

ONE MORE ODYSSEY

Being a half-autobiography of  
James (Dimitrios) Tsavalas

Translated by:  
Anthony Velonis – Nephew

FOREWORD

By the translator and nephew of,  
Dimitrios (James) Tsavalas who doesn't know what year he was born, but it must have been about 1894. From then shortly will have elapsed a whole century of unbelievable changes in attitudes, education and culture. In the great historic and social rivers, Uncle Jim was swept along with the current - no more than a mote yet an empathetic appreciation of the adventures of even one life in a particular time mirrors the special quality of that time. I believe, therefore, that while Uncle Jim's memoirs will prove interesting in a book for general readership, they would definitely be fascinating for his, pumerous American kin, particularly the third and fourth generations who cannot read or speak Greek. The folkways of Greek rural life will at times be droll, stupid, wise, liberal, prejudiced, visionary, narrow, cruel, kind, humorless, fun-loving and jovial - in a word: inconsistent,

Uncle Jim accepted the culture shock from Greek mountain country to European and American urban life as a trip of discovery into "that's the way the world is" and adapted accordingly. It should be remembered that Athens like the rest of the Western world was strongly influenced by Paris, and the aura of Lord Byron was still very much in the air. Even though the uncles all talked, sang and danced in Greek, the 19th century European' romanticism somehow came through.

At this writing, Uncle Jim is alive and living in California. He is now in his eighties, 'the last of the first generation of the Tsavalas clan (seven brothers, two sisters) arrived in America around the beginning of the twentieth century.

The story begins in the late 1700's because that's as far back as the Tsavalas genealogy can be traced by Uncle Jim's gleanings. "Tsavalas" may be Slavic or Albanian in origin, but it could also have been Macedonian/Greek: Savalas or Zavelas. Epirus borders Albania and its inhabitants spoke Albanian as well as Greek. However, Uncle Jim guesses that the name was Albanian after all, because in that language it has a meaning. Probably without being aware of it, Nicholas Savalas, one of the several older brothers of Uncle Jim, and father of the famous Aristotle Telly Savalas, changed "Tsavalas" to one of its original versions.

Greece, over the millennia, has been as much a melting pot of tribes, refugees, immigrants and conquerors as you can find anywhere. The classic Greek face on the Statues, with its straight nose, is more likely to be found on a native of Naples or Sicily (the old Greek colonies), than in Greece itself. The Tsavalas' shared the fierce nationalistic pride of all Hellenes (Greeks). They explained that Albanian was often spoken by Greeks under the Turkish occupation to disguise their underground activities. Be that as it may, when the hill people as far south as Laconia in the Peloponesus spoke Albanian it carried overtones of close, folksy intimacy. I've always found my mother's "Ika-chika-too!" (Albanian for "get out of here!"), as a good—natured version of what is normally an ill-tempered command. In Uncle Jim's story, whenever he makes an Albanian reference he does so with warmth and love.

I cannot vouch for the historic accuracy of Uncle Jim's account, especially when one bears in mind that it is in the tradition of the old oral story tellers. I know that Uncle Jim

wrote it all down first and then read it into a cassette tape recorder — but the quality is still oral so there may be ambiguities, embellishments and omissions plus a good deal of gross paraphrasing on my part in retelling the story in English. I am also going to take advantage of this opportunity to include some of my own remembrances of the Tsavalas uncles as well as some anecdotes told to me by my mother Helen (nee Tsavalas).

## PROLOGOS

The years pass. Inexorably onward and there comes an instant when you stop to take a breath. You turn your head to see your brothers, friends, grandchildren, nephews, kin - who have been traveling life alongside you. Then the breath taking surprise: you are left alone. It is at this moment that you realize at last that the years have gone - forever. A life has been lived. An overpowering urge comes upon you - somehow to relive that life - together with all those who have loved you and whom you have loved.

Then you sit down, mop your forehead, close your eyes, and attempt the futile gesture of embracing the tree of the family, digging your nails in the bark, down the trunk, down to the roots, down - deep - deep - to Souli - to Epirus - there where the Tsavalas seed began.

## **CHAPTER ONE - - BEGINNINGS**

Ali Pasha of Teleben was born in 1742 and died in 1822. He apparently had some ambitions of wresting power from the Sultan and becoming Sultan himself. He tried to take advantage of the Greek restlessness under the Turks and by promising a more understanding and enlightened form of tyranny he felt he could win the Greeks over in a struggle against the Turks. He sent hundreds of Greek agents to blanket Greece with talk of revolution. Among other places he sent these agents to Athens, Corinth, Arcadia, Laconia - and to the islands of Hydra, Spetsi, Poros.

Some of the mountain areas in Mani and Laconia were unoccupied by the Turks. For one thing, the inhabitants gave them more trouble than it was worth. For another, the poor peasantry scrounging subsistence from the mountainsides was hardly worth taxing or guarding. On the Eastern mountains of the province of Laconia in the Peloponnesus lies the Demos of Zarahos with its villages Rihia, Fregra, Vestamata, Aghios Dimitrios, Kiparisi, Kremasti. The bay of Ierax is also there, invisible from the sea, so that inland it has the appearance of a lake: the Limani

About the time that Mozart was composing in Vienna, Turkish armies were filing back and forth across Greece. In Souli, in the village of Zalongho there remained only women when the Turks marched in. The women welcomed the conquerors graciously and offered to dance for them. It was the traditional circle dance, but the ballad they were singing was prepared for this occasion: death, rather than submit. They were near the edge of a high cliff. They flung themselves over before the Turks realized what was happening. The song about the death dance still remains one of the most popular of the old folk tunes: "The Horus (Chorus) tou Zalonghou"

Ali Pasha did not succeed in his dreams and a genuine revolution of liberation took place more than a generation later in the 1820's. In the meantime, refugees from the North had poured into the cul-de-sac of the Peloponnesian peninsula. Among the refugees from Epirus, from Ioannina and Souli, was the Tsavalas family. The Tsavalas clan settled in Corinth.

In Corinth, in the late 1700's, there was a young man, by the name: Panos Tsavalas, a strapping, handsome lad, a true levendi. He loved the daughter of a Turkish official.

Before meeting Panos she was a maiden, but after, when they had burnt it and spent it (sic) and the belly started to inflate, the Turks found out who was responsible and began earnestly to search for the culprit, so that they might stretch his neck. In the meantime, Panos took off for parts unknown, across barren mountains - with cap, staff and dog.

Descending from the last mountain (Kouloyera), toward the Aegean on the Southeast of the Peloponnesus, he came upon the bay that looked like a lake, the Limani, and the ruins of Ierax where the ancient king Zarax ruled. There were some peasant huts in the area, and Panos backed off toward the mountains, about four kilometers. He found a substantial cave and covered the mouth with branches. Later, when the incident for his flight was forgotten, Panos attracted other Albanian speaking families and there founded the village of Yerakas (from Ierax). Whether he built himself a hut or made an extension to his cave is not clear. He eventually accumulated about one hundred wild goats, the only livestock those scraggly mountains could support. The honey from the wild purple thyme was hardly enough.

Panos thought it would be good policy to make friends with the local Turkish administrator, the Agha, in Monemvasia, about fourteen kilometers south. Often he

would load a donkey with gifts for the Agha - probably goat cheese, honey, olive oil, etc. Panos acted with groveling deference to the Agha, but with the exaggerated innocence of the simpleton, and thus he gained the protected intimacy of a court jester. His act was not meant to fool anyone, least of all the Agha. Panos was tolerated, even with affection, because having a personal philosopher-fool made life more bearable for the Agha. Further, the parables of Panos and barely concealed insults to all Turks, were entertaining and not offensive - and they seemed to illumine the Agha in an area where he had no other contact. So, the Agha, being a clever and prudent man, played the game, and was grateful to receive the alms of wisdom, however crudely given.

There was one time when the Agha sent a tax collector to Yeraka. He was hastily evicted with canes, shovels and hoes. The Agha was furious and he called Panos to account for the unlawful behavior of his fellow villagers. Panos did a prelude with much suitable groveling and scraping.

“Ah, my dear Agha, if you only knew the truth! But I will tell you the truth no matter how much it might hurt me and my people. When the accursed one made his wants known, we told him such a thing as money was unknown to us, and there was nothing much we could offer him except things to eat, we had roast chicken; he didn’t like it. We had roast lamb which we slaughtered especially for him; he didn’t like it. Nothing seemed to please him. Finally he said he wanted to sleep with one of our young women. Naturally, my dear Agha, this angered the people and he was quickly shown the road out of town. How else would you expect such a fool to be treated?”

The Agha sighed a sigh of helplessness and the incident was forgotten.

On the other hand, this high morality didn't stop Panos from behaving with questionable propriety with some of the women in the Monemvasia area. One time he came before the Agha on a specific charge." This time you can't get away with it! I'm going to have to fine you." And he named some ridiculous sum that Panos couldn't possibly pay.

"Ach! My dear Agha! How can you punish me for something that God could not have meant to be either a crime or a sin (Panos' immortal dictum) for isn't it by this means that both you and I came into this world?"

The spell was broken. The Agha laughed.

"And furthermore, the lady got as much pleasure as I did. How can such a thing be bad?"

Fine suspended. "But don't do it again," the Agha admonished.

"Yet how can I help it?" Panos replied. "God has endowed me with powers and abilities that are perfectly natural to a man. How can I help not using them?"

The Agha looked at him hard. "All right, get out of here!"

As far as Panos' natural endowments are concerned, he was reputed to have had a formidable appendage. He was also said to have tied a kerchief at the base of it for fear that too deep a penetration might hurt his lady.

One time when the Agha and Panos were taking a walk in the Aghas gardens, they came upon an orchard of orange trees.

"My dear Agha, for heaven's sake, what are those things with such a poisonous, unnatural color?"

"They are oranges, Panos, and quite delicious. Taste one".

"Ugh, you can't get me to touch those things, let alone eat them".

That night Panos quietly got up, filled a big sack of oranges and heaved them over the wall to a waiting accomplice, and then went back to bed. The Panos donkey always had some freight going both ways.

Another time Panos saw the Agha was raising a flock of turkeys.

“In the name of God! What are those monsters? They look like the devil’s spawn straight out of Hell! Save me!”

The Agha just laughed.. In the middle of the night about a half dozen of the turkeys had their necks quietly wrung. The next day there was feasting (a panegyri) in Yeraka.

About this time a number of family names seem associated with Yeraka besides Tsavalas: Papamichalis, Papadimitri, Karayani - (Kara is Turkish for black, thus “Black John”), Coulouris (bread like a ring), Stavropoulos (son of the blind one). Drivas was a name of some importance in nearby Rihia. And then there was the Andromedas family of Kremasti, the highest village in the Demos Zarahos. Panos finally settled down when he married one of the comely Andromedas lasses. Uncle Jim does not relate Panos’ transition to family life, but evidently he worked hard to arrange a subsistence estate of sorts: olive and nut trees, goats for milk, cheese and meat, wheat and leafy greens in winter and occasional fishing and hunting.

‘Barba’ (Uncle), is a term of respect, intimacy (like Pop”), and kinship, that was bestowed upon any family man of a village who might have attained the age of, say, forty-plus. So, by the time “Barba” Panos was thus known, he had five children: Kostas (Constantine), George, John, Christos, and a girl. The girl’s name was lost in the mists, but after all, she was only a girl - and besides, she became a nun probably as a consequence of the following tragic story.

One blustery winter evening it became dark before Panos finished getting the goats to the corral. The girl, who was eleven years old, thought to help her father, so she took the lantern from the one room hut, and went out so that he might have some light to work with; but as soon as she went out the goats took fright and scattered in all directions. The girl hastened into the hut and trembled against the frightening wrath of her father. Panos did indeed burst in and roared "Who frightened the goats away?" The girl blamed it on her younger brother, who was five, on the assumption that her father would not punish little John, since he was too young to be responsible for his behavior. But Panos was furious, and he gave little John a blow made heavy with his senseless frustration. John fell, hit his head against the stone wall, and was killed instantly. Panos could not survive with the weight of this awful guilt, so from then on he was seen to be somewhat demented. He didn't kill the little boy - it was Satan who took his mind over and made him do it. In his defiance of the devil, he also became Satan's intimate and kept proving it to himself and others by various incidents. For instance he might have some difficulty lighting the hearth fire. He'd repeatedly call "My own little Christ, for my own poor sake, help me light the fire, But the fire would not respond. Then, at length, in anger and desperation, he'd command: "Satan, light the fires and sure enough, Poof!, there was a blaze.

To Panos was born another boy who was named John. John was always somewhat sickly, but he evidently made up for his lack of strength by marrying a strong woman. In those days, everybody in the hills was illiterate except the local priest, the Papa. In spite of his lack of school learning, John was quite clever and resourceful, and helped the village in many ways. He encouraged the planting of orchards. Besides the existing rugged olive

trees, he planted orange and lemon trees, nut trees, figs and grapes. He even invented a method (called sano) whereby bushels of edible greens were gathered when the rains were plentiful, in winter and spring; then the women with a big needle and thread strung the greens together at the hard stem part and hung them up to dry. Once dry, the greens became very crumbly, were unstrung and put up in cloth bags, All one had to do was add water and boil. The greens were said to be tastier than when they were fresh. In summer and fall they were a delicious addition to a meal.

Although John was constructive, he also had picked up some of the superstition and irrationality of his “crazy” father. Further, he was perversely mean to his own family and took full advantage of the father’s traditional dominance. There were times when his wife could have throttled Barba Yanni (Uncle John), but the woman kept her place, did her chores, and was literally a slave. Barba Yanni had four children: Panos (after the grandfather), George, Kostas (Constantine) - and Maro, a girl. The father was dubbed by his own kids with still another name, this time an over-familiar one: Yero Pharmaki, literally “Old Man Bitter Medicine”.

One year the local farmers raised a good cotton crop and a man came through with a train of donkeys to buy it and transport it over the trail to a town where the shipping facilities were better. He was idly passing the time of day with the townspeople, waiting for someone who would give him a hand in loading the bales of cotton on the donkeys. There were three peasant women who had stopped to see what was going on. By way of playful banter, the man challenged the women that whoever could lift a bale high enough for him to strap it to the donkey could have the bale for herself. One of the women was John’s

wife. She lifted the bale with teeth, arms and knees to the proper height. What she did with the prize cotton is not clear.

One day John's wife had to go to Monemvasia, fourteen kilometers away, to have wheat milled into flour. She loaded sacks of wheat on two donkeys, made the long trip, had the flour made, and then she started on the homeward journey. On the way it rained hard and long. The flour was somewhat protected but every thing else was soaked. She got home dripping and dead tired. She unloaded the donkeys herself while her good husband looked on at the doorway, wrapped in a blanket, and pitying the donkeys: "those poor, suffering beasts".

Another day his good wife was making some basic flour dough and she asked her husband whether he would prefer macaroni or biscuits (koukoula). First he asked her to make biscuits, but after she had them all laid out and ready for the fire, he changed his mind and said he preferred macaroni. Then when she had kneaded the dough together, he changed his mind again to biscuits,, She finally put them on to bake and asked John to watch that they didn't burn while she went out to do another chore, After a while she smelt the biscuits burning and rushed into the house.

"My good man, couldn't you have taken them from the fire?" A which John went to the window and yelled at the top of his voice, "My good neighbors listen to me. I've got a worthless bitch up here and I want you all to know that such a dog is not worth having and I will have to take her out and shoot her!"

There has probably never been a relationship in which the necessity to repeat something that was not heard the first time, (the water's running), is not a little irritating, but Barba Yanni carried this to extremes. When one of his children didn't hear what he wanted,

they would ask him again, but he would never repeat himself. He'd just say: "Do it" and nothing more. The girl, Maro, would burst into tears of frustration. One day John asked his son Kosta to fetch something.

"What did you want me to bring, father?"

"Just bring it."

"But what is it?"

"Bring it."

And so on. This time young Kosta lost his temper and did some thing unheard of in those times. "Well, my dear father, you can just eat my shit!" Another father would have become violent, but not John. He just looked to heaven, crossed himself, and asked God to witness the fact that his son was momentarily possessed by the devil and whatever he had just said, it was not his fault, so please forgive him.

Barba Yanni planted a small grove of orange trees which he meticulously cultivated.

When the trees were loaded with oranges, he would take his "Valitsa" (what passed for a sleeping bag in those days) and sleep among his trees so that the fruit would not be stolen. One dark night some boys of the village contrived a scheme to deprive Uncle John of some of his oranges. They let the old man sleep for a few hours, then they stripped, and half-naked, crept into the orange grove. Then they burst into a kind of devil- dance, knowing John's hereditary fear of the Devil. After a while, the head devil asked one of his band:"

"What bad thing did you do today?"

"There was this man who was cleaning his gun. I made the gun go off and it killed his friend.

“Bravo, you are a proper devil.”

Then he asked another;

“What did you do?”

“There were two boys fishing in a small boat. I tipped the boat over and they both drowned.”

And so on. The chief asked each devil and each recounted a bad deed, Finally he came to the last the smallest devil. “And what bad thing did you do?” “I didn’t do anything.”

“What? I’m going to have to pin you with my pitchfork.”

“No! Wait! I’ll think of something.”

“Think fast, or else!”

“Yeah. I’ve got a great idea. You’ll like it. You see that old man sleeping there? I’m going over there and I’ll fuck him.” At that, Barba Yanni grabbed his valitsa, ran into the house and locked the door. Next morning bushels of oranges had disappeared off the trees.

The story now moves to John’s son Kosta. He was a soft-spoken and thoughtful boy. He would have been a good student but there were no schools in the area. He would often visit his uncle Christos who was a monk at the monastery, and he would do what he could with the boy. But Kosta had another source of education. It is interesting that in those days a man who today would be considered eccentric and outside the pale of the community was revered and even became legendary. His name was Sturnada.

