

**THE HISTORY OF AN ANCIENT GREEK VILLAGE
AND OF A FAMILY THAT LIVED THERE**

**by
Konstantinos E. Sverkos**



The Konstantinos Sverkos Family

1968

Editor's Note:

I was given a Greek manuscript by the son and daughter-in-law of the author, Konstantinos El. Sverkos, and I was asked by them to translate it so that the author's children find out what their father was writing about all these years. First, I typed the manuscript and edited it very lightly for spelling. Then I translated it into English and both versions were given to the Sverkos family who added some old photos of the family.

The original manuscript was written in 1968, and I think this booklet is instructive because it describes life in a rural village in the Central Peloponnese, and it is the story of Tourniki, a typical rural village in that part of Greece. The exact location of the village is on the east side of the Artemission Mountain. Nowadays, the tunnel for the National Highway goes through at the base of the mountain and it bypasses the village that sits on top of the tunnel. The highway tunnel connects the prefectures of Argolis and Arcadia, and by extension it shortens the distance greatly between Athens and Southwestern Peloponnese. It the quickest road between Athens and Sparta, and in ancient times foot traffic passed through the village of Tourniki. Pheidippides, the original Marathon Runner, when he ran from Athens to Sparta to ask the Spartans to participate in the struggle against the Persians at Marathon, must have stopped in this village to fill his canteen with fresh water. It was believed that the god Pan had roamed in the area. For over 2,500 years the village probably did not change much, but in the late 20th century it practically disappeared, as did most other mountainous rural villages in Greece.

Peter N. Demopoulos
Editor and Translator, August 2015

Dedication by the Author:

Dedicated to the Sverkos Family, past, present, and future. May our Roots continue to grow deep to endure any storm, may our branches grow strong and flourish from the storms, and may the warmth of the sun always rest with Love upon our Leaves.

I humbly bend and kiss the ground and say to myself somewhere here is the root of my Family Tree. They are now on the ground below where one day I will join them. They were the roots and the trunk of the Tree and we are now its small branches.

-Konstantinos E. Sverkos, 1968

The Story of a Rural Village and Family

A human being comes to this world for a trial and not to win worldly wealth, which easily spoils and disappears. Nobody can take wealth from this world when he dies. How many rich people have become miserable and how many poor have become rich? That is why we have to first of all avoid evil and instead try to enrich our soul and do good deeds because those are pleasing and everlasting to both the benefactor and the beneficiary. Our life on earth is temporary. «I came, I saw, I left.»¹ Many songs, proverbs, and religious hymns deal with this subject. For example, the Bible tells us «For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?» or «Today it is me, tomorrow it will be you, it will never be everyone,» and the proverb «Do good and forget it.» Also, the Bible states that the basic command to win the afterlife is to «Love one another,» and there are numerous others.

Everyone has good and bad things in his character. Some worship money and will sacrifice anything to gain it, even their own life. Others try to discover an invention, and so on. Personally I love to read and write, even though I am basically illiterate since I only attended school up to 4th Grade of the Elementary School. That is why I decided to write the history of my family, starting from my great grand father. My sources are what I heard and have lived in my village where the roots of the family began. I hope that my descendants keep this book and add to it . My hand that wrote this will dissolve in the dirt of my grave, but the book itself can last forever.

Written in Kefalari on January 1968

(signature)

K. E. Sverkos

Note by the author:

Forgive me if you find many misspellings and other errors because this was written by an illiterate man.

¹ This is a famous quote by Julius Caesar, which in Latin was: Vini, Vidi, Vici.

The Village Roots

On the borders between Arcadia and Argolis is Mount Artemision². Legend has it that, that in primeval times, the sacred doe of goddess Artemis roamed in its forests. Even today there is one location called Elafofouna (deer-pond) and «Foundation of Artemis» on «Pig-Mountain» and there are traces of an altar in a location called Ambelia (Vineyards) where today stands a little church dedicated to the honor of Saint Nicholas. On the East side of Artemision, facing the Argolis, there is a village called Tourniki. Its history is not very clear but it goes back thousands of years. It seems that it has been moved as many as three times before it settled in this location. The most ancient location appears to be in a place that today is called *Paliohori* (Old Village). We don't know the reason of the prior destruction of the village, but it is rumored that its people assisted the nearby Mantineans against the invading Thebans. In retaliation, the angry Thebans destroyed the village.³ Another story has it that the present location was chosen because it is more suitable to bring water from the springs higher up on the mountain.

It is said that the old name was Thourios (a military marching song) but the inhabitants had won many victories so they took the name Thour-Niki (Thour-Victory), which later was corrupted in pronunciation into Tourniki.

Today the location is abrupt and difficult to approach, especially from the East side because it is very rocky. However that was an advantage during the years of the Ottoman occupation where its roughness was actually an advantage that provided protection for the people. During that period, people from the low areas, and other more accessible villages, left and came there to avoid harassment by the Turks. During that period, the village actually had its greatest population. Before the age of modern transportation and during the time when transportation was conducted by animal and by foot, this was on the path of the shortest route of communication between Argos and Tripolis. People had made steps on the rock for the animals to walk so the road was called the Pano Scala (Upper Stairway).

