

Good Bye Sweet Dreams

Yiayia Sophia & the Fascists

by Aphrodite Matsakis, Ph. D.

Sophia was all alone. She had been alone many times, but when she found out the fascists were coming, she felt more alone than ever. Her husband Demetrios was far away - in a small coal mining town in Pennsylvania.

Her two pallikaria were God-knows where. Nick had left Karpathos in 1929, right after 8th grade. Kostas had left soon afterwards.

Suddenly, she envisioned her sons before her. Their curly brown hair. Their huge brown eyes.

She bit her lip and kept on walking.

Every day at 5:00 a.m., Nick would milk the goats, cart water from the well, then walk miles from their home in Othos to school in Aperi without complaint. He was bright too, so bright, she had hired tutors to advance him.

Her husband had objected, "We don't have money for tutors," he wrote from America.

My grandmother Sophia had never heard of women's liberation, but in this matter of education, she ignored her husband's wishes. Determined that her sons would not spend their lives in some dark coal mine, like her poor husband, Sophia scrimped even harder and hired a tutor for her son.

But it was now 1940 and Sophia was all alone in Karpathos with her teenage daughter, my aunt Kalliroi. Her other daughter, Lemonia, was long since dead. For all Sophia knew, perhaps her sons were dead too.

In one of his last letters, Kostas had written, "I'm in the Army now, Mama. I can get my high school diploma then go to college. Aren't you glad?"

Yes Sophia was glad, but her joy ended when WW2 broke out.

After OXI day (October 28, 1940) and the subsequent occupation of Greece by Hitler's and Mussolini's troops, no mail was permitted in or out of Karpathos.

Sophia knew her sons were in the US Army, but she had no idea where.

Were they in the United States or rotting in an open grave somewhere in Europe or the Philippines?

The very thought that one of her sons was injured or dead sent her running into Christos, the major church of her village. She carefully lit a candle with fragrant olive oil, bowed down before the icons, and prayed what so many parents pray during wartime:

"God, save my children. Take me instead."

Sophia rarely cried, but when she remembered that she had been married in that very same church, Christos, she could not control the sobs. Suddenly her whole life flashed before her.

Sophia was born in Othos, Karpathos, one of the twelve Dodecanese Islands. According to an ancient Greek myth, when the gods created the earth, they fashioned together rivers, lakes, flowers, and hills to form the various countries. By the end of the day, all they had left was a few scrawny rivers, some bramble bushes, and rocks, lots of rocks. Tired from their day of labor, the gods simply threw the rocks into a corner and called it Greece.

Some rocks didn't quite make it to the corner: they became the Greek islands. Some of the islands, like Rhodes and Corfu, had considerable greenery and water cast their way. But Karpathos was not so fortunate and to this day, is exceptionally dry and rocky. Crete was also blessed with some greenery and water supplies and that is where Sophia's grandfather, Manolis Balaskas, was born.

Even though most of Greece was liberated from the Turkish domination after 1821, Crete did not become free until 1897 and was not united with Greece until 1909. Therefore, my great-great grandfather Manolis grew up under Turkish rule. Like many Cretans, Manolis hated the



Sophia Matsakis, 1934

Turks and was a revolutionary. Along with his wife and two daughters, he ran an anti-Turkish underground newspaper. When the Turks found out, they beheaded him and his wife and daughters.

Manolis's three sons (including Sophia's father, Lios, were in the field during the massacre. As soon as they heard about the beheadings, they fled to the neighboring island of Kasos, where they stayed until the Turks burned the island. They then fled to Karpathos.

There the three brothers hid in the village of Menetes and were generally accepted, until one of the brothers seduced a young girl. His brothers had warned him to leave the girl alone, but he had refused to listen. Eventually the girl's father and brothers killed him.

Fearing for their own lives also, the two brothers decided to separate. Since villages in Karpathos are separated by huge mountains and (before the automobile) hours, if not days, were necessary to walk from one village to another, communications between the villages were poor. Therefore, there was a chance the two brothers could escape the wrath of the girl's family by fleeing to different villages.