In Athens there is a street named after him. He abandoned family and position in Athens to get away from artificiality and social pressure. He wanted a retreat in the mountains and to be among simple peasant folk. He lived in a cave and became the town’s

philosopher, teacher and doctor. He subsisted on koumara (John's bread), a tree which grows wild in those parts, and on whatever children and their parents brought him. The cave he picked was forbidding and contributed to his legend. The Cave of Balonghieri, Kingdom of the Archdevil, home of the Sirens. Stalactites dripping. Nevertheless, Sturnada himself was not forbidding but was wise and gentle. John Tsavalas' Kosta was one of his favorite "pupils". John barely recognized the existence of his son, while Sturnada was both teacher and surrogate father.

Kosta was also close to the family of the village priest, Papa George. When he was about fourteen he visited Papa George's house and picked up the baby, Katerina.

"Careful," Papa George said, "Do not drop her. When the baby grows up you will take her for your bride,"

"Hah!" says his wife. "My daughter marry one of those Tsavalas boys! God forbid!"

But the good priest was prophetic, for when fifteen years passed, Kosta did marry Katerina. They were to have sixteen children, nine of whom survived, seven boys and two girls, and all eventually emigrated to America. When Kosta held the baby Katerina in his arms he didn't know that half a century later, (fifty years!) he was to hold his own last child in his hands:

Dimitrios, who was to become our Uncle Jim,

Even though the maternal side of the Tsavalas family was somewhat more genteel, the ancestry seems to have faded in the mists, Katerina's surname before her marriage to Kosta was, naturally, Papageorge. However, her father's father: was called Papa Dimitrios. One's surname is changed when one becomes a priest. Papa Dimitrios seems to have come from the Brati family from Arcadia and Hydra.

Uncle Jim's maternal grandfather, Papa George, the village priest, was quite a contrast to his paternal grandfather, John Tsavalas, Barba Yanni, Papa George was as jovial as Barba Yanni was morose. He liked everybody and everybody liked him. He was at the head of the circle dances in the singing of ballads, and he drank wine with the best of them. He also liked to hunt. All this came to the attention of the visiting Bishop, called Despotoc (Lord - a Byzantine title), He told Papa George:

"You are neglecting your duties to the village when you go off. Promise me you will not go hunting. Besides, it doesn't become a priest. If you don't stop hunting, I will make you argon." (Pronounced argi meaning to remove from the priesthood)

"I promise not to go hunting" said Papa George. But he must have crossed his fingers, or the equivalent thereof, because shortly after, he took his gun and was up in the hills again. He came back with a substantial string of quail. When the Bishop was asleep he draped the quail around the edge of the Bishop's bed. When the good Despotoc awoke, he rubbed his eyes, crossed himself, and called loudly for Papa George.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"Well, I promised not to go hunting and in your honor I went hunting for the last time. These quail, which I hope you will bless, are for a feast tonight to celebrate the occasion - which is that from now on I will not go hunting."

The Bishop, who was also not without a pixyish sense of humor, burst into hilarious laughter. They had a good time.

"Forget what I said about not going hunting," the Bishop finally said. "Just don't overdo it. Remember the village needs you."

This whole scene happened again when ‘the Bishop forbade Papa George from going to the taverna to drink wine. Papa George went as far as the door of the taverna and called to the proprietor:

“Bring me out a decanter of wine.”

“Why don’t you come in and sit at a table?”

“Because the Despotis forbade me from entering the place.” Papa George evidently knew that the Bishop was inside, for presently the Bishop came out and with considerable suppressed laughter invited Papa George inside. There was no mention again of forbidding. The Bishop, in his wisdom, had finally realized that Papa George’s good nature was his greatest asset as priest.

Once a peasant came to Papa George and asked him if after the church service he would announce that he had lost his donkey and that if anyone had seen it he would appreciate its return. This was an opportunity for a joke that Papa George could not resist. At the end of the service, Papa George announced the missing donkey, and then asked the congregation:

“Who among you does not drink, smoke, play cards, dance, sing or sleep with his woman?”

One young man spoke up:

“I don’t do any of those things.”

Papa George turned to the farmer:

“There’s your donkey.”

Papa George was also named Papa Rosu, an Albanian quixotic version he spontaneously gave himself. It came about this way:

Some Albanian speaking fishermen had landed in the area between Monemvasia and Yeraka, a pleasant seacoast spot, and were cooking fish soup. Papa George and his wife were passing through and when the fishermen saw the priest, they knelt with arms crossed and asked his blessing, which he freely gave. Then they asked him if he and his good wife would join them in their meal, which they did. When they were about to part Papa George blessed them again. He was asked his name, and evidently to make the simple fishermen feel like kin to him, without another thought, he said he was Papa Rosu. The name has some arcane or untranslatable meaning, because the incident was picked up by the villagers and from then on whenever they referred to the good priest in a close, affectionate way, it was always as Papa Rosu, or in the Greek nominative, Papa Rosos. Uncle Jim's voice on the cassette recorder says that he could go on and on with anecdotes about his grandfather, but that he will have to limit them. He mentions that Papa George, before his priesthood, was chief cook to King George I.

Uncle Jim goes on with the story about a man who stole a goat. The thief skinned it and brought it to his house, but his wife would have nothing to do with stolen food. He put the goat in a sack and brought it to church to hide it, and put it behind the place where the candles were kept. Later when Papa George was preparing the liturgy he went to get some candles and discovered the goat. Like the good housekeeper that he was, he took the sack to his wife to have the meat cooked. Papa George had understood what was going on and knew that the thief would be back later.

In those days they didn't have regular pews in the church and the men and women had separate areas. There was also a kind of balcony which was provided with simple benches made of heavy staves. Papa George secreted himself behind the benches and

waited for the culprit to show up to take his goat. The balcony was above the candle place where the goat was supposed to be hidden. When the priest heard the thief come in he gave the benches a kick, which made them fall like dominoes. With additional stamping and knocking about on the resounding wooden floor, the church sounded like it was in an earthquake. The thief was literally thunderstruck. He glanced up and saw the icon of the Virgin Mary. He prostrated himself before it:

“Save me, O Virgin! Save me!”

Then he got up and ran out of the church, sans goat. Several weeks passed and the goat came to church for confession:

\_\_\_\_\_ and from then on, father, my hand has not turned to stealing.”

“My son your experience here was indeed a great miracle, and it should always remain a symbol for you not to steal. But tell me, to whom did the goat belong so that we both, together, might pay him, since I happen to be the one who ate it’?”

When Papa George’s daughter was about nine years old he sent her to old Barba Yanni,

“Tell him I need some oranges for your mother because she is pregnant.”

Little Katerina asked Barba Yanni:

“My mother would like some oranges because she is pregnant.” John: “Tell your mother to ask him who got her pregnant for oranges”. Then: “Tell me, whose daughter are you?”

“Papa George’s.”

“O my God, I have committed a sin. Don’t tell your father what I said. Wait, I get you some oranges.”

When Kosta was about fourteen or fifteen a painter from Sparta, a Mr. Valetta, was commissioned by a nearby church to decorate it with icons and murals. Kosta visited the painter at his work every day. They became well acquainted and Kosta helped Mr. Valetta in any way he could. Kosta developed an irrepressible ambition to be an artist and asked Mr. Valetta how he could become one.

Mr. Valetta said: “Well, if you really want to be an artist you will have to come to Sparta with me and be my apprentice, but first you will have to ask your father.”

At that Kosta was crestfallen because he knew his father would refuse just out of meanness, if for no other reason. Valetta and the philosopher Sturnada had become friends and they discussed the boy. Sturnada said: “Never mind about the father, I’ll talk to him. He hardly knows the boy is alive. He really doesn’t care whether he comes or goes and so Kosta went to Sparta, but after a year he returned because Valetta had died suddenly.

Kosta’s ambition still burned in him. My mother told me that he went to a mountaintop, a favorite retreat, where there was a large domed rock. He prayed about his obsession to be an artist. Clouds gathered. Lightening struck the rock. It rained all around, but he was dry.

A sign.

Shortly thereafter, Kosta heard that some icons were needed at the church, but the Fathers were held back because of lack of money. Kosta went to them and offered to paint them for a very modest sum. Not only that, if the Fathers didn’t like them, they didn’t have to pay him. They agreed to these one-sided terms.

When the paintings were finished the local priests seemed to like them, but as country people they didn't want to commit themselves. They asked the Bishop, who was knowledgeable in these matters, to come visit the church and assess paintings. The Bishop shook his head wisely and tugged at his beard.

“Where is the man who painted these icons?”

Kosta came forward and kissed his ring. The Bishop was amazed that the “man” was still in his teens.

“How much are they paying for all this work?”

When he was told, the Bishop clucked and said it should be three times as much but a bargain was a bargain. There was rejoicing all around. Commissions followed from other churches. Henceforth, he was known as the, “Zografos”, the artist.

When Constantine (the Zographos) Tsavalas was thirty, he married Katerina Papageorge, who was sixteen. There was no objection from Mama Papageorge against her daughter marrying the tall, blond, handsome artist. Kosta built a white-washed hut high up on the hillside, with a tiny courtyard. On one side is an open-air cooking fireplace and on the other side was a well. Because there was no other building at a higher level, Kosta's family was assured of pure water. Kosta's house was the coolest spot in town, It is still there, occupied by one of the Tsavalas branches. Incidentally, Barba Yanni, the groom's father, didn't go to the wedding, claiming he was sick. Later the bride and a girlfriend went to visit him. It was the courteous thing to do. There was a perfunctory exchange. Still, old man Pharmaki did manage to come up with something sour. Katerina had on her head a gay fez that she wore at the reception. It had a long tassel and was quite fetching

on the pretty girl. Barba Yanni had the bad grace to ask her where she got the donkey's tail.

Though the groom was thirty, he was still a "virgin." Still, he and Katerina had a long productive life together, both marveling about what a wonderful thing God made in a human being. Nevertheless, how they managed in a two room hut with a stream of sixteen children is also to be marveled at.

Thirty five years later, the last of the children was born, Dimitrios, who later became our Uncle Jim. Katerina was over fifty and Barba Kostandis, as he was then known, was about sixty five. The child was underweight and not much to look at. Papa George did look at it and remarked something about a funeral that shouldn't be too expensive. A few weeks later he came back and was amazed at the appearance of the healthy and very pretty baby. Once more the marvels of God were recognized with signs of the cross and expressions of amazement and awe. The old Zographos was about ninety when he died, and his wife Katerina, (Yaya, grandmother) lived to about one hundred and four.

With the advent of Dimitrios (James) Tsavalas on the scene, I, the nephew, paraphraser and translator, should allow Uncle Jim to tell his own story in the first person.

## Chapter 2

How old I am I don't know for sure. I do remember one date - 1895. The teacher put the date on the blackboard each day before we began. I must have been 5 or 6 at the time, so I would guess I was born in 1889 or 1890. When I asked my mother about the date I was born she replied: "I don't know about dates, my boy, but I do know you were born on St. Demitrios day; that's how you got your name. I do remember it was autumn and they were harvesting olives.'

When I was still very little I used to help my father. I gathered olives that were on the ground. Not far below our house was the church and on the left was our vineyard, the only one in the village. My father used to tell me: "You should love the grapevine, my son, because it was your nurse. Your mother could not nurse you and sometimes your aunt, Thia Vissilou, who was much younger than your mother, would come around and breast feed you. Otherwise we could only feed you bread, soaked in wine and olive oil; or in the late summer I would take you to the vineyard and peel and seed grapes for you and put them in your mouth. Somehow, you did well with such nourishment." This undoubtedly explains my love of wine. Even though I sometimes drank more wine than I should, I never got drunk.

During my childhood my father had already given up painting icons for various churches, but my elder brother, Theodore, had taken up the study of painting and he was indeed

gifted. He was studying at the Athens Polytechnic Institute. One day the instructor called out: "Tsavalas and my brother stood up.

At the same instant another student got up also. His name was Basil Tsavalas from Corinth, This verified the stories about my great-grandfather having fled from Corinth where the early Tsavalas clan had settled in their flight from Epirus in the late 1700's. My father never raised his hand against me or scolded me. He loved me very much, but one day I did him such harm that if it were any other father but his gentle self, I would have really gotten it, We had, besides the vineyard, planted a number of pear trees. This was the first year that they were ready to bear and the blossoms had appeared on the little trees. My father was very proud of them and could hardly wait to get the fruit which would have been a first - and a wonder - for the village of Yeraka. One day I had taken some bread to my father in the orchard and on the way back I picked all the little pears I could reach on the tree and threw them on the ground. On his way home my father saw these tiny pears strewn all over. When he got home he asked: "Who gathered the pears off the tree?" I proudly stepped forward and said, as though I had accomplished something useful: "It was I, father." He looked at me for a while, and then said: "Good boy, Mitzo. Bravo!" He understood that my act was not of mischievous intent. When you are a good man paternal wisdom comes naturally.

One villager, Papalambros, one of my father's close friends, was widely respected. Around the Christmas or Easter holidays groups of young boys would go to the various houses to sing psalms and carols. When some of these little groups came to Papa Lambros' house and asked permission to sing, he would give them each a nickel (5 lepta) and send them gently on their way. However, when the Tsavalas boys approached he'd

bring out a chair and prepare to enjoy some good, well-rehearsed singing. One of these carols told the whole story of the birth of Christ. It was in meter and rhyme and I could recite the entire thing even today. (I must be about 82 as I write this.) Papa Lambros was so enthralled he gave us each one drachma! During Holy Week before Easter we recited and sang the whole story of the Passion. The good Papa with tears in his eyes, would bless us and wish us a good Easter,

For the first time, a traveling “theatre” came to our village - a “Karagheuzi”, (the “black-eyed one”, in Turkish), a kind of puppet show/shadow play. The producer-actor, a gifted man of many voices and songs gave a number of performances, but many of the villagers stayed away a second time, believing, poor, simple, uneducated people that they were, that such theatre was the work of Satan. They were obliged to fast for forty days to atone for their sin,

When the Karagheuzi presentations were given, I didn’t have a nickel for admission, but I managed to slip in anyway. When the play began, I stole to the rear of the performance tent and through a hole I watched for hours everything that took place. I took in every detail. The shadow play “Punch and Judy” idea must be very ancient, but it was passed on to the Greeks from the Turks and now the Greeks used it to satirize the Turkish power structure. There was the stupid Pasha in his ornate palace and the clever but mischievous Karagheuzi and his wife living in a cave, and also several other classic characters that appeared in all the stories.

I knew that my father was able to master iconography in a remarkably short time, and since I felt I was pretty smart, too, I decided to become a puppet-master. I then took my father prized one-of-a-kind tools: saw, hammer, knife, scissors and file. Every morning I

took the two milk-goats so they could browse. I didn't want them to get into trouble while I wasn't watching them, so I tied them with a long rope to a tree. Then I was free to design the scenery and the puppets. The goats were crying, my father was crying that the goats were crying, but where was the goatherd? Busy with demonic works. In about a month I had finished all the wherewithal to give a grand presentation of Karagheuzi, For music I had my friend, Angelios Orphanos, who played the flute. For puppeteer, producer and treasurer there was another close friend, George Andromedas. I had mastered the various voices - at least they were loud enough. We were ready for an evening performance. My father took his cane and descended to where our "theatre" was located. I realized later that the cane was as much a symbol of punishment for our satanic works as it was to help him get down the mountain. At the same time descending from the mountain was a universally beloved philosopher and gentle man, Barba John Yerakopoulos. He immediately understood the importance of this grand theatrical occasion and tied his mule to a nearby tree, loaded as it was with a huge pile of faggots for the fire.

He settled down to enjoy the presentation. He asked someone:

"Tell me, who is the Karagheuzi-player?" He was told it was

"Mitzos, the son of the Artist." "Is that right? Unbelievable!"

At that moment, O Zographos (the Artist), that is, the father with-the-somewhat-threatening-cane was greeted by Barba John who seemed to be enjoying the show hugely. My father's cane abandoned its symbolism and assumed its proper function - some thing to lean on. He forgot all about the milk-goats having cried all day, or the rather free use of his precious tools and instead attended to the unfolding story line. At the end of the

show the “Producer” came out to collect the nickels - since admission was charged after the show. What nickels? There were few indeed! Instead, the company received some figs, one egg, pieces of cheese and so on. It looked like we were going to eat well, and we found that we even preferred this form of admission after all. When the Producer approached Barba John, that eminent man took out his money pouch, which, in spite of the ceremonious unbuttoning and peering inside, and so forth, undoubtedly contained very little Nevertheless, he fished out an entire drachma and gave it to the amazed boy. We were overjoyed with the success of our presentation, and enthusiastically made plans to show elsewhere and make a lot of money - or things.

\*Mitzos is the Greek nickname for Demetrios, an etymologically inexplicable change. Incidentally, James (!) is the name universally chosen by all Greeks who come to these shores who were originally christened Demetrios - almost a lugubrious change. I wonder about the communication that produces such consistency. The seven or eight tiny villages that surround Yeraka, each approximately five kilometers apart, were known as the “Villages of the Forty Knots” because the inhabitants wore a rope around their wrists in which were forty knots. These were symbols and reminders of the forty repentance prayers they had to do every night. They were done on their knees with bowing down to the floor in front of each home’s tiny altar. They were a stern, puritanical folk, not given to the usual merry feast days - called “panegyre” (Pan whirls) even in modern Christian Greece. Above all they were hard and thrifty I would say, stingy.

We started our circuit in a village where one of my friends had relatives. There we set up our considerable paraphernalia. After a while we were confronted by a big, stern, well-

dressed burger - the head of the house - and he started laying about with his heavy cane, destroying our precious structures. He was yelling, meanwhile, mostly at me: "Get out of our town! We don't want Satan's works played here! Instead of doing this, you should be home, working to get your father out of debt!" We sorrowfully picked up what was now junk and went back to Yeraka. We, of course, gave up our theatrical careers. Thus it was that the forces of Anti-Christ were routed.