² In 1968, there was no tunnel under this mountain. The National Highway now passes through the base of the Artemision Mountain where several tunnels pierce through the mountain and shorten the distance from NE to SW. This Highway bypasses the ancient villages which sit up higher on the mountainside.

³ A very important battle was fought nearby in Mantinea on July 4, 362 BC, between the Theban Alliance and Sparta where for the first time the invincible Spartans were defeated. This paved the way a few years later for the Macedonians, first under Philip and later under Alexander, to dominate militarily the Greek world.

The inhabitants lived mostly off livestock and the cultivation of small plots of land. They had many goats and some cows, which they also used for plowing their small farms. Later they found mules very useful for this terrain. Today the village is practically abandoned except for a few visitors who go there in the summer⁴.

There is a story that came down by word of mouth that the Turkish pasha, Kiamil Bey, came to Argos and was headed for Tripolis. Of course he took the shortest route which was through Tourniki. When the villagers realized that so many Turks were coming, and being powerless to resist, they took whatever they could and ran to hide. The men took their livestock along and went into a forested area where they hid. The women and children went East where there were some big and secret caves to hide. The village was deserted except for an old and crippled man who stayed in his house. The Turks started burning and looting homes. When they came to the old man, he became scared and told them where valuables were hidden. For that, the Turks saved his life and did not burn his house. My grandmother told us that after the Greek Revolution in 1821, that house burned three times, and the last time it was built as a two-story and on the first floor had nine cows, which burned. During my own time it was built for a fourth time by the owner, Spyros Psychos.

When the Turks left for their mission, they left behind a garrison to guard the road. The Turkish commander who stayed behind, sent the old man they had found in the village to go to his fellow villagers and tell them to return and there would be no harm to them. Meanwhile the villagers who were hiding had suffered plenty already and their supplies were exhausted, so they returned and lived peacefully with the Turks until the Greek Revolution of 1821. When the Revolution started, the Turks left for Tripoli. The village then was taken over by Kapetan Dages and the two sons of Kapetan Kladouris, Prokopis and Stefanis. In fact, the two younger men married girls from Tourniki, who had been taken from the Turks, and made their families there and took the name Kapetan.

After the Greek Revolution, Tourniki was a large and thriving village because, as I stated earlier, people had come there for protection from other villages. People started

⁴ There are three reasons that made Tourniki flourish: Protection from the Turks, being a transportation hub, and being relatively safe from mosquitoes and malaria because of its high elevation and cooler climate. When these factors were eliminated, Tourniki essentially disappeared from the map.

building better houses and better animal shelters to house their animals. They built two reservoirs for drinking water and to irrigate gardens. There were two fountains for drinking water in the village, one was called Dounda and the other the Kapetan's Reservoir. The water was brought there from springs in the mountain and the water was nice and cool. The village was covered with two types of green trees. One type was wild trees covered with ivy and the others were mostly walnut trees. The village was divided into two neighborhoods, the Far Village and the Near Village. It had one church dedicated to Saint Athanasios who was celebrated with a festival on the 2nd of May.

On the South side of the same mountain there were two other villages: Bouga, now called Kryoneri (Cool Water) where the elementary school was located, and Kria Vrysi (Cool Spring). The three villages later were united into one township which was called the Township of Kryoneri. After the Revolution we were organized into municipalities and our township was attached to the municipality of *Achladokambos* (Pear Valley). Because of the high altitude of the location, in the winter we had a lot of snow and many villagers migrated to winter quarters with their animals. These winter quarters were as many as 3 to 5 hours walking distance in the direction of Argos. The main ones are Elliniko 10 km from Argos, Agios Stefanos 15 km, Fregaina, and Merkouri. There in the lowlands is where they spent the winter with their flocks.

With the arrival of peacetime, people started to leave from the village for other more hospitable locations. Many younger people left for Argos, Nafplio, and Tripoli and other more fertile lands because the village had limited land to adequately feed its population. By 1850, there were probably about 80 families with flocks of goats, some sheep, and some cows that were also used for farming. Now that the people were free, they still lived a village life but it was peaceful. These people may have not been overly wealthy but they were respectable and hospitable. At that time, transportation was conducted by mule, horse and even donkeys, and, as we said before, this location was on the main transportation route from Argos-Nafplio to Tripolis. Many a times, travelers had to spend the night in the village, or if there was bad weather, they were taken into homes for free lodging.

Most of the action happened in the Spring by shepherds passing from Gortinia, Roino, Kardara, Valtetsi who were returning from the lowlands and they had to stay when it

rained, and at times when women were giving birth, or when someone died and had to be buried. We called them *diavatareous* (travelers). All the villagers were eager to host them and thus sell to them supplies for the remainder of the trip. The reverse trip occurred in the Fall.

