can be included transmission of intergenerational memory or postmemory into written form, a “structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience” (Hirsch 2012, p. 6).

As a creative oral history, *The Bells Will Toll* includes memories of people living in the Serras region of Greece during and after the Greek Civil War. My account of family experiences in the mnemography enhances the historical record, by offering fine-grained ethnographic type detail about the daily lives of such people in those times. It also clarifies the way my relatives traversed strong differences of political opinion within the family and society at the time. It is a record of how the intergenerational memories of my parents, grandparents and other relatives have affected me through postmemory transmission of memories and trauma, and how my parents were also affected by the postmemory transmission of their own parents’ and grandparents’ memories and experiences. Hirsch argues that “postmemory is *not* an *identity* position, but a *generational* structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation” (2012, p. 35). These forms of mediation require a living connection between the generations. She distinguishes between *familial* and *affiliative* transmission of postmemory. Familial transmission of postmemory refers to the second generation: there is a vertical transmission between a parent and a child. Affiliative transmission is “intragenerational horizontal identification that makes that child’s position more broadly available to other contemporaries” (p. 36).

Because my parents lived through the Greek Civil War as children, and I heard their stories about these times from a very young age, I have benefited from familial transmission and, later in life, intra-generational horizontal identification through my research into the Greek Civil War and dictatorship.

This relentless postmemory transmission between generations and my haunting by the past appears to slow down occasionally when I have done enough thinking about the past to notice the present and look towards the future. This sentiment is echoed by Eva Hoffman when she writes: “once time uncoils and regains its forward dimension, the present moment becomes a fulcrum on which I can stand more lightly, balanced between the past and the future, balanced in time” (1989, p. 280). I believe that writing my mnemography has helped me gain some perspective on the precious balance between the past, present and future. I have come to realise how important the present is, the here and now, as the time to act and make the links with family while it is still possible. The links with the past can be dissected and thought about in the present, but the past cannot be changed. The transmission of trauma from tragic events in the past is there and it brings with it a kind of helplessness, which needs to be rationalised so that it does not become internalised and cause ongoing damage in each subsequent generation.

My parents’ grief has, to an extent, become my grief, but I do not want to pass this grief on as it is. Instead, this grief, consisting of migration loss and trauma from events from the Greek Civil War and dictatorship, needs to be balanced between joy and honouring, love and acceptance. Mnemography is an act of remembrance, balancing all aspects of that remembrance, from the traumatic to the joyful while embracing elements of the mundane.

The Greek Civil War and the trauma it caused my relatives and how this has been passed on to me is a constant theme in my mnemography. This transfer of memory is best understood in terms of trauma, in this case the intergenerational remembering of trauma experienced through times of war and financial crisis perceived through the further trauma of the rupture of migration, caused by the need to escape the ongoing harassment of the dictatorship. I often wonder how much of this transmission I have welcomed or “asked for” by listening to memories of the past, and what the personal cost to me has been. Hirsch raises similar questions:

What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the aftermath of crimes we did not ourselves witness? (2012, p. 2)

I considered letting the stories end with me, not passing them and the trauma they contain on to my son. But then I remembered that this is all I have left of my relatives, first because of the separation and migration, and now because of the loss caused by death. I decided to walk the difficult path of exploring the memories, doing research and writing them down at some personal cost: exposure to displeasure from some relatives, repeated exposure to traumatic events, working through grief and loss, when all I wanted was to lay down my pen and give it all away. The truth is, it did not feel like I had a choice because the memories would not let me rest. And I had promised my grandparents and parents that I would record their memories.

As a sub-genre, mnemography sits closer to oral history than creative nonfiction. This, along with how it gives expression to the transmission of postmemory, makes it a form of qualitative research, located somewhere between the arts and social sciences.

Lynn Abrams suggests that oral history has:

largely retained its role of advocacy for groups marginalised or excluded from formal channels of power. In this way, oral history has remained at the intersection of academic research and the political sphere. Oral history was intended to give a voice to the voiceless, a narrative to the storyless and power to the marginalised (2010, pp. 153–154).

As stated above, oral history can provide an avenue for the repressed and silenced to be heard. And mnemography, as a creative oral history record, provides a written avenue for intergenerational transmission to be recorded, giving voice to the previously silenced.

The transmission of postmemory is not straightforward. Hirsch explains:

The bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which one trauma can recall, or reactivate, the effects of another, exceed the bounds of traditional historical archives and methodologies (2012, p. 2).

I have presented the sub-genre of mnemography as one new method of recording postmemory transmission, with my mnemography *The Bells Will Toll* as an example.

The stories are not linear, nor strictly chronological; rather, they are circular in that some themes and stories are repeated. My story in *Choleric* (Pt 4) goes over some of the previous stories, especially where there are discrepancies. I asked my parents about these discrepancies and even they could not completely answer my questions. In some cases, my asking of these questions brought answers through hindsight and a new perspective to my parents, such as my father understanding elements that contributed to why his family left Greece for Sweden. My father refused to share all of his new insights with me, as he was too saddened. I have concluded that my research into the past has caused my parents and relatives to rethink the past to a level that they had not previously permitted themselves to do, perhaps because it had been too painful. Perhaps my structured research into the past helped them too to structure the past in a new way and to gain perspectives.

Thea Halo's *Not Even My Name* (2000), Nicholas Gage's *Eleni* (1983) and Angelo Metropoulos's *The Wild and Twisted Branch* (2020) are examples of texts that could retrospectively be considered works of mnemography. They include some elements of oral history interviews, and capture the postmemory transmission of memories from grandparent, parent and child. However, these examples do not fit perfectly every criterion for what constitutes a mnemography, as they are not creative group oral histories, and usually the memories of only one other person is used. *The Bells Will Toll* is the only example of the sub-genre mnemography that I have found.

Mnemography records a living connection to the past, before it is lost and forgotten or reduced to myth that future generations can only speculate about. The transmission of the past via a living connection or familial transmission is stronger than if by affiliative transmission alone. Hirsch explains that the process of postmemory occurs where:

descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of memory, and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event (2012, p. 3).

These postmemory remembrances which become a "form of memory" are made evident in *The Bells Will Toll*. The chapter "Kalikanzaroi" (Pt 2.3) illustrates how the images have clearly been formed in my mind enough for me to recreate scenes recalled to me by my mother so that I could actually "see" and "remember" the events as if I had been there.

Describing her reason for creating the term "postmemory", Hirsch writes:

I felt the need for a term that would describe the quality of my own relationship to my parents' daily stories of danger and survival during the Second World War in Romanian Cernăuți and the ways in which their accounts dominated my postwar childhood in Bucharest. As I was reading and viewing the work of second-generation writers and artists, and as I was

talking to fellow children of survivors, I came to see that all of us share certain qualities and symptoms that make us a postgeneration (2012, p. 4).

My parents lived through the Greek Civil War as children and their stories have become my memories and my inheritance. I am one of the postgeneration sharing those memories. This legacy includes traumatic memories as well as joyous ones such as sights and colours and smells of foods I did not taste, clothes I did not wear, music I did not hear but can still somehow “remember”. I believe it was the way my parents and grandparents told me their memories, where I noted and assimilated aspects of their emotions, actions, the way they spoke, and the images they remembered. I have also considered a possible “psychic” affiliation with the memories I have inherited. Psychic affiliation is mentioned by Hirsch in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012, p. 2).

These images and stories have haunted me throughout my life and continue to haunt me now. However, after finishing my mnemography, new images and feelings emerged, “memories” I had previously not had access to. It was as if by grappling with some memories and somewhat putting them aside by writing them down, I had created a vacuum within which other memories could surface.

This “remembering” of experiences is understood by Hirsch to be essential to the process of postmemory, wherein “the ‘generation after’ bears witness to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up” (2012, p. 5).

For me, such intergenerational transmissions were not limited to memories but included names, meanings and ways of doing things as well. I would call my pets names which were Greek but had not been used by my parents at home, and some of them had fallen out of use in Greece, as they were primarily from the 1800s. Mother was surprised at the

name I gave my cat – Manioka – and told me it meant “little mother” which was an old seldom-used word in the village dialect. Similarly, Father told me that I cooked just like his mother, which was interesting as I had not known my paternal grandmother after leaving Greece so did not learn to cook from her. This has led me to consider that, if we can inherit traumatic memories, why not also memories of old names, and places, behaviours and ways of cooking?

My mnemography expands the reach of postmemory by including stories of how my parents and I have been affected by the past, through group creative oral history which can also be seen as a group postmemory. It shows not only how trauma was transmitted but also how memories of culture and habits, beliefs and language have been passed on, kept or discarded. In every chapter of my mnemography, there is fine-grained ethnographic detail. This is obtained from my memory and from the oral histories, depicting what life was actually like during the Axis War, the Greek Civil War and the dictatorship in the villages in Northern Greece. Examples of this are the flowers Mother talks of in Grandmother’s garden, and everyday chores that had to be completed, how food was harvested and prepared. As already indicated, there are not just traumatic memories in my mnemography. There are also some beautiful memories of how life was and all these memories have had an impact on me, even the magical violin of Uncle George, which I never heard but can “remember” and respond to in the stories of Father.

This fine-grained detail facilitates the reach of postmemory because the memories become clearer and more detailed and therefore more easily transmissible. In *Sanguine* (Pt 1), when Father describes the wood-fired stove that Grandmother used for heating and cooking, I can clearly see and hear in my mind the black stove puffing out hot air and vibrating as it heated up.

It is conceivable that migration might also compound and intensify postmemory transmission due to the need to constantly remember family in order to remain connected. To maintain this connection in the diaspora, we relived trauma, separation, joys and celebrations, and mourned deaths. When Father spoke of his parents and relatives it was an “honouring” of our relatives and I would listen in reverential silence. Storytelling was the most immediate and meaningful way we had of reconnecting with our family life in Greece. The trauma and grief of leaving home and my desire to reconnect with our life in Greece motivated the writing of the mnemography. I wanted to recapture and preserve what had been lost. Damousi contends that being “Australian” was the ideal, the preferred identity, in the diaspora, but that it “did not allow for a public expression of grief or loss of migrants’ previous lives and former experiences, nor did it allow for any emotional response to the challenges of migration by the migrants themselves” (2015, p. 84).

As there was no other avenue for my family to deal with this issue of negotiating our previous identity with the new identity formed through assimilation in Australia, it became vital to share stories of the past with each other at home. Damousi further explains that the passing on of family stories was possibly a type of therapy and that these stories were also “bearing witness and cautionary tales” (2015, p. 84).

Not only were the stories and memories important, but our cultural practices too. We celebrated Easter at a time that usually did not match with the Australian Easter celebrations. Christmas was extended to the seventh of January, the original date of birth of Christ in Orthodox Christian religions. We also danced to the songs of my parents’ youth, learning both Pontian and local Greek dances. This reinforced that we were Greek, and that although we were also Australian, there would always be differences.

If I had not left Greece, I would probably have been more like my cousins, living in the present without the haunting of the past. Instead, I listened to stories of injustices done to family members during the Greek Civil War and how this injustice continued during the dictatorship until we left Greece. My parents and I lived a haunted present primarily because of the trauma of the Greek Civil War and the dictatorship but also because of the trauma of migration.

Damousi states that approximately 136,000 people emigrated from Greece after the Greek Civil War to escape further harassment (2015, p. 202). Father took us out of Greece twenty-three years after the end of the Greek Civil War, during the dictatorship. As a child of the 1970s, I remember how newly emigrated Greeks would still identify themselves as having come from a certain region of Greece. Differences still remained. Greeks were not just Greeks, they were from Athens, from Kalamata, from Florina, from Crete, from Peloponnesus, or other locations, and often they still identified as leftist or rightist. I remember a distinct feeling of freedom and joy in the Greeks of Melbourne in the 1970s. They had escaped the war or the dictatorship and even the racism in Melbourne at the time was not enough to dampen that. They congregated in Prahran and Lonsdale Street in the Greek cake shops, restaurants and also in the Greek churches. During the 1970s and '80s I remember Easter was a major four-day event at the church in Footscray, with fireworks, and thousands of people meeting at midnight to light their candles with the holy light. Now there are barely two hundred who meet on Saturday night, and fewer still march the streets to the drums on Thursday nights. My father explained that most of those Greeks passed away and in some cases their children too, and the others have either assimilated so much that they no longer celebrate the separate Greek Easter or have moved away. My father stated that hundreds of Greeks that he knew in Footscray and the

surrounds passed away. This only increased my desire to record my family's history before it was lost.

Damousi further explains this intergenerational transfer of memories and the continuation of old identities:

the children of migrants...had been shaped by their parents' experiences: the family history brought by parents from the old world became central to their children's identities in the new (2015, p. 4).

It was not just the trauma of war or the dictatorship that my parents brought with them. Father had traumatic postmemory transmission from his parents, grandparents and extended family when they were forced to leave Pontus in Turkey to come to Greece during the Christian genocide in 1922. His lament for leaving Greece was compounded and amplified by the lament he had inherited from his parents and grandparents at having been forced to leave Pontus in Turkey. His lament became my lament, and I could see the seven hills upon which seven mills were built in Samsunda, where my great-grandfather and his sons were successful farmers and millers, and their relatives before them who were bronze smiths.

Interestingly, Father's relatives who remained in Greece have a greater lament for Pontus than my father and I do, and this forms the basis of most of their stories, not the stories of the Greek Civil War or the dictatorship. Our migration from Greece to Australia was permanent and facilitated a greater lament for the loss of close contact with our relatives in Greece. I have come to understand that I am a casualty of the Greek Civil War and dictatorship as well, because the continued harassment of my father led to our migration away from our relatives and this caused migration trauma and loss.