Incidentally, "debt", in those days and in our villages, was a shame and a sin. Our father used much of his property, icons, and whatever of value we had, to borrow sufficient money to educate the seven boys in Athens (never mind the two girls), and, with a generosity full of grief to finance their various voyages to America, the land of opportunity. Four hundred drachmas became eighteen thousand by the time they were paid!

Here I was, the last of the Tsavalas children, a burden to my father and a disgrace by trying such silly and useless ventures. The best I could do was to go off and find work so that I could help with my father's debt. (He was 12 years old?)

I went down to the bay and stowed away on a Hebraic caique loaded with John's Bread (Charupia). When the ship had put out into the open seas I appeared before the captain. He spoke in Albanian: "Well! What are you doing on my ship?" "I am a boy looking for work" I replied - also in Albanian. "Welcome aboard!" and all the sailors cheered and made a fuss over me. "Let's go below and have something to eat." We put in at Hydra, a blessed island. I gawked at the tall houses ( two stories) and the paved streets. This was the first time I had been away from my home area and I was dumbfounded with the general beauty and marvels of the place: stores filled with good things I never saw before,

the bay with countless sails and caiques, the gaily colored skiffs, and so on. The good captain took me to the taverna of Kokonezi, another Albanian, "Friend George, I have here a willing worker. Maybe you can use him as servant." Barba George did take me on and he was kinder and more considerate of me than he was toward his own boys. When we ate together he would often give me the choicest part of the meat or fish:

"There! For our new boy." Very often I didn't wake up in time to open the taverna. One morning I woke up and heard footsteps coming down from the upstairs apartment. I pretended I was still sleeping. When Barba George and his wife got down he asked her: "Didn't you wake the boy?" "I felt sorry for the poor boy, he was sleeping so soundly." "Get the keys and we'll open the store ourselves. Let him sleep." I was listening to all this and I was so overcome with love and gratitude that I resolved never to oversleep again.

Almost two years passed in Hydra, the happiest time of my youth. Then my oldest brother, Peter, found me and took me to Athens to advance myself with better work, but unfortunately it didn't turn out that way. My life was suddenly much worse.

I found a job at a tobacconist. My boss (effendikos) was a scoundrel, nervous and short of temper. I had no understanding of my hours of work or pay. I never heard a kind word. He found reasons to scold and beat me no matter what I did. He had no family, just the devil inside him. He had a room above the store. I slept on a packing case in the back of the store. It was my job every morning to sweep, clean and then open the store. I also had to heat up the boss's milk so that it would be ready for the elegant "Agha" to sip with ritual solemnity. I'd put the milk on and begin my cleaning. Sometimes the milk would boil over before I could reach it, and I would replace the missing milk with water so that

the shortness would not be noticed, since he would think I drank it. One time the milk boiled way over and I was obliged to put in too much water to make up the difference. The boss woke up, came down, and noticed that there was plenty of dried milk on the gas range. The milk, however, was at its proper level. Without saying a word, he beat me up as he never did before. I left him.

I knew I had my father's blessing because I was in luck this time. I got a job with a "Tsangari" (shoemaker) and in six months I was a master. I finally noticed a little money was left in my pocket. I earned four drachmas a day which in those days was considered good pay.

And now to tell about the first of a long series of erotic involvements, some of which struck me, naive and unaware, like a conspiracy of the fates.

In those days in Athens, water was a precious commodity. The municipal water system consisted of a pipe end and valve at most street crossings. Water was available at these sources only at prescribed times. One was obliged to fill whatever suitable vessels would hold water and carry them often for considerable distances. My brother and I had rented a small apartment on the ground floor of a house which was occupied by the landlord's family on the second floor. The daughter of that family was a plumpish good girl. Every evening she would carry a heavy load of water from the corner "sink to the house. She conscientiously watered a small flower garden, plus various pots of plants. One night I was at a window which looked out on her flowers and noticed the garden girl approaching up the street with two heavy water-filled vessels. When she got near the house she tripped and fell and the water spilled all over. The streets were not paved in those days and the area turned into slippery mud. The poor girl tried to get up but kept

falling back in the mud. Of course, I, like a proper gentleman, went to the damsel's aid and assisted her to a seat in her garden while I went down the street to refill the vessels. I even watered the garden for her. The young lady thanked me heartily and then bid me good night. The next day she picked a bouquet of flowers and presented it to me with an expression of her "gratitude and affection" for a proper gentleman. I think I must have been about fourteen years old and I didn't understand why hearts beat faster at times. The young lady, being a few years older than I, understood very well. Anyhow, the few hairs I had in a certain lower region had not yet learned to curl. Every evening from then on I used to watch her from my open window and she'd look at me too, but with a certain mysterious smile. Sometimes she'd approach quite close with an expression which said: "How about a little kiss?" I may or may not have understood. Regardless, I didn't have the courage to make so bold as to approach those rosy, thirsty lips. One night I thought I might give her a quick peck, mainly out of curiosity as to what would happen next and how I would feel. At the very moment when I had made up my mind to tender love's first gift, footsteps approached. It was my elder brother, the sailor. The two would-be lovers froze for a moment and then the girl took off with amazing rapidity, but not without having been noticed by my scowling brother. "What did she want here, stupid?" That, of course, I wouldn't know, but I mumbled something about a waitress who was -- "What waitress? She was no waitress; she is the landlord's daughter." "Oh, I thought she was a waitress." "If she ever returns again I'll tell the landlord." An austere brother. And as it turned out, she did not return to the window. Quite a while passed before I saw her again. The first day of Holy Week is called Clean Monday and it is an occasion when most Athenian families go out into the country to celebrate and have a picnic. The family

upstairs did just that; they went to the country. The daughter, however, pretended she was sick and said she preferred to stay home. I happened to pass below her window when a paper tied to a stone dropped at my feet. I picked it up, untied it and read: “Come upstairs. I’m alone -- Sophia.” I mounted the stairs with a fast—beating heart. Before I could open the door it opened by itself and I saw my pretty round little angel. “Please come in and have a bite to eat.” I didn’t even dare to shake her hand. “Please sit down. Here. Near me.” She looked at me with that same mysterious smile. Then she took me by the hand as if to say:

“What are you waiting for, dummy? Embrace me. Kiss me.” I just sat there and did nothing. The LANDLORD’S daughter! How could I kiss HER? It was pretty evident that those hairs hadn’t curled yet. Finally Sophia lost patience, stood up and with an imperious glance studied me for a bit as if to say: “Maybe the kid is a bit young after all.” She then went to the kitchen and returned with the traditional offering to a guest, a cold glass of water and a spoonful of fruit preserve. I gulped the water and the sweet, got up, said a dry thank you, and left.

Years later I thought about that which I didn’t do, and considered that I had committed more of a sin by not doing it than if I had persisted with enough courage to have done it. Sophia and I avoided each other and I never saw her again.

Ever since my boyhood episode with the itinerant shadow play, Karagheuzi, I had been fascinated with “theatre.” In Athens I saved my change until I could attend whatever show I could afford. In our neighborhood was “The Theatre of the People” intended especially for the poor of Athens. My favorite play was called “The Skupa” (The Broom), which also included many delightful musical numbers. My favorite role was “Retsina”

played by Iota Laskaris, who had a face and figure just like Aphrodite. The scene opens and an actor called Chiotis sings the mischievously satirical song of Chios where the Turks got an unexpected comeuppance. At the end of the song, and applause, Retsina breathlessly runs in, wearing a diaphanous gown, the color of Retsina wine itself. "Save me! Save me!" she cries. "From Whom?" asks our hero. "From Peter, He wants to drink me whole. I can't stand the big brute!" At this she bursts into song, describing herself as a metaphor for the uniquely Greek Retsina wine (which, incidentally, to the uninitiated, tastes like turpentine.) For an adolescent like me, she was absolutely overwhelming. The secret hairs were beginning to curl in earnest now, and I dreamed of clasping her to my bosom, or rather, clasping her bosom to my chest, and thus refreshing my thirst for Retsina. I was gone, head over heels in love with an unapproachable goddess. Besides, there was a crowd of older and more debonair men in line trying to approach the lovely Iota. She was always accompanied by her father, a former teacher, who sported an impressively heavy cane. They could be seen walking together from her house to the theatre and from the theatre to her house. I decided the only way I could communicate my burning love was to write. I sent voluminous letters but never got an answer. I went to the theatre every night and my beloved knew where I sat because I had written her that information. When she finished her number she'd look straight at me with a pitying smile that said: "My poor boy, to suffer love's agony; you are much too young." Unrequited, my love's wound healed all too slowly.

Passage here relating to the legendary comic "Mitros", an Evzonas from the island of Chios. The regional dialect had an overtone that seemed to imply naiveté, simplicity and rural horse-sense, but also had an endearing bravado:

“Better not mess with me, mister.” Uncle Jim recites a comic ballad composed by Mitros telling about the confrontations of city life by this irrepressible country bumpkin. Mitros was also a peerless patriot. By virtue of the naming of King Constantine’s daughter, Irene, he became kin, or “kumbaros” to the King. They would talk man to man in a coffee shop. “Let’s sit and talk of country and old times.” Once the King asked him what favor he might want in view of his military service and his many deeds of patriotism. “My Kumbaros, I would ask one favor. If there happens to be another war with those Turks or Bulgarians and we are marching for Constantinople and I happen to get shot on the way, I would request that my comrades tan my skin and make Evzonas sandals and then I would surely get to the Polis.” The Greeks felt a great identification with Constantinople, equally as much as with Athens. The Turks’ occupation of that city (for 800 years) was unbearable. Incidentally, the Greek “eis tyn Poli” (in the city) became the Turkish “Istanbul.”

So now I packed my shoemakers tools and forms and diploma as master shoemaker and returned to Yeraka to practice my trade. I remember my father leaning on his cane and watching me sort the tools, marveling at the accomplishments of his son, then telling my mother how amazed he was that the boy was able to learn such skills so quickly.

In autumn the harvesting of olives and the making of oil was the chief preoccupation of the entire village. Many young people came from the surrounding area to help and be rewarded at least with a share of olives or oil, There was one sturdy, good-looking blond girl of sixteen or seventeen years who was quartered at our house. In retrospect, it seems to me that there must have been some connivance in this, since eligible young men were getting scarce and people wanted their daughters married off before they became too old.

However, at the time I wasn't aware of any scheming by my elders, but I was aware of the young lady's many charms. It wasn't long before the urge to kiss and fondle became almost unbearable. Almost, because I had to bear it. The controlling fear of unknown consequences and resulting commitments that would pin me down for life held me back. That, plus a natural diffidence of one who was as yet inexperienced in the excitements and practices of love. Besides, my mind was still set on Athens and the theatre and Athenian girls who talk boldly to a man without blushing. Here in Yeraka even a casual "good morning" from a girl may be taken as a sign of deathless love. Once when we were alone I said as much to our blond girl in a tone of resentment and the superiority of a man of the world. "Is that so?" she scorned, nose in the air. At that point, in a flush of anger, I lost control. I grabbed her, held her close, and kissed her. I was amazed. No resistance. She didn't even get angry. She kept her eyes closed as though she were half asleep, and indeed the whole episode was like a dream, since, for both of us, it was love's first kiss. Taking courage I began to unbutton her dress and beheld and held in my hand the velvet of creation's loveliest fruit, the rosy centers of which I hungrily began to mouth like a baby. As one would expect, footsteps! Quickly we put to right any disarray and leaned out the window as though in casual conversation. Turning away, we neatly avoided being caught red-faced.

The next day the guilt of my boorish behavior toward innocent loveliness weighed heavily on me, I hardly said two words to her all day. Thereafter, though, I began to talk to her - not as a neighborhood kid - but as a considerate gentleman, with deference and respect. Gathering an irresistible energy, my attitude quickly evolved to one of the tenderness and graciousness of a model lover. I asked her pardon many times and

whether it would be possible for her to forgive me and so on. Finally I took her hand, kissed her on the forehead, and asked her if she loved me. “I love you,” she said. “I could never love another now. You gave me love’s first kiss.” She may have been obliquely reminding me of the traditional unfairness to women which required them to go to the marriage bed as virgins. Slowly, with much sweet talk, we took up our love making where we left off, but this time without the tempestuous abandon of the first encounter. We took advantage of every opportunity to be alone.

There were two rooms in the house, The bedroom where my parents slept, and the other main or all-purpose room. My beloved and I slept in the big room; I on a small wooden bed and she on a mattress laid on the other side of the room. At night when my parents were asleep, I got out of my bed and crept over to her mattress where we proceeded to enjoy the gifts of Eros. Caution dictated that it would be prudent to go only so far and no more, and, of course, that was her choice. “Not before marriage.”

One fine Sunday we hiked to the sea - about six or seven kilometers - to go clamming. The sea was very calm and it would have been just the right conditions to dig clams, but our attention was elsewhere. The sea may have been calm, but storms raged inside us. In the evening we returned to the house without a trace of clams. Father said: “Couldn’t you have picked one or two clams just as an appetizer?” “Father, the sea was very stormy.” Why I said that, when it was obviously not true, I’ll never know. “We couldn’t get close enough to where the clams were.” Father looked at me and shook his head and muttered something about “When our attention wanders, the cattle in the next field---”, a proverb,

not quite the equivalent to “When the cat’s away---”. Nevertheless, he didn’t press us, probably remembering his own courtship days.

The olive harvest was over, the oil was enough to hold us till next year, and the time came for parting. My girl was the only one who knew that I intended to emigrate to America, to join my brothers and sisters, and, naturally, to make my fortune. One night, when everyone was asleep, we crept outside so we could exchange a few words privately, and, incidentally, a kiss or three. We pledged our love, which was forever, and I swore that I would return after a few years and we would get married. She kissed me through her tears, and then I tenderly wiped them off her cheeks and kissed her; for this secret rendezvous was our goodbye. Scoundrel that I am I forgot my promise and did not return “in a few years’. It was not all erased. Even now, in my reminiscences, I still feel wistful and not a little guilty.

### **Chapter 3**

My oldest brother, Peter, and Uncle George between them scraped up some money and a working passage to America. At Piraeus I embarked on a small freighter from Cephalonia, the “Saint Gerasimo”. I was the only sailor not from Cephalonia. I got the job of loading coal for the boilers where I heard all kinds of stories, both good and bad, from my shipmates. I was barely seventeen and not sufficiently muscled to handle such a hard job. I did reasonably well when the seas were calm, but whenever we encountered a storm or large waves, I just couldn’t make it. I couldn’t fill the furnace coal truck, the coal ending up everywhere except in the truck I finally resorted to picking up the coal with my hands. Somehow, I worked up a few tricks in my loading process so that I gave the impression I was keeping up. “Bravo, Mitzo they’d say, but my conscience knew I didn’t earn the bravos

We finally arrived. “America, America!” we yelled when we spotted the Statue of Liberty. As soon as we docked at a pier on the Hudson River, I beat it; my face and rags still black with coal dust. I tried to go to an address a relative had written out on a piece of paper. Every time I showed the paper to someone, they kindly told me how to get there, but I understood not a word, other than “Yes” and “No”. At least they pointed. I

decided to use some of the coins I had. I saw horse drawn wagons, buses, cars everywhere. In following someone's directions, I must have made a mistake, because after paying my nickel I found myself on an island that moved! A ferryboat! I returned on the same boat. I'd been wandering around on the lower west side of New York City and I finally understood I had to go north to the Bronx. The usual time for the trip was forty five minutes by the "Elevated", but it took me ten hours! I didn't dare ask a policeman, especially with my filthy appearance and in my fearful mental condition of a refugee from the law. At last, tired, thirsty and hungry, I showed a ten year old girl the paper with the address I was looking for, and again all I understood was "yes" and "no". I didn't realize I was so close to my destination. The little girl was trying to tell me that other people lived at this address, not the name that was written on it. My brother's name was on the paper while the flat was in my Uncle's name. I was sitting on the front stoop not knowing what to do and I got up to go when I heard Greek spoken in the flat above. I went up the stairs and saw my cousin, but as soon as she saw me she closed the door and called Mama, Mama!. A dirty black man is coming!" I knocked on the door and yelled: "I am not black. I'm from Yeraka! And a relative!" My good Aunt opened the door and looked at me hard. "You must be Katerina's son, Christopher". "Another step down," I told her, "Mitsos". She kissed and embraced me just as I was. Although she had left Greece many years ago, she had often taken care of me as a baby.

At this time four of my brothers lived in Canada. It just happened that one of them was in New York. He picked me up and off we went to Toronto, or rather a suburb of Toronto. My brothers had an Ice Cream Parlor where they made their own ice cream and candies. I worked in whatever capacity I could, from waiting on tables to cleaning the soda fountain

to mopping the floor. There was a young woman, Jean, who worked there. Jean also did a variety of things but mostly making candies and dipping chocolates. Incidentally, one of the things that kept impressing me in this new land of America/Canada was the democratic conduct of the people. One morning as I was sweeping the sidewalks, a well dressed gentleman emerges from the bank next door, stops and engages me in a most pleasant conversation - not that I could say much or that I understood much. Still I was amazed that a proper gentleman would pass the time of day with me or take notice of me as another equal human being, even though I appeared as nothing more than a young sidewalk-sweeper He left me with a burst of good-hearted joviality and a slap on the back. Two of my brothers were watching this little scene from the store window. When I came in, broom in hand, I asked them who that gentleman was. "He is the bank president" they laughed. Such incidents did much to bolster up my self-esteem - which was flagging, naturally, in a foreign environment. In fact, when I was working for the tobacconist in Athens my sense of freedom and worth was much lower. I remember one incident when my boss took me shopping. He loaded me up with goods, and as with a mule he walked behind me, occasionally poking me in the back with his cane.