Sophia's father went to Othos, where he changed his last name, and married Sophia's mother, Kalitsa. Sophia was the

first of five sisters and had two brothers. Her father tilled the rocky fields for a handful of wheat and tended olive and fruit trees, sheep and chickens.

When my grandmother Sophia was in the third grade, the family experienced hard times and Sophia's mother had to help in the fields. Sophia was pulled out of school to tend the household and her siblings. She never got over that.

One of her biggest sorrows was that she never had the opportunity to learn how to read or write very well. Yet she always tried to improve.

I remember her asking perfect strangers to teach her a new English word and clerks in stores to read her labels and other things and explain the English words to her. She'd also plead with neighbors to teach her English. As a child, I used to cringe with embarrassment when she did these things, but now I feel proud of her.

I can still hear her now saying, "Teacha me English. I likes learn, Aphridi." (She liked to pronounce my name American style, not Greek style, in an effort to learn English.) And I can still see her now reading my Dick and Jane books or English-Greek dictionaries while doing the laundry. A few times I caught her crying because she wanted to read the newspapers or the Bible (in English or in Greek) and had trouble doing so. She also felt ashamed that she could not properly write down the many *mantinades* (song/poems) she'd compose.

Once she confided to me that when she was a little girl and had to cart water home from the fountain at Panagia, sometimes she'd go into the church for a while and pray that after her brothers and sisters were raised, she could return to school. She'd be older than the other students, but she wouldn't care.

Her dreams for returning to school, however, were interrupted by marriage.

When Sophia was 16, my grandfather, Demetrios Matsakis, like many Karpathian men, came from the US to find a bride from his home island. After he saw Sophia at her brother's graduation in Aperi, he decided that she was the one.

Following the custom, he first obtained his parents', permission to marry Sophia; then, that of Sophia's parents.

"No," they replied. Sophia was their prize, their jewel. She watched the children

while they worked. How could they manage without her? Besides, she was only sixteen and had no dowry. And, if Sophia went to America, they might never see her again.

Yes, they were but poor peasants and yes, they had five daughters - more than they could ever hope to provide dowries for - but, they were not willing to give even one daughter in marriage if that meant she was going to be taken to some distant land and they would have to grow old without her.

Demetrios insisted and insisted. He didn't want a dowry: only Sophia. Furthermore, if he was allowed to marry her, he promised to provide dowries for all her sisters and even help her brothers emigrate to America.

Sophia's parents glanced at each other. This Demetrios was a stranger to them, even if he was Karpathian. Yet he seemed honest enough, and his promise to help the rest of their children was oh so appealing.

But what if they never saw Sophia again? On the other hand, if this man had as much money as he said he had, would he not send Sophia for visits? But, oh no, America was far away and they just loved Sophia too much.

"Yes or no?" asked Demetrios.

They shook their heads.

Demetrios then realized that if he wanted Sophia, he would have to do something drastic. He boarded the first boat for Rhodes and there bought Sophia a fancy wedding gown and lavish gifts for her family. In Karpathos, he loaded all the gifts on a donkey and started up the long winding path from the port of Pegadia, to the mountain village of Othos, shooting a gun in the air all the way.

One by one, excited villagers followed

him. With each village that he passed, he picked up followers - first from Pegadia, then Aperi, Volada, and Othos. By the time he arrived at Sophia's home, there was quite a gathering of people, all congratulating Sophia's parents on the upcoming wedding of their daughter.

Before Sophia's parents could protest, Demetrios showered them with gifts and reiterated his promise to provide dowries and help for all the family.

It was, as is often stated, an offer which they could not refuse. And with so many people from various villages already toasting the new couple, it was almost a fait accompli.

Two years after the wedding, Sophia left the clear shimmering skies of the Mediterranean for the soot of the small coal mining town of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. As the babies started coming, she and Demetrios custom build a home which still stands on Blaine Avenue.

Sophia was happy in Canonsburg. There were other Greek women there whom she could talk to, and a commuting Greek Orthodox priest held services there. She was busily raising her children and



Nick, Kalliroi, and Kostas Matsakis in Othos, Karpathos, 1928.

saving money to send to Greece, when she suffered a serious infection following the birth of her fourth child, LEMONIA. The operation was successful, but her body refused to heal.