In *The Rise and Fall of the Colonels*, CM Woodhouse explains how the dictatorship rescinded eleven articles of the constitution, prohibited political activities, banned the free press and suspended human rights and representative government (1985, pp. 292–293). As a young child I did not see these issues in Greece: I lived in the family circle and it was a joyous circle. But I remember Father was sometimes stressed. Mother told me he would play his Mikis Theodorakis records, and she would turn the music down low so no one would inform on them. My father's story shows that relatives and neighbours continued to inform on him, of how his files were sent from the village to Thessaloniki when we moved.

It is therefore not surprising that many Greeks left Greece during and after the Civil War but also during the dictatorship due to the difficult climate and lack of freedom or even basic human rights, especially for leftists. Damousi explains that “the massive post-war migration of Greek immigrants to Australia was one of the largest in Australia at the time” (2015, p. 73).

Hence, my mnemography captures the way that migration represents a double loss in my life – loss of family relationships and culture, and the loss of stories from the past. It also led to the loss of a more singular identity. I cannot call myself only Greek, as I am also now Australian and my relatives in Greece call me an Australian. Shopkeepers in Greece call me a foreigner. In Australia I am a specific type of Australian: a person of diverse cultural and linguistic background, which is actually true for every non-indigenous Australian. If I try to think about this on the larger scale, these three losses have led to gains by virtue of my having assimilated into an extra culture and language.

However, that does not take away the pain of the loss. Many of the stories in my mnemography are frozen in time due to our migration. We did not see Greece embrace

change through reconciliation. Migration did not dull the pain of Father's loss or Mother's loss. I know that, along with the memories I have inherited, the loss will remain. My son has not been subjected to migration and, as yet, I cannot see the same feelings of loss manifesting in him. Perhaps these traumas will end with me and not be passed on through my stories or my mnemography.

In this chapter I have explored how mnemography is a group oral history narrative, made up of the memories of relatives. I have discussed how these can be passed on through intergenerational transmission to the next generation and in doing so facilitate postmemory transmission of trauma. I have explained how mnemography is an expression of postmemory, due to the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

I have also established how most of the postmemory trauma in *The Bells Will Toll* is from the Greek Civil War and dictatorship. It has been explained how the further trauma of migration facilitated the transmission of another layer of intergenerational memories and trauma to me and how these memories still haunt my present and have come to "approximate" memories of my own.

The next chapter explores how my relatives' oral histories in *The Bells Will Toll* contribute to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War.

Chapter 3

The Contribution of *The Bells Will Toll* to Knowledge of the Greek Civil War

As a mnemography, *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War through oral histories of my relatives' experiences prior to, during and after that conflict. The narratives are unique to my parents' villages and present information on how people lived there at that time and the difficulties they faced. These stories are my family's contribution to knowledge of this time in history and are distinct from other stories published from other regions of Greece in which the left is depicted as the aggressors and the harassment of leftists is underrepresented.

This chapter shows how my mnemography contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War and will cover the main events of the Greek Civil War, with mention of the dictatorship. Specifically, I will discuss how my mnemography contributes to our knowledge of the *paedomazoma*, the harassment of leftists during the White Terror and during the dictatorship.

Other texts which have contributed to knowledge of the Greek Civil War will be discussed and compared with and contrasted to my mnemography. My research involved the collection and interpretation of oral histories and the piecing together of information provided by several narrators. The conflicting information contained in some accounts indicate that not all the stories could all be true, and reflects how lies, rumour, propaganda, and misinformation proliferated during the Greek Civil War.

Narrative researcher Molly Andrews identifies this issue of needing to look further into narratives:

In my experience, we are often unwilling to extend the boundaries of what we regard as believable, and yet, if we are to do our research well, then we are required to do so. This is why research of this nature is so emotionally demanding, for ultimately we must be willing to take seriously that the way we see the world is only one way amongst infinite possibilities, to recognise the situatedness of knowledge and of interpretation. (2014, p. 28).

I believe that in terms of the Greek Civil War, the multivocality of stories of left and right means that all sides of the story must be considered. It is easy to focus on the side that you have affinity with, thereby mirroring the Cold War strategies of the Civil War. It is harder and more important to understand that all sides suffered, that there was good and bad on both sides. *The Bells Will Toll* does show how both leftists and rightists behaved aggressively, as my father's and mother's stories highlight acts of retribution, ambush, retaliation and harassment.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the primary trauma passed down from one generation to the next through the stories in the *Bells Will Toll* stems from my relatives' experiences of death, hardship, exile and exclusion during and after the Greek Civil War. These events differ from region to region, and also depend on the political status of each person in the story.

Leftists have different experiences to those of rightists. *The Bells Will Toll* provides insights into "ordinary" people's everyday life experiences during that conflict, and, as such, deepens our understanding of those events and their aftermath. It is an example of how short-term policies and beliefs can have profound impacts on a generation but can be all but forgotten a generation later. These stories provide an ethnographic sense of how people lived in that region during those times.

The Bells Will Toll explores Greek village culture and the richness of family life in a nonlinear and personal way. Each chapter is another cycle of the *ouroboros* swallowing

its tail, a renewal and regeneration of past memories into the present. The distinction between personally experienced events, and those experienced second-hand as remembered events, is echoed by Viet Thanh Nguyen, who states: “all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory” (2013, p. 144). I would argue that they are fought endlessly in memory, not just a second time. And not just in the memory of those who experienced them, but in the memories of succeeding generations through postmemory transmission.

The importance of remembering and sharing stories is supported by philosopher Richard Kearney, who explains in *On Stories* (2002) that in terms of Holocaust survivors and their stories, Hitler’s plan had been:

to ensure that no witness would survive to bear witness, that no executioner would dare confess the tale, and that even if either did so, nobody would believe them. The best way to defy Hitlerism is to tell the story (2002, p. 63).

This example underscores why the stories of my relatives also needed to be told. Through years of intimidation by those in power, my relatives kept their stories to themselves. However, my parents and grandparents were sure the stories should be told to end their powerlessness and the silencing of the past.

I felt I could not rest until I had recorded their stories, not only because I had promised to do so, but because those memories haunted me, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Some relatives were surprised that I wanted to write about their memories of the past. For them, it had all been swept under the carpet, and reconciliation had occurred. When I made it clear that I was interested in more than just political events and the Greek Civil War, like things not documented in official histories, such as their daily lives, they were even more perplexed. They could not understand why famine and trouble would be worth

remembering, let alone recording. The attitude of the researcher is important, as the outcome of the interview will be:

the exchange between ourselves, as collectors of stories, and those who share with us accounts of their lives, [which] only works so long as we are willing to believe (Andrews 2014, p. 16).

This willingness to believe is not just required of the interviewer but also the interviewee. As discussed in Chapter 1, this meant that only those of my relatives who believed in the value of the stories contributed to my project.

My interest in these events was to develop a deep understanding of what it was like to live in those times, and to honour the everyday memories of my relatives, not just the traumatic ones. Lack of food meant that everyone in the villages had to work the land to survive. I felt that sowing tobacco, preparing a meal or feeding animals are events worth remembering: they have their own place in the story and serve as the backdrop to the politics of the time and the horrific events these visited upon families like mine. They show and document a way of life which is disappearing. Very few of my relatives still work on their farms. They either rent them out or have sold them, proof that in one generation a whole way of life can be disappear.

In my mind there must be balance between the everyday or mundane and the traumatic or significant events, just like in everyday life these are balanced. They stand out in relation to each other. If, as author Tom Zoellner advises, the “simple act of being alive and conscious ... is enough to make just about anybody interesting by sheer default” (2007, p. 8), then my family history would be interesting anyway, regardless of the Greek Civil War. However, echoing Kearney, in my family’s case, remembering their past is an act of defiance against those who hoped persecution would be forgotten. Hopefully, remembering ensures that similar events won’t be repeated in the future. In order to

appreciate how *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War, key issues and events just prior and during that conflict need to be sketched out.

In summary, the end of the Axis War created the power vacuum in which the Greek Civil War commenced. The Axis War led to large numbers of leftists and rebels defeating Nazi German and fascist occupiers freeing Greece for a short time. The internal conflict between rightists and monarchists wanting the pre-existing order to be reinstated, and leftists wanting a new, fairer Greece, with more rights for all, reignited old conflicts. The leftists were cast as outlaws and the Greek Civil War began.

The 1941 invasion of Greece by the Axis powers of Germany, Bulgaria and Italy further weakened the Greek economy, which was still recovering from the influx of more than 1.5 million Greek refugees from Turkey after the Christian genocide during 1912–22 (Mazower 2000, p. 3).

When the rightist dictatorship came into power under Ioannis Metaxas in 1936, leftism was made unlawful, and those in prison were handed over to the Axis powers in 1941 (Christodoulakis 2016, p. 14).

During the Axis War, the Greek government failed to deliver food to the major cities and islands, resulting in many people starving. The economist Nicos Christodoulakis states that food shortages alone led to an estimated 300,000 deaths in Greece (2016, p. 14). Greek ex-servicemen and leftists began attacks on invading Axis troops to stop them taking food from the Greek people (p. 4). However, this did not last long because the Bulgarians retaliated by killing Greek civilians, which led to Greeks fleeing Drama for Salonika. When the Nazi Germans were attacked in the Strymon Valley, near where my relatives' villages are, in October 1941, this led to 200 villagers from Kato Kerzilion and

Ano being killed (p. 4). These events are supported by the story of Dimitris from Nigrita in *Melancholic* (Pt 3.2) of *The Bells Will Toll*.

Slowly the underground movement, the *Ethnikó Apeleftherotikó Métopo* (EAM) – the National Liberation Front – emerged to make sure there was fair distribution of food. The *Kommounistiko Komma Elladas* (KKE) – the Greek Communist Party – was the organiser behind the EAM. In the spring of 1942 they organised *Ellinikós Laikós Apeleftherotikós Stratós* (ELAS) – the Greek People’s Liberation Army – against the Axis occupiers, mainly in the mountain regions (Christodoulakis 2016, p. 4). At this point, the leftists were a resistance movement against the Axis powers and the Civil War did not commence until 1946 (Marantzidis & Antoniou 2002, p. 224).

According to Mazower (2000, p. 5), the KKE insisted on the disbandment of other leftist groups, often by force. He further explains that while Metaxas had removed many leftists from power, the Germans had in turn ended the dictatorship and dominance of the right. With the monarchy having been discredited due to the king fleeing to Egypt during the Axis invasion, for a time it seemed possible that the left might govern Greece. Britain, however, supported the return of the monarchy, despite it being more logical to support the EAM/ELAS, who were the most effective in resisting the Axis Occupation; however, “longer range political concerns required some kind of anti-communist counterweight” (Mazower 2000, p. 5). Instead, the British financed another resistance group, the National Republican Greek League (EDES) led by Napoleon Zervas, to support the monarchy.

Attempts to get the two resistance groups to cooperate failed. The EAM/ELAS fought and drove the EDES off mainland Greece to the island of Corfu in 1943, and when the Germans withdrew in 1944 there was nothing to stop the EAM/ELAS from taking control of Greece. The EAM /ELAS allowed Andreas Papandreou to assume power, expecting

assistance from Russia. However, Greece did not know that Russia and England had made a secret deal that Greece would be under British influence, not Russian. So, contrary to expectations of the leftists, Russia did not intervene (Mazower 2000, p. 6). This history – the secret deals, leftists funded by rightists such as the EDES, collaborationists, longer-range political reasons for decisions such as military bases and access for ships in the Mediterranean – illustrates the complexity of the times.

In late 1944 the resistance ministers in the Papandreou government resigned over a dispute over who should provide the armed forces and police. Fighting broke out between the two sides and on 4 December 1944 demonstrators in Athens were fired upon, with several killed. This led to fighting in the city, with the ELAS attacking British soldiers and British jets bombing Athenian suburbs known to house leftists. It is disputed who initiated the December 1944 events, and leftist sources claim it was the British. Christodoulakis states that the British troops aided the rightist government forces against the leftists in these attacks (2016, p. 15).

By 12 January 1945 the Varkiza Agreement was reached to end the fighting and bring peace to Greece, but it resulted in strong anti-left sentiment for the first time since 1942. Those considered dangerous to public security were outlawed by the government (Mazower 2000, p. 11).

Marantzidis and Antoniou explain that “the Communist defeat and the Cold War established an intense anti-Communist governance of the country until 1974, when the seven-year-long right-wing dictatorship collapsed” (2004, p. 223). This anti-left sentiment lasted beyond 1974 until reconciliation in the 1980s. This is borne out in *The Bells Will Toll*, in the stories of harassment told by some of my leftist relatives including my father, who was persecuted for his political beliefs until he left Greece.

In 1946, when the king was returned to power, there was extreme violence against the left, both in cities and in villages. Leftists fled their homes and armed resistance units again began forming in the mountain regions in Central Greece and the Peloponnese (Mazower 2000, p. 7). My father stated that his father and uncle had been with the KKE since 1942 when they had been fighting the Axis forces. Then they were heroes, as were the majority of leftist resistance fighters, helping defeat the Nazi Germans and fascists, but the tables turned and they came to be seen as criminals, because they would not capitulate to internal fascist rule.

The ELAS reformed into the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) and was successful against the national army. However, the British and later American forces supplied arms and planes with napalm against the leftists, and moved whole villages so relatives and friends could not feed the leftists who came down from the mountains for food, something clearly shown in my mother's and father's stories.

After Tito and Stalin split in 1948, the DSE chose to go with Stalin, so Tito withdrew his support. By 1949 the DSE and leftists were defeated, as Russia did not assist and Tito's support had evaporated. The rightists had the support of the USA and England. Leftists fled across the Northern Greek borders into communist countries. Some were caught before leaving and were imprisoned on the mainland or in prison islands such as Gyros (Mazower 2000, p. 7). My father's stories include insights into how people were treated on Gyros.

Mazower states that after 1950 there was some peace, but it was a strained peace under which the persecution of leftists persisted until the military Junta was overthrown in 1974 (p. 7). The war on the larger scale ended, but the occasional killing, and widespread harassment, of leftists and their sympathisers continued. The victorious parties "embarked

on a new wave of exclusion politics against left-leaning citizens” (Christodoulakis 2016, p. 16).