In Canada I made considerable progress with my English but my vocabulary was still quite limited. On the other side of the store was a barber shop. One hot afternoon the barber came in to cool off and rest at one of the tables. There was no one else around at the moment so I went up to him to get his order. "Well Jim he says after some thought "You can get me a glass of water and a toothpick". "A glass of water" I knew, but what was a "Toothpick?" I read the entire list of sundaes and ice cream sodas but no "Toothpick". I assumed then that it was a more expensive special than any on the list. I

took the largest and most elaborate of the silver sundae dishes and I began to put together a master piece. Several balls of different ice creams, a variety of sauced fruits, whipped cream, chopped nuts on the top and three cherries. I proffer this to the surprised barber with an announcement that needed a fanfare, “Toothpick!” Since the poor man evidently ordered it, he felt obliged to eat it. Later a brother came back. “Nick”, the barber says to him, “You say that Jim understands English?” “Yes, probably more than you or I”. “Well he just sold me a “Toothpick” for sixty—five cents”. This was three times as much as any sundae on our list.

As I said earlier, there was a good-looking young woman, Jean, working for us and since I was in a highly susceptible state, I fell in love with her and believed she must have been in love with me. Since I was new at this ice cream and candy business, my brothers would yell at me (in Greek, of course,) with frequent instructions and rebukes. Jean would take pity on me, comfort me and stroke my hair and say, ”You poor boy!” In my ears this was the voice of an angel. Back in my home village in Greece, if a girl did nothing more than smile at you that meant she loved you, let alone stroking your hair and saying “My poor boy”. I wanted to let Jean know that I loved her too, that I adored her, but how to tell her with my very un-poetic broken English? I studied the Greek-English dictionary and wrote out a garble of laughable and pathetic nonsense, but at that time I felt it was the most esthetic and romantic piece I ever wrote. However, the English was more than broken, and consequently was all very indirect and didn’t really express how a crazy seventeen year old boy feels about a girl. I wanted to tell Jean that her passion for Victrola records and Caruso were a waste of time, instead she would find high romance in the real world, namely in my arms. Can’t she see that I’m dying for love of her? One

afternoon she was seated in a chair before the phonograph. There was no work to do and we were alone. I got on my knees before her and I started to expound my undying love for her. Then I got up to embrace and kiss her. I believed that after such heartfelt eloquence she would just melt in my arms. Instead, she got up and gave me such a whack across the face that I can feel it even today. I was properly deflated. My romantic eloquence, so laboriously studied, went for naught. In retrospect I can hardly blame her. She probably understood no more than two words in my entire oration, words like “crazy” and “dead”. Nevertheless, my intentions became clear at last. After a few days, however, things returned to normal. Evidently she felt badly about her spontaneous reaction and wanted to apologize. I understood this to mean that her lips and rosy cheeks were hungry for my kisses. I approached her again somewhat timidly, but this time before I had the courage to act, she embraced me hard and kissed me all on her own. Not only that. She used her tongue in a way that was unknown to me, I learned fast. After we recovered from the violence of that first kiss, we began to talk seriously about plans, marriage, etc. I took pains to explain that my intentions were honorable, that this was true love. One Sunday she took me to her home so that I might meet her parents. After the formal introduction, I assumed that we would all talk about the future. But something different happened. Papa and Mama offered their good wishes and their goodbyes and left! The young people were allowed to have an opportunity to talk about their plans alone, but having been conditioned with a Greek moral code, this did not impress me. Parents were not supposed to leave their daughter alone with a suitor and parents were also supposed to be involved with marriage plans and so on. Now that we were given this freedom I entertained some inner conflicts about how I should conduct myself as against

how I would like to conduct myself, assuming, of course, that my young lady was willing. And she was. After a while we found the bedroom, lay down on the bed as though to rest ourselves, and thus began the opus of Eros. On the other hand, my inhibitions and mental discomforts were substantial. First, I didn't like her parents conduct in leaving us alone, and, second, I couldn't forget that tongue-twisting kiss Where did she learn that? If I were going to marry this girl, as a Greek I had a right to expect that she would be a virgin. Consequently, I became very cautious about getting into difficulties that would limit my future options. The opus of Eros remained incomplete.

Some time later my brothers' store burned down, and one of them remained to rebuild and open another one. As for me, I left to find work in the great Canadian city of Toronto. I was hired at one of the three ice cream parlors owned by the, Kidi brothers: "Diana Sweets". There I met a brother-in-law of the owner's family, an "Uncle" John, who was a master candy maker. Because I kept close to him and showed a desire to know all about his trade, he loved and guided me like a son. He was a tall man with an enormous waxed mustache like the Kaiser's. He did not speak the Greek vulgate but the cultured and majestic high Greek, the so-called "pure" language. After a lecture on techniques and principles beginning with "My dear young man, Dimitrios, hear me now with your utmost attention ----", I didn't know whether to appreciate his information or to resent his superior tone, I, who, with my limited Greek education barely understood his strict conjugations and declensions. I then asked him, "Uncle John, how did it happen that you, who acknowledge your origins as a shepherd, now are a master of your trade as well as speak the Greek that only the highly educated do?" He stood there proudly,

twirling his moustache, pleased at the flattery in my question. This sort of thing obviously gave him even more enthusiasm in his role as my mentor and teacher. And so, recalling my father's astonishment in my ability to learn all sorts of mysteries in technical practices, in about a year I became a master candy maker myself.

As to my affair with Jean. I had been working at my new job in Toronto for about a month when I received a letter from her. She wrote that she did not have a job, would like to be with me and perhaps, I might find her a job in Toronto. But before I had a chance to answer she showed up in person. With some embarrassed diffidence, I presented her to Uncle John, who conducted himself with elaborate continental courtesies. "Ah," he says to me in Greek "would that I were half my age"

Jean got her job somewhere nearby. Not trusting my own conflicts and feelings about her, I avoided going to her room for a while. We acted like a typical engaged couple. Then I noticed that her ardor - and mine too - was cooling. She might have had eyes for another man. "Well and good," I thought, "Maybe he could take her off my back—Bed play was the only thing that kept our relation alive. There was none of the high romantic passion that began our love. I felt relieved when we stopped seeing each other.

Two of my brothers became owners of two ice cream parlors, one in each neighboring town.

My eldest brother Peter, suffered from rheumatism. A friend of his told him that if he ate a lot of garlic, he would become better. The friend had been afflicted in the same way. whether it was the garlic eating or not, in a short time my brother, too, became entirely well and throughout his long life, he never became rheumatic again. He thought so much of the remedy that he wanted to put up a garlic mixture into pills and patent the idea. He

approached Park and Davis, an established pharmaceutical firm, with the garlic pill proposition. He was told that it would cost up to \$100,000 to advertise, promote and properly distribute the garlic pills, but if he wanted to have garlic pills put up and distributed in Canada as a trial, he would need at least \$3000 to finance it. He was told again, that without advertising them, there was no guarantee of success. Peter took the chance. Had the pills made and distributed. Not one sold.

Because of this distraction I took over Peter's store. At this time World War I began. Canada and Greece were on the same side even though the Kaiser's sister, Sophia, was the Greek King's wife. Patriotic efforts were intensifying and I got an idea to work out a deal with the local Red Cross. I proposed that on the opening day of my store under "new" management that they send some good looking volunteers in uniform to wait on my customers and then I would donate the whole day's receipts to the Red Cross. This didn't hurt my reputation or my future sales one bit. I was flatteringly referred to as a "Greek God" who was patriotic for his new country, and generous too.

There was a high school nearby and a parade of pretty girls patronized the store. Any attempt, however, to go beyond casual flirtations seemed to end up in some kind of bumbling embarrassment. My unreasonable sexual drive gave my self-image some severe whiplashes.

One day a good looking steady customer asked if she might wash her hands in the back room (where I slept). "Of course." I then brought her a towel. Something about her manner and the circumstances really turned me on, but no sooner did I make an advance than she clawed my face like a tigress. "You idiot" she said, "Can't you see this cross around my neck? You ought to be ashamed!" And I most certainly was. I turned green. I

had visions of rape charges and lynching parties. But no sooner were my apologies out than she takes off her chain and cross, puts them on the table, lies on the bed and says, “Now, you can do whatever you want.” I pick up the cross and hand it to her. “Now? Now it’s too late. Please leave and don’t ever come back.” Naturally, after such a fright, my ardor had more than cooled. It was frozen. Nevertheless, from then on I watched my crosses.

I came to know a young pianist quite well. He’d come in the store and we’d philosophize about life, conditions, the war and so on. One day some prevailing prejudice showed itself. “How come you’re sort of light haired? I thought Greeks were all dark, uncivilized, peasant-looking greasers?” “Hah” I answer. “Your people were barbarians when the Greeks were involved with ideals of beauty. Where do you think civilization was born, anyway’?”

And sure enough, that statement was uncannily reinforced a thousand times by something that took place shortly after. I attended a pageant dramatizing the unity of the Allies fighting the war. Civilization herself was upon a central throne and was receiving the various nations who had helped her in the past and would help her now in her time of great danger. It took about two hours to receive all the nations, “Civilization”• acknowledging their contributions with a gracious nod and queenly smile. I was getting upset because Greece was nowhere in sight. Finally Greece came on stage - last. At this point Civilization rose and spoke for the first times “Mother, come sit beside me, for you are tired. All your friends will now defend you.” Well! I was overwhelmed. I burst out in applause all alone, but shortly the entire audience joined me. There! There wasn’t as

much anti-Greek prejudice as I thought. Later, however, I had reason to change my mind again.

The brothers now had three stores in the various small towns. We decided to sell the stores and open a large ice cream parlor and candy shop in Toronto itself. Things began to go pretty well when one incident with which we had nothing to do wrecked our prospects. A soldier on leave came into a Greek restaurant, had lunch and refused to pay. The proprietor said it was all right but please leave. Instead he kept yelling, challenging all Greeks to a fight. The proprietor gently guided him outside but he came in again. Perhaps this time the proprietor was not quite so gentle because the soldier tripped and fell on the sidewalk. He went to the police station and blamed “the Greeks” for his bloody face. In time of war, prejudices take over and we Greeks, even though our mother nation was an ally, were forced to sell and leave Toronto.

All six brothers and two sisters were reunited in New York. Christopher was doing a stint in the Greek Navy.

At that time only one of my brothers had married. In a few years two more married. That left Peter, John and Sotiros. The last two remained bachelors all their lives. Word had gotten around that here was a group of handsome eligible men. Our married sisters threw parties for us in their flats where we invited friends and their friends. One evening there was a considerable gathering at my sister Helen’s place where I got to know the family Ayianis and their daughters Julia and Marta. We ate and drank and later, since we had neither radio nor TV in those days, we sang, joked, danced and played games. One game was played wherein a young woman got dressed as the Virgin Mary and they who wished would pray to her to get their heart’s desire. The girl Maria not only had the right name

but even looked the part, beautiful and demure. My turn came. I bowed and knelt and disclosed my wish when lo and behold, this holy looking being devilishly doused me with water she had held in her mouth! Everyone laughed, but I didn't like being the butt of a joke - and a childish one at that! However, I recovered. Still, I wondered why she picked me for attention. There were others there, more handsome than I, I thought, including four elder brothers. Throughout the evening, though, it seemed she had eyes and smiles only for me.

I had a very close friend, Peter. We shared a room together. As partners we managed two ice cream/hot dog concessions at Long Beach, Long Island. Maria learned about this and asked if we could not find a room for her family there since they were about to go on vacation. No question! I would have found her a room in the Waldorf if it were in Long Beach! I was twenty seven at the time and I had really been smitten with her. So they came to Long Beach

Maria's family liked me. They were hoping I'd become their son-in-law. But not with Maria. With Julia, since she was older. The younger sister must not marry before the elder. Poor Julia had indeed thrown out her net but it was too late; instead her sister Maria had thrown out her net and had caught a fish. Julia's net was short and round and too closed to catch a fish, whereas Maria's had no knots in it and was open and light.

One day in a casual conversation with Julia I asked her if she loved anyone. She answered "Yes, but he doesn't know it and doesn't pay the slightest attention to me in that way." "Who is this scoundrel who doesn't see fit to concern himself with such a good and good-looking girl?" No answer. I had, in fact, become aware, as Maria had, that Julia was bitter with jealousy. Consequently, when Maria and I met for a bit of petting

and kissing we made sure we weren't seen. When everyone was asleep, Maria and I would meet on the beach, lying on the sand, looking at the stars and enjoying the music of the waves. We danced the Dance of Love and there was many a kiss and caress. As always, I never went all the way. I had kept my vow never to dishonor any woman I approached. Love's darkest mystery was to be explored only after marriage. I thought it would be a sin, a fraud and a mockery of the marriage vows to go to church and observe the white gown, veil and bridal crown, symbols of a virgin, knowing the bride is not. The summer went well for a while. One day Maria and I were alone in the shadows in the back of the store, tasting the nectar of long kisses with eyes shut. We heard, too late to part, the footsteps of Julia. We were discovered. She became very angry and immediately went to her father who scolded Maria unmercifully. As for me, I was helpless and heartbroken. I went to my friend and partner Peter and with tears in my eyes I told him my sad story. "What the hell!" he says "There are plenty of other women in the world." I was so desolated I didn't speak to him for two weeks.

Peter was from the province of Mani in Greece, Maniotis". The men of Mani were reputed to be "crazy", short tempered and would act impulsively in disregard of consequences. (Origin, perhaps, of the word "maniac".) So one night Peter had enough. He puts his pistola (sic) in his pocket and accompanies me to the errant family. His intention was to shoot everyone in sight unless they accepted his friend as the groom of Maria. However, when we got there he talked reasonably enough with the family but the father would have a groom only if he married the elder daughter.

I, for one, wanted no truck with any kind of forced or arranged marriage. “Would you please return”, my friend said to Maria, “the gift of love, the ring he gave you.” Maria, with tears streaming down her face, gave it back with one phrase “I’m sorry.”

Months passed and with the jeering, yet comforting words of Peter, the fires of love had dampened. One night we were invited to a home where, we were told, would be some unattached girls. Sure enough, both Julia and Maria were there. We acknowledged one another’s presence with some kind of frosty greeting and that was that. Thereupon began the fifth, the most dramatic, almost tragic, of my love affairs.

Among the women there was one tall and striking. Evangeline. I could not fathom why she singled me out for attention. There were other young men present who were better looking (I doubt that...-A.V.) and better dressed than I. I was diffidently ignoring her while she edged close on some pretext or other and kept watching me. When the dance started she came right over and asked me to dance. She danced with no one else but me the entire night. Again I asked myself, why me? There were bigger fish in the pond. We talked quite a bit. She asked me my name and what kind of work I did. Since I was about to leave with my friend Peter the next day for Detroit, I could only give her my sister’s address.

Peter and I were going to open an ice cream parlor/candy shop in partnership with Peter’s uncle. There was a lot of banter and laughter that evening. My two sisters were pleased that I was enjoying myself due to Evangeline ‘s sparkle and high spirits. I, of course, especially toward the end of the evening was completely relaxed, with no thought that I would ever see her again Nevertheless, at the train station the next day, there she was! I had a suitcase in each hand and before I could put them down, she embraced me. She

gave me a kiss that was so calculated that I would never be likely to forget it. She burst out: ‘ I’m crazy about you. I love you.’ Still holding my suit cases I stood there like a log, dumbfounded. The conductor’s, “All aboard!”, brought me back to some reality and I clambered on.

As soon as Evangeline found out my new address she wrote me every day with many expressions of love including “I loved you at first sight” She would put lipstick on and implant a pair of red lips on each letter. For four months she missed hardly a day I hadn’t written her even one. I resisted writing for a variety of reasons that are not clear to me Anyway, I imagined that writing a love letter would make me feel like a fool. Still, the relationship was ripening. I felt both flattered and pleased that such a lively and passionate woman could Love me. In the meantime, Evangeline and her mother visited my sister and arranged a party in order to get better acquainted with all my brothers. The party was held at my sister Helen’ (I remember It well. I was nine at the time. A.V.) It was a successful gathering. Everyone was pleased for my good fortune with such a lovely woman, I was engaged “by proxy (sic). My brother Theodore, a prestigious church painter and iconographer gave his stamp of approval, and that was important to me. Evangeline went out of her way to win the good graces of all my relatives. At this point, even I began to write regularly. Obviously, there was some discussion as to when the wedding would take place.

A few months passed. One day my sister happened to talk to a neighbor who knew Evangeline. This neighbor said that Evangeline had been having affairs with every agreeable male for years including her own husband and son. In other words, she was not much better than a prostitute. A brother writes me about this and I immediately write

back to Evangeline. She thereupon takes her mother over to my sister and demands an explanation. My brother was there too, and Evangeline and her mother were told clearly and honestly whatever they knew to be “facts”. Evangeline then, without saying a word, went to the bathroom, locked the door and drank down a whole bottle of iodine. With all the screaming and thrashing the others know something was amiss and proceeded to break in the door. An ambulance was called. The doctors had some difficulty but they succeeded in saving her. After two weeks she was released from the hospital and she began to write: “My darling Jimmy, if you believe any of those evil stories about me, I certainly would not want you to marry me. I have never been intimate with any other man and you and only you, are the only man I ever loved.

Please believe me. With all my souls, with all my heart I have given you love’s first kiss and I never have to any other man. Now I beg and plead with you, come, and give me a kiss that will at least enable me to die happily, for die I surely will and the thought of your sweet kiss will ease my passage”. I continued to receive daily letters and every one was full of high tragic drama, The letters were wrinkled at the points her tears fell. Somehow they were not very convincing and even though I didn’t believe everything she wrote, nevertheless, little by little I began to feel a certain compassion for her. Whatever she had done it was her present state that asked for consideration. After all, who was I to cast high judgment? I was a simple working man, not a prince or an aristocrat or anything like that. Common people have less “honor” to defend and every one makes mistakes.