"Take her to Arizona. She needs a better climate," the doctor advised.

"Arizona? What's that?" wondered Demetrios.

My Papou could barely speak English. After he got off the boat in New York and traveled to Pennsylvania, he never left Pennsylvania except to return to Greece to marry. What did he know about Arizona?

"What if Sophia never gets well? What if I lose her?" he wondered.

"No. I can't think like that. Yes. I must think like that. If we stay here, who will take care of Sophia and the children while I work?"

Karpathos. That was the answer. There, Sophia's family could help nurse her back to health, and there, God forbid, should his Sophia die, there would be family to raise the children. He would not like being parted from his wife children, but how could he, a man who spent his days in a tin mill care for four children?

Sophia did not want to return to Greece. She would bitterly miss not only her husband, but the freedoms which America offered women. In America she could wear a little powder, just a touch of rouge, and fancy hats, items forbidden to "proper" women in Greece. She could also go places, for example, church services and social gatherings, without her husband, something no woman in Karpathos would ever do.

However, eventually the reality of her health made her agree to return, with the promise that she would return to the US after she had healed.

Soon after Demetrios escorted his family back to Karpathos, LEMONIA died, most likely from the long hard journey. The day before, however, the doctor had decided that LEMONIA had "nothing serious." After the funeral Demetrios, usually a quiet man, wanted to kill the doctor. The villagers stopped him.

Demetrios then returned to America, only to find that he had lost his job in the tin factory. He took a job in a coal mine, lived as frugally as possible, and faithfully sent Sophia the lion's share of his pay.

When Sophia healed, she wanted to return to the U.S., but it was decided the children's schooling should not be disrupted and that she would return to America after the children had finished school in Greece. By that time, however, America was on the verge of depression.

Demetrios was afraid. He came from a family of ten children, a family so poor that at age 10 he was sent to be a servant in a relative's home in Egypt in exchange for room and board and education. His coal-miner's pay could feed his family in Greece, but not in an economically depressed U.S.

Nick and Kostas came to the U.S. anyway, but once here, they had to support themselves. Sophia and Kalliroi wanted to come too, but Demetrios feared he could not afford it.

"Wait until times are better," he wrote Sophia.

Yet in 1933, when war broke out between Italy and Ethiopia, Demetrios feared the war might spread and quickly sent Sophia passage money.

But it was too late. So many people were fleeing Greece and Italy, there were no boats available.

Now it was 1940 and Sophia was standing in Christos, the same church where she was married, facing WW2 without her husband. Silently she promised God that if she and her family made it through the war alive, she would do all she could to make Christos and other churches in Karpathos as beautiful as possible.

Meanwhile, she had to figure out how to survive. Until the war was over there would be not only no more letters from her husband, but no more American money either - nothing with which to supplement the food which she grew herself. At that time, food was being rationed and for Sophia, as for many other Karpathians, the allotted amount per person was often insufficient.

Italian soldiers had occupied Karpathos ever since 1912 when Italy won the war

against the Turks in Tripoli. After the Turkish defeat, the Dodecanese Islands were conceded to Italy. The Italian occupation from 1912 until 1926 was not harsh. However, the Karpathians were not allowed to display the Greek flag or to paint their houses in blue and white.

In 1926, the fascist dictator Mussolini introduced the Italian language into the schools. After 1937, the Greek language was totally banned from school curriculum and all subjects were taught in Italian. The Greek school teachers were sent to Rhodes or Italy to learn the Italian language or lose their jobs. Karpathian property was confiscated without compensation to build roads and government buildings. For these projects, each family had to donate a few days of labor each week or pay the wages of a laborer in their place. Somehow, Sophia managed to pay for laborers.

After 1940, the fascists facing Sophia became more militant. In my grandmother's case, they took her prize wheat field and converted it into an airport without asking her permission and without paying her for it. Their excuse was that she was married to an American.

Sophia had four other fields left. Would those be taken too? she wondered.



Demetrios N. Matsakis, after work in coal mines, circa 1930.

If that happened, she and Kalliroi would surely starve to death.