This continued harassment of leftists is supported by my father’s stories, about his mother being arrested and imprisoned until 1950, and his brother’s murder, all because they were supposed “communist sympathisers” due to Grandfather Kleanthis being a communist in exile.

Other historians have raised this demonisation of the left. Janet Hart wrote in *Cracking the Code: Narrative and Political Mobilization in the Greek Resistance*, that in 1944 the White Terror commenced, where communists, ex-partisans and their relatives were harassed, pursued or arrested, and imprisoned or sent to concentration camps. This harassment continued until the 1970s (Hart 1992, pp. 643–644). My father was pursued until he left Greece with us in 1972.

Hart further discusses how Cold War propaganda painted the EAM and communists in general as the aggressors and calls for a multinarrative approach to determine the truth of the matter. She further states: “contrary to standard postwar historical texts, I have painted the EAM movement more as victim than victimizer” and that “what we think we know” has gotten tangled up in “cold war rhetoric that has left little room for a fair reading” (1992, p. 644). My mnemography, *The Bells Will Toll*, adds further narratives for consideration so that this time of history receives a “fair reading”.

Another way that my mnemography supports official history is by revealing how difficult life for farmers was before, during and after the Civil War. Christodoulakis explains that during the Axis War farmers suffered confiscation and physical annihilation of crops and livestock due to the fighting (2016, p. 37). My mother’s story shows how her father and his flock got caught in crossfire with sheep being killed (“Captain Christodoulos”, Pt 2.2,

p. 106). This is also supported by Metropoulos's *The Wild and Twisted Branch* (2020), where the writer's father was asked to warn people in various villages on his way home to hide their food because the Germans were coming (ch 1).

My father's stories in *Sanguine* (Pt 1), my mother's stories in *Phlegmatic* (Pt 2) and my relatives' stories in *Melancholic* (Pt 3) also reveal how food was scarce and had to be hidden from both leftists and rightists. Hart includes an excerpt from a diary where a family receiving "30 grams of bread ... are beside themselves" (1992, p. 651), confirming the claim that 300,000 Greeks starved to death during the winter of 1941–42, that children could be heard saying "I am hungry" and that people were killed for playing a radio or stealing a potato (Christodoulakis 2016, p. 14).

The EAM had set up soup kitchens in Athens in 1941 to stop people starving (Hart 1992, p. 651). My father's story explains how the cities became devoid of food and many died while those living in the regions and villages still had their land to grow food on. In *Melancholic* (Pt 3) of the *Bells Will Toll*, Dimitris explains how people had to secretly work their farms and hide food. Another fact revealed by the first three chapters of *The Bells Will Toll* (Pt 1.1–1.3) is that people at that time were largely vegetarian. People preferred to keep cows, buffaloes and sheep or goats for milking, labour or wool production and chickens for eggs so as to have a regular source of animal protein, rather than to kill them for just a few meals. My father's story explains how people collected snails to eat (Pt 1.15, pp. 87–88), now considered exotic in French cuisine, but during the Civil War and in 1950s Greece they were a necessary form of protein. Wild birds, herbs, dandelions and bitter weeds were collected from the forests and hills. Pulses, grains, fruits and vegetables were the main sources of harvested food. Olive trees were already kept by

many farmers and were used for oil production for cooking, lamps, soap and skincare, and the olive fruit was preserved and eaten with bread and soup.

The huge tobacco industry in Northern Greece went into decline during the Axis War and the Greek Civil War, as evidenced in *The Bells Will Toll*. My parents' stories show how in the 1950s tobacco again became one of their major crops and a vital source of income. Sowing, harvesting and the drying of tobacco is also discussed, as well as the prices it fetched at the time.

The Greek Civil War was not known as a civil war in Greece until 1989. It was previously called a "bandit war", where the leftist guerrillas were seen as engaging in illegal acts. The change of term to "civil war" is one aspect of the reconciliation process, a triumph over negative propaganda (Siani-Davies & Katsikas 2009, p. 562).

In the late 1960s Grandfather Kleanthis returned from exile in former Czechoslovakia, as did many other leftists. However, my uncle took his family and my grandparents out of Greece again in the early 1970s to Sweden because there were still difficulties in finding work or getting paid for work already done, due to discrimination for my grandfather being a leftist. My mother's story explains how there was no pension for widows of leftists (Pt 2.5, p. 123). My uncle and grandparents returned to Greece in the 1980s at a more favourable time for reconciliation.

Siani-Davies and Katsikas (2009) have recognised that there cannot be only one version of the truth in the reconciliation process for Greece. They advise that "reconciliation cannot be total if it encourages forgetting because of the risk of the uncontrollable return of the past" (p. 559), and suggest that justice also "rests on the vindication of memory and the compensation of victims and their families" (p. 561). They add that "reconciliation needs to establish truth about the past" (p. 561), and this is another aim of

The Bells Will Toll – to search for and question different versions of the facts and offer alternative stories to those already published. To be heard, to have a voice and to present conflicting information are all valuable aspects, not only of the reconciliation process, but of democracy and human rights. *The Bells Will Toll* can be viewed as furthering reconciliation by presenting alternative stories and unique points of view for consideration.

There are other memoir-like texts which have deepened our understanding of the Axis War and Greek Civil War. Yet as stories of leftists are underrepresented, it is important that my parents' stories are recorded as a counterbalance and to add to this area of the Greek Civil War. There were many injustices which leftists and their sympathisers experienced. Most memoirs translated into English are anti-left, whereas *The Bells Will Toll* presents stories of harassment of the left, indicating that suffering and harassment affected the majority of people, regardless of political standing, at one time or another during these conflicts.

One of the best-known life histories of the Greek Civil War is Nicholas Gage's biography dedicated to his mother's life and death, *Eleni* (1983). He used his journalistic skills to sift through official records, hearsay, eyewitness accounts and oral history interviews. His research was driven by the need to know the full story and to make those responsible for his mother's death accountable in some way. While he did have strong views about leftist guerrillas, it was based on his personal experience of leaving Greece, backed up by eyewitness accounts of what happened to his mother at the hands of the communists. He wrote: "Communists in exile came flooding back and began to propagate their own version of the war" (1983, pp. 450–451). His views contrast starkly with the personal

experiences of my leftist relatives, who were harassed by rightists. Gage contested positive images of the guerrillas, stating that

the best talents of Greece were busy rewriting the history of the war ... while Communist leaders were denying ... execution of civilians and the abduction of large groups of children (p. 8).

In light of his experiences, it is understandable why he had these views; however, this makes it all the more important for *The Bells Will Toll* to add more narrative complexity to our understanding of this period.

The *paedomazoma* – the abduction of children – is not clearly described in most existing memoirs. Gage in *Eleni* states that leftists were responsible for removing children from his village. However, my parents' stories highlight how it was necessary for the children of some leftists to be taken out of Greece – usually by relatives and neighbours retreating behind the Iron Curtain so they were not harmed. There are many sides to this story and more stories are needed for a balanced reading. *The Bells Will Toll* discusses how and why these removals or “abductions” occurred.

The contrast between Gage's biography and the memories of my relatives indicates the depth and variety of experiences generated by the Greek Civil War. There was trauma on both sides, and both sides of the story must be told. I feel that Gage was convinced that the communist rebels were responsible for the majority of unrest and atrocities, and while this may have been true for his village, and in other locations, it is not a reflection of what occurred in my relatives' villages, nor in Greece as a whole. Therefore, there cannot be one single narrative of the Greek Civil War, and my mnemography adds more strands to existing narratives to create a more cohesive vision of what occurred at the time.

The *paedomazoma* was used for propaganda purposes against the KKE. This, along with other memories of the Civil War, was used to ensure an “anti-communist strain” in post-war Greek government propaganda (Cull, Culbert & Welch 2003, p. 154). My relatives have a different perspective of the expatriation of these children. They recall that the children taken were relatives of leftists who were leaving Greece, or who had already fled or died. These children would have been subjected to social stigma, disadvantage and danger if they had remained behind, as the murder of my Uncle Kostas illustrates. My relatives later conceded that they should have left the villages to avoid harassment, but it was not possible at the time.

Danger did not end with the Civil War. Local hatreds and resentments led to reprisals during the 1950s and beyond, as exemplified by those who returned from exile and found no work in Greece. One of my mother’s stories describes some of these events:

People began to return to Greece after 1972, but many did not want to come back and did not want people to know they were still alive. They did not believe that people would leave them alone after being communists (“August Feast Day”, Pt 2.12, p. 153).

When I asked, none of my relatives knew of anyone taken out of Greece by force. While it may have happened in other parts of Greece, my relatives only know of those who left because they had to. It is interesting that little mention is made of the so-called “queen’s camps” in existing memoirs or research papers. Interestingly Gage did not focus his research on this either. He and his siblings fled from the threat of abduction by leftists. Gage’s story is supported by the stories in *A Child’s Grief, A Nation’s Lament: A Modern Greek Tragedy 1946–49* (Diamandis et al. 1995) of children being abducted in villages ruled by communists. However, in the queen’s camps, the rightists took children away from leftist families by force and adopted out or repatriated them elsewhere, as far away as South America. In her memoirs, Queen Frederika writes:

The main project, at the beginning, was to save our children in the northern provinces from being carried across the borders and from being educated as enemies of the country (Bærentzen, Iatrides & Smith 1987, p. 127).

Danforth and Van Boeschoten concur that there are two sides to the story, where Queen Frederika's collection of the children is called "protection" versus the communists' "collection" with connotations of kidnapping (2012, p. 38). The communist response to this was that children were taken out of Greece at the request of their parents, to more hospitable countries for victims of the American conquerors (p. 39). It appears, then, that mainly children of leftists were collected by communists, with the permission of their parents, where possible (p. 40). As children were also collected by the government and sent to the queen's camps, from the communist perspective this was done without the permission of parents and the children were sent to be indoctrinated to hate their parents and hate communists (p. 40). It appears that rather than this being done out of concern for the children's safety, they were taken to the queen's camps in order to protect Greece from a possible future wave of communist return.

This chimes with what my parents and relatives have told me. The rebels wished to take their families with them, to avoid them being abducted or hurt by rightists. Bærentzen, Iatrides & Smith add: "these opposing viewpoints faithfully reproduce the propaganda of the opposing sides during the Civil War" (1987, p. 128). Danforth and Van Boeschoten also add that "both the Greek Government and the Greek Communist Party have constructed oversimplified one-sided accounts of these complex events" (2012, p. 41). Each side painted the other as black, but it appears both were responsible for taking children, and for harassment. It is interesting that the Greek government did not want to repatriate all of the supposedly "kidnapped" children. If those children had not been from leftist households, perhaps that would have been different. This again supports the notion

that the leftists took the children of leftists with them in order to protect them (Danforth & Van Boeschoten 2012, p. 6).

Because the government of the time and the following dictatorship were rightist, leftists were persecuted for a longer period than rightists were persecuted by leftists. It is my hope that by presenting stories from both leftist and politically neutral relatives, *The Bells Will Toll* will help redress the imbalance in relevant existing biographies and memoirs which are predominantly rightist.

My research process through oral history interviews revealed secrets and ambiguities. Some animosity still remains in villages along the main road which runs through them, past Nigrita on the way to Thessaloniki. It is a road which brought many tragedies during the Greek Civil War. There are villages along the way in which other villagers were not welcome. They are called villages of “fascists” or “leftists” and the younger generations may not know the full stories behind these biases. Shame, fear of retribution, stigma and despair have kept people quiet. If people could not rely on the authorities, they had to be stoic and rely on themselves. My father advised that the investigation into his older brother’s murder was a farce, where evidence that ordinary people could see, such as car tyre tracks, was overlooked or dismissed. It was another lesson in silence. During the 1950s police could not be relied upon to investigate acts of violence aimed at removing leftists from the community. The oral history interview with my father about how his family was targeted features in my mnemography in *Sanguine*.

In 1949 the cost of living in Greece was 254 times what it was before the war; people trusted gold coins, not the drachma, and most of the population was near starvation (Nachmani 1990, p. 8). Against the backdrop of this economic crisis, acts of murder, however politically motivated they might have been, were also aimed at removing those

deemed more successful than others at a time of financial crisis. My father told me my uncle Kostas's murderers were known to his family or even related to them. They were, he suggested, envious of Uncle's hard work and trading success when he was the son of a leftist in exile. The loss of his elder brother sent my father's family back into poverty at a time when their father was unable to help. This was the final straw that drove my grandmother into a long-term depression. Photos taken of my father, his two brothers and his mother (a mere six months before my uncle's death) show Uncle Kostas with sensitive, intelligent eyes and a peaceful demeanour. Apparently, he was a mathematical genius, tutoring university students even though he only had a high school education. My father looks angry, with dark Anatolian looks, and Grandmother's face is split into two expressions, one eyebrow arched in shock and the other dropping in sorrow, an exact mirror of her mental torment. My father revealed that she had been subjected to frequent arrests, simply because her husband was a leftist in exile.

Voglis (2002) asserts that this harassment of leftists and their families was common during the Greek Civil War and its aftermath, citing the ongoing persecution and imprisonment by fascists of Antonis Flountzis. In his memoir, Flountzis writes: "Never yet have I been tried or sent for trial for violating any law and I have no criminal records whatsoever" (Flountzis, in Voglis 2002, p. 524).

The silencing of voices does not only occur after war or tragic events as a form of self-protection. It can also be a way of shutting out information about family members with whom one is displeased. Auto-ethnographer Christopher Poulos describes how a family secret slips out when talking casually to his father about a photograph in a dusty album. His father tells him that they just don't talk about certain family members, the skeletons in the closet, locking away "secret knowledge behind a veil of silence" (2009, p. 14). The

reason for this veil of silence may be that the event has caused a “wound”, as Poulos calls it, which is too deep to heal of its own accord, and if the family is not “talented in fending off despair”, it lapses into silence (pp. 15–16).