I decided to come to New York to settle this thing once and for all. I go to my sister Helen’s, where my other sister and all my brothers were gathered to see me and console

me. And to caution me. A strange turn in my feelings took place. The more my relatives displayed an aggressive, indignant and demanding attitude, the more compassion I felt for Evangeline. My older brother Theodore, the artist, in his large and florid way, universally commanded respect. I held him in high esteem myself as a surrogate father. But when he took full advantage of his position and commanded me “not to see that woman or have anything to do with her, she is clearly a whore” I could not accept such a commandment - even from my father. The decision was mine.

I went to see her. She was in bed and as soon as she saw me she tried to get up and fell on the floor. She began by kissing my feet, then my hands and finally embracing me and kissing my lips. “Oh my love,” she gasps, “I am so glad you came to see me. Now I will die happy.” We drew up a couple of chairs and talked ‘till about three in the morning. I tried to reassure her and comfort her. Nevertheless, I told her that at this point I didn’t feel I could marry her, but that I valued her continued friendship and that time will bring everything to light and right. She seemed to calm down and I left her with a brotherly kiss on the ‘brow.

I went to get the subway uptown. While waiting on the platform I saw the train approaching from a distance. At that moment an apparition all in white leaped off the platform onto the tracks I jumped down and dragged her to safety just in time, She had fainted. I got her on the platform and tried to revive her by slapping her, She finally opened her tear swollen eyes. With a small bitter smile she says “This time you saved me, but next time when you will not be near, no one will save me, I will die because I simply cannot live without you.” We looked up and saw Mama approaching in her robe and slippers.. With tears she embraced her daughter declaiming against me “You evil man!

You murderer! Why do you want to kill my only child? Who do you think you are, God? Have you no pity?" At this point I became convinced that Evangeline's life depended on me, I took her in my arms and little by little we got her home, and there I remained.

Now my brothers were waiting for me and when I hadn't returned, a group of them took off to "rescue" me, together with my steadfast friend Peter, who was prepared for any degree of mayhem. When they got to the house, my brother Nick, (Telly Savalas' father, Telly was not born at this time.) stopped them and said "Boys, what are we trying to do? That's not a bad looking house. That being so, the occupant can't be all bad either," Nick was the creative opportunist, the practical one, the "business man" and his intuition 'told him, no matter how much they loved, their youngest brother, this was not their business. But Peter would have none of this. He pounded on the door as if to break it in.

Evangeline opens the door with me behind her "I understand you are going to marry my friend Jimmy there "under the threat of bullets" (translate as "shot gun wedding") I came forward took my friend aside and explained to him quietly that it was more than just my duty to marry her.

At the wedding none of my relatives or friends attended except Nick, our practical business man. My bride and I went off to Detroit where we rented a small flat.

Like most first—generation Greeks in America, I saw opportunities for advancement only if I worked hard and now that I was married, I felt doubly impelled. I made and sold candy in my little shop and I discovered an excellent market at night, setting up a portable stand outside a theatre. In those days popcorn and candy were not sold inside the theatres. So I worked hard as both manufacturer and peddler of my own candies. When I came home dead tired every night I was not inclined to exercise marital rites as often as I

might. Many a good night kiss was dry and passionless. In the morning I leave for work while Evangeline was still asleep. While I didn't believe the stories some people told about her, I did surmise that before she knew me she was a gadabout; her life was a round of parties and little work. The life that I provided for her in our poor and lonely place was certainly a contrast to everything she knew before. Often I'd find her moping and crying. I advised her to share my work with me to be a partner not only in marriage but in business as well. My advice was wasted. After two months of this she could stand it no longer. She wrote her mother without my knowing it. Mother came to Detroit and took her darling daughter back to New York. Later those two were to cook up a crazy and fanciful divorce case. It seems that all her show of love for me was not genuine but just so much empty romanticism, the whim of a spoiled would-be "princess".

Now I began to believe that maybe there was substance to those stories about her. I felt worse than merely abandoned - that didn't hurt my ego so much. I felt ashamed that I'd been taken in like a fool. Especially so because my brothers had taken to writing me about my foolishness. My noble, proud brother Theodore went all the way: "You have brought disgrace on the family. I hereby instruct you to change your name so that your actions will not remain as a memory to shame the name of Tsavalas!" This reminded me that my schoolmaster didn't like the name "Tsavalas" because for him it showed Albanian origins (Epirus). He advised me that we ought to change our name to "Zografos" (artist) since my father was an iconographer. Anyway, everyone referred to my father as Constantine, the Zografos. Therefore, in order to shorten the name for American use, I henceforth called myself James Zoras. I returned to working harder than ever to forget my problems.

At that time candy making was not highly mechanized. Chocolates were all hand dipped. I phoned a friend of mine who had a candy making shop to send me a “chocolate-dipper” if he knew of an experienced one. The next day a pretty, blue-eyed, pink cheeked young woman appears. “Good morning, master, how are you?” she says - but in Greek. I then began to talk to her in Greek: “I not Greek” she laughed “My name is Margaret Laroux. I came to work for you if you want, me to “; “Of course I want you” I said, Her work was excellent. There was something else. The way she looked at me it was as though I was the first man she had ever seen in her life, After a while she asked me “Are you married?” I, for one was glad to have a sympathetic ear in which to pour the previous episode of my life story.

One morning Margaret came to work with the same “Good morning master” in Greek, Then she approached me and said, “it’s terrible the way you carry your past troubles around with you .all the time. She is simply not worth it, Forgot her. There are others, myself for instance, I fell in love with you at first sight.

Once more my ego was ransomed. But more than that I was vulnerable to the voice of an angel from heaven. Without waiting for an answer she threw herself into my arms and kissed me. I forgot everything except the sweetness before me, We must have clung to each other for quite a while because the caramel, that was boiling in the pot burned.

We continued our demonstrations of love whenever possible, but it was rare that we were alone. She was curious of every thing about me. How was my apartment? Was a man able to keep it clean alone? And so on. Naturally, I invited her to see for herself. As soon as we entered she paid no attention to the apartment orderliness, but instead excused herself and went to the bathroom, In a few minutes she came out dressed like Eve except

that she was still wearing a pair of silk panties. What ensued were better left to the imagination. She was absolutely delightful in every way and took the lead in everything, so I was convinced here was a girl with experience. In my old age, as I write this, I still light up when I think of this occasion. Later when Margaret got dressed and was about to leave, she turned to me with a cryptic smile, said, “Now I hope you are satisfied” and blew me a kiss When I fixed the bed I noticed a bloody spot. Unbelievable, she was actually a virgin. She was twenty one and no other man but me had her?

I would talk of marriage but she would put me off with “We have time, We’ll see, my love”. Of course I hadn’t yet heard of any divorce proceedings from Evangeline. For a year Margaret pursued her examinations of my room to see if it was properly “clean” When Margaret and I first got to know each other, she took me to her home to introduce me to her mother, a widow and to her brother Fred, a handsome well-built young man over six feet tall. He would often take us to the movies in his car. It was obvious that he could see in the mirror what we were up to in the back seat. This whole idyll with Margaret was happy while it lasted, but it was too good to be true.

One night I arrived at her house to take her to a dance but she wasn’t ready. While she was dressing up I had a conversation with her mother. She told me in a matter of fact way, “You know that Margaret is not my daughter, but my daughter-in-law, Fred is my son. He is Margaret’s husband. She doesn’t let on that she’s married because it’s easier for a girl to get a job if she’s single. At first I thought this was some kind of a joke, but I looked at her and she seemed to be ingenuous and quite serious. How could a respected lady like this, white hair and all, be telling me a lie? Upset and confused, I left without excusing myself very credibly. And the poor girl was left without an escort.

The next morning before the shop was opened I found Margaret at the door with tear-swollen eyes. “You have so little love that you believed my crazy mother and not me? My mother is crazy. She is insanely jealous. How could Fred be my husband? You are my husband in fact. Don’t you remember the first time we slept together? Wasn’t the sign I left on your bed proof that I was a virgin and had no husband?” It wasn’t hard for me to believe her. I wanted to. We made another start. We rented another apartment as husband and wife and we lived happily for a while until a candy maker, a friend of mine, asked me to give him a hand with his techniques and production. At his place there was a young woman, a chocolate-dipper. I asked her what her name was. “My name is Margaret” she said. Amazing! Are all chocolate- dipper called Margaret? “What a coincidence” I say, “I have a chocolate—dipper who’s name is Margaret too”. “Oh, you mean Mrs. Laroux?” “No” I say, “It’s Miss Laroux”. “You are mistaken. I know her very well. We were fellow workers for quite a while. I also know her husband, Fred. He used to pick her up every night to take her home”.

Now, who can I believe? The mother was crazy. But this woman seems perfectly sane and reasonable. On the other hand, what about that sign of virginity? I phone Margaret, my Margaret Laroux, and tell her where I am. As soon as she comes to the candy shop she sees the other Margaret and greets her like an old friend. Somebody is lying, and now I know who. My lying love and I went to a nearby park and there Margaret begins the very strange and dramatic story of her life

Margaret’s father was a business man, a manufacturer. He owed a lot of money to Fred’s father, a debt that was never paid - at least not with money. Why a marriage was “arranged” for Margaret and Fred is hard to explain. They were both good looking people

and possibly they were eager to marry each other. From what ensued, I suspect Fred's father hoped a marriage might help his son to mature. Fred evidently was too close to his mother; he even slept in her room, and his inability to consummate his marriage confirmed his impotence.

"I lied to you" Margaret said "because I didn't want to lose you. I had planned to get a divorce from Fred and then I'd be free to marry you without you being aware of my problems. I lied to you and now I see there is no excuse. If you still love me a little, forgive me and let me go. If you love me a little more than that, forgive me and I'll be your slave until I die". "Well and good" I said, "I may believe, you and I may not believe you, but how do you explain that "sign of virginity" that you left the first time you came to my room? If it wasn't that, then what was it?" "I can't explain that, even to myself. But you might ask my impotent "husband". Maybe he can explain it," "I go so far as to believe in Fred's impotence, but I don't think he was stupid too. He could see what was going on around him. He knew about us." "Yes, he knew about us. He loved me very much and he is a kind and considerate man. He insisted, since he was helpless himself, that my normal instincts as a healthy young woman be satisfied," Then I thought, the weight of the horns that he helped place on his own head must have been almost too heavy to bear

This whole matter left me very sad and sorry. I decided to leave. I couldn't go on with our relationship. I had no control over my feelings. I simply gathered my things and left, without any dramatic goodbyes to my pretty blue-eyed innocent.

There is an epilogue to this story. Quite some time later, Margaret wrote me. She said she was the mother of a beautiful boy who, strangely, looked like me. Fred had overcome his affliction, though not entirely, and was now a happy, proud father!

I returned to New York and after a time I got to know a good family, distant kin, from Yeraka, my home village in Greece. I had not seen them since I was a boy. The father was traveling and I had to show Mother, Aunt and Daughter around New York. The daughter's name was Aphrodite; she was sixteen and far more beautiful than her namesake, the goddess herself. But she was human and modest and gentle. Her deep black eyes seemed to say:

“I am still only a bud on the point of becoming a flower, a flower of unknown promise and deepest mystery. Do not look on me. The time for possession is not yet - but soon - soon.” I was unaware of such subtle signs. After my recent pain and inner conflict, I had no appetite for any more affairs of the heart - for a while.

After two days of showing the three ladies the wonders of New York, each one deposited a kiss on my cheek, thanked me and departed by steamer for Constantinople (Istanbul) where they were now living. The father of this family had lent money to a cousin to start a candy shop here. This cousin did not know the business well so he failed. I was asked to reopen the shop to see what I could do with it in partnership with one of my brothers.

“What did you do for her kinfolk?”, my brother asked one day, “that they speak so highly of you? You know the whole family is coming back to New York to stay”. When they did, we were not yet opened and Aphrodite came to work with us, There were hints all around, even from her family, that I would make a good match for her, and with my bruised ego I didn't discourage these suggestions. On opening day Aphrodite and I were

sitting at a table having a bit of lunch, when her mother comes in with two roses, puts them on the table before us, saying, I see these two beautiful roses at this moment, so I would like to see you two until I die”. With such heartfelt enthusiasm from mama, how could I not respond? The comfort of family approval in these matters is valuable - and stimulating, particularly when such a lovely “bud” seemed so precious and unapproachable in my eyes. I continued my reluctance to pluck this “bud”, thinking that my touch might make it wilt. We exchanged friendly and affectionate smiles whenever we happened to glance at each other. Our brother-sister love didn’t last too long. While I didn’t have the courage to approach her, one day she just came right up to me and kissed me on the lips. The bud was beginning to flower! Still, for me that kiss was platonic, not erotic - maybe I could describe it better as angelic, even spiritual. It put me in a daze. The kisses quickly increased in frequency and simultaneously they changed in essence. They became erotic as well. I began to notice all the beautiful petals on this flower. A few buttons were eventually unbuttoned but everything below the waist was forbidden territory as far as I was concerned. It was up to me because when she was in my arms with eyes closed, it was like a complete surrender as if to say “do whatever you like”. I held back for many reasons, some of which might be considered old-fashioned in today’s world. Also, I wasn’t trying to be cautious so much as thinking that future satisfactions would be that much greater by not hurrying. Then too, I was at least ten years older than Aphrodite and I felt it was up to me to take the responsibility. I had been through a good many emotional upheavals in my time. Somehow I felt she was too young to get involved in some unforeseen difficulty unless I was sure I could follow through with marriage and all the family support we could get. Remember, I was still married legally to Evangeline.

Nevertheless, within the above self-imposed limitations we were content to maintain our love in a kind of delicious suspension. And this lasted almost three years! Two things happened that had the effect of an atomic bomb. The happiness of two people was destroyed

First, from Canada came a certain Mr. Papasimakis with some Canadian friends, some of whom we knew when my brothers and I were working in Canada. Mr. Papasimakis was an English millionaire who seemed to have associated with the British nobility and even some members of the royal family He had photographs showing him in friendly poses with many Lords and Ladies. He was here to sell shares for a company to extract gold from deposits in the north of Canada. He had inspected the sites himself and was convinced that a lot of money was to be made. He had charts showing the exact locations of these strikes. Evidently our old friends who were now business associates of Papasimakis had enough faith in the venture to have invested all the money they had or could borrow. My eldest brother Peter was quite impressed and became one of the most enthusiastic salesmen of this project. Papasimakis had hired a large meeting room in one of the best hotels and had invited all who might be interested in making money. He had an excellent display area and plied everyone with fancy refreshments. There was even a small dance band.

My brother quit his job and spent all his time selling shares. I didn't buy any. Peter asks didn't I want to become a millionaire? I finally gave in and invested \$100. I couldn't invest more anyway. Whatever else I had was tied up in my business. The next day a couple of government investigators came asking for Papasimakis. I didn't know, of course, but I asked them what they wanted him for. They said he was selling stock

illegally and it was important that they catch up with him before a lot of people lost their money. In the meantime, Papasimakis had a whiff of what was astir and took off, withdrawing all the money at his bank. Of course, I didn't lose any time stopping my \$100. check, so the incident didn't hurt me financially, but it broke my brother. More than that, everyone we knew heard about it, and the disgrace tainted me as well. That didn't sit well at all with Aphrodite's folks.

The second part of my atomic explosion came from my as yet un-divorced wife Evangeline. It was five years since our two months life together. She wanted to get married again, but in New York state divorce was only obtainable on grounds of adultery. There was also the possibility of annulment if the circumstances warranted. Her lawyer didn't want me to appear to contest the case so he claimed he didn't know where to find me. By the time I knew what had happened it was too late. The judge granted Evangeline an annulment on the grounds I hoodwinked her into marriage, giving her a false impression of who I was, that I was a rich merchant with extensive business connections, and so on. It happened that a reporter from the New York Journal was present at the divorce court ready to pick up juicy morsels for the "yellow" press. Hearst's newspaper network was represented in every major city in the country. The sensational story of Evangeline's deception by me appeared not as a simple news item, but on a full page of the Sunday magazine supplement, printed in 52 Hearst papers! (I remember the incident well. I was 13 years old and I was amazed that a newspaper could print such lies and exaggerations. A.V.)

The paper artist had made a sketch which was supposed to be of me, James Tsavalas, with a full dress suit - tails and wing collar - and a top hat. This elegant figure was a

beggar! He also had a pair of dark glasses showing he was blind. From his shoulders there hung a small tray of candies. In his hand was a cup for alms. Evangeline's mother was also shown at the point when she unmasked the culprit by pulling off his glasses. With this sensational disclosure, business fell off rapidly and I had to declare bankruptcy. Aphrodite's father was dead set against anybody in the family having anything to do with such a shady character. Her mother, always the essence of gentleness, still had a soft spot in heart for me. The family left town, and for six months Aphrodite and I had a heavy correspondence. Never in my whole life had I written as many letters as I did in those few months. We exchanged declarations of trust in each other and vows of eternal love, Aphrodite's father, on the other hand, kept up a continuous barrage of vilification against me, saying I would always be sneaky and irresponsible, not the way an honorable man should be, and so on, He even wrote to some of his relatives in New York to get them to talk to me about stopping this impossible romance with Aphrodite. They tried and got nowhere, so they began to talk against me to everyone, Among these relatives was a cousin, a young braggart who came to the store one day and threatened me: "If you dare to approach a certain young woman again I will kill you." And he takes out a "pistola" and puts it on the counter. "With that I will clean you out Then I proceed to tell him: "My fine fellow (palikari) tomorrow I will go to her town. I will embrace and kiss her and will go far away from all relatives and the likes of you. I will wait for you there and maybe we will meet and we shall see who will kill whom." The next day I took my car, picked up my brother John and we were off to settle great matters on the field of honor, I had not been driving very long so my lack of experience made me overcautious and sensitive with the wheel. A car approached us with great

speed driving more on my side of the road than his. I veered off to the right and hit a big boulder. The glass broke in a thousand pieces and cut our faces. Brother John was in a far worse shape than I. Blood was all over his face. The car was useless. Nevertheless, after taking John to the hospital, I got cleaned up, for I was near enough to the town to get a room at the inn where I was known. The next day I appeared at the appointed time and place to confront the brave cousin. I waited but he was nowhere in sight. Instead, Aphrodite's father appeared and with exaggerated politeness tried to talk some "sense" into me. He seemed very calm and did his best to sound reasonable. "These matters", he said, "require patience, perhaps with time everything will work out for the best". Quite a diplomat. I must say he put me at ease and I returned to my room. Who was waiting for me there but herself, my Aphrodite!