Like most peasants, Sophia held no illusions about war being a glamorous adventure. In her view, war brought suffering to the innocent and meant that little people, like herself, lost control over their lives.

In war, there was no telling what would happen next or when the war would end. A truce could be made one minute, then broken the next. Friends could turn traitor and traitors could save one's life. One had to be paranoid, yet trusting. Above all, one had to stay alive.

Walking home from church, Sophia glanced over Yia, her major remaining field with the practical eye of a business investor. There were olive, almond, and apple and pear trees; tomato and bean plants; and assorted vegetables. How much would she and Kalliroi need? How much would the Italians take? Would there be any left over to sell? If so, how much?

Alas, my Yiayia concluded, the produce of her fields, the eggs from her few small chickens and the milk from her scrawny goats would not suffice. And since there would be no more money from America to buy flour, sugar, material for clothing or other staples, she would have to come up with a plan for what she (rightly) considered the inevitable: that as the war escalated, the government would want more and more of her food.

She decided that even though she would have to give some food to the government, she would have to hide some of it too. There were many risks involved in this plan, but it was a matter of survival. She made a mental map of where she would bury her beans and lentils in the fields at night and where she would hide her less sturdy produce in secret places in her home. Also, she would have to keep changing her hiding places to trick the police who enforced the rationing rules and be careful to clean off her shovels in case they came, noticed the fresh dirt, and asked her what she was digging up at night.

"But what should I say if the government asks for more food than I give them. Lie?" she wondered. My Yiayia took her Christianity seriously. She did not want to lie. Also, if she lied and was found out, her punishment would be severe. Instead of lying, she decided to make the sign of the



Left to right: Minas Kourouglos, Minas Chryssofos, Athanasios Kontos, Demetrios Matsakis, and Kostas Matsakis. Hamarville, Pa., 1932.

cross, say nothing, and act as if fear had frozen her lips. "That won't be hard," she thought, "For I will be petrified."

But even hiding food would not meet her needs. She would have to do something else. But what? Aha, even though it was illegal, she'd make wine and ouzo and sneak it to the storekeepers in exchange for extra rations of flour and rice. She'd even sell liquor directly to the soldiers themselves if need be.

But she had to be careful. If anyone saw her burying food or making liquor, they might tell on her and get a reward for turning her in to the authorities. Or what if the shopkeepers turned her in for a price? She would have to give them especially good rates to help insure that they would say nothing.

At home, Kalliroi was napping. Glancing at her sleeping daughter, Sophia made the sign of the cross and said, "Poor Kalliroi. I should be planning her wedding, not how to hide food. Dear God, if anything happens to her, you might as well let me die on the spot. This child is all I have left. God, you just have to help us."

On the kitchen table was a letter. When Sophia saw it was an official letter from the Italians, she sweat profusely. As she read the letter, she froze. The Italians were ordering all American born children to be sent a concentration camp in Rhodes until the war ended. Kalliroi was scheduled

to leave in one week. There would be no exceptions.

Only girls, not boys, were being sent away. Nobody knew why for sure, but any fool could guess.

Sophia went wild, then got hard. Surrender her daughter? Never.

The letter promised that when the war ended, Kalliroi would return. "Hah," thought Sophia. Who knew when the war would end and if Kalliroi would even be alive then? Sophia had no trust in enemy promises.

Sophia's only hope was her Italian brother-in-law, Mr. Kotoni, the Postmaster. At that time in Karpathos, Postmaster was a position of much esteem. Kotoni, for example, sat in on the governor's council meetings. He was also highly regarded on a personal level.

Mr. Kotoni was married to Demetrios's sister Eugenia. After seeing her when she came to pick up mail at the post office, he courted her by serenading her outside her home. Although Eugenia and her family liked him as a person, they felt that marriage to "the enemy" was unthinkable. Eventually, however, Mr. Kotoni's sincerity, gentleness, and mandolin won Eugenia's heart, and then, that of her family.

Sophia ran to Kotoni's house.

"I'll do the best I can," he promised. And that he did. He argued to the gover-

nor that there was no proof that Kalliroi was foreign born. For example, she did not have an American birth certificate. Therefore they could not take her away.