Among the village families that we will focus our attention in this book is the Giannakoulis Family which consisted then of about 6 brothers and cousins. Three of them left for Karia, one for Koutsopodi, and one for Fychtia. In Tourniki remained Yannis Giannakoulis who was known by the nickname «Sverkos». Most people knew him as «Blind» because he was missing one eye. He was one of the good family men in the village. He had one of the best houses, mules, many goats and some sheep. In the winter he moved his household to Elliniko, 10 km from Argos and near Kefalari, where he had a house and animal shelters. He also had another larger animal shelter higher up on the Hill of Prophet Elias. He had three boys, Christos, whom he married off and made him the exclusive heir to his property and gave nothing to the other two. The second, Dimitris married a woman and moved into her family home but later died, or rather he drowned and left behind his wife and a severely disabled girl. The third son, Michael, who is my grandfather, seeing that his father disowned him as was the custom then, went to Kefalari and got a job as laborer at a factory that was manufacturing gunpowder. This factory used water as energy to move the engines but in a few years the water dried up and the factory quit working. So the owner of the factory moved the factory to another part of Greece and he fired all the workers in Kefalari, and Michael was now without a job. So Michael went back to Tourniki and asked his father if he could hire him as a shepherd to tend the family goats and sheep.

Also, in the village was an orphan girl with two small houses, one in Tourniki and one in Agios Stefanos. She had an older uncle and together they owned and farmed some small plots of land. She was poor but honorable and hard working. She had a few goats jointly with her uncle and together they made a decent living. Her name was Eleni Psyhou. Michael got hooked. He told his father about her and decided to get married. It was done and his father was relieved to get rid of him, so the marriage was performed in 1878, and lovingly the two poor youngsters started a new family. They farmed the small plots, tended the few goats, and if they had any spare days, they hired themselves out as laborers. In 1879 they had their first child, a boy, and named him Trifon. Their joy was immeasurable because they had their first child but also that their firstborn was a male, which then was

more desirable. After two years, in 1881, they had a second child, another boy and called him Eleftherios or Lefteris for short. He became my father. Their joy was great, especially since for the second child the godfather was the brother of the mayor of Achladokambos. It was a big honor to have Eleftherios Paravantis as the godfather of your child.

But a popular saying goes: «Orphans have no joy, widows do not boast.» It happened to these two young people because fate became jealous of their happiness and did not allow them to enjoy life, and punished them. In 1884, Michael, died. The orphan girl, now became a young widow responsible for two infants and was forced to sell her goats because she had no way to take care of them. She had no animals for milk to feed her young children and, with the two infants, she had no way or the means to work the small farms by herself. Fortunately, she had a sow and sold off the piglets. She left the children with neighbors and went as far as three hours distant to collect firewood and another three hours to go to town to sell it. Many times her children were hungry, lacking even plain bread. At times she boiled wheat grains and gave it to the children to stop their hunger pains. One time, the younger boy, Lefteris, told his mother, «I am not hungry for wheat seeds, I want to eat some bread.» That burned her soul even more. and made her cry silently.

It seems unbelievable but it is true that she spend many hours collecting firewood, then loaded the wood on her back and walked for hours to take it to town to sell it in order to feed her children. That way she did not have to beg for food. God gave her a lot of strength. Not being able to endure this life for long, she found the opportunity to marry for a second time to protect her children. And fate had it that another orphan came along, without a mother or father, without a home, who had left as a child and had just returned. Truth be told, they were both poor, but who else would marry a poor widow with two small children? But he had no place to lay down his head and here he found a little home, some small plots of land which he could work. He was young and strong. She was also young and strong and managed to stay afloat on her own. Now that she had a man by her side, together they could do much better.

His name was Panagiotis Sotiropoulos. He had two other brothers and a sister when they were orphaned. The oldest left and found a wife in Krya Vrysi. The second, was somewhat slow and became a shepherd-servant in somebody's household. The sister was

married off to someone and she took as dowry all the family land. Panagiotis remained behind on his own. He was very smart but too young to be on his own. As he roamed the streets, one day somebody yelled at him because he bullied his son. Afraid of getting punished, Panagiotis ran away from the village and hid in a small little church out in the countryside along the main road of Argos-Tripolis. He was crying when a itinerant merchant with three loaded mules was passing by. He asked him: «Hey kid, come here, why are you crying?» Panagiotis replied: «Because they are after me and they want to whip me.» And the merchant said to him: «Can you come with me? I will feed you, dress you, and tip you when you do chores for me.» And Panagiotis said «Sure, I can come.» and he jumped on a mule and the man gave him a piece of bread and they went together to Nestani. There Panagiotis got his fill with bread for the first time in his life. He was obedient. He liked it, and stayed for two-three years. Tourniki and Nestani have a lot of interaction. Many of his fellow villagers visited there and saw each other often. Panagiotis liked it.