The recurring taunts by the authorities directed at Grandmother Athina caused her to become silent and stoic. My father said she bore many burdens (“Photograph”, Pt 1.12, p. 56). This silencing led to some family members not even knowing basic facts about other deceased family members, such as what they looked like, as in the case of my father’s twin sister, as this event was not discussed. Many died during the Greek Civil War due to lack of doctors and medical facilities. People had to rely on folk remedies and prayers. Local women usually had been trained to read from the Bible for various illnesses, or to remove the “evil eye”. This is another area of knowledge that *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to.

One taboo subject of the Greek Civil War is the participation of women. In my mother’s stories in *Phlegmatic* (Pt 2), she describes how two of her cousins were taken by force by leftists to help cook, wash clothes and carry water for them. Danforth and Van Boeschoten state that the communist forces took women by force: “women and children were being requisitioned to carry the wounded, prepare food, build fortifications”, and that the rightist Greek Army used them “to clear mines” (2012, p. 44). There is no one narrative for any aspect of the Greek Civil War, including the *paedomazoma*, as both sides were responsible for taking children, and for forcing women and children to participate in helping soldiers with daily chores. My father’s story illustrates how his older brother was taken by their uncle to carry water for the leftists in the mountains, but he returned.

It is a significant contribution to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War that the stories of ordinary villagers can be heard through my mnemography as a collection of oral histories

and bear important witness to the heartbreaking everyday hardships which have been overlooked in other memoirs or family histories of the Greek Civil War. Oral historian Paul Thompson asserts that “[o]ral history is built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people” and, most importantly, “oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history” (1988, p. 21).

As previously discussed, most Greek memoirs produced during the Greek Civil War and the dictatorship are from the perspective of the right and are marketed as histories rather than memoirs, indicating a political agenda (Marantzidis & Antoniou 2004, p. 224). Leftist biographies were published in 1945–1946 and were not seen again until the 1980s. Marantzidis and Antoniou claim that this is evidence that “there is a correlation between socialist governance and the construction of the civil war’s collective memory” (p. 225). In other words, the ruling rightist party excluded historical accounts of leftists that did not suit its interests and it spread information and propaganda which served its own purposes.

Freedom of speech was not possible during the Greek Civil War. Mikis Theodorakis wrote *Journals of Resistance* (1973) during the dictatorship from 1967 to 1969, and the conflicts which emerged during the Greek Civil War are still evident in this later work. Theodorakis wrote that he was shocked to find that his was the lone published voice opposed to the changes that arose in Greece at the time. He had the means, contacts and support through which to pass on his essays and proclamations to the rest of the world, including Greek citizens. His journal entries reveal fear, persecution and suppression of freedom of speech. Speaking out was difficult for any person, which makes me realise how brave my Grandfather Christos was, taking a moral stand to save rightists from leftist retribution, and leftists from rightists, as revealed in several stories in *Phlegmatic*.

An example of the battle between opposing political views of official history is found in Stefan Heym's memoir, *Collin* (1979). The main protagonist, Collin, is an old communist who resisted the Third Reich. Collin has to decide between being honest about his life experiences in East Germany or holding back some views which the authorities would not like him to write about. Being honest would mean being ostracised, and the stress of this dilemma leads to a heart attack. While in hospital he meets the Minister of State Security, who becomes concerned about what Collin will reveal in his memoirs, and it is assumed that whoever outlives the other will dictate the course of official history about East Germany through their memoirs (cited in Epstein 1999, p. 182). This is an extreme example of how the publication of a life history could potentially have an impact on official history.

Another example of stories of opposing political views is provided by Steven Hopkins, who makes the point that the memorialisation and commemoration of historical events has the ability to evoke reconciliation and healing but can also increase the division between opposing views, as in Northern Ireland (Hopkins 2016, p. 6). He adds that self-criticism of long-held views can lead to increased tolerance.

This possible questioning or self-criticism of opposing views is one aim of my mnemography. I have included examples of heroic acts by both leftists and rightists to show that these were just labels used to cover the complex nature of individuals, all of whom had the capacity to show their humanity and moral values. An extract from *Sanguine: Father's Story* exemplifies this:

I then ran to an uncle who was a fascist but who was also a very good man and asked him for help.

“They took Mother and are hitting her and not giving her food or water.”

Uncle Pavlos went to the police station immediately with a *bastooni* in his hand and said, “Why punish this woman? She is not a rebel, neither are her children involved in this war. Let her go and don’t bother them anymore, or I will make trouble for you.” He tapped the desk emphatically. The policeman saw that my mother had the support of fascist relatives and decided to release her (“Voices of Freedom”, Pt 1.5, p. 20).

If some reconciliation has occurred in Greece, it has not occurred to the same level in the Greek diaspora. With many Greeks having fled the country prior to the end of the dictatorship, they were not there to experience the process of reconciliation that followed. My father told me about confrontations with ex-fascists in Melbourne. Among the Greek diaspora are vast Greek populations in England, America, Canada and Australia. My *mnemography* is in English and may be of interest to the younger English-speaking generations because it ties in with their own family histories, whether right or left.

During the Civil War and its aftermath leftists were seen as unlawful so harassment of them was allowed. These acts have a political rather than a moral basis. Political theorist Hannah Arendt questions human judgement in the ability to tell right from wrong, and gives the example of how under Hitler some crimes became legal:

Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgements, and they did so freely ... because no rules existed for the unprecedented (1965, p. 295).

My mother’s stories reveal how her father would also go by his own moral code, not following local resentments or believing in propaganda in order to protect rightists and leftists from each other.

Arendt furthers this argument in her essay *Truth and Politics*, by clarifying that this does not mean politics is somehow “low or base”, but that the custodians of truth must be outside of politics, so that truth is safe from politics (Riley 1987, pp. 391–392).

Otherwise, truth becomes another casualty of war, with those in power changing the facts to facilitate political agendas, and propaganda is allowed to proliferate.

The Bells Will Toll highlights the vilification and harassment that occurred in the villages as part of the White Terror, when guerrillas were not seen as legitimate and those with any ties to them were stigmatised and left without power or voice. The mass persecution of leftists commenced in 1945, when communism became illegal in Greece and people were imprisoned according to the Varkiza Agreement, which caused leftists to be declared common war criminals (Voglis 2002). My mnemography shows how the violence continued beyond the official end of the Civil War, well into the 1950s, '60s and '70s, and left many people fearful to speak out. My father's story, *Sanguine*, in particular shows how he and his brothers and his mother all were harassed. Father became a leftist after the murder of his brother in a supposed "car accident" and the harassment continued until our migration to Australia.

This interplay of power structures from the Civil War and the dictatorship is evident in my mnemography. Helene Ahl (2007, p. 217) argues that social reality is constructed and is always in flux and that any changes to it may meet with resistance. There may be resistance to the material presented in *The Bells Will Toll* because it questions the norm and tackles prejudices and views which were previously legitimate and accepted as valid. Presentation of harassment of leftists and their families may still not receive a fair reading by rightists. Regardless, it is necessary for stories of the left to be presented. One such story is depicted in "The Island of Gyáros and the 40,000 Children" (Pt 1.14):

We didn't have our own buffaloes after the war to plough our fields so my brother went to an uncle's house and made the agreement to plough three days for him and then borrow the buffaloes to plough our own fields for one day. After working three days he went to get the buffaloes but the uncle refused and said, "Take your complaint to Stalin." I found out about this after a boy

ran over and told me to hurry because my uncle was beating my brother. I ran over there and pushed our uncle away and saved my brother from further humiliation. I was fearless and stood up against aggressors or injustice, when my family could not do so. I took his buffaloes and we ploughed our field. An agreement was an agreement. (pp. 81–82)

Ethnographer Francesca Cappelletto looks at this dichotomy of views in relation to the Italian Civil War, writing that:

the dynamics of the divided memory are to be viewed as strictly intertwined with victimhood and with the more general issue of how these communities reacted against the brutality and violence of the established regime (1998, p. 84).

This supports my understanding that many people became anti-right or anti-left depending on how they were victimised by one political party or another.

Allan and Wendy Scarfe wrote the memoirs of Greek Australians who fled the Greek Civil War “to help people understand the complex political and historical events that shaped the moral choices those involved in them had to make” (1994, p. 14). They further explain:

We recorded their stories to redress a balance of thinking that comes naturally to many members of our society: that the Left are always wrong, always the evil doers. We were angered by the glib lies told in school textbooks about Greek history and concurred with Gough Whitlam that it is “important to avoid the perpetuation and legitimisation of the myths created by enemies of the Left”. We have no wish to make readers cynical or one sided (p. 14).

The Bells Will Toll is my contribution to dispelling ongoing myths about the leftists through the stories and experiences of my family. There are two sides, and through *The Bells Will Toll* it is apparent both have experienced suffering at the hands of the other. My mnemography questions the legitimacy of any violence, even politically sanctioned violence.

My relatives told me many times that sometimes it was only coincidence, fate or loss that determined if a person identified as left or right. If a relative was killed by one side, then the other family members would oppose that side. Often it was not an agreement with political ideology, but an opposition to those responsible for personal suffering and loss.

The memories of my relatives reveal discrepancies in existing knowledge of the Greek Civil War in Northern Greece, as mentioned throughout this chapter. Political theorists Laura Neack and Roger Knudson chose to use personal narrative as a:

significant methodological departure from standard peacekeeping research, research that has failed to both hear the accounts of everyday people and to offer meaningful lessons for constructing peacekeeping that contributes to genuine peace (1999, p. 525).

In contrast to narratives from the elite, my mnemography focuses on the everyday lives of my relatives as ordinary villagers, farmers, husbands, wives and children because these types of stories are underrepresented in existing memoirs.

Van Boeschoten explains how the anti-communist ideologies even extended into the Orthodox Church:

[While] some members of the clergy had supported the partisan army, the Orthodox Church, as an institution, resolutely took the side of the Greek government in the civil war (2015, p. 106).

With the government and the Church opposed to the left, there was little support available to leftists except from a few families who were either leftists or sympathised with the left. My grandfather Christos could see beyond temporary labels such as left and right into the core of the human condition, overarched by an all-forgiving God.

My mnemography, though made of up of the memories of my relatives, is also intertwined with the collective memory of general contemporary events. The stories of individuals

can contest aspects of collective memory, because individual experience cannot be generalised. This point is also supported by Van Boeschoten's research on the Greek Civil War in the village of Ziakas:

A first important point that has emerged is the multivocality of local memories, in contrast to the homogenous view of the past, transmitted by "national memory" (2005, p. 60).

My mnemography adds more local and individual voices to this larger, less diverse collective memory of Northern Greece during and after the Civil War.

Most memoirs from the Greek Civil War such as Nicholas Gage's *Eleni* (1983), or Angelo Metropoulos's *Wild and Twisted Branch* (2020), or *Dandelions for Dinner* by Sam and Peter Stamatis (2011), are either rightist or leftist. In contrast, *The Bells Will Toll* outlines the different political factions, how they interacted with each other, and how some people remained neutral. It also provides fine-grained detail of what life was like during the Greek Civil War, in an ethnographic sense, and contests ideological propaganda on both sides of the political divide.

The death of my great-uncle Eraklis as related in *Sanguine* (Pt 1) is one example of how there are different sides of a story and not all of them can possibly be true. My father describes how rightists beat drums all night and lit bonfires to celebrate his uncle's death, how some claim to have put his head on a pike, and that it "is not known who buried Uncle Eraklis or where" (Pt 1.14, p. 79). But Grandfather Christos claims to have buried Eraklis with his own hands (Pt 1.2, p. 11), so it is unlikely that the story of his head on a pike could be true. If it is true, then it shows the inhumanity of the right in disinterring a grave to decapitate the deceased so they could parade his head around town. I do not think this occurred. The fact that my relatives could not even investigate this properly and the

silencing that followed shows how the White Terror gave rightists the legitimacy to behave in such a manner.

Such conflicting stories about what happened to some relatives illustrates how propaganda, rumour and silencing was used during the Greek Civil War. I believe that such stories have their own motivations – some were possibly outright lies or misconceptions, and others may have been the truth. People could not openly discuss events for fear that informers had ears at the window at night, so discrepancies could not be straightened out early on. Who would dispute what rightists said if it would entail divulging where you had buried a leftist guerrilla? I believe what Grandfather Christos told me. He was an honest man with no political motivations. And I believe his eyewitness account of burying Great-uncle Eraklis, rather than the rumours of him having been beheaded and his head paraded in the village of Zitohori. This contradiction is discussed again in my mnemography in the fourth and final part, *Choleric*, which is my story:

I asked Father, “If Grandfather Christos had buried Uncle Eraklis and seen his head and what remained of his face, how could the fascists have cut off his head and danced with it in Zitohori, beating drums the whole night to celebrate the death of a communist rebel?” Father did not seem to hear the logic in my question. He said, “Yes the fascists cut off his head and danced in the village with glee, as if they had caught a lion.” I tried to point out they couldn’t have his head if he had already been buried and Grandfather Christos had been the last one to see him. Father did not hear me. He was lost in his thoughts (“Maimundire”, p. 199).

Each story had its own agenda and perhaps propaganda was used to demoralise communist sympathisers, their relatives and rebels in hiding. By bending the truth or completely fabricating events, people’s emotions could be manipulated. Of course, I cannot say for certain that the fascists had not gone and found the shallow grave and disinterred the body. However, Grandfather said he had hidden the grave in the soft riverbank, using his bare hands to dig. He had collected stones, branches and twigs with

which he covered the spot. It would have been difficult to find. My grandfather cried and lifted up his hands to show me how they had bled from digging in the dirt. Grandfather did not mention anything about fascists cutting off uncle's head. Perhaps he had remained quiet about the burial until he told me for his own protection. Therefore, I do not believe that both stories are true.

Social historian Shawn Parry-Giles explains that during the US presidencies of the Cold War:

public discourse of truth and peace camouflaged strident anticommunist rhetoric that was planned and executed by the presidential administrations to support their foreign policy agendas (2002, p. xxi).