It was a melancholy meeting, full of high love, with scarcely a suggestion of the erotic, and all kinds of pledges renewed. We decided each to rent a post office box so that we could correspond in secret without upsetting her family. Aphrodite and I kept up this secret exchange for another year. Every once in a while I'd go to her town and we'd meet in my room. The landlady knowing all about this romance looked the other way and never said a word to anyone. There were plenty of "erotic" kisses and embraces for hours on end, but we had agreed "thus far and no further".

One day I received a letter from her. She was terribly distressed. Her father, after not being able to sleep, decided to settle this matter once and for all. At 3 A.M. he came into his daughter's room with a revolver. He said he was determined to kill himself unless she put an end to this affair with me. Aphrodite was really frightened He said: "You can go

ahead and marry him and I will kill myself. I doubt if you'll have a moment's peace after that." Aphrodite believed that he would really do it and promised him anything

Shortly after that I received a letter from her father, inviting me to their home so that we could all come to some agreement concerning the future. I thought the soft tone meant that father was beginning to change his mind about me. I went to their town and

Aphrodite met me first and asked "What should I do?" Since my hopes were up I said "You do as your father advises". But father had plans I didn't suspect. He was as firm in resolve to get rid of me as ever. I went to the house at the appointed time. Father, in the meantime, had invited all his friends and relatives to the house, including even the local priest. Aphrodite's father started the speech—making by saying all sorts of unfavorable things about me. The priest spouted a bunch of trite homilies, thus throwing the prestige of the church behind father. Aphrodite herself spoke up and declared that she did indeed love me, but it was more a spiritual sisterly love than an erotic one, implying by this statement that in the three years we knew each other, her virginity was still unsullied. I looked around me at all the unsympathetic faces and I told them my love for Aphrodite was far from platonic, that it had all the dimensions that love between man and woman should have - but it was true that Aphrodite's purity was unsullied.

Nothing much was accomplished. There could be no positive judgment by the clan, but I was just as undesirable as before. As lovers we were terribly upset and felt we were at an impasse. Aphrodite kept writing to me, but there was a different tone to her letters - as though she had accepted defeat and we were destined to part. She made statements like "I will never forget you even if I marry someone else, you will always be on my mind and you could still have me whenever you wished, for you gave me love's first kiss. That first

love can never be replaced. In another letter she divulged a secret that her family did not know about. And in the three years we knew each other she never told me It seems, when she was thirteen years old, a certain scoundrel came to see her father but he wasn't home. Neither was her mother. He raped her but she was too ashamed to mention it to anyone. By making such a statement, Aphrodite let me know that she knew all about the mechanics of the sexes and that she wasn't a virgin. If I had known this all the while, she felt that I would not have been able to resist "going all the way". Now it's possible that story was fabricated in order that my love for her would lessen. And it is true that with many such subtle ways we did in fact draw apart - and our love faded into memory.

And now begins the story of the love that lasted me the rest of my life. In this, I regard myself the luckiest man in the world; a luck that was undoubtedly helped by my revered father's blessing when I left Greece. In this love I was given the most heavenly gift God had ever given to anyone. As I write this we have been married close to fifty years and as the years go by our love gets deeper, more sacred and with ever more tenderness, caring and respect. We have never fought about anything. Once I was having some difficulty with a waitress. I was furious with her about something and I yelled "shut up". My wife was nearby and thought I yelled at her. You'd think it was the end of the world, she cried for hours and it was with difficulty that I finally convinced her that my anger was not directed at her, I was never that careless again. Turbulent as my amatory life had been in my early years, there was peace and contentment for my middle and later years. I will now tell about how I met my angel. I say "angel" advisedly, for there has never been anyone with a more angelic appearance or disposition.

Some of my buddies and I were talking one day and what started as idle talk ended up with a serious decision. We decided to go to Greece for a long vacation. This suited me fine. It would help to make me forget my recent past. There were five unmarried male friends who wanted to make the trip - all Greek expatriates and like myself now American citizens. I had a car at this time and was about to put it in storage, but I was talked into taking it along on the boat in order to use it in Greece. The extra expenses would be shared by all.

I knew a professional photographer, Stavropoulos, who hailed from a town, Kyparissi, not far from the village where I was born. He had returned from a visit to Greece and brought back a radiant wife. While he was there he took hundreds of photographs. As he kept developing them he'd put them in a box. He heard that I was visiting Greece and suggested that I take these snapshots with me and give them out to whomever the picture concerned.

We boarded an Italian steamer, the Saturnia. We had a wonderful time, including eating plenty of Italian spaghetti. While on shipboard I thought of the box of photos I was carrying and that it might be fun to look at them in company with my friends. And jokingly we said "Maybe we could find our future wives." So we lounged about commenting on this one or that one, but in particular noticing all the pretty girls. Of course I wasn't in the slightest mood to get involved with another love affair or bring back a Greek wife. My psychological scars were far from healed, Still, I went along with my friends' jovial speculations.

Out of the hundreds of snapshots, by some stroke of fate, I happened to pick up one of a girl from Kyparissi. There was something almost magical about it. She appealed to me

instantly even out of that tiny photograph. I thought, if I were to bring her back, my brother Theodore, the iconographer, could use her as a model for angels or for the Virgin Mary. I put the picture in a special pocket and did not share it with my friends.

We disembarked at Patra, which is on the northwest side of the Peloponnesus. We got the car off with a heavy duty bond and landing fee only to learn that because of landslides, repair and construction, there were no passable roads between Patra and Athens. We got the car back on board and finally disembarked at Piraeus, the port city of Athens.

I was met by Peter Economachos, my old friend the Maniotis. Everyone was impressed by the arrival of a rich “Brooklyn” (a colloquialism for a Greek who has become an American citizen in those days, 1929). It was almost unprecedented for a visitor to bring his own car. Only Peter knew I was almost broke because of that unforeseen heavy fee for the landing. Still, with a good suit of clothes and my own car, I shone, In fact, no knight in armor ever shone more in the natives’ eyes ‘than I did in my convertible. I was approached with many a handsome dowry, all mentioned confidentially, but I ignored all offers, Peter kept pushing me. “Why do you want to go back to America? Conditions are not too good there right now. Get a nice wife and settle down here.” “My good friend Peter”, I answer, “I didn’t come here to get married. But suppose I do. I’m very wary of wrong impressions if not outright deceptions. When I honestly tell someone here that I’m broke, they don’t believe me because I’m an American, I must be rich. What would happen when I get her back to America where she would have to bear up under grinding poverty in a strange land?”

About two months passed before I decided to visit my home village, Yeraka. I was in no hurry because none of my close relatives were left. However, I did want to see’ the

ancestral house. Or should I say the ancestral “hut”! Land travel still being very difficult, if not impossible, except by donkey, I arrived by small steamer at the bay of Yeraka, seat of the ancient principality of Zarax. Yeraka was five kilometers inland.

Somehow word was sent ahead that a son of Constantine, the Zografos, was coming to visit. On the road I was greeted by a lively, highly spirited and handsome man of 97 carrying a rifle. He was all dressed up in the Evzone kilts, “Greetings, Cousin! (Bang) Welcome son of the Zografos! (Bang, Bang) Welcome to Yeraka! (Bang, Bang Bang), He was the son of my father’s elder brother. This started a round of good times, eating, drinking and dancing. I hardly expected such a burst of hospitality. Unforgettable! Our party was joined by the two local doctors, one from Yeraka and one from neighboring Rihia, both very hearty and jovial. We made a circuit of all the nearby villages. Wherever we went the hospitality was overwhelming. We visited Sparta, especially to greet the brother of the beautiful Christina, who was my brother Nick’s wife, and later the mother of Telly Savalas. We didn’t think anyone knew us in Monemvasia, but when we arrived at the only “taverna” there (in 1930) word got around that the son of Constantine, the Zografos, was visiting. Again, our party was welcomed with great enthusiasm. “My boy”, I was told, “Your father brought God to our village. He painted saints and angels from one end of our church to the other. Come and see. It has been fifty years (1880) since these icons were painted! They look as though they were painted today.” We did visit the church, but alas, our informant was wrong, the icons had noticeably deteriorated. My father had painted the icons on good hard wood, but the expansion and contraction of the wood due to roof leaks and weather changes had flaked off much of the gilt and egg tempera.

When we returned from church, the good times started again. Twenty of the local people had joined us. We started with horse beans (like extra large lima beans) and garlic stew.

Then ate about twenty roast chickens and drank gallons of wine

We returned to Yeraka and decided to go for a swim at a fine beach near Rihia. We swam and we fished and we cooked. We had gone several times and each man was to take a turn in cooking. Our good doctor's turn came and for some reason, probably because he

was a know-it-all, we thought he'd cook up something better tasting than the rest of us.

He created a dish that only he could eat. He took a pot, put a little water, and started putting in everything he could find, split peas, flat beans, onions, dried dandelions, sugar, honey, milk, tomatoes, cheese, pieces of meat, salt and a variety of local herbs "Now", he says, "When you eat this you will be getting all the vitamins and something will rise up surprisingly hard for you. He cooked the stew for hours and in the end he wasn't satisfied with everything he put into it so far, but he added flour and eggs without beating them and the potpourri began to pop and boil like molten lava in a volcano, In the end not one of us could find the appetite even to taste it, but that devil of a doctor, small as he was, calmly and methodically ate up the whole thing! He certainly was the greatest gourmand, if not gourmet, that I'd ever met,

There was a local religious period for St John Peridromos when everybody fasted before feasting. In fasting, though, it was permitted to eat mashed peas (fava) with bread but without butter or oil. During our visits to the various homes where we were invited, our doctor must have eaten at least six plates of fava with bread. Not only that, he ate a whole watermelon including the rind because, since it was green, it had more vitamins. In the evening began the time of feasting, and I had ordered, at my expense, that a goat be

slaughtered and roasted at my family's house. By the time we got back it was all ready and we sat down to eat. There were about sixteen in our group; most of us were visitors from America (Brooklynites) already full of the historic St. John's fava from the day's "fasting" visits. The entire party could not eat more than half the goat, but our devil doctor quietly de-boned and ate the remainder!

When we were enjoying the beach at Rihia, we had decided that one of these days we should visit Kyparisi, a nearby beautiful town. It also had a reputation for the most beautiful women in the region, who were also meticulous housekeepers. All the houses were decorated with window flower boxes full of marigolds, fuchsias geraniums, anything colorful that would grow in a pot. Kyparisi was made up of three small villages Paralia Dimitropolis, and Vrissi. "Vrissi" means stream, and there was a crystal clear mountain stream there, famous through out the area. And the myths tell of Nereids (water-nymphs) who bathed and danced at this stream. This is the reason, it is said, that the maids of Kyparisi are the most beautiful.

One day while swimming we decided on the spur of the moment to walk up to the town. We had bathing suits on, which seem so comical today, and were so cut that only our feet, hands and heels showed, Our devilish doctor, who was the only one dressed in regular clothes, went along with us so that he might get a laugh at our expense. Being local, he might have warned us about the propriety of our attire, but he was eager to show us off to the good people of Kyparisi as curiosities prototypes, first-of-a-kind. As a matter of fact as we approached, the people kept their distance, shaking their heads and no doubt remarking about the sorry destiny of the world. One man joined us. He was the only official (unpaid) in the town, equivalent to mayor. We all sat down under a tree and he

begins “Well, fellas, aren’t you ashamed appearing before the townspeople in such a ridiculous shape (tetya chalia)?” We wanted to offer him a drink at the taverna, but he refused. “You guys are ready for the crazy-house.” We left considerably abashed, and each step back kept rhythm to the doctor’s laughter. Incidentally, I had never before visited Kyparisi even when I was growing up in nearby Yeraka.

( Thirty five years later I visited Kyparisi for the fourth time. It was summer and since it was very hot, as soon as we landed from the boat I wanted to cool off with a swim. I was ready to get into the water when I had to rub my eyes to see if the apparition before me was real. Here was a well-shaped young woman emerging from the water completely naked! No, not completely, she had some minimal patches at the appropriate places. This was the first time I had seen a bikini in the flesh! I had seen this on TV of course. I had to ask myself, “Where am I? At Kyparisi at the French Riviera?” What a contrast from our experience in 1930! We were men, and covered from the knees to the neck - and we still had to leave in shame! )

I received word that we, the American group, were all invited to Kyparisi to attend a christening celebration at the Drivas family (my sister Sophia married a Drivas.). This time we went to Kyparisi dressed up, not in bathing suits. We ate, drank and danced into the morning hours. The next day we were invited to another home, that of one more “Uncle John”, Barba Yianni, the father of the photographer’s wife. Incidentally, I had the box of photographs with me, as well as the photograph of that angelic girl which I kept in the handkerchief pocket of my coat. Every night I used to look at that piece of paper - almost praying to it to bring it to life like the ancient myth of Galatea. This was inconsistent with my feeling that even if I met the girl, there was no intention of marriage

involved. I respected too much the image of her apparent purity and innocence to be serious about trying to win her. It was just too remote. And yet the miracle occurred, Galatea came to life.

When we came to the dining room of Barba Yianni, there were places for at least twenty five persons. As centerpieces on the table were two roast piglets. After dinner we were ready to dance the traditional round dances, the Kalamatiano, the Syrto, the Tsamico, and the Hassapiko. But before that I took Barba Yianni aside and told him about the box of photographs that his son-in-law took, that he might inform whoever might have been involved in the photographs to come and claim them - in particular the young ladies, since Stavropoulos took so many of them. Quite a group eventually formed around the box, Sure enough my miracle woman came to life - my piece of paper - my Galatea, appeared before me, full size, alive and breathing. I was not disappointed. In fact, just the opposite. I kept looking at her, in the mood to just about kneel and pray to the Madonna. She became aware of my staring and was somewhat embarrassed. She picked up some thing out of the box and went aside to share with her friends.

Now the dancing started. After a while there was a couples dance. Each lady would dance a chorus with one man and then go on to the next. The couples danced by each partner holding on to the end of a handkerchief, not touching at all. When my turn came to dance with "Galatea", I put on my most self-possessed air and pompously presented her with the end of my handkerchief. As we danced, my fingers walked toward hers on the handkerchief until I held her by the hand which I then squeezed tightly. She there upon gave me a look that seemed to acknowledge the gesture. The dance ended and conversational groups formed. I was excited, I cracked jokes and as always I talked a lot

In the heat of the party I exposed something I had not consciously acknowledged to myself before: that finding a wife here was suddenly becoming a real possibility and a highly desirable one at that. I was in a corner with my hosts and a couple of older ladies. I talked about this and that but finally I said, "You see, the Americans who came with me all have relatives here and these relatives will act as go-betweens in finding them a suitable wife. However all my relatives have left so I have no one to act in my behalf. Perhaps one of you would want to do this for me, since I am like an orphan." "Of course," the ladies piped up, "We will be glad to act for you. But tell us, of all the young ladies present wasn't there at least one you liked?" "Yes", I say, "There is one. There. The one with the blue eyes and light brown hair." And the two ladies started to laugh as though I just told a joke. It seems, although I didn't find this out till later, one of the ladies was the girl's mother and the other her aunt. Well, I had quite a bit of wine anyway, so there was no exertion of courage when I said, "I desire that lovely girl and soul, so, my dear ladies, see what you can do for me." Such boldness was improper and disrespectful and the girl's father should have thrown me out. I would have deserved it. But then I didn't know that the man nearby was her father, and I'm sure that he surmised that I didn't know. (Evidently there was no tradition or custom that said you should be introduced by name around the company. Such a lack made for embarrassment, as in this case. I assume they thought that by continued contact, one's name would automatically become known. If there were no further contact it didn't matter anyway. It didn't even occur to Uncle Jimmy to find out the name of his "angel". A.V. )

The singing and dancing went on till after midnight, and I had no chance to say even a word to the one I yearned for. Time came to say good night and the most I could do was

to throw my lovely a pitiful hang-dog look with eyes close to tears. Her answering glance was very sweet.

The next day we were to go on a circuit tour of the towns and villages of the demos (county). We assembled a caravan of mules and donkeys. Our guide was John Tsavalas, a cousin, who, since he had interests and land holdings in various places, was well known wherever we went in the Demos Zarachos. On the way we talked. He had been to America and knew English well. "How did you like the party last night, cousin?" he asks. "Did you like any of the young ladies there?" "John", I say, "There was one light haired, blue eyed girl that took my heart away". "Talk softly", he says, "The man on the mule behind you is her father. He is the man who supplied the animals for us." I turned around on my mule. It was the same gentleman who was reclining on the easy chair behind the two women I was talking to so boldly last night. From various signs I did understand that the ladies were his wife and sister-in-law. These were my angel's family! What strange coincidences!

The next day we mounted another set of mules, continued our explorations and finally returned to my own village, Yeraka.

After a few days Cousin John said, "I'm going to Kyparisi. Would you like to come along?" "Of course I want to. I want to very much. That girl is still in my heart. I would like you to take the responsibility of making the necessary contacts and arrangements for me." "Don't worry," he says, "If I take this on, you are as good as married. I congratulate you on your choice, She's a good girl and from a good home. And she's smart and beautiful, too. After all, she is from Kyparisi. My own wife is from there."