After a few years he decided to come back to his village. Now he was older. He was well fed and well dressed. One time, a tinner was visiting to tin the copper pots and utensils of the village. This job then was very profitable because everyone used copper pots and utensils that needed to be tinned every so often. The kids had gathered around the tinner to watch «Mastro-Kitso», as they called the tinner. He was from Northern Greece. All year long he traveled from town to town and village to village. He knew practically the whole country and everyone knew him and liked him because he was a good and honest man. As the kids were gathered around him, he noticed Panagiotis that he differed from the others. He was more sophisticated, smarter, and handled the tools better and more expertly. Mastro-Kitso said to him: «Hey, kid, do you like this work? If you want, come with me to learn the job.» Immediately the young man said, «I am coming.»

«Who are your parents?» the tinner asked.

«I am an orphan, I have neither a father or mother. They are both dead.»

«And where do you live now?»

«Sometimes I am a servant, here and there, wherever I find.»

«Then get ready to come with me.»

«I am ready. I have nothing. I am as you see me. Clothes for sleeping are the ones I wear now.»

For tinnners, food and drink is provided by the customers, so there is no worry about that. Panagiotis, smart and obedient as he was, became the perfect apprentice. There was never a misunderstanding between the boss and the pupil. As I said before, the job required a lot of travel and Panagiotis got to meet a lot of good as well as bad people, and learned how to behave socially and how to deal in business transactions. He became a man with knowledge, although he had no formal education. He learned the practical application of knowledge and how to transact business. He also gained the respect of his boss and of many friends that he made. He was no longer a naive village boy.

After a few years of this, he started getting tired of a life of constant travel so he returned to Tourniki to see his relatives and friends and stay a while to think about what to do next in his life. His relatives and Eleni's relatives, the widow of Sverkos, saw a good match. They saw that he was smart and wise and talked among themselves and then proposed to Panagiotis (now he was called Mastro-Panagiotis the Tinner). The conversation went like: «Panagiotis, how long do you plan to travel with this job, from village to village, and doing this tinning? Here we have Eleni, a widow but a good woman, honorable, hard working and the boys will grow up, soon they will be working. You, have practically nothing of your own, no house, nothing.»

He kept thinking about it. He weighed this way and that. He found it logical and decided to go for it. But the beginning was hard. After the wedding, he saw everything being difficult and hard to get used to the different lifestyle. He had to give up partying, friends, staying out all night... Poor Eleni had a hard time trying to get him into the mold of married life. She knew about poverty and family life. In the beginning he protested, but gradually he came around. She had great patience and he finally became a good family man, one of the best. Not only of the village but of the whole area. He was one of the most respected in all of the Argolis. And he treated his two step-children as his own. He became an exemplary family man.

After they got married and they passed through the initial difficulties of marriage, they made an effort to improve their household. They bought a mule and a cow, and worked the small plots of land. They started to build up some savings. The children were growing. Around 1887-1890, the government began building a railroad through Achladokambos where the family had relatives and friends. Panagiotis got a job there while

Eleni and the children took care of the household. He saved some money from that and renovated and expanded the house in Tourniki. The children were growing and started helping with chores. There was no school until 1898 when they made a school for the villages: Tourniki, Kryoneri, Krya Vrysi. The school was located in the middle village, Kryoneri, and school functioned during the summer. In the winter, it moved to the lowlands, down to Elliniko where many of the families moved.⁵ The family still had no flock of goats or sheep of its own. To start out, the family hired out as a shepherd the oldest one, Trifon, who was smaller and weaker, to earn some money. Lefteris was taller and stronger so he stayed to work as farm worker in the villages of Argos and Tripolis, and as digger in the vineyards of Argos and Korinthos and Aigion, and even further in Amaliada where the pay was better. When the boys grew up, they acquired their own flock of animals.

In 1889, Trifon was drafted into the army, but because he was the first-born, he got a deferment and they built an animal shed in Agios Stefanos where they only had goats. Then they got a cow which gave birth to calves. From these they slowly started to multiply and they all got involved in the business. Trifon stopped working for others and worked for the family fulltime.

In 1902, Lefteris was drafted by the army and had to appear in Nafplio. He was trained there and was sent to serve in the police service. That's how it was then; the police were draftees. He served in two islands, Syros and Tinos, and after two years he was released, at the beginning of 1905.

In 1904, they married off Trifon. He started a family and lived to an old age, even though he had a small disability in his left hand.

After they married off Trifon, with the dowry they some land and a few sheep so their household kept expanding. In September of 1905, they married off Lefteris to a girl from Nestani. She was Eleni, daughter of Elias Manios, and with the dowry they improved the house. So the household kept expanding with more goats, sheep, cattle, two mules, various farm plots, vineyards, and even some property in Nestani and in a place called *Helona* (Turtle). Now they were one of the most prosperous families of the village.

⁵ The reason they moved in the summer back up to the mountain was to avoid the malaria scourge that is spread by mosquitoes. In the winter mosquitoes were dormant.

In 1906 they decided to built a “good” house, worthy of their stature. It was the first two-story house in the village, with large upstairs rooms, verandas, large first floor and covered balconies.