The Greek Civil War was on one of these agendas. The perception of the rebels was manipulated by propaganda influenced by American policies and the local Greek authorities.

It is highly likely that local propaganda was spread amongst the villages in order to mislead and manipulate. I chose to include opposing views from different relatives because allowing both sides of a story to be heard can lead to a fuller understanding of what occurred. There were lies, rumours, misconceptions and propaganda circulating along with fact. That was the climate of the times during the Greek Civil War and dictatorship, when some people believed the rumours and propaganda and were duped, and others knew the truth due to being an eyewitness, as with my Grandfather Christos. There were often two or more versions of events. But as individual experience is in many ways subjective, it means there are several versions of the truth: the emotional truth (see discussion in Ch 1, pp. 244–245) and the factual events which exist alongside this.

This layering of truth, propaganda and rumour is what adds uniqueness and authenticity in capturing something of the political and social climate of the time in my mnemography. Interestingly, Nicolas Demertzis points out that there is a silencing and obliteration of the public record from 1950 to 1974, basically from the time after the Civil War to the end of the dictatorship (2011, p. 138). *The Bells Will Toll* adds voices to this “silent” period in history, revealing how the harassment of leftists continued throughout this time, and also how very few leftists actually still engaged in retaliatory acts against fascists, as related in “Dimitris, Nigrita 2015”.

Perhaps the public record is silent because the actions of the rightists were legitimate during this time and therefore the right could be silent on the harassment of the left. This was the time when Uncle Kostas was murdered in 1950 and also when the politician Grigoris Lambrakis, a former resistance fighter, pacifist, doctor and athlete, was assassinated in 1963 after his anti-war speech, not far from my parents’ villages, in Thessaloniki. In the foreword to *Lambrakis and the Peace Movement* (Triganis 2013), Kostas Papadopoulos states:

Today it is difficult to find anyone in our country who is nostalgic for the junta and their preachers of Nazism – who does not recognize the struggles of Lambrakis and does not treat his memory with respect (p. 11).

Lambrakis is now honoured, and ordinary people such as my relatives are now honoured in my mnemography, as the tide appears to have turned towards peace and democracy.

Perhaps the greatest insight *The Bells Will Toll* provides regarding the Greek Civil War is the way the trauma it generated, including that of mass migration, continues to reverberate down the generations. Recording family history is important not only for me and my family but also as a significant multivocal record of times past to be read in conjunction with and against more official histories.

Part 4, *Choleric*, of *The Bells Will Toll* highlights my struggle to understand the way things were and still are in the villages, in terms of taboo topics such as the Civil War which few wish to discuss even now. There still are forbidden areas to visit, such as the mountains near Seita. My younger aunt born after the Greek Civil War would not explain to me why I should not go into the mountains. I could only understand that it caused her great unease to discuss the mountains.

Another consequence of the Greek Civil War and dictatorship is the trauma of the subsequent migration undertaken by the many who fled Greece , and the further trauma which is not just the intergenerational trauma of postmemory.

Damousi outlines that the hidden wartime memories and their effects on migrants and their families are underresearched (2015, p. 198). She further stipulates that “there is an absence in the Australian literature on second-generation migration in ethnic communities in general but on Greek migrants in particular” (p. 199). My mnemography is an addition to this scant area of research in Australia, and quite possibly other diasporas. My homesickness, the haunting of the past and the transmission of memories from my parents to me is evident in *The Bells Will Toll*.

Unlike many other families, my parents did not engage in a “conspiracy of silence” in order to forget the past (Damousi 2015, p 199): we actively spoke about the past and wanted to remember. The loss of family relationships and connections due to geographical separation was the greatest trauma that my family and I faced, and this was a consequence of the Civil War and dictatorship.

This chapter has discussed how *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War and its aftermath, in terms of the harassment of leftists, and the struggles to survive during those times of famine and deprivation. It contributes to our knowledge

of how people lived in my parents' villages and the political climate of the time. *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of how the silencing of people after traumatic events led to misinformation and loss of information, and how there are still misconceptions about what really happened to some of my relatives. This mystery resulted from the suppression of free speech and other human rights of those who identified as leftist or were relatives of leftists.

This chapter also discusses how there are conflicting stories presented in *The Bells Will Toll* and how I determined which story was most correct, if such a thing was possible. These conflicting stories were the result of the suppression of freedom of speech and proliferation of propaganda.

The Bells Will Toll adds to our knowledge of how leftists and their families were harassed, imprisoned and pursued by rightists and police during the 1940s to the 1970s in Greece.

In this chapter, the complexity of the *paedomazoma* has also been discussed, and why there cannot be one single narrative, as both sides participated in the removal of children. Moreover, it has been discussed how the anti-communist policies of England and the USA influenced the ideologies, propaganda and events of the Greek Civil War and led to harassment of leftists and their families in my parents' villages. It has been discussed how innocent people like my uncle Kostas were collateral damage in the legitimisation of harassment against leftists and their families as part of the nationwide suppression of communism.

This chapter has also discussed how the history of the Greek Civil War is multivocal, and how both rightists and leftists were involved in aggression and retaliation and in the removal of women and children to support soldiers' efforts. It has also been clarified that the harassment of leftists occurred for a long time after the Greek Civil War ended, as the

rightist government and then the dictatorship ruled until 1974. This is another reason why it is so important for the stories of the left, which are currently underrepresented in the literature, to be recorded, so as to enable a “fair reading” of the political, social and cultural climate of the Greek Civil War to the dictatorship.

The next chapter moves from how *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War to how it contributes to our knowledge of the myths, superstitions and symbols relevant to my family from the 1940s to the present day, and how these feature in *The Bells Will Toll*. These symbols, myths and superstitions are important to understand because they show the belief system and culture in place at that time, which again adds to our understanding of the climate my family lived in during the Greek Civil War and beyond.

Chapter 4

Myths and Symbols in *The Bells Will Toll*

This chapter explores how myths and symbols in *The Bells Will Toll* contribute to our knowledge of the daily lives and beliefs of villagers in Northern Greece. *The Bells Will Toll* includes many symbols, metaphors and myths, and this chapter discusses in greater depth how and why they are important to the narrative and the extra meaning they add. These symbols are specific to the culture in which my parents and grandparents grew up and therefore are relevant ethnographically, as well as from a narrative point of view. These symbols and myths – which have their origins in Ancient Greek polytheistic culture, in Christian religion, and in local superstitions – are important to understand because they delve into the culture of the time and places recorded in my mnemography, further adding to our understanding of the climate my family lived in during the Greek Civil War and beyond.

Omens and superstitions were important to my family because they were interpreted as warnings of danger or bad luck, and they tried to avoid travel or making important decisions if such signs were unfavourable. This was partly because there were few telephones, few televisions and few cars in the villages, and no doctors, therefore every care had to be taken to heed omens to avoid accidents and catastrophe. News usually travelled by word of mouth, slowly, as people moved around the villages by foot, donkey or horse-drawn carts.

Superstitions and omens are nothing new to Greeks, with them first being recorded in Theophrastus and Plutarch's work on *Deisidaimonia* or "fear of God" (Bowden 2008, pp. 56–57). This work explains how natural phenomena are viewed and the actions taken to honour God and avert evil when they are encountered. Bowden explains how this

“popular practice” is deeply rooted in human beings and the campaign of explaining these superstitions by the Greek philosophers is unlikely to ever end. The omens are listed by numbers and include what to say and do if one hears a certain bird noise, or sees a dead body or tombstone, what to do at the crossroads. It is curious that number 15, which involves spitting on your chest, is similar to what is still practised today by my relatives in Greece to ward off the evil eye.

The Bells Will Toll shows how belief in ancient superstitions, omens and signs continue today in my parents’ villages. Being deeply cultural, these signs, symbols and superstitions needed to be included in *The Bells Will Toll*, and their significance explained here, as readers might otherwise question the relevance of their inclusion or mistakenly assume they have been added as a creative element and were not in the original oral histories.

The Bells Will Toll brings to light the complex and subtle ways these symbols are perceived and understood by my family members, and other local villagers, and provides information about how my relatives and ancestors lived and interacted with their surroundings, with the land, with the seasons, with the divine, with the innate spirit of things which they perceived. This is because:

knowing the meaning of symbols or symbolic stories not only allows us to read the art and literature of the past with more understanding. It also helps to put us in touch with the mind-set of societies that developed the language of symbolism over thousands of years. For them, the realm of space and time was penetrated by a higher consciousness (Tresidder 1995, p. 6).

My family believed that everything is interconnected, that signs in the natural world could forewarn of other events and dangers. As my mnemography delves into the ways of life of my relatives, it is necessary to also look at their beliefs, superstitions and customs for a greater understanding of their lives.

According to psychologist Carl Jung, the “complex and unfamiliar part of the mind, from which symbols are produced, is still virtually unexplored” and communication from it, including symbols, is “too tedious for any but a very few people to be bothered with it” (1964, p. 93). However, these omens, symbols, dreams and myths are useful and important. Jung also states that the study of “individual, as well as of collective, symbolism is an enormous task, and one that has not yet been mastered” (1964, p. 94).

Several symbols, myths and popular village superstitions run through *The Bells Will Toll* and can be seen in each of the four parts. This includes how my family perceived natural phenomena and the links between the physical and spiritual world. This is important because it provides intimate knowledge about how my family members, and villagers in Northern Greece in general, perceived events in the world and in the spiritual realm, and how they used these insights to make decisions about what they should do and what should be avoided.

Like my parents and relatives in Greece, I grew up close to nature, and was exposed to the ancient village superstitions my parents had passed on to me. The meaning came through to me in the way they explained and viewed life and through the stories they told. These superstitions, metaphors, myths and ways of looking at life are linked to symbols such as bells, birds, mountains, rainbows, almond blossoms, and other natural phenomena local to the Serras region of Greece. My relatives previously lived in a way described nowadays as “off the grid”, without modern conveniences such as running water, electricity, or cooling, for most of their early lives. Cast-iron stoves in the house provided heat and a cooking source. Prior to the purchase of these stoves, they had a fireplace over which they hung pots.

People took notice of omens. They could not afford to ignore them, even if they did not believe wholeheartedly. It was better to be cautious on some days to try to avoid a potential disaster. Perhaps it was easier to see these natural omens and signs because they lived their lives so close to nature, in the fields, getting water from the well, collecting firewood from the forest.

This magical “link” with nature was passed on to me through my parents and is another example of intergenerational transmission – not of trauma but of ways of looking at the world. As this way of perceiving events and the world was an integral part of their lives, it is obvious that these symbols, myths, superstitions and beliefs would feature in *The Bells Will Toll*.

The Bells Will Toll reveals how my parents and grandparents could read omens, such as a black bird flying to the right as a warning of coming danger; a snake passing in front of you in the road indicated trouble, danger, deceit or a potential ambush; red blossoms in your path meant love; animals behaving strangely indicated an earthquake or natural disaster was imminent; and if children crawled on the floor in front of you it meant visitors were coming. Strangely, these predictions were often correct.

Greek myths are incorporated into *The Bells Will Toll* because they formed part of my cultural heritage and family memories. Village superstitions have their roots in ancient beliefs and customs. These include the notion of the “evil eye” and goblins, called *kalikanzaroi*. The word *kalikanzaroi* has links in language to Hindi – *kala* meaning black, or *Kali*, the Goddess of Destruction, and *Kanz*, a Hindu Demon (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 270). In Greece *kalikanzaroi* are considered small creatures who create mischief. They are said to roam the countryside during Lent and Christmas when people are trying to fast and be good, and also appear before calamities. Some people call them Christmas

Goblins, who pause cutting down the Tree of Life to come and make trouble during the twelve days of Christmas. The Tree of Life is also related to the Christmas tree, or to the oak tree (described later in this chapter). The Christmas tree or evergreen tree celebrates the death of the old year and birth of the new (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 106).

The snake is seen as a bad omen, and when the car runs over a large snake on the road in the village in “Maimundire” (Pt 4.4, pp. 197–198), according to local superstition it means that evil has been averted. If the snake is seen as the keeper of wisdom, another older interpretation might be that hidden knowledge has been lost. The snake also represents the primeval life force, mysteries of birth and creation, and is symbolic of both male and female, duality, both fear and reverence, and as the *ouroboros* (Fig. 4.1) it symbolises eternity and divine self-sufficiency (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 445). My relatives who are Christian Orthodox also associate snakes with evil, as the serpent is seen as evil in the Bible.



Figure 4.1. Early alchemical *ouroboros* illustration with the words *εν το πον* ('The All is One')

Source: from the work of Cleopatra the Alchemist in MS Marciana gr. Z. 299 (10th century), image, Wikimedia, viewed 18 June 2019, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chrysopoea_of_Cleopatra_1.png>.

In my mind, the symbol of the *ouroboros* – the snake swallowing its tail – kept recurring. It is a symbol of infinity, of continuity and constant renewal. This is a relevant symbol,

for each time my mnemography is read, it takes on new life, new meaning and is recreated again. So, the *ouroboros* became part of my mnemography and a symbol for the sub-genre of mnemography. Each time we remember we are walking down the corridor of time but also recreating the past in the present. It symbolises the way *The Bells Will Toll* gives eternal life to my family stories and to my relatives' memories.

The *ouroboros* symbol also fits in with the concept of postmemory, how the memories and experiences of the previous generation live on in the next generation. The *ouroboros* shows how the past is renewed in the present each time we recall an event. Storytelling, and remembrance are ways of resurrecting the past in the present. The *ouroboros* is central to the Ancient Greek Orphic creation myth, encircling the cosmic egg from which the universe is born. It was also part of the Eleusinian mysteries (Shepherd & Shepherd 2002, p. 231), which involved Demeter and Persephone who are linked to the four seasons, to rebirth and change that follows a set order or pattern. Persephone symbolises spring or the renewal which comes after winter or destruction. Demeter is her mother and she symbolises the Earth and fertility (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 146). My mnemography retells stories and gives them new life in a pattern of renewal linked to Persephone and the four seasons through the four parts of the mnemography, and the *ouroboros*.