The governor consented and Kalliroi was spared.

However, Sophia's troubles were not over. Some of the neighbors saw her burying food at night. Others knew she made wine and ouzo. Everyone knew that the fascists handsomely rewarded anyone who turned in "traitors" and some of the very people Sophia had befriended with generous gifts of food and wine set her up for capture.

One day while my Yiayia was delivering wine and ouzo to a local shopkeeper, Italian police sprung out from hiding places in the store and arrested her. Then the police brought forth neighbors who showed them where Sophia buried her food.

Sophia was found guilty of treason, jailed, and sentenced to go to a concentration camp on the next boat which came to Karpathos.

Sophia had seen those boats, full of starved and beaten prisoners. Surely she would die unless something was done.

She prayed and sent for Kotoni.

Kotoni arrived immediately, but feared there was little he could do. Sophia had committed tangible (and, in the government's view, a serious) offense. But he would try.

"Look, she's just an old lady," Kotoni argued. "If she promises to never again sell liquor illegally or hide her food, will you let her go?"

"No," the police said.

"Do it for me," Kotoni pleaded. "She's my sister in law. I've been a loyal Italian all my life."

"No."

"But if you send an old woman to her death, the villagers will organize a resistance movement against you - and that won't look good to headquarters. We've had no trouble with these people so far. Let's not start problems now. I know for a fact that this woman is well-respected. Besides, she hasn't harmed anyone. She was only trying to stay alive."

The police captain shook his head. "If we let her get by with hiding food, the others might start hiding theirs. Then what will the other people have?"

"Make an exception," Kotoni pleaded again. "She's my sister-in-law."

Finally the Captain relented. But this was the last favor Kotoni could ever request.

My grandmother was released on the condition that she give all her hidden goods to government and that she never hide food or make any liquor again. As the policemen marched Sophia to her fields to watch her unearth her food, Sophia feared that they might harm her or Kalliroi. Because she was a woman alone during war, she felt especially vulnerable to attack.

She asked the policemen if they could stop at her home before going to the fields because she wanted to give them bottles of wine and ouzo - all they wanted. They quickly agreed and drank the liquor even quicker. By the time they arrived at the fields, the police were quite inebriated.

Sophia then invited them into her stavlo (little home in the fields) and served them more liquor. In order to ward off any attack on her or Kalliroi, she kept giving the police gifts of wine and ouzo and food and kept repeating to them, "You nice men... you no hurt old lady and her little gal." They started joking and singing, until they finally went merrily on their way barely noticing that Sophia was unearthing and handing over only part of her buried food.

As the war dragged on, food became scarcer and scarcer. But food, although a problem, was not Sophia's major worry: it was Kalliroi. So far, the Italians had not bothered any of the local girls. They probably knew the Karpathians wouldn't stand for it. However, some Karpathians, especially my grandmother, became frightened when Italian officers began attending the festivities and dances held by local churches and other groups and began asking the village girls who attended to dance with them.

Girls never attended these functions alone. Their parents and other relatives were always with them and any dancing which occurred took place under the watchful eyes of these and other Karpathians. However, a girl who danced with an officer was taking a risk of being gossiped about. On the other hand, if she refused an officer, out of consideration of Karpathian customs and out of fear of

hurting her reputation, that officer, or even his friends and other Italians in authority might feel offended or insulted. After all, to the Italian police and officers, dancing was just that: dancing, not a sexual advance or act. However, for an unmarried Karpathian girl, dancing, even in public, was not seen innocent. Even if her parents were right there, dancing with a man, especially an Italian officer, could harm a girl's chances for a good marriage in the future.

On the other hand, if the girl refused to dance and if, in the future, either she or a member of her family needed the assistance or kindness of the fascist police, the fascists might not be helpful to them. Some villagers were afraid to let their daughters go, for fear of gossip. Others feared that if they didn't allow their daughters to go, there would be reprisals.

But Sophia knew where she stood. The first time the fascists came to her home to invite Kalliroi, Sophia told them Kalliroi was sick. Kalliroi was in bed with sweat clothes, pretending to be incoherent with a high fever. The next time, Sophia told them Kalliroi was at one of the family's distant wheat fields tending to crops. The next time, Sophia hid Kalliroi in a stavlo at a far away property.