So Cousin John made his presentments to the father and mother. “My cousin, the man who is concerned for your daughter, you have already met. He is the son of Constantine, the Zografos, who painted the holy pictures in your church. He would be a worthy son—in-law. The only problem is that he will not remain here, but expects to return to America.” Of course I did not receive an instant reply. “We will think about it and let you know in due time whether it will be yes or no.”

It became known in town that Tsavalas, the Brooklys, was interested in Exidactyla’s daughter. (His first name was Gabriel, but he had a small deformity. He had the bud of a sixth finger growing out of the back of his index finger, so his folk—name was (“Six – fingered-one” – Exidactyla.)

There was an Aunt Maria in town who made a point of taking me aside. “My boy, they say you are interested in Exidactyla’s daughter. Listen to me. Remove yourself. Far. She is an epileptic. Don’t tell anyone I told you this. I’m your aunt and I love you.”

Cousin John hadn’t had word yet about the family’s decision. The father, we heard, did not like the idea that his daughter would be in America. He had spent twenty years in the United States and he did not associate that period with any happiness. Furthermore, he had made a promise years ago to a friend, that, when they came of age, his daughter and the friend’s son would make a fine pair. The daughter herself was asked how she felt about that Tsavalas man, but she preferred not to answer, although for her that painful squeeze of the hand was a symbol, sufficient for a lifetime. It was my future mother-in-law who made the difference and took my part very heartily. I got to love her equally with my own mother.

So the message came “Yes”, We were invited to a tentative engagement party so that “We may cut the word”. A few days before we were to go, I told cousin John what my Aunt told me. He laughed. “It’s a lie, a dirty, stinking lie. I’ve known the girl since she was born. That old lady is crazy. What the devil could that poor innocent girl have done to the old bitch? Pure fantasy.” John’s assurances about this matter were absolute.

“Now then” I asked him, “Is it possible to meet the girl personally so I could talk to her? You know all we did was exchange glances so far John said “That is not permitted without the consent of her parents, but I’ll tell you what, we’ll play a little game. Without making a big thing of it, I’ll just ask the parents to send their daughter to the store. I will have some special groceries for the house. You can idle your time away in the coffee house next door. When the girl comes we will tell her someone wants to talk to her and we will send for you immediately. You will then be able to hear the sound of her voice.” And so it was done. As I approached her I took off my hat.

“Miss”, I said, “I believe we have met before at Barba John’s house,” My, such a blush! With downcast eyes she said softly, so we have”. That soft demure voice! For me, nightingales were singing. As she went over some of the items in the store we began to talk more freely. Cousin John, always the “business man”, said to my young lady, “Panayiota, my child, go ahead, take anything you think you need - and more too.” The girl went home with a big bundle. Cousin John laughed a fit. “Romance is always costly,” he smirked, meaning, of course, that I was to pay for the groceries, (Panayiota - This is the first time the girl’s first name is mentioned. It has a connotation of “devotee of the Virgin Mary, Panayia.” Panayia means the “most holy” and always denotes the Madonna. A.V.)

Finally the evening came when my party was to appear at Panayiota's home, hopefully for the betrothals, because up to that point nothing had really been settled. My party consisted of cousin John, his father-in-law and his whole family. The father-in-law, Barba Chronos, was a handsome, jovial, hearty man (levendanthropos). He had known me as a kid and had taken a shine to me. Before we were to leave, he took me asides "Listen here, my boy, since you don't have any close kin, you can regard me, especially for tonight's purpose, as your father." And he pulled his moustachi. "Now listen close. First you will greet your future mother-in-law and you will kiss her hand. You do the same for the old man. Of course the young lady (copella) will also be there. You will reach for her hand, pull her toward you; you will embrace her tight and give her a good kiss right on the mouth. I'm amazed. "My, Barba Chroni, how can I do that? They will take me and break me in two." "I don't know about that", Barba Chronos says, "If you don't do exactly as I say I'll break you in two myself.

We went over and I did do exactly as he said. The poor girl, however, did not expect such an emphatic display of my ardor. She remained standing motionless, mouth open, eyes wide in astonishment, and then she fainted. She came to almost at once, and her mother took Panayiota into the next room so they could calm each other down, Barba Chronos watched all this, smiled and twirled his moustache. "Bravo", he says to me, "You did do as I told you. That kiss was a seal, a signature for the wedding to take place. Any other formalities are superfluous. All we need do now is eat, drink, dance and be merry till the small hours of the morning. Sure enough, there were no more discussions that night. Some time later arrangements were made for the wedding in two weeks December 27, 1931.

I found out later that the nuptial kiss did have tradition behind it. It was done when the groom-to-be didn't want to hear any discussion or objections, and indicated that as far as he was concerned he was as good as married. In fact, when the time for parting came that memorable night, my mother-in-law stopped me when I was trying to say good night. She said, "Where are you going, my boy? Wherever you go, it will not be the house of your kin. We are your kin now and this is your house. It's late, so stay tonight." And so I did. When I got up in the morning, coffee and the Greek equivalent of croissants (Koulourakia) were waiting. I thanked my mother-in-law for her extraordinary kindness in allowing me to sleep at her house even before the wedding and for the good breakfast. The symbols were good; they made me feel comfortable. Panayiota was present and her mother said, "Well, my children, just because we are all family now doesn't mean you can take any liberties before the wedding. Conduct yourselves properly. When you have exchanged the crowns of the marriage wreaths and received the blessings of God and the church then you can do whatever you want."

Anyhow, even if we would have wanted to do anything that was not proper we were both never left alone. Except once, Mother was about to go to the garden to pick some greens. "There's a pot of lentils cooking there", mother said, "Watch out that it doesn't burn." But as soon as we were alone, after an embrace and one sweet kiss, I told Panayiota, "Now, my love, let's sit down and talk without anyone listening. I love you very much, first as my friend and second as my woman. I expect that you feel the same way about me. In loving friendship we will spend our lives together and the erotic side of our lives will take care of itself. But before we get married I want you to know my economic condition. Maybe you have gotten wind that because I am a Brooklyn and I have a car, I

also have thousands of dollars and that you will have a rich husband. The truth is I am poor. I am rich only in our love. I have nothing to give you except my heart and soul and my life. Now, if you wish, you are free to let me go and to forget me.” With downcast eyes she said: “When I first saw you my heart beat loudly for you. It didn’t ask me whether you were rich or poor And now I love you even more because you are poor, for I, too, am poor And I embraced her once more, but at that moment I hear “Fire! The house is on fire! “I see smoke going out the window. Of course, the lentils were burning. “Whoo! Whoo!” mother was blowing as if she expected to put out the fire that way. “I sort of expected you two would want to talk privately for a bit, but did you have to burn our dinner? Now you will have only greens to eat.” And she went out the door to gather some more, laughing.

Days passed, and in the middle of the week before the wedding on Sunday I was talking to Bárba Chronos: “What is going to happen, Barba? It has been raining every day. How will all my people get here from Yeraka in this downpour? It would have been a nice procession, but now? And we couldn’t even dance outside “Do not worry one little bit”, Barba Chronos replies. “I have everything arranged Saturday will be a nice dry day and your people will have no difficulty getting to Kyparisi. Sunday will be a glorious warm day, just like a day in summer and the sea will be calm as a lake.” And it happened just as Barba Chronos said it would. (Was he a reincarnation of Chronos the father of Zeus? A.V.)

And now I’d like to interrupt my narrative and talk a little about the marriage customs in those days some of which are still observed in the rural areas today. The preparations and goings-on lasted eight days, from Monday to Monday, inclusive. Monday and Tuesday

were spent preparing the dowry. When I say “dowry”, this means everything to furnish a house: beds, chairs, tables, plates, silver, drapes - everything. There was also sometimes money for the groom, depending on the financial condition of the bride’s family and the demands of the groom.

In 1954 we returned to Kyparissi and we attended five different weddings. At one wedding I was part of the groom’s party. We went to the bride’s village to help transport the dowry. Two mules were already loaded and the rest of us carried household objects that couldn’t be put on a mule and we made a colorful procession to the groom’s new house in the next village.

The dowry custom is one of Greece’s bleeding wounds. It hurts the poor, especially people with daughters. If the parents don’t have the wherewithal, the brothers are obliged to earn the capital necessary for the sisters, because it would be a family disgrace for the brothers to marry before their sisters. I have known many men who came to America to build up a dowry for their sisters although very often those sisters got old waiting and died single.

When I was a boy I overheard a story being told about a groom who was promised 3,000 drachmas in cash as part of the dowry. The groom came from another village riding his mule. He approached the bride’s home but he wouldn’t get down from the mule unless he was counted out the 3,000 drachmas. The unfortunate brother had indeed gotten together the three thousand, but had to spend 200 of it for the wedding expenses. The brother explained his problem to the groom and that he would have the missing 200 the next week, but the groom insisted “Three! Three! or else I won’t get down off this mule.’ The

brother asked the groom to wait while he borrowed the rest of the money. This he did, from a number of people in the village, and only then did the groom deign to disembark

My father told me a story once which he heard in one of the towns where he was painting icons. There was a poor widower who had a fine daughter on whom he doted. When the time came for the daughter to marry, a groom was found. In discussing arrangements the subject of a dowry came up “My boy,” the father said “I am rich only in my daughter. I have very little else and since I have no sons, she and you will inherit all I have.” The groom accepted that, but when he left the house he noticed a little donkey tied to a post, so he went back in and asked for the donkey or else no marriage “Not the donkey”, the old man said, ‘I’ll need her for company.” “The donkey or else”. “But I need her to carry things for me. When I die she’ll be yours”. “No deal”, and the groom started to leave. The daughter, in the meantime, happened to hear this bargaining and she said to her father, “Give him the donkey. I will not be going far. I’ll be around to help you with your chores”. The father gave in and the groom left, satisfied that he’d struck the best possible bargain.

The Sunday of the wedding came and the proud groom and his party approached the bride’s house, The bride was there, but she was not all dressed up in a wedding gown. “What do you want here, sir?” she asked. “I came for you. Why aren’t you ready?” “You are mistaken, sir. You came for the bride; the one you love is there”. And she showed him the donkey all decked out with a gown and veil, The groom left, angry and properly humiliated, with neither bride nor donkey. The story became well known so that a young man of some wealth sought the girl out and married her. And they lived happily ever after.

To resume the procedures of the wedding week. Throughout the week, and particularly in the evenings, there would be much singing and dancing. Wednesday would be a good day for baking bread for the festivities. Three or four of the bride friends or relatives, all maidens, were assigned the task of kneading the dough. In the process a small piece of dough would be thrown up at the ceiling. If it stuck - and it always did - it was a sign of good luck for the marriage and the crowning with the wreaths would be blessed. For the maiden who threw the dough it also meant luck when her turn came.

In those days, not so much today, bread was considered sacred, the giver of life. It was Christ who gave out the bread and said:

“Receive this and eat.” As a boy I remember that when I ate bread and a crumb fell on the floor, I was supposed to pick it up, make the sign of the cross, kiss the crumb and then eat it. The kneading of the dough and the baking of the bread gave a feeling of a holy ritual. Some of the dough was saved as a starter for sweeter breads later on in the week.

On Friday pies of various kinds were made, not sweet pies but pitas such as the well known spinach pie made with thin pastry dough (filo, spinach, feta cheese and eggs). If spinach wasn't handy almost any other greens would do. The whole vicinity was permeated with enticing aromatic odors. Also on Friday, the groom's "koulouri" would be baked - a large ring of bread. On Saturday meat was butchered and prepared for roasting on Sunday.

On Sunday, the morning of the wedding, there would be the procession carrying the bride dowry to the groom's house.

The bride would start to get dressed with the bridal gown and so on, but the combing of the bride's hair was a ritual, attended by three maidens who sing many songs of wishes and yearnings for the future:

Bless, my mother, this combing

Bless, my father, this parting.

I leave you. I go far, my mother.

Give me your blessing, mother.

Then as companion I'll need no other.

In the meantime, the groom does not lack company either. Unnecessary advice is given by everyone. The groom's attire is criticized, corrected, approved, and so on. The groom's party then goes to the bride's home, so that the entire wedding party may proceed to the church. As the groom approaches the bride's house, the "Koulouri" (the ring bread) is handed to the groom by the bride's mother. The groom then makes the sign of the cross with the bread in front of the door. Next he breaks the bread on his head into parts, and throws four of the parts in opposite directions, North, South, East and West, which are then recovered by those in the party who would wish for luck in their future marriages. The fifth piece is thrown into the bride's parents home. The bread throwing symbolizes that the groom's life and future good fortune might be shared by others. The ritual reaffirms the groom's open-hearted generosity and love for all.

The mother-in-law at this point will either kiss or slap the groom. The bride's close kin follow by either kissing or slapping the groom. The mother-in-law approaches the groom again, but this time feeds him a spoonful of sweet (compote or preserves).

She then takes a silk scarf and looping it around the groom's neck leads him into the house. The groom's party follows and they are treated with all kinds of pastries like baklava, clove topped shortbread mounds dredged in confectioners sugar (courambyethes): deep fried, pretzel shaped puff pastry with honey and chopped nuts (thee'pless) a kind of deep dish custard pie (galatouriko) and so on. Most of these were made by the bride herself "Sweets from the bride".

The time comes to form the procession to the church. The groom's party leads and the bride's party follows. The Greek Orthodox ceremony is substantial, elaborate and colorful. There is much chanting interspersed with many allusions to the Old Testament on the sacredness of marriage into which these two "servants of God" are about to enter. The high point of the ceremony is the crowning of the bride and groom with two orange blossom wreaths connected by a ribbon. The wreaths are interchanged several times by the best man, who then follows the bride and groom, led by the priest, three times around the altar. With the chanting it seems like an ancient, stately dance. (Later the orange blossom wreaths are allowed to dry and are kept 'by the couple near a small altar in a corner of their home. Sometimes the wreaths are kept sealed behind glass).

After the ceremony the bride and groom together lead their combined parties outside the church, and they all continue in this order until they reach the groom's house - now the couple's house. The bouzoukis and violins and whatever are ready and waiting and strike up a joyous tune. The bride and groom then lead the rest of the party in a huge round dance circling the house, a "syrto". Then the procession dances back to the bride's old home (her parents") where a once-in-a-lifetime repast is being prepared to the

accompaniment of much dancing. This goes on until quite late. The bride and groom do not leave until everyone else has left first.

The next day, Monday, the newlyweds have open house through the afternoon and evening.

By and large, the above is what happened when Panayiota and I got married, except that there was no dowry - which would have made me uncomfortable anyway. Also, there was one other difference. When I broke the koulouri (the groom's ring bread) and threw the four parts around, the fifth part, the largest, I did not throw into my in-laws house. Instead, I ate that part myself with great gusto, demonstrating that I appreciated the skill and care of my in-laws offering the bread, I realized that this symbolized, too, the appreciation of my in-laws' most important product of their skill and caring:

Their daughter.

Incidentally, in the last century at every rural wedding there was sporadic, enthusiastic shooting in the air. Almost every Greek man in the countryside had a rifle, carbine, shot gun or pistol. This was not only a left-over from the hundreds of years of guerilla warfare against the Turks, but guns were also necessary for hunting. This was outlawed in 1912. I remember as a little boy running to hide in the bushes with every volley. This was at my eldest sister's (Sophia's) wedding. Everybody else was dancing and singing, but the guns frightened me.

We remained in Kyparisi two weeks. There were tears and dramatic goodbyes and we were off to Athens to see about papers. At the proper office I handed over my customs papers and passport to a young woman at the desk and explained that I wanted a passport for my new wife so we might go to America. After some perusal and references she

looked at me sidewise and said, "Tell me, sir, why did you marry this poor girl when you already have a wife in America?"

At that moment a bomb fell and utterly destroyed me. I couldn't move. I was speechless. I didn't even have the nerve to turn and face my wife. "My dear woman," I said, "Since you know English couldn't you have told me that in English rather than Greek? You've distressed my wife terribly and it is possible that you've made a mistake." "I'm sorry about that, but it was my duty to tell you. These things do happen." "You may be right, but my situation is somewhat different. In my early twenties I was married for a very short time. That marriage was a mistake for all concerned and there were grounds to have the marriage legally annulled. It's exactly as though I had never been married." "Well, sir, you're probably telling me the truth, but until I have proof in writing on official and legal papers, you will not be allowed to leave the country with your wife."

We left the office and took the train for Piraeus. I start telling my story to Panayiota, still without daring to look at her. "My love, what I said, what you heard just now was the truth. If you love me, believe me. It was my fault that I didn't bring the necessary proof with me, but when I left America for Greece, I didn't come with the idea that I would get married. That decision came when I fell in love with you heart and soul. If by chance you don't believe me, you are free to return to your parents. She gave me such a look, eyes brimming with tears and said, "I believe you."

We went to see my old friend Peter, who was so involved during the episode with Evangeline. As soon as he saw us with such unhappy faces he asked immediately, "What's the trouble? What's the meaning of those faces (mutra)?" ( The Greek word for

face is prosopos. Mutra is colloquial for a dramatic face! The Sanskrit” mudra means a gesture loaded with significance. A.V.)

“My old friend Peter, once more the specter of Evangeline has appeared before us.” He understood at once. He laughed and he sought to put Panayiota at ease right away. He embraced her and said: “My little bride, little sister, don’t pay the least attention to what you heard at the foreign office. I was with Mitso during his marriage mix—up. That marriage was annulled and that means it’s as though it never happened. So don’t worry at all about it, Mitso is a good fellow, Love him as he loves you and he loves you very much. And now don’t even think about it. As long as you’re here, we will do nothing else but have a great time, We’ll sing and dance and celebrate.”

And sure enough, the good times we had for the next week or so were unforgettable. Peter’s brother-in-law owned a “Taverna”, A kind of pub, restaurant and coffee house. Peter announces to him: “Tonight the taverna is all ours.” And without a question as to why - it was all ours.