As an explanation of ways to use symbols and metaphors, Carmel Bird explains that writers "sometimes take the metaphor of the house, or the garden, or a tree on which to structure their stories" (2007, p. 158). She insists that, "whatever the metaphor, [it] will be something of deep significance to" the writer, but that writers do not have to have a metaphor if they do not want one (p. 139).

Another way of describing how a symbol may be interpreted is given by Robert Moss, who states that “a symbol is more than a sign: it brings together what we know with what we do not yet know” (2015, p. 3).

I found several metaphors had significance for me when writing *The Bells Will Toll*, including the ones mentioned above. The *ouroboros* is a metaphor for my family stories being told and retold into infinity. The Tree of Life holds significance as a metaphor for my family tree, ancestors and the future generations. This is not just because the family tree is a genealogical record. The tree with branches shooting off from a main trunk also symbolises how we are all offspring of past ancestors. I was intrigued by the classical belief in ancient Greek myth that the oak tree was the Tree of Life and that its branches penetrated the sky to heaven and its roots went to the underworld where the departed reside (Shepherd & Shepherd 2002, p. 236). This unity and continuity of life – the past, present and future – are contained in the one symbol of the Tree of Life.

Another very significant symbol in my mnemography, included in the title, is the church bells which ring to warn of danger. In “Clouds of Destruction” the church bells ring after a disastrous hailstorm so the survivors could meet and pray for salvation (Pt 2.9, p. 142). The bell as a symbol is the “divine voice that proclaims the truth” (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 67). The church bells called people to prayer several times a day in the villages, marked celebrations like weddings, and signalled the close of one’s life – a funeral.

Church bells are also said to ring before the approaching resurrection, as in the Yiannis Ritsos poem *Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes*, “The Bells Will Toll”, which forms the title of my mnemography. I chose this title from a famous Greek song composed by Theodorakis, which is based on a cycle of poems called *Romiosini* by the famous Greek poet Yiannis Ritsos (1945–47), who was a member of the *Ethnikó Apeleftherotikó Métopo* (EAM, the

National Liberation Front) during the Greek Civil War and remained leftist throughout his life. *Romiosini* was another name for Byzantium or Pontus, now part of Turkey, with the separation of the living from the dead linked by the same earth, as the separation of Greeks from Turks in Turkey after the genocide, and the separation of leftists from rightists in Greece. The words are very poetic and haunting, especially “this soil is theirs and ours” which is repeated over and over again in the Theodorakis song.

Ritsos’s poems and books were banned after the Civil War until 1954. This song *Tha Simanoun oi Kampanes* was played endlessly during my childhood; my father had brought the albums with him from Greece. In Greece when he played them during the dictatorship my mother kept turning the music down for fear of arrests. In Australia from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s Mother would dance with us in the living room to this song and others from *Romiosini* sung by Theodorakis (Theodorakis & Bithikotsis 1966), and to the “Ballad of Mauthausen” sung by Maria Farandouri.

“The Bells Will Toll” is anti-war and promotes reconciliation. But to us, it was a wonderful poetic song with amazing imagery and phrases. We heard it blaring out of car windows in Prahran during the 1970s, in Greek cake shops in Lonsdale Street in Melbourne. It is the song of my childhood, of family unity, the idealism of the 1970s and the freedom of youth. It is the song which reminds me of my father. The title had a special meaning for me as it referred to the exiled and incarcerated Greeks during the Greek Civil War and dictatorship. I did not clearly understand it at the time, but it also referred to the harassment of my father and his family by fascists and my grandfather in exile, to the wrongness of my uncle Kostas’s murder and to our painful separation through migration from home. For me, that song is the essence of what it means to be Greek, and especially a Greek in exile through migration in the diaspora.

Ernest Hemingway's book *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was first published in 1940 and is a novel about the Spanish Civil War during 1936–39. I realise there is a similarity between my title and his, and also that both are about civil wars; however, that is where the similarity ends. My work, as a mnemography is a creative oral history, while Hemingway's work is a novel. His title did not influence my choice of title in any way. The Ritsos poem, a strong feature of my childhood, was the reason for the choice.

Hemingway's title came from a John Donne poem, "Meditation XVII" (1624), with the famous line "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee". To a Greek, the tolling of the bells does not signify death but resurrection and the judgement day which will come, so that martyrs, heroes and the righteous will have everlasting life and freedom. It is an appropriate title for my mnemography – giving family memories everlasting life.

The four seasons are another metaphor used in my mnemography – the separation of life into birth, growth, harvest, decay or loss. My family lived at a time when the four seasons defined what activities the community engaged in, such as sowing, weeding and harvesting, and then the rest period during winter when they enjoyed the fruits of their labour. Spring correlates with youth, beauty, birth and fertility. Summer is abundance, fullness, completion. Autumn is harvest, the collection of the fruits of one's labour, and preparation for winter, amassing preserved food and firewood for storage. Winter is decline, rest, coldness, stillness, and a time when the wise stay indoors to avoid danger such as bad weather and wolves.

Other motifs are the road or path, the mountains, the swallows and the red poppies of spring, the red-dyed Easter egg, bread, the harvest, storm clouds, lightning, the colour red and the wolf. These symbols are related strongly to the seasons and time of year, as the

red poppies mark spring and approaching summer, the sanguine, joy and natural beauty. The wolves are predominantly related to winter and early spring when there is hunger and snow in the natural world.

I did not self-consciously contemplate metaphors or themes for *The Bells Will Toll*; rather, these meanings and symbols evolved in the writing process and were told to me often by my parents.

In the stories in *Choleris* (Pt 4), the mountains, which to me were fresh and inviting, are dark and foreboding to my relatives, especially those who lived through the Civil War. Mountains were seen as sacred in ancient Greece because they were closer to heaven or the realm of the Gods. Temples were often set on top of mountains or the highest peak so that pilgrims could toil to reach the top, their hard work earning the arrival at the destination, and so the sought-after favour with God. A visit to the realm of the Gods had to be earned. In the early 1990s when Santorini was not so developed, I remembered seeing ancient bathtubs near the road, and a rock with a snake carved into it pointing towards the small mountain on the left, an ancient signpost to show where the divine path was. It took a long time, possibly an hour, to walk all the way to the top and offer flowers and leaves at an altar. I felt the unique energy of the place and appreciated being at the top after walking uphill for an hour. I saw other people who came up by donkey, had a quick look around, then went back down, and I understood that my experience was very different from theirs.

The mountains in the mnemography represent a realm different to that of the life in the village. Universally, mountains symbolise the meeting of earth and heaven, of transcendence and ambition (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 328). *Maimundire* is perhaps the reason none of my relatives wanted to venture into the mountains. My mother told me

that it is rumoured to be full of the ghosts of those cruelly executed. Ordinary people did not go into the mountains. My father supplied the whole village with firewood, making the treacherous journey into the mountains on donkey.

The Bells Will Toll makes it clear that the ideologies of the Civil War tainted the sacred image of the mountain, which became a place where rebel outlaws hid and hungry wolves roamed, where destruction and death lurked. Mountains also marked the physical boundaries through which the rebels left to cross borders into Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia when they went into exile.

Swallows in *The Bells Will Toll* symbolise joy and the return of spring. According to Jung birds are the symbol of transcendence (1964, p. 147). They are also a symbol of renewal and resurrection (ed. Tresidder 1995, p. 458). Children in my parents' villages traditionally plaited red, blue and white threads together and wore them on their wrist in March, then laid them on a branch or fence so that the swallows could use them to line their nests and bring good luck to the original wearer ("Easter", p. 40).

The road through the villages during and immediately after the Civil War symbolises the coming of disaster, danger and change – the death of my Uncle Kostas, the passage of the national army revelling at the end of the Civil War. My family members have always interpreted the road as a dangerous place, a place which can bring change, take you far from home and cause separation. Here is another depiction of dangers of the main road:

When we were returning home, another group of girls was also walking on the road through the villages with their brother Takis as an escort, a *cavalliero*. He also became our escort and our groups merged. There were older boys in Patriki and they would admire the modest girls who were too shy to talk. A group of boys wanted us to stop so they could talk to the older girls who were sixteen or seventeen years old, but our whole group ran away. All the older girls ran and left me and Takis behind. My older sister yelled, "Run, those boys will kill you!" ("August Feast Day", pp. 150–151).

The importance to my family of the symbol of the almond tree and the myth of Phyllis and Demophon is explained in “Myth” (Pt 4.6):

When Mother reached the end of her story, I saw there were tears in her eyes. I remembered a black-and-white photograph of her standing on the lower branches of an almond tree in bloom. She must have been fifteen, wearing a white sweater, cardigan and fitted skirt, with flat ballet slippers. On the back was a short sad verse, something like “this body you see is an illusion”, meaning that the soul is immortal. I think this photo may have been given to Father as a keepsake during their long engagement. The myth of Phyllis reminded me of this photo and the stress Mother must have felt while waiting for her father-in-law to return from exile so that she could finally marry (p. 203).

The writing of *The Bells Will Toll* was not straightforward. It also involved following hunches and intuition to get to what I thought “felt right”. It was as if my mnemography existed somewhere already and I needed to recreate it from memory as best I could. The other aspect of writing was more analytical – listening to my relatives and recording their stories and translating them in the way I thought most accurately reflected what they were saying in Greek.

Jung states that “we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend” (1964, p. 21). Initially the tarot cards featured as chapter headings and symbolic signposts for the events covered, but I found I was imposing a structure onto my mnemography that was not suited to the subject matter. As the oral history interviews and my mnemography began to take shape, these chapter headings lost relevance. Deeper, more personal meanings emerged. *The Bells Will Toll* was not just mine; it was the collective stories of my family members.

The mnemography comprises four parts, containing my father’s stories, my mother’s stories, my relatives’ stories, and my own stories. I determined that all four parts needed to be separate because each has its own point of view and is distinct. But, like the four

humours in Greek medicine – the sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic – all four are needed to create a balanced whole. This humoral theory (Fig. 4.2) comes from the Ancient Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen and the philosopher Aristotle. It links the four associated qualities of “heat and cold, dryness and moisture” with “the four humours of the body – blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile” (Cohen 1953, p. 157).

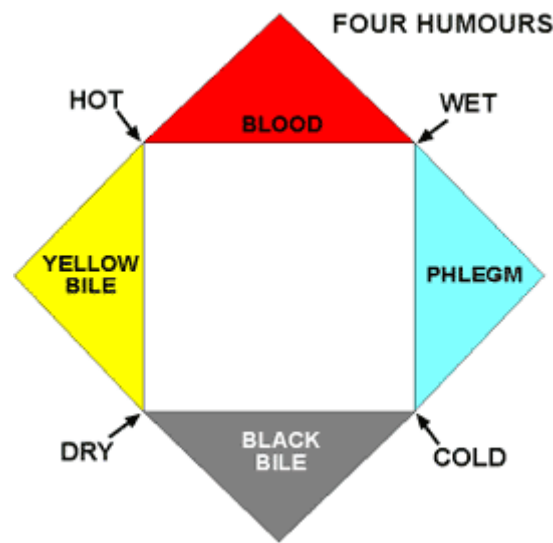


Figure 4.2. The Four Humours

Source: “The 4 Humours”, image, Ancient Greek Medicine, viewed 18 June 2019, <<https://sites.google.com/site/greekmedicinecleeve/the-4-humours>>.

I remember my Aunt and Grandmother Fotini telling me that “in youth the blood boils”, meaning that it is easier to fall in love, have an attraction, get angry or act impetuously because the wisdom of age has not yet developed. This relates to the sanguine humour – the colour red and blood. The different humours influence different phases of one’s life and health (Fig. 4.3). Sanguine is the humour of youth. Melancholic, choleric or phlegmatic humours can come into play during specific life events which cause anger, depression, laziness or tiredness.



Figure 4.3. The Four Humours Personified

Source: Merry Conway, “The Four Temperaments with Birds”, image, viewed 18 June 2019, <<https://www.merryconway.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/four-temperaments-with-birds-1-1024x367.jpg>>.

This understanding of health dominated Western medicine for 2000 years (Cohen 1953, p. 157) and is still entrenched in the minds of older Greek villagers today. My father’s brother told me that with age comes a ripening of the mind, and the understanding of what is important – family and respect of the elders of the family. This is related to the melancholic humour, which includes wisdom and sensibility. Part 1 of *The Bells Will Toll* – *Sanguine: Father’s Story* – represents the sanguine humour, namely blood, youth and optimism in the face of adversity. The theory of the four humours fits in with the way I view the Greek psyche, and my relatives’ dispositions. Mother is phlegmatic, sensible, slow and orderly, and Father sanguine, quick and impetuous. My relatives’ stories fit the melancholic humour – looking back on a sad and difficult past but learning and growing from this wisdom. My own story is the choleric humour: ambitious, striving for knowledge and understanding of the past.

Through this chapter we have seen how myths and symbols are of relevance and importance to my family and why they have been included in *The Bells Will Toll*.

They add depth of meaning to the narratives, meanings that my family inherently understand. Because the meanings would not be so apparent to other people from other cultural backgrounds, and perhaps even from other parts of Greece, I have discussed the

meanings in this chapter. Without the myths and symbols, omens and superstitions being included in my mnemography, the ethnographic value of the work would be diminished.

While there are many books on myths and symbols, I have focused on how my family specifically looks at and interprets these, with other references to support these meanings where possible. I have listed the symbols and myths and the interpretations given to them by my family.

The origins of some of these myths and symbols have also been discussed. I have also explained how the relevance and interpretations of these myths and symbols have also been passed on to me through intergenerational transmission of memory. It is advantageous that through the oral histories leading to *The Bells Will Toll*, my family explained the myths and symbols and superstitions affecting their lives and how they interpreted them.