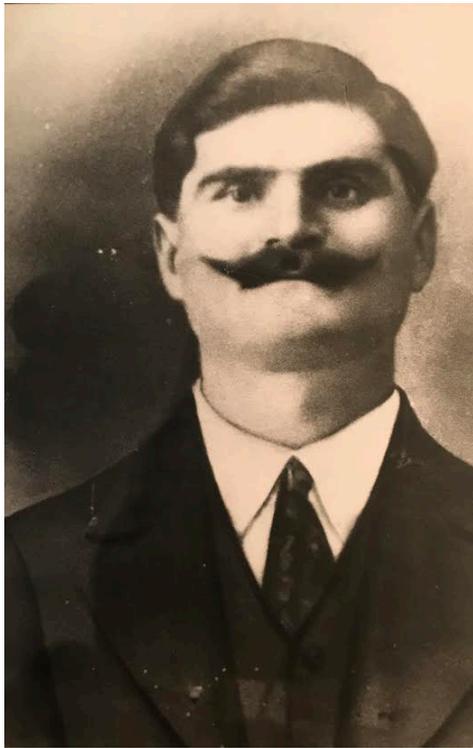
After marrying, unfortunately, Lefteris had similar misfortune as his father, whom he never met. He also never really got to know his family, especially his children, and died very young after spending most of his adult life as an immigrant in America.

After both children got married and received good dowries, with hard work they built up a good fortune for a village family. People used to say, “like the family of the Maestri,” they were three able-bodied men, three healthy and hard-working women. People referred to the women as the “Maestri-brides.” They had plenty of livestock, earned money as laborers. They also sold firewood for cash in Nestani in the summer and in Argos in the winter.

The overall manager in everything was the “Old-Tinner.” He knew how to manage well. Two houses, two households, everything in duplicate, large wooden barrels of wine, grain holds full of wheat, big containers full of olive oil. When he left one house for the other one, he took nothing because both houses contained everything. And in the village, everyone respected him. If there was a big decision to be taken, they said, “Let’s ask the Old Tinner.” He was the most knowledgeable on any subject. If they asked him, “what school you attended,” he replied, “the Community School.” “But there is no Community School,” they told him. “Yes there is,” he replied. “And it is the best in the world,” and then he would explain what he meant by Community School.

The Family of My Parents

Here is where the story of Lefteris and Eleni's Family starts. They are my parents. As we said before, in 1905 they got married and on the 26 of July 1906 they had the birth of their first child, a boy whom they named Konstantinos, which is me. They were doubly pleased because they had their first child and it was a boy. In 1908 they had their second child which was a girl and named her Demetra, but in two years she died. That was the first misfortune of the family. In 1909, my father was recalled into the army reserves to train in the new armaments, the Mannlicher rifle, as they said, but it was really preparing for war with Turkey. In 1911, another child was born, a girl, who was named Panagiota.



Eleftherios (Lefeteris),
the father of Konstantinos

In 1912, our country did go to war in alliance with its neighbors against Turkey during the so-called Balkan Wars. My father was called up in early September and found himself on the front lines. At that time, my grandfather was in America where he had gone a year earlier before the war started. When he found out that my father was in the army, my grandfather came from America to protect the family. After winning the war with Turkey, our country had to turn around and fight off our former allies, the treasonous Bulgarians, who stabbed us in the back in 1913. After winning that fight, and peace came, my father was allowed to come home.

After the family was all together again, many people from Tourniki started leaving for better opportunities abroad. So, my father and his brother sold their flocks and on March 13, 1914, they left. My mother was pregnant and four months later gave birth to a fourth child, a boy, who was given the name Michael, the name of my grandfather.

With the protection and guidance of Grandpa Panagiotis, the household was running very smoothly. He loved everyone and was very fair, even though he was a step-father to us. We also loved him back and respected him as the best family leader. Now that we had no livestock, he got involved in other business, mostly selling firewood and farming the land.

My father in America had a hard time during World War I, first because there was unemployment and second because there were diseases, and third he was wrongfully accused for something he did not do and had to defend himself in court where he was found innocent. Unfortunately, this cost him a lot of money and he was left almost broke.

Meanwhile, in Greece there was political division during World War I, and in 1916, the Allies blockaded the harbors to force the country to enter the war on their side. The economy was ruined and there was hunger and disease spread throughout. Fortunately for us, due to our good protector, our Grandfather, we had plenty of food, and enough to help others. In 1917-1918, the terrible disease, the Spanish Flu, spread throughout the country. There seemed to be no known medicine to stop it and it killed two to three people in each family. In our home, we lost my sister and my grandmother, the poor lady who was an orphan child and worked so hard in her life till her death. She helped so much in the house which she loved but left with the sadness that her children, for whom she suffered so much to raise, were not there on her deathbed. She was a sweet and loving daughter, a loving mother, an honorable and dear wife, tireless worker from childhood until her death. We, her descendants have the obligation to honor her everlasting and blessed memory.