Sophia knew she could not keep on avoiding the issue of her daughter attending these festivities forever, especially since she had already been pegged as a "troublemaker." Since, so far, the fascists tended not to bother married women, the only solution seemed to be to marry Kalliroi as fast as possible. In addition, it was time for Kalliroi to be married and, although it would be better if she were married without a war going on, who knew when the war would end and how many more men would become involved in the war, leaving fewer and fewer prospective bridegrooms.

Yet it was almost unheard of for a wife to arrange a wedding for one of her children without her husband's consent. But Demetrios was in America. Sophia couldn't reach him by letter.

At the same time, tensions were rising between the villagers and the fascists. For example, the villagers were accustomed to whitewashing their homes and churches in white and blue, the colors of Greece. The fascists did not like this show of patriotism and painted various churches and homes

different colors. At night, rebellious villagers would re-whitewash their homes or church in Greek colors. Investigations were held and tension filled the air.

By this time, Sophia read the handwriting on the wall. She feared, and justifiably so, that the war would intensify before it abated, or ended entirely. All alone in Karpathos, with no adult woman or adult male in her household to help or provide moral support, Sophia feared the worst: that Kalliroi's reputation might be compromised or that Kalliroi might actually be harmed if she, her mother, did not act.

Although no Karpathian woman had yet been assaulted by the fascists, the fear of such an event taking place increasingly plagued my grandmother. For some time, Sophia did not know what to do. On the one hand, she did not want to marry her daughter without her husband's knowledge, consent or presence. After all, he could be furious with her for arranging marriage without him. On the other hand, if Kalliroi's reputation was somehow compromised (or God forbid, something worse happened) or if Kalliroi ended up an "old maid" because she did not arrange a marriage, she would never forgive herself and her husband could also be furious with her for not doing what was obviously the right thing to do. Finally Sophia agreed to a match with someone who had been pursuing Kalliroi for a long time: the dentist from Menetes, Dr. Constantinos Levadiotis.

Meanwhile, the war escalated. The port of Pegadia was bombed. Many homes were destroyed and several people were killed, primarily civilians who did not leave their homes even after bomb warnings were made. Most of the populace fled to the mountain villages and was unharmed.

After the war ended, the English arrived. Four thousand refugees also came from Rhodes. Sophia's property at Afiarti was used to set up camps for the refugees and Sophia and Kalliroi visited the refugees, and helped all they could. Soon, mail began to arrive from the U.S. and, happily, Sophia found out that her sons were alive.

Sophia reunited with her husband in the United States immediately thereafter. The couple, Kalliroi and Kalliroi's husband came to live with us for a few years. Sometimes other cousins and relatives



Left to right: Aphrodite, Nick, Theodora, Demetrios, and Sophia Matsakis, circa 1950.

lived with us too. At times home was more like a hotel.

Kalliroi and her husband eventually returned to Karpathos, after which my grandparents bought a small home near where their life in America began, in Harmarville, Pennsylvania. Even though my grandfather was a retired coal-miner by now, he had grown accustomed to being near the mine and just couldn't leave it.

Their home had cheap plastic curtains, not cloth ones, and some of the floors waddled when you walked on them because they were made of large linoleum blocks, rather than custom fitted linoleum sheets. The beds were hard and there was no fancy furniture. The only ornaments were pictures of relatives and icons. Even though the war was over, my grandparents still lived as frugally as possible because they were still sending money back to Greece.

In fact, one of their major arguments was over whose family was going to get how much money. My grandmother was always pushing for helping her side; my grandfather, for his. They would hide money from each other to send overseas. I knew Yiayia's hiding places, because she showed some to me. I know Papou hid money too, but, overall, Yiayia was better at it. After all, she had much more experience at hiding things, thanks to the war.

In Harmarville, Yiayia still asked neighbors to teach her English and tried to

improve her reading and writing skills. But as she aged, she had to use a magnifying glass. It was my job to clean it, and to make sure that my brothers didn't tumble down the mountain side outside her house and get run over by the trains that ran along the base of the mountain.