The following conclusion summarises all the elements of how *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War, how it is a creative group oral history, how it is an expression of postmemory and expands our knowledge of the beliefs, symbols, myths and superstitions and ways of life of people in my parents' villages.

Conclusion

The creative work of this thesis, *The Bells Will Toll*, presents qualitative research in the form of oral history interviews translated and adapted into a unique form of creative oral history that occupies an in-between space – between the genres of ethnography, oral history, creative nonfiction and memoir. As the work was not readily classifiable I was led to inaugurate a new sub-genre of life writing that I have called “mnemography”, a form of creative oral history.

Chapter 1 introduced how my mnemography contributes to our knowledge of oral history research as it is comprised of a group oral history and is about family history. The methodology and research difficulties and outcomes have been discussed and how I had to adapt both my approach during the research and the way I structured the oral histories in the mnemography.

In Chapter 2 I explored how my mnemography is an expression of postmemory, primarily because it consists of stories which have been passed to the post-generation and which led to intergenerational transmission of memory and trauma experienced through times of war and financial crisis, perceived through the further trauma of the rupture of migration. The chapter also captured the way the memories of my parents and grandparents recorded in *The Bells Will Toll* have come to inhabit and haunt me. I have discussed how migration represents a double loss in my life – loss of family relationships and culture, and the loss of stories from the past.

Chapter 3 discussed how the history of the Greek Civil War is multivocal, and how both rightists and leftists were involved in retaliation and aggression, and in collection of women and children to support soldiers' efforts. It has also been determined that the

stories of the left are currently underrepresented in literature, and my mnemography adds to this area of knowledge to encourage a “fair reading” of the political, social and cultural climate of the Greek Civil War and the dictatorship. It has also been discussed how my family fled the dictatorship, which resulted in migration trauma and the further trauma of assimilation. My mnemography also contributes to our knowledge of how people lived during the 1940s to the 1970s in my parents’ villages.

Chapter 4 explored the myths, symbols, signs and superstitions which formed a part of life in my parents’ villages and why it was ethnographically important to include this information in the mnemography.

Each of these topics is revisited in more detail below.

Throughout this exegesis I have discussed how I felt it was necessary to create the term “mnemography” as a sub-genre because no existing genre could completely capture what I had created from the oral history interviews. Mnemography is a creative group oral history and therefore cannot be defined as a memoir or biography, and because it has creative elements it is therefore not an oral history or an ethnography. It sits somewhere between all these narrative modes. Mnemography specifically aims to honour ancestors and their memories by memorialising them in written form. Therefore, mnemography may explore how the human spirit can triumph over many types of adversity – natural disaster, events such as political upheaval or war, migration – and how postmemory continues to perpetuate some of these stories generation after generation as they pass into myth (Hirsch 2012, p. 1).

Through oral history interviews, my mnemography includes fine-grained ethnographic detail of ways of living, documenting a way of life which is disappearing as very few relatives still work on their farms. They either rent them out, have sold them, or hire others

to work on them. This is proof that in one generation a whole way of life can be wiped out. *The Bells Will Toll* reveals which were the major crops and sources of income for my relatives in Greece during the Axis War, the Greek Civil War and into the dictatorship, and includes information on sowing, harvesting and storing tobacco leaves, wheat and other crops. *The Bells Will Toll* reveals how my parents' lives centred around the four seasons, which dictated what activities needed to be done at the correct time to maximise crops and reduce loss and wastage. My parents' stories also include information about how they cared for animals and which ones were used for milk production or labour.

The Bells Will Toll supports official history by revealing how difficult life for farmers was prior, during and after the Civil War, due to their crops and livestock being taken by Nazis, rightists and leftists. My mother's stories show how the fighting itself led to destruction of crops and livestock, a claim supported by Christodoulakis who states that during the Axis War farmers suffered confiscation and physical annihilation of crops and livestock due to the fighting (2016, p. 37). *The Bells Will Toll* shows how people struggled to survive, how all effort was put towards food production, agriculture and gathering firewood, a picture supported by Nachmani who states that most of the population was near starvation (1990, p. 8).

Another way my mnemography contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War is through unique narratives from the Serras region of Greece. As Hart states, "what we think we know" has gotten tangled up in "cold war rhetoric that has left little room for a fair reading" (1992, p. 644). My mnemography offers new narratives for consideration so that this time of history receives more of a "fair reading". While the memoir-like texts mentioned in Chapter 3 have deepened our understanding of the Axis War and the Greek Civil War, stories of leftists are underrepresented, or the left are presented only as

aggressors. *The Bells Will Toll* in comparison includes stories of harassment of the left. It is important that my parents' stories are recorded as a counterbalance, to add to this sparse area of knowledge of the Greek Civil War.

Another area of knowledge of the Greek Civil War that my mnemography contributes to is the *paedomazoma*. There are many sides to this part of history and more stories are needed for a balanced reading, as discussed in Chapter 3. *The Bells Will Toll* discusses how and why the removal of children occurred in my parents' villages and so adds to this area of research. Chapter 3 clarified how both rightists and leftists collected children, especially from the northern provinces, and the reasons why this was done, and discussed how propaganda was used to cast leftists only as kidnappers of children, while rightists removed them for "protection" in the so-called queen's camps. There are many conflicting narratives, and *The Bells Will Toll* adds to this conflicted area of research.

The Bells Will Toll also contributes to our knowledge of ways in which propaganda was used in Greece during the Greek Civil War and the dictatorship. If, as Arendt argues, the custodians of truth must be outside of politics (cited in ed. Riley 1987, pp. 391–392), then by providing narratives from ordinary people, mnemography may give a fairer reading of historical events from this time. Van Boeschoten explained that in regard to the Greek Civil War, there is a "multivocality of local memories, in contrast to the homogenous view of the past, transmitted by 'national memory'" (2005, p. 60). *The Bells Will Toll*, supports that there is no homogenous view of the Greek Civil War or dictatorship, and reveals which views were sanctioned at the time, and how leftists like some of my relatives were silenced and harassed. *The Bells Will Toll* adds to our knowledge of how the Greek Civil War played out in my parents villages through narratives revealing that

the conflict from the Greek Civil War did not end in 1949 and how reprisals continued into the 1950s and harassment escalated during the dictatorship.

The Bells Will Toll includes several versions of stories, official history and facts. I have discussed how I decided which ones were most correct or, if this was not possible, how it reveals the political and social climate of the time. It also offers alternative stories to those already published in order to further promote reconciliation.

The Bells Will Toll records family history and voices since gone, for me and my family. These shared stories are not only my inheritance but also those of my child and future generations. It records in fine-grained detail ways of life my family lived in Greece which have since passed and examines how some of these aspects of culture continue today.

Chapter 3 discussed how my family's experiences enhance the historical record, by offering minute ethnographic-type detail about the daily lives of such people during those times and also clarifying the way my relatives traversed strong differences of political opinion within the family and society.

The Bells Will Toll expands our knowledge of the beliefs, symbols, myths and superstitions of people in my parents' villages, as discussed in Chapter 4, and how these have been passed on to me through intergenerational transmission of memory, and cultural understanding originating from the Serras region of Greece. This knowledge of local myths and symbols and superstitions is of ethnographical and anthropological value.

I have discussed how *The Bells Will Toll* is an appropriate title for my mnemography – the everlasting life given to family memories through a written record – and how to me and my family the tolling of the bells does not signify death but resurrection and the

Judgement Day that will come. I have also discussed the the *ouroboros* as a symbol of repetition, renewal, regeneration and transmission of memory in *The Bells Will Toll*.

I have discussed why remembrance is important to me, drawing on Arendt's statement that the greatest evil stems from a failure to remember past events, because no thought has been given to past wrongs, "and without remembrance, nothing can hold them back" (2003, p. 36). Arendt clarifies that thinking and remembering "is the human way of striking roots, of taking one's place in the world into which we all arrive as strangers" (p. 100). Writing my mnemography allowed me a way of striking roots and understanding my place in my family history. Before writing my mnemography I was lost in the stories of my relatives, and later I found my own story had its place in my family history. It was a way of finding freedom from the past. This led to the writing of the fourth and final part of *The Bells Will Toll*, my story.

My feeling of "being present" in the stories is something that may have been enhanced by my empathy for my family. Writer Richard Kearney advises that readers "need to experience the horror of that suffering as if they were actually there", adding: "Memory can both inform and illustrate." (2002, p. 62). I have visions of events which occurred in the past before I was born, indicating there is a visual element to transmission of memory, in reference to Hirsch's psychic affiliation between images and memory. This empathy can facilitate further intergenerational transmission of memory and images, as discussed in Chapter 2.

My family asked me to record their stories as a warning to succeeding generations and also to finally be able to reveal events they were forced to keep silent about. The stories are warnings about what can happen in times of political upheaval, war and hunger. The stories show the power of the human spirit and the depravity of those who could not see

beyond labels of right or left. This moral instruction or warning through stories is another way *The Bells Will Toll* contributes to our knowledge of the Greek Civil War.

Viktor Frankl has warnings in his stories and memories: “Be alert – alert in a twofold sense: since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of ... and since Hiroshima we know what is at stake” (2006, p. 154). This elevates the power of testimony, memoir, family history and mnemography to its highest level: to reveal what is important in life and what can be lost if one is not alert.

Until 2020, I had never thought I would be tested in the way my parents had been. The coronavirus pandemic overturned the lives of the majority of people in the world and stole my father from me. Even so, I still believe that what my parents endured during the Greek Civil War and afterwards in Greece was a lot worse than the coronavirus pandemic. They too were subject to curfews and forbidden from allowing rebels to enter their houses or giving them food. Unlike them I still had food to eat, shelter and work. I did not need to go to collect dandelions, weeds and snails from riverbanks or wear patched clothes or shoes made from tyre inners. I believe times were harder back then. *The Bells Will Toll* starts with the Greek Civil War and ends with the coronavirus pandemic. The stories contribute to our knowledge of how my family navigated and responded to difficult times.

I have discussed in Chapter 1 how the research process evolved and how it was important to me to keep a record of family memories before it was too late to do so. Rieff states that “everything will indeed be forgotten sooner or later” and that rewriting the past can resemble “myth on one side and political propaganda on the other”, if care is not taken in the way this is done (2016, p. 22). I avoided this type of “rewriting the past” by staying as close to the original oral histories as possible, so that the voices of my relatives could be heard.

Exploring the politics involved was a by-product of learning about family relationships and previous ways of life. Politics were important to some of my family members during the Greek Civil War and therefore it was unavoidable that the complexities of politics and family relationships would feature in *The Bells Will Toll*.

Armed with Thompson's suggestions for conducting oral history interviews, I began research as an oral historian and ethnographer in the initial stages. Then I realised I had to take into account my relationship with the interviewees, as this influenced what they told me. Because they were trying to protect me, they usually only spoke about general events during the Civil War or their personal stories, usually one or the other, not both. My parents were the only contributors who told me what life was like during the Greek Civil War for themselves as children and for their parents, as well as their own personal stories. My parents are the main contributors to *The Bells Will Toll*. I could not control what any interviewee told me; they chose the story they told. If I asked for more information, this was often side-stepped, or ignored.

I discussed in Chapter 1 how I had seen *The Bells Will Toll* as my creative work, which it still is, but it is also a collaboration of oral histories. My mother told me to *not* include some events or stories for ethical or other reasons, so some stories were removed. I decided to remove other stories for similar reasons of family sensitivity. This process of deciding how to use the oral histories is discussed in Chapter 1, including how I realised I must include my own story and quest for more family memories. Barrington encourages the writer to "share her intellectual and emotional quest for answers" (1997, p. 28), adding that readers will lose respect for a writer who "doesn't meet her responsibility to pursue meaning" (p. 29). My choice to include my story was not an immediate one. Rather, without it *The Bells Will Toll* did not seem complete, and as Barrington advises, I decided

to include my own quest and search for answers and meaning in my mnemography so the reasons for writing would be more evident.

Initially, the stories included some hearsay, rumour and gossip. I discussed in Chapter 1 how veiling the stories as fiction would not help. My aim was to honour my relatives, their memories, and our shared family history in a way that was respectful. It was necessary to indicate when information was speculation.

I had expected that I would have greater autonomy in deciding what to include in my mnemography. As I got further into my research, I felt my freedom diminish. I could still be creative, but not in the way a novelist could be, even though I used many of the same tools in constructing the mnemography. Historian Peter Hees explains that even though stories in first person may be “immediate self-expression”, they can also be seen by critics as “*tools* of self-construction: not just accounts of what happened but ways of molding the stuff of the past” so that it is an “act of self-creation” (2013, p. 6). Therefore, my mnemography is possibly tainted to some extent by what I wanted it to be. Even though I tried to be impartial and authentic, did I still *hear* only what I *wanted* to hear? Did I *write* only what I *wanted* to write? And did my relatives *tell* me only what they *wanted* me to know? It would therefore be naive to take what is written at face value.

It is hard for us to be honest with ourselves, harder to be frank with others, still harder to write the truth as we have seen it and preserve what we have written (Hees 2013, pp. 6–7).

Is my mnemography then a collection of subjective stories masquerading as historical fact? I thought about this question carefully and decided it is the question all future mnemographers must ask themselves about their work as well.

It is inevitable that there will be personal bias in the way I created my mnemography, just as much as there is inevitably personal bias in the stories my relatives told me. But this can be argued of any piece of writing whether it is history, oral history or life history. The writer still can mold the work in any specific direction they choose: “someone frames a discourse in particular ways because he or she wishes to control what people discuss and the terms in which they discuss it” (Clark 2012, p. 103). I have discussed in Chapter 1 the decisions I made about what to write and how to write it for my mnemography. Even today, if I wrote a contemporary mnemography, there would be similar concerns. Oral history includes subjective personal information as well as factual information.