In 1919, my father's older brother, Trifon, returned from America, and in 1920 he and Grandpa Panagiotis decided to move the family from Tourniki moved to Kefalari near Argos where they bought some land from the Georgitsopoulos estate, near the location called *Magoula*. They signed the contracts on November 23, 1920, and settled there permanently. We left from Tourniki after we sold everything and didn't come back. We kept some of the property in Agios Stefanos for a few more years. In December of 1921 my father returned

from America and came to Athens where he was detained because he had not appeared to serve in the army when they had called him up while he was away in America. He had to serve 6 months and finally was allowed to come home the following May.

Greece at that time was suffering a terrible financial crisis and was at war with Turkey in Asia Minor. To pay for the government debt, the Finance Minister ordered that all currency was to be cut in half and one-half was to be confiscated on behalf of the government. Thus, all of the money my father brought from America was immediately devalued by 50%.

When my father came home, his mother and his daughter had died. He took what was left of his family and moved to Kefalari on May 20, 1922. He dedicated himself again to hard work, just like before. He was away from his family since 1912, practically ten years. When he was in America, he missed his family but fate did not let him enjoy it when he came back either. On August 15, 1923, he took his wife and children and went to Nestani to see his in-laws, and to be at the local festival. He saw the relatives and friends, and enjoyed the food and drink after being gone for so many years. When he got back to Kefalari he fell sick right away. When he went to the doctors in Argos, they told him he had pneumonia. He had this twice before but this time he did not last long and on the 29th of August 1923 he died, leaving his wife a widow and his two children orphans. He was the most unfortunate father and husband. He did not get a chance to manage his family or enjoy family life. He was a young orphan, spent most of his adult life away from home as an immigrant or a soldier. He died at 42, with the sadness that he never had enough time to enjoy his youth or his married life.

My Life

This is where the history of my life begins. It is the fourth generation that is included in this book. As I said before, I was born in Tourniki on June 30, 1906. My parents were Eleftherios(Lefteris) and Eleni, farmers and shepherds. During my pre-school years I lived with my maternal grandparents in Nestani (then also called Tsipiana). My mother was from there, and her parents were Elias and Asimo and they used to keep me there often. First because they loved me a lot, because I was their first male grandchild, and second because my parents were shepherds and they had no time to devote any attention to me. In 1913, I started school for the first time. The school was in another village, in Kryoneri, about an hour and half each direction by walking. In other words, we had to walk three hours a day to attend school. This was for several months in the Fall and in the Spring. In the Winter our village population decreased so for school we went to the village of Elliniko, which was three hours walking distance each direction. Because we could not travel back and forth daily, we were forced to stay overnight in people's houses at Elliniko. We went on Monday and returned on Saturday. The only thing that was good was the teacher. He was good for the good students, but very hard for the weak students.

The whole school was in one room for four grades and had about 70 to 80 students. I passed all four grades successfully. When I finished that school my father was in America and my grandfather Panagiotis wanted me to continue, so he sent me to Nestani where there was a school that had the 5th Grade. The 5th and 6th grades made up the «Elliniko» school. which was the equivalent of Junior High then. After that you had to attend the Gymnasium which was the equivalent of High School. But at about that time, bad fortune struck and my sister and grandmother died due to the Great Epidemic, so I had to follow the family tradition and take over as a shepherd and a farmer, and so I gave up school after the 4th Grade.

A year later, at the end of 1919, my uncle, my father's brother, came back from America but an accident kept my father behind. In 1920, my grandfather and uncle decided to leave the village and move all of us with them. We move to Kefalari, near Argos, where they bought some land at a place called Magoula and thus in 1921 we settled permanently in Kefalari. We abandoned the land of our ancestors like many of the other villagers and

eventually our historic village was left with a few visitors who go there mostly in the summer.

After we were settled in Kefalari in 1922, my father came from America, as I stated earlier. He found us in Kefalari, his wife and his two children. We were overjoyed that God finally brought us all together, especially my younger brother who met father for first time, since he was born after father had left. But fate had other plans for us and our happiness was to last only 15 months, and that time was very turbulent. On the 15 of August in the year of his arrival, the Greek army was defeated in Asia Minor and over a million refugees poured into Greece. Conditions in Greece became horrible. Some army officers revolted and declared a revolutionary government with emergency powers. On August 29, 1923, I lost my father and on the 11th of September my grandfather. He was the man who raised us, who was father and grandfather because we only had a father for 15 months.

The Old Tinner or Panagiotis Sotiropoulos, adoptive father of two families of the brothers of Trifon and Eleftherios Sverkos, having fulfilled his duties to the fullest, honorably, and beyond reasonable expectations, died without leaving behind any biological children but only very loving step children and grandchildren. As his adopted descendants, it is our duty to never forget him.

After father died, I was left with my mother and my younger brother, living with our uncle's family, and the uncle was more self-centered than I could bear. Our days there were unpleasant because our uncle always complained about us.