The food and drinks! The dancing and singing! There was a law that said tavernas had to be closed at midnight. Since everybody had been drinking pretty well even the proprietor, who played the guitar, - the midnight closing law was forgotten. It was close to one A.M. There appeared two handsome young police officers. They closed the two open windows and closed the door from the inside. We were all frozen, particularly the proprietor, who thought he was about to lose his license. The policemen took a good look around and understood that this was a family celebration, not a public one. With mock seriousness they pulled up two chairs, one of them picked up the guitar and they began to sing. The

party was in full swing again. The officers ate and drank with the rest, but after a short time they got up and said good night to all! They did warn us though:

“Don’t make too much noise at this hour and keep the door closed, but you can go on with your celebration as long as you want.” I was really impressed. These policemen interpreted the law creatively by themselves!

Before these celebrations I had phoned my brothers in New York and after a while I received the proof concerning my old pseudo-marriage.

Many times since I have thought that if it had been any one else less innocent and ingenuous than my angel, I could easily have been the butt of vilification from everyone she knew in the old villages. Fortunately her trusting and beautiful good nature took over. As a result my love for her as a friend and spouse was intensified four times over, I considered myself the luckiest man in the world. The only thing that worried me now was my lack of any money whatsoever. I wrote to my brothers for help, but they answered that they were in no better position than I was. It seems the depression was now in full swing. However, with Peter’s efforts to get the best price for my car, we sold it and were able to buy tickets for America!

On the steamer we were in great spirits. I was full of hope about the future. We made many friends, told stories, laughed and sang and danced as usual. So much so, that often the Captain and many from First Class came down to join us. Whenever I was resting in a deck chair I had a book in my hand. One of my Greek fellow passengers was from one of the islands and he wasn’t used to seeing ordinary people reading so much of the time. He asked me if I was studying to be a priest, (Papás). So the name stuck for the rest of the trip. Everyone called me “The Papás”.

We met a beautiful young lady, Alexandra. She was part of a friendly group that spent a good deal of time together, dining, talking, playing. Alexandra had married a Cretan, a man a good deal older. He had taken her to his home in Crete. Evidently things there were not what she had been expecting. She couldn't adjust, so she left him and was now on her way back to America, alone.

In our group there was also a handsome young man, "levendis", another Constantine. He had been visiting Greece with a notion, in the back of his head, that he might find a wife, but he was returning home still single. Constantine and Alexandra liked each other and after a while seemed inseparable. This was obvious to everyone, so that in jest we decided to marry them in a make believe ceremony. Since I was already called the "Papas", I was unanimously elected to lead the ceremony. Alexandra and Constantine were rather sheepish at first, but they got into the spirit of it. "Alexandra, servant of God, do you take this man...!" "Constantine, servant of God, do you take this woman..." I was intoning powerful words with mock seriousness. Time came for the exit procession and the rice throwing, but instead of rice the steward had found dried lima beans in the kitchen stores and had parceled them out to the participants. They hurt a little but they were good for a lot of laughter.

The pseudo-ceremony may have been a joke, but the suggestion was inescapable to Alexandra and Constantine, so for the rest of the voyage they lived together as man and wife. Later, after landing, they went through a legal ceremony

We went ashore and in my pocket was my entire fortune:

Seventy five cents! We went to live at my brother Nicholas' home and we were there for two years. That was when Nick and his wife Christina raised their five children - all of

whom ended up in very good shape. The eldest was Constantine, after my father, He had a distinguished diplomatic career. The next was Aristotle (Telly), the well-known actor of movies and TV. Then George, also an actor and singer. Then Theodore, a teacher and educator. Lastly, Katerina, named after my mother, who married a successful California lawyer.

Depression 1932. Just by looking outside the window Panayiota could often see a long “bread line” even in rain or snow. She’d tell me about it when I came home. I had gotten a job working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, with the great pay of \$12 a week. That didn’t last long. Another brother and I promoted a small delivery van and we became jobbers of baked goods. That is, we bought from the bakery and resold the cakes, cookies, pastries and pies to restaurants and coffee shops. After a while we did make enough to support our families.

Our first-born was named after my revered father: CONSTANTINE, of course. There were now eleven at Nick’s house, including our mother. Father had died a few years before, and we had brought mother to America. All her children were here. My family of three, plus mother, moved into a small rented apartment where we stayed for about a year. Then we moved to the Bronx where most of my relatives and friends were, as well as most of our customers. And there two other children were born: Eugenia and Sophia. There were three brothers, Cypriots: Jacob, Demos and Louis Louizides. They were customers and also good friends. The three of them were too many partners in a small coffee shop, so Louie took to riding with me in my van all over the Bronx on my deliveries, to see if there was a likely coffee shop/restaurant that he might buy.

At that time, I was buying baked goods from a Jewish bakery. Besides cakes and so on, they made excellent pumpernickel and Jewish rye. When going about my rounds I would pick up second day bread and return it to the bakery. After seeing so many loaves go wasted, I asked the owner if I might have some of them for my family.

Incidentally, I loved that old man for me he was another father, much kinder and more honorable than many so-called Christians I knew. He used to tell me all kinds of stories, which I would like to put in another book. Often, when he ran short because of his demand, he'd ration out the orders. "Hey, Pop", I said, "how come you cut my orders but you don't cut the Jewish drivers?" "Jimmy, my boy, let's be fair, Them Jews are already cut, but with you it's different. You have not yet been cut." He allowed me to take all the two-day old bread I wanted, so I distributed them to all my relatives and friends.

It was at this time that Louie was riding around with me. I kept kidding him about "it was time he got married" and so on. While making deliveries, we would also stop at relatives' flats to drop off the bread. We often stopped at my sister Helen's house. Louie would grab the bag, ring the bell at the entrance and run up the stairs, while one of the young people would run down to meet him half-way. In this fashion, he met my sister's daughter, Penelope. (Penelope is the translator's sister. A.V.) Fairly soon Louie found a small restaurant to buy. After a time Louie said to me "As long as you insist on my getting married, how about your niece, Penelope?" In due course it was done. They lived together thirty-seven years until Louie's death. They had four children, all successful, I also had something to do with marrying off Louie's two brothers. I did the same for several of my other friends, too. I began getting a reputation as a match-maker. I just happened to be in a good spot to do this, since I knew Greek families all the way from

Coney Island to Hartford, Connecticut. I also had many friends from Cyprus and some from Albania.

Albanian was a folk language found in many places throughout Greece and the islands, inherited from the refugees who scattered from the Turkish oppression in Epirus around 1790 to 1800. I remember that as a boy I was told not to speak Albanian by my teachers and even by my father. The language was considered both unnecessary and vulgar, beneath the notice of cultivated Greeks. Nevertheless, I'm very glad I learned it. It came in handy many times in my life

It was very hard for me to get customers who weren't Greek, However, whenever I heard of an Albanian coffee shop, I approached the proprietors in Albanian, saying, "How are you, boys? O.K? How's business?" Immediately the red carpet would come out and they'd buy me a drink or a cup of coffee, and in due course, I'd get an order. In this way I got to know the three Tselon brothers, all of whom had Greek first names: Panayiotis, Constantine (Kosta) and Athanasios (Tassos). I was best man at Kosta's wedding and he was my daughter's godfather. According to custom, the first daughter should be named after the father's mother, in my case, Katerina. However, Kosta had just received a letter from Greece informing him that his mother had died. She was named Eugenia. Kosta asked me if it were not possible to name my daughter after his mother instead of Katerina. I told him of course it was the godfather's right to give a child any name he wanted, and he was perfectly free to do so, even according to custom.

I called on one large cafeteria owned by two partners, one Greek-Albanian and the other Greek. I wasn't getting any orders, but I hit it off with the Greek-Albanian. Once when we were having quite a conversation, all in Albanian, the Greek, who didn't understand a

word, told us: “Come off it. Who wants to hear that lousy language all the time?” I saw that he was somewhat less educated than I, so I told him: “Sir, in order to be a free Greek, one who is educated and knows his national history, such-a man would regard Albanian with high respect. Many of the major islands were liberated from the Turks by Albanian—speaking guerillas. Not only that, but many of our greatest revolutionary heroes spoke Albanian: Miaouli, Bouboulina, Koundouriotis, Matrosos, and many others. And not only that”, I said, “but Jesus Christ himself spoke Albanian.” The Greek gave a derisive laugh. The other partner said “Well, now, you’ve overdone it “Wait a minute,” I said, “I’ll prove it to you. When Nero was Emperor of Rome and after he burned Rome while he sang his poems, he blamed the fire on the Christians. He ordered a whole sale oppression of Christians, feeding them to hungry beasts and so on. St. Peter himself was in a bad situation and he decided to leave Rome before they found him. On the road away from Rome, St. Peter saw a bright circle of light, in the middle of which was Jesus himself. St. Peter fell to his knees and when he recovered his voice asked “Quo vadis, Domine?” And now I turned to the Greek-Albanian and asked him, “What does that mean in Albanian?” “Why” he said, “that means “Where are you going, Lord?” “There”, I said, “I proved to you that Christ spoke Albanian.” The Greek shrugged and went off to the kitchen. The other partner was beside himself. He made the Sign of the Cross, kissed my hand as he would with an authentic papas, and, of course, gave me a big order. The story was even less authentic, but it passed. They didn’t know any better, in any case, and they weren’t about to check it (Much of the Albanian language is of un known origin, but a good deal of it is Latin, stemming from the Roman occupation. A.V.)

After two years we rented a little house on the very border of the Bronx — toward City Island. It was not built—up and quite country-like There was some land that came with it that we could use. At first we thought about living there only for the summers, but we liked it so much we decided to stay the year round. And we did - for three years.

We had a good—sized vegetable garden and we even sold some of the excess harvest. I built an outdoor oven like we had in Greece. I made a place where our kids and their friends could go for a swim. Under a large tree I put up a covered, screened- in pergola where we ate and sometimes slept without being bothered by mosquitoes. I raised chickens and eggs. We barbecued outside, not only whole chickens, but whole lambs and piglets. Often on a summer Sunday friends and relatives would gather. We'd eat in the pergola and then we'd sing and dance. Everything was fine and dandy, but my father used to say, “My children, may God keep you from malicious neighbors And I sure had one in the Bronx. He worked for the city and knew some of the laws. He complained to the authorities that we were violating zoning ordinances by raising farm animals. And it was true that besides chickens, I had a nanny goat, so that I'd have goat's milk for young Kostas who had been sick but was now recovering.

When we first moved to this place, I had to do a lot of weed and brush burning for the garden. Among the weeds was poison oak. It didn't affect anyone else in the family except my eldest child, Constantine, Kostas. He had the poison oak all over his body and face so that he could barely open his eyes. None of the doctors we went to seemed to help much. My own doctor suggested goat's milk for its therapeutic value. Apparently it worked.

My neighbor took me to court on the zoning violation. I was in the witness chair. I showed the court a letter from my doctor and two pictures of my son, one during his affliction and one after his cure. I didn't find it necessary to hide my emotions, so I made my testimony somewhat dramatic. The judge listened kindly. However, he wasn't so well-disposed toward the complainant, who previously had tried to show off his knowledge of the law. The judge told him he didn't need to quote chapter and verse. He knew the laws too. The judge asked: 'Why don't you buy goat's milk for your son?' I replied, "My economic condition doesn't permit that. Cow's milk is ten cents a quart, but goat's milk is one dollar and ten cents a quart. Your honor, I am not the only one who raises chickens and animals in that area. Other people nearby have various animals - pigs even. Not only that, but the area where we have our chickens and goat is actually just outside the city line. The judge addressed the complainant, "Now that you have heard the whole story don't you have any sympathy for your neighbor?" "No", he says, "I have no sympathy for him." "Well, sir," the judge says "I don't have any sympathy for your position. Case dismissed. Mr. Tsavalas, get more goats if you wish." As a human interest story the "Case about a Goat" got quite a lot of publicity.

Because of my background as a candy maker, it was only a step to baking our own cakes, cookies and pies. With Panayiota's help, we made more money this way, but of course we worked harder and longer hours for it.

It was traditional around Easter time to make doughnut shaped sesame cookies. We made them for ourselves, but they were so good. Panayiota couldn't believe that they wouldn't sell well alongside of the other baked goods. Most of my customers were Greek anyway, so why not give it a try? The first customer was reminded of the old country, the village

celebrations, and so on, but he said: “These people wouldn’t eat them here.” And I said “If they don’t eat them, I’ll take them back.” The proprietor would eat two or three, then the dishwasher and then the other employees. Before the day is over, they disappeared. The natives didn’t have a chance. Next time my customer said:

“Leave as many sesame rings (koulourakia) as you want. The others sold in less than a day.” After a while we sold twice as many koulourakia as anything else. The Americans loved the “Greek cookies”

However, it wasn’t long before my neighbor reported that my place wasn’t zoned for a bakery. This time the judge was stern and unsympathetic and I had to close up.

In raising chickens for our own use, I’d occasionally pick up chicks at a hatchery. Once I was accompanied by a niece. She was impressed by the two houses and the factory system in the hatchery for turning out 10,000 chicks a week. “Uncle Jim”, she said, “this is the kind of a farm we should have.” The owner overheard this and said, “We can sell it to you, if you want it.” We laughed. What would we buy it with? Such a lay-out must have an astronomical value - as much as \$30,000! Nevertheless, when we got home, my niece, out of curiosity, wrote to them. They answered that they wanted only \$12,000. The larger part of the down payment was from my brother Theodore’s savings, who immediately became my partner. So we bought the place for \$1,000. But that was a crazy, whimsical venture. My brother was an artist and I was a candy maker. What did we know about the technology of chickens and eggs? At the moment, though, we thought we were on the road to riches. The farm was in Long Island and badly located for raising chickens because of the excessive dampness. Consequently, more chickens died than

survived. I should also have known a lot more about nutrition and the treatment of the many diseases that chickens are likely to get. After a while, my brother, the artist, gave up in disgust and I was left to manage as best I could. My heroic wife, (who in my eyes is still a practicing heroine) had an awful lot to contend with. She had all the domestic chores that come with a large house, plus raising three children, plus feeding us, plus helping me with the cookie and cake business that I still held on to, plus taking care of 3,000 chickens.

At 3 AM I load up my van with both baked goods and freshly killed chickens and I'd be off on my route. My daily mileage totaled about 125 miles. New York was thirty five miles away. All this was bearable in the summer time, but in winter the difficulties tried me like a martyr with the cold and the snow and the traffic jams. This kind of life lasted for three years. Whatever money we made, most of it was eaten by the chickens.

One winter morning when I was due to take off for New York, the weather was as bad as it could get. It was blowing and snowing. It was cold. The thermometer had reached 10 degrees below zero. Still I felt obliged to go. With some problems I reached Whitestone Bridge. My truck stalled I got out to try to get help. I went a short distance when I realized that it was too slippery and difficult to continue. I turned back to go to my truck when I fell and lost consciousness. I don't know how many hours I was out, but when I came to, it was day light, and I found myself in a customer's cafeteria. At that point I swore that when I got out of my present troubles, we'd pack up and go off to a warmer climate. Now, who was the good Samaritan who rescued me? He remained unknown to me. He left neither name nor address. He also left me with a feeling of incompleteness - how could I know and thank this man, now?

I put the chicken farm on the market. A Frenchman, a Mr. Lamont, bought the farm.

World War II had just begun. Lamont was a young man and due to be drafted in the army, but now as a farmer he had a good chance at a deferment.

Our target was San Francisco or its environs. It seems that many of the people from my wife's village of Kyparisi ended up in San Francisco, and I knew most of them. One of these, a good friend, Louis Lakos, was also there. I had written to him to let me know what the situation and the climate was like. He wrote back: "If you want to be in Greece and America at the same time, come to California. In fact the climate is even better than in Greece."

Here was my chance to redeem the vow I made during the snow storm. In any case, it was not only I who needed a warmer climate. My wife had gotten down to 90 pounds from overwork and was very weak. Our doctor agreed that this was a good move.

Furthermore, the prospect of being with fellow-villagers was very comforting to my good wife.

California, here we come. Of my six brothers and two sisters plus a hundred other relatives and friends in the New York area, not one believed I'd make such a crazy move. Consequently, there was little ceremony and no big goodbyes when we left. I didn't hear from anyone. My niece Maria, was also the godmother to my youngest, Sophia, whom she loved as her own child. Maria couldn't bear to be parted from her, so she came along. Normally, it takes four to seven days to cross the continent, more than 3,000 miles by car. We took twenty days. The closed-up hell that we made for ourselves in New York never gave us a chance to look around. Now we stopped often to get a good look at some of America's wonders. We reached Blythe, California and we tried to find a place to stay.

There was nothing available whatsoever. At that time the area was full of soldiers and sailors on their way to the war with Japan. I finally stopped at a restaurant owned by a Greek and he said; "It's hopeless! There simply is nothing around. I've been here for some time and I can't find a proper place to live myself. I had to fix up the garage as living quarters for me." "I don't care about myself, but I have two women with me." He came out to the car and saw the three kids sleeping. That melted him completely. "Come with me", he said. We went to the garage, which was fixed up quite comfortably. "There, maybe you can work out the sleeping arrangements. Which we did. The children on the bed and the rest of us on mattresses on the floor.

Thus our lives in California began.

### **Epilogue by the Translator -- A.V.**

I can't assume after the family arrival in California that everything was coming up roses and that there were no more dramas and adventures.

From that point on James (Dimitrios) Tsavalas has lived more than half his life in San Mateo, California, and is still going strong at ninety He's had a very successful restaurant and was known and respected in the community.

He has a well-appointed houses, a garden and some fruit trees, which produce quite well in California.

In his middle seventies he wanted to retire and he sold the restaurant, holding the mortgage, The new management didn't manage very well, so James and Panayiota repossessed the restaurant and ran it successfully again. Next time they were careful to sell it to people who knew the value of detail and the friendly personal touch.