Every night when those trains passed by, the whole house shook. And every morning around 5 a.m., a ghost would walk through the house. It wasn't a real ghost: it was Yiayia.

Before anyone else was up, she'd be walking through the house with her long gray hair flowing in one of her long white robes holding an incense burner. She'd go into every room of the house (sometimes even the bathroom), make metanies (bows), ask God to protect the people in her home, and thank God for various blessings.

Although my grandmother had a strong spiritual side, she was also a woman. One of her concerns, although not a major one, was her fading beauty.

"I used to be pretty," she once told my mother. "But now look at me now," referring to her weather-beaten skin. She used to ask my mother to buy her good face creams and she was quite disappointed when the creams could not undo the damage of having worked the fields for decades. She also liked to wear a little makeup. Once she even put on mascara, but it was too radical for her and she took it off.

When she visited us, she liked to go to church a lot (even during the week), but hesitated to constantly impose on my mother to drive her. So she'd get on the phone and ask people for rides. In Harmarville, she would often hitchhike to church. The sight of my 4' 8" inch grandmother, dressed in black, limping down the street with her cane, stopping cars and asking perfect strangers for rides to church is one I will never forget.

"You nica man (or nica lady)," she used to say. "Take old lady to church?"

After my Papou Demetrios died, my Yiayia Sophia went back to Karpathos to live with her daughter. At that time, widows were required to wear black, almost forever, and, no matter how old they were, confine themselves to the home, unless they had children or relatives to take care of.

Now Yiayia could no longer take the walks she loved or even go to church too much or people might think she was not showing respect for her husband. Socializing was restricted too. Once when I visited Karpathos she was glad to see me, but for more reasons than one. With her granddaughter in town, she had a legitimate "excuse" for taking walks and visiting people.



Demetrios N. Matsakis, circa 1960

She also had to give up swimming. Yiayia was no athlete, but when she was in the United States, she liked to go swimming with my parents, brothers, and myself. She'd wear a long suit, of course. Even in Karpathos - before her husband died - she liked to paddle in the beautiful blue waters. She was practically the only older woman in the sea - but that didn't bother her one bit.

The last time I saw her before she died, we walked along the pier in Pegadia and she shared with me some of her "secrets." For example, even though she had forgiven the neighbors who had turned her into the fascists, she often had to go into her room and cry about those days. She'd also cry about missing America. She loved Karpathos, but not some of the restrictions it put on her.

After the walk, I gave her items which she had requested from America - navy colored and beige dresses, hats with colorful flowers, rouge, make up, and lipstick. As a widow, she could never wear such items again, but she wanted to have them. She kept them, and other dresses, cosmetics, and hats in a trunk in her room. I'll never forget her opening the trunk and fondly touching the pretty new clothes and the lip-sticks she could never wear and say, "America, America."

She was about to cry, but bit her lip. "You lucky, gal. Aphridi. You goes to nica American school. I no goes. Mes family too poor. You lucky gal. I lucky yiayia have nica granddaughter like you."

Before she put away the clothes, she patted them one more time. "Bye, bye America," she whispered.

For the first time, I understood her pain and I was full of regret for not having spent more time teaching her English. At least that part of one of her



Sophia Matsakis, circa 1965

dreams might have come true. So often we forget that our parents and grandparents are more than our relatives: they are people who had dreams and hopes apart from being good parents or grandparents to us.

After that visit I never saw my Yiayia again, but she wrote to me frequently, often enclosing mantinades full of love and good wishes for me in her letters. As always, she'd apologize for not being able to write better Greek and explain to me once more that she had to leave school before the third grade to raise her brothers and sisters.

During her last days, she used her savings to install running water for the cemetery in Othos and for restoring and decorating the Chapel of St. Demetrios and St. Sophia with icons. She also gave money for the installation of a huge crystal chandelier for the church of Christos in Othos. Perhaps this glittering chandelier stands over the very spot where she became a bride and afterwards, where, for some twenty years, she so often talked to God about her pain, fears, and loneliness and asked for divine help to see her through. ❏