After three years, on November 15, I was drafted by the army and appeared in Nafplio, at the 8th Infantry Division, 1st Battery. But, as head of a household I only served 6 months. However, a new misfortune was in store for us. On the 13th of February 1927 my brother died of purulent meningitis. I was still in the army, my poor mother totally alone after so many misfortunes, having lost three children and her husband, and now I was the only one in her life she could lean on. Every week, she tried to visit me near the barracks and tell me bad things about my uncle who always found something to complain about.

On May 20, 1927, I was released from the army, and came home to find my mother alone and terribly upset. Being alone, she came up with a proposal for me to marry and bring a bride into our home. So on September 5 she engaged me to a girl from Agiorgitika

near Tripoli, the daughter of Vasilis Kapogiannis. Her name was Katerina and we got married on October 2, 1927.

I decided that we had to live apart from my uncle's family, as it was also very much my mother's wish. And after 12 months and 12 days, on 14 October 1928, we had our first child, a girl and we gave her the name Eleni. Mother was very happy, even if the first one was a girl.

In 1929, I built my own house and from then on I stayed there permanently, but fate did not allow us to enjoy our happiness. On September 12, 1930, our little girl fell off the carriage and hit her head, which caused internal bleeding in the brain. This caused partial paralysis for the rest of her life, even though I took her to many doctors, they were unable to cure her.

On December 27, 1930, we have our second child, a boy, and we named him Eleftherios as we will write more about him later, but he was visited by misfortune as well as were his parents.

Life was fairly normal with our farming and the animals and the horses and cattle, we had achieved a good standard of living and we were a loving family. On February 18, 1933, we had our third child, a girl and we named her Yannoula. After three years, on 15 February 1936, we had our fourth child, a boy and named him Dionysios.

Then we get another misfortune in the family. My first cousin accidentally shot with a gun our son, Lefteris, on 14 November 1937. I took him to Athens. He was shot in the left eye and the lead shot had penetrated into the brain. The boy was alive and lasted for 25 days. The doctors tried everything but it was impossible. He died on December 12.

On January 5, 1940, we had our fifth child and we named him Eleftherios again, the same as the child who died.

On August 28, 1940, Italy declared war on our country. Greece rose up in a general mobilization, and we gave our horses right away to be used for the country's needs. Under the leadership of Ioannis Metaxas as premier, King George II, and Alexander Papagos as head of the military, the country fought back and not only repulsed the Italians from the Greek territory, it captured territory from the Italians making them look very foolish. On

January 25, 1941, my age group was called up but having four children at home I was released. On April 6, 1941, Germany attacked Greece which now had to fight off two empires with thousands of tanks and aircraft. In the end, Greece could not endure and gave in, but the battle continued on in Crete for another month before the whole of Greece fell to the fascist powers. The occupation caused a lot of disruption in the economy and brought on hunger, especially in the urban areas. People were dying off on the streets. Fortunately for us, because we produced our own food, we did not go hungry but were able to feed others who were less fortunate.



Konstantinos Sverkos and Wife

On April 21, 1943, we had our sixth and last child, a boy and we named him Panagiotis. The following September, the occupying Germans left Greece because they saw that they were losing the war. The Resistance fighters, mostly leftists, came into the towns and caused a lot of reprisals. In some places there was civil strife but the authorities in Argos gave in without a fight because they realized the fight would be too bloody and useless. I think that was wise because with the arms they had any resistance was hopeless. Nafplio resisted for a while but in the end it capitulated. In December of the same year, Athens had a huge civil war. It is too complicated to describe, but it is part of the sad history of Greece. The only thing I can say is that after that, cooler heads prevailed and an agreement was reached so that Greece formed a unified government, although a bloody Civil War followed.

On December 27, 1946, my mother died at the age of 61. She was Eleni Sverkos, a daughter, honorable and loved by her parents, loving wife and loved by her in-laws, and her daughter-in-law, peace-maker in the family, loved by her husband and respected by society.

It would have been three years and three days on the 24th of September, Saturday, when the worst misfortune visited my family. In an accident, the carriage overturned and my wife was killed leaving me with five orphaned kids. Now I was in great despair. I felt, since I lost my wife I lost myself and all my family. It is not because I was faint-hearted that I was desperate, but she was not just my wife, she was my counselor, my helper in my work and my family management. We were two people, one thought and she got along well with her mother-in-law, her husband, her children and was socially well loved by everyone. Seeing that I could not protect and raise the children alone by myself, I decided to marry for a second time for the good of the children.

On the 16th of February 1950, I married Vasiliki from the village of Sagga, near Tripoli, and we started organizing the household, trying not to have the second wife feel that these children were not part of the family. She loved them and protected them as though they were hers, especially since she never gave birth to any of her own. And of course, I never forgot my first wife with whom I lived 22 loving years together, and will never forget as long as I am alive. The same goes for my second wife. There was no distinction inside the house, even the sisters of my first wife visited our home often and considered Vasiliki like a sister and the mother of the children.

In 1953, we had a family meeting and decided to marry off the second daughter, Yannoula, since as we said before the first one was disabled for life. The wedding was in April of 1953, and the groom was a young man from Argos by the name of Georgios M. Spyropoulos. A few months later he volunteered in the Air Force and on the 27th of February he was admitted as a junior officer and served for 27 months.