The things which stand out above this purported personal bias in my mnemography are the ways my relatives did not believe that any loss of life, rightist or leftist or neutral, was a good thing or deserved. This decency, the moral code by which they lived, is similar to the highest moral codes that other people of any other culture or religion might follow. Life was to be preserved at all costs, including the protection of the environment where possible. If my mnemography was written with a personal bias, the biggest bias I believe I had was wearing the rose-tinted glasses of my love for my relatives – or, as Averill terms it, “love enhancing vision rather than inducing blindness” (2012, p. 22).

So, then, is a family member the best person to write a mnemography? Linda Myers states that “understanding the psychology of the family and the individual helps memoir writers to develop their stories with more nuance and insight” (2010, p. 48). This understanding of family supports my belief that, regardless of the question of personal bias or the wearing of rose-tinted glasses, a family member is often the best person to write a family history because they understand the psychology of their own family, the culture in which they come from, the ideologies, symbols, myths and superstitions of that culture.

However, conducting the oral history interviews came at a cost that I could not have previously imagined. A distance and formality arose between me and some of my relatives in Greece. While it initially may have created a feeling of closeness and sharing, the disclosing of privileged information ultimately created some distance. My relatives also pointed out to me for the first time that, by migrating to Australia, my family had gained financially but not in other ways. This was something I already knew from the homesickness I felt. They stated that by going to Australia, my mother had not escaped suffering and hardship. Instead, she had to endure new hardships and face new challenges on her own without family support. This has led me to understand that by sharing their stories of hardship, they might have felt vulnerable and needed to point out that suffering was universal, even for those who had tried to “escape” to another country. I think perhaps they had not understood how much I admired their strength in surviving all their life challenges, especially from the Greek Civil War.

In Chapter 1 I explored how oral history can be adapted for use in a mnemography, and how this can be helpful but also restrictive. Ethical considerations of which versions to use, the “ring of truth” in testimony and respect for privacy have been explored through this exegesis. There are many ways to write a mnemography as a creative oral history, requiring hours of research and interviews; however, I understand the writing of my own mnemography is unique, as it depends on my own set of circumstances, relatives and family history. My aim was to write a mnemography and through that to gain understanding about the processes involved in writing. I considered the ethical dilemmas faced by other writers as well as by myself in writing. I made my own ethical decisions about how to write, what to leave out, what to change and what not to change. I always tried to put the considerations of my family first and deleted material that I knew would make them unhappy.

My mnemography is an attempt to show the variety of experiences arising from the Greek Civil War. I believe that the experiences my relatives had as common villagers are underrepresented in existing memoirs and that my mnemography will make a significant contribution in redressing this imbalance. This does not only refer to leftists being underrepresented. It also includes the beauty of my family's simple lives close to nature, and the way they lived.

Furthermore, I aimed to show the ways in which personal narratives or oral histories can contribute to knowledge. Myers explains that "story is a means of teaching us more about ourselves" (2010, p 13). No matter how challenging writing might be, she insists that if you enter the adventure of writing with an open mind and heart and dedicate yourself to a path of learning and deeper knowledge, you will be rewarded with emotional understanding, and even healing and forgiveness (p. 13). I have gained a greater understanding of my family, especially my parents and why they are as they are, from the process of writing my mnemography.

I discussed in chapters 1 and 3 how I had heard so many versions of some events from my relatives, each with a different outcome. It was obvious not all could be true. Had there been a deliberate falsification of facts through local propaganda? Or did people truly not know what happened and believed any rumour they heard? In some cases, it was impossible to tell. I discussed the methods I used to come to my conclusions about which stories were the most factual. However, with the story of my great-uncle Eraklis, there is so much confusion about what happened that I have decided most of it was lies told by the opposition to humiliate and demoralise the leftist members of my father's family. I felt though, that two stories stood out from the others. The account my grandfather told

me in 1994, that he had buried my great-uncle with his bare hands, and the account of my great-aunt who said she believed her husband was still living.

In the end I had to decide who had the most evidence, and who I believed the most. The opinions and beliefs of my other relatives were still valuable because they illustrated how the silencing of individuals stops the transmission of information and the loss of factual historical knowledge. Instead, these are replaced by whatever information is left: gossip, rumour, propaganda and lies. This is one outcome of war, when people are suppressed and freedom of speech is lost.

In Chapter 1 I explained the issue of recreating scenes and dialogues from what was remembered, and the issues around translating oral histories from Greek to English. I extended some dialogues, and I gave a couple of unnamed people names when my relatives could not give them to me because they either forgot or did not know. I thought about Barrington's challenge that if you can make up dialogue, change a name or re-order events to make the story flow better, "how is this different from fiction?" (1997, p 26). I kept this type of change to only two minor characters who appeared only once. The other chapters are almost word for word from the oral histories. Barrington adds that readers expect a memoirist to be "an unflinchingly reliable narrator" (p. 26). I tried to show when something was speculation in the oral histories, as in my story, and state when this occurs.

Following Barrington's suggestion to choose stories that are most life-enhancing, and if stories are not, then to consider leaving parts of the story out (2000, p. 133), I decided that the message of a story could still be conveyed without including every detail or name or location. I discuss in Chapter 1 how I took care not to include some stories and leave some details out of others so I did not offend relatives still living. Political differences have been put aside, but times can change again, and right or left may become an issue

once more. I believe there are greater issues at stake in Greece now, such as large numbers of refugees coming from the Middle East and Asia who need assistance, overcrowding, high rates of unemployment, low wages, destruction of the natural environment and diminishing resources.

My interest in writing a family history confused some of my relatives, because they did not see any value in digging up the past, especially when their pain, suffering and hunger had been triumphed over. While I did have an interest in potential future publication, it was because my grandparents and parents expressed their wish for the stories to be published. It was difficult for me to explain how recording a family history for ourselves and our future generations could be beneficial. I learned that while I was haunted by the past, only my parents shared that desire to delve into the past. My other relatives did not: they were happy with their lives as they were in the present.

My relatives had previously understood I wanted to see them and be with them each time I visited, but once the interviews began, their attitudes towards me changed. Perhaps my need to be with them and reconnect with them was not so obvious in my search for more stories and memories, and in my focus on the past which they did not want to be dug up.

Some of this change was possibly due to the inevitable separation between interviewee and researcher. This relationship implies some distance. I was no longer just a niece, or grandniece or cousin, but a researcher. This power imbalance was not appreciated by some of my relatives. Instead of being the guest, trying to fit in and sharing their lives, they were not happy to have questions asked during the interviews. I found I had to keep questions to a minimum. I let them speak about whatever they chose – it was their story, their memory – as I also did not like the change in our relationship. In the end I did not

pursue all the questions I wanted. I decided it was not really worth damaging my relationships with my relatives in my search for more stories.

I found I had to be especially careful with my parents, because they did not like me to question them more than once on a particular event. The type of enquiry research demands did not entirely suit the production of a family history, because relationships had to be navigated and taken into account. However, I still think they told me more than they would ever have told a researcher who was not a family member.

Normally, oral history research may suit individuals that the researcher does not personally know because when used on family members, it can backfire, as discussed above. Myers explains:

writing a memoir can shift the balance in your family and shake up your individual assumptions and beliefs, forcing you to examine the very foundations of your family and your beliefs (2010, p. 62).

My conclusion, therefore, about the process of writing my memography has been to highlight the importance of writing for me and my family, in the face of separation and loss, but also to show the ethical dilemmas faced by the writer and the difficulties of the interview process. Within this research there is further scope for examining the process and value of writing a mnemography as a family record. There are numerous untold stories from the Greek Civil War and other wars, other countries, other times, which the succeeding generations of those who experienced them may want to record. Not everyone would want to record their family history and they have their own reasons. For me, being separated through the trauma of migration, family stories were essential. Family memories are precious, and I argue for them to be recorded rather than lost and forgotten. Especially when there is a rift due to migration trauma leading to separation of family members, when some are living in the diaspora and homesick for their country of origin.

For me, writing the mnemography let me tie up some loose ends, and record valuable information from my parents and other family members.

There is some value in not letting pain and suffering be forgotten. The story of Noah's Ark in the Bible has not yet stopped succeeding generations from degrading the environment, but perhaps one day it may be of benefit as an archetypal story serving as a reminder of what can be lost. As a type of ark, *The Bells Will Toll* aims to collect memories and preserve them for the future, to benefit me, my family and others.

Perhaps, like many Greeks, I am influenced by the concept of a great and heroic past, of the need to always look back to the past and to honour it. Historian and writer Jaques Le Goff explains that "in Greek culture the sense of time is oriented toward either the myth of the Golden Age, or towards memories of the heroic era" (1992, p. 11) and that "history has thus become an essential part of the need for individual and collective identity" (p. xxiii). In my need to discover who I am, I had to delve into the past and learn more about my relatives. Rather than looking towards a golden past, I look at my cousins who grew up surrounded by family and never had to leave their country of birth and wonder if I would have been as content as them if we had stayed in Greece. The loss of family and my country of birth as a young child had an immense impact on my psyche.

I had hoped that by completing my mnemography, the nagging pull of the past on my psyche would ease, but that is not so. Animals have an internal compass which shows them the way home, even from great distances. I can remember my cat who escaped my arms at the veterinary office and found his way home four days later. My internal compass has always pointed towards Greece. I wonder if that will change now my mnemography is complete. There are new questions, new thoughts, and also the same old ones which will probably never let me rest. My mnemography has become separate to those thoughts

– static and closed – whereas memories and perceptions of past events are subject to change over time.

I echo Holocaust survivor Abraham Biderman's thoughts at the end of his memoir:

I think a lot about the future, a future I may not even be a part of. Nevertheless, I feel it is my duty to raise the alarm, and to warn younger and future generations to beware. It is happening again! ... I ask myself whether I have told all there is to be told. Will my words help the world to untangle itself from the web in which it is trapped, and from which it seems desperately so unable to free itself? (1995, p. 356).

As stated earlier, Arendt raises the question of human judgement, and the ability to tell right from wrong, even when crimes are “legal”:

Since the whole of respectable society had in one way or another succumbed to Hitler, the moral aims which determine social behaviour and the religious commandments – “Thou shalt not kill!” – which guide conscience had virtually vanished. Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgements, and they did so freely ... because no rules existed for the unprecedented (1965, p. 295).

This dichotomy of what was condoned, allowed to happen or “legal”, and that which was “illegal”, is explored in *The Bells Will Toll*. The government was rightist, and the left became “illegal” after 1945. How people behaved under these conditions is one focus of *The Bells Will Toll* that contributes to our knowledge of how people lived and behaved during the Greek Civil War, and what challenges my family faced during those times. My mothers' stories show how my grandfather Christos chose to respect all life, regardless of political allegiance. My father's stories highlight how many villagers and others saw all leftists as unlawful criminals and those who supported them should be harassed.

Political theorist Patrick Riley discusses Arendt's essay on “Truth and Politics” and the paradox that politics is often concerned with enlarged or generalised opinion, “not with timeless Platonic truth” (Riley 1987, pp. 391–392). This means that it is possible at certain

times that genocide, mass murder, scapegoating, changing of the facts to facilitate political agendas, and propaganda are allowed to proliferate.

I have noticed that of my relatives who were leftists, the majority of them were less well-off during and after the war than the relatives who were rightists. There are many opinions about why this may be so. *The Bells Will Toll* highlights that many leftists had to leave Greece to earn a decent wage or have the same opportunities as others. Some stories in *The Bells Will Toll* explain how the leftist guerrillas and the rightists would visit villages and gather supplies – wheat, flour, animals. People had few resources after the Axis War, or the Greek Civil War. And now with the financial crisis in Greece, farms lie abandoned, the younger, more educated generations refusing to work the land like their parents and grandparents did. Wages for this type of work have always been low. Unemployment is currently high in Greece. My story in *The Bells Will Toll* looks at this current issue in Greece and my search for more information about my relatives' lives.

There is one personal understanding that has come out of my research for *The Bells Will Toll*, which is encapsulated by Arendt: “the reflection that you yourself might have done wrong under the same circumstances may kindle a spirit of forgiveness”; “what public opinion permits us to judge and condemn are trends”; and public opinion seems to agree “that no one has the right to judge somebody else” (1965, p. 296). However, it is still something which occurs – people do judge, and those who are not aligned with those in power are judged and treated more harshly in times of war.

My intention was to reveal events which occurred and were in danger of slipping into oblivion by being forgotten. For me, my great-grandparents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and all of my relatives are worthy of being remembered, even though they were ordinary people. They were my relatives and I wanted to celebrate them through *The Bells*

Will Toll in a way that differs from other biographies or memoirs from the Greek Civil War.

A further aim was find a way of writing that allowed a respectful honouring of the past which continued to haunt my present. This passage of the past into the present is how Hirsch describes postmemory, as the “stories, images and behaviours” amongst which we grew, which were transmitted so deeply and affectively as to “seem to constitute memories in their own right” (2012, p. 5). These stories and memories from my family have become part of my memories, as discussed throughout this exegesis.

For me, having been separated from extended family most of my life, this style of writing, mnemography, may be a bridge between the past and present into the future. I do feel my mnemography has achieved some of these aims of uniting and recording my family memories. The pain of separation lingering from my past is still there, and possibly may never be fully healed, but I feel I now know more of who I am, because I know more of who my family were and are. I do feel at peace with many of the memories which haunted me. I have put parts of the jigsaw together and understand that there are pieces lost which can never be found and have been taken to the grave.

I conclude that by looking behind me and mourning what was lost and what cannot be, in terms of family relationships and connections due to migration trauma, I am not looking enough at the here and now, or the future. There is a danger that I will not be able to truly live my life due to the shackles of the past. I hope that in writing *The Bells Will Toll*, by fulfilling promises made to my deceased relatives to write those memories, that these stories will finally leave my present. Remembering and honouring the past is noble, but I know I need to learn to accept the loss and try to not let this haunt me in order to live more fully in the present. So far this has been impossible. In honouring the past and giving

a place to past memories through my mnemography, there perhaps will now be space live in the present. Only time will tell.

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