Several years went by after the early misfortunes and times of mourning were replaced with more tranquil events, such as watching the children grow and praying to God that evil will stay away from your family and the future of your children will be better than yours. But fate has its plans and always watches over you, and as the years pass, and of course aging tips the scales against you.

In 1960, the oldest son decided to immigrate, and not wanting to thwart his decision and upset him, I did not dissuade him but I let him try his luck. He left on March 11, 1961, by plane for Australia. A few months later, on July 15, 1961, the other son, Lefteris, was drafted by the army. I tried and got him two years deferment for him so that way I could keep him for a while. In 1962, the youngest son Panagiotis wrote to the oldest in Australia and asked him for an invitation so he could go to Australia. Truth be told, I did not want him to go but I saw he insisted so I let him and he left on 24 December 1962, by boat for Australia.

Now I was left with one disabled kid and my wife. Seeing my big mistake that my family was dispersed and my kids were gone, the joy in my house was gone too. My heart tightened and I prayed to God that we keep things as they are and be thankful for that. We were few, but fate had other plans for us and hit us hard again. In 1963, the deferment for Lefteris ended and he appeared for service in Tripolis. I tried hard to extend the deferment to no avail. Depression spread throughout the house. My wife was hit hard, thinking that she lost all the children forever, in a month she fell sick. We went to one or two doctors, they could not diagnose the problem, despite the drugs and the shots her condition got worse.

On January 4, we to a new doctor who diagnosed the problem as an incurable disease. He recommended we go to Athens for more tests. In three days we were in Athens more tests were performed, we consulted various professors who diagnosed it as tumor in the lung, in other words, lung cancer, inoperable, the only thing we can do is radiation. We admitted her to the hospital, even though there was little hope for cure but we had to do the best and sacrifice all we had. There is a popular saying, «One who drowns, grabs his own hair and holds on.» That's what we did.

At home we had somebody take care of the disabled girl, because being at the hospital I was not much at home. It occurred to me to marry the son off, even though he was still in the army. After some treatments, we came home and had the boy come visit us. Since we knew the wife was about to die, the three of us decided it was best to bring a girl in the house as the wife of our son. We arranged for the daughter of my brother-in-law, Dimitri Mavrogiannis, her name was Katina. The wedding was on the 17th of May 1964, and he was still a soldier in Corinth but was able to take frequent leaves.

In June we went back to Athens for treatments and we did that back-and-forth for about a year until she died on May 20, 1965, when I lost my second wife and was left alone and desperate one more time.

The woman who died was a worthy, very worthy, and did her best to the very end. She raised five orphans better than if they were her own children, and her last word was «I am sorry that I did not see the boys who have immigrated and are far away. Forgive me for that.» That was her last breath.

My situation now was desperate. I was extremely depressed and unable to continue living. It took me long to get my bearings again. My guide was my faith in God and the Holy Trinity.

On the 20th of July 1965, Lefteris and his wife had their first child, a girl and named her Vasiliki to honor the memory of my second wife. In September of 1965, my son Dionysis invited me to go to Australia for a visit and by November 17 all my documents were prepared for the trip. On February 15, 1966, I left by boat from Piraeus with the Italian ship SYDNEY. The first port we stopped at was Port Said in Suez. Then we passed through the Red Sea and the second port was Aden. Leaving Aden, we went through the Indian Ocean and after four good days, we had eight days of very rough seas.

We arrived at the first port of Australia, Freemantle near Perth, then, even though we went along the shore, there were rough seas until we got to Melbourne, which is the second biggest city of Australia in population. From there we came to Sydney on the 13th of March after 26 days of travel. For me, traveling for the first time of my life by sea, it was an achievement but I did not become too much sea sick. There were, of course, my children waiting for me. I went to many places and saw many things, people from all parts of the world, many people from our part of the country and other parts of Greece, relatives and old friends.

I stayed there almost nine months and on the 3rd of December 1966 I departed from Australia, leaving Sydney, and did the same trip backwards, again with a lot of rough seas. The boat this was Greek called PATRIS and did one more stop at Colombo, Ceylon, before going to Aden. We arrived at Piraeus on the 28th of December after 24 days on the boat.

Immediately I left for Argos with my son and my daughter who were waiting for me in Piraeus.

Up to here is the story of my life. As the popular saying goes, «What is passed is gone, what is coming can be bad.» After two months, Lefteris and his wife had their second child on May 10, 1968, and named him Konstantinos, in my honor.

Since I got back to Greece I thought of the years that have passed and thought it would be prudent to leave somebody in charge of the property here. I left the son who is here in charge of what I have here since the other two boys have immigrated abroad. The son here has a family and has to be in control by himself.

A Final Wish to My Dear Descendants

I wrote this book as a kind of a bible to record the history of our ancestors who started out our family after the long struggle between 1821 and 1830 and the liberation of our country when it was finally recognized as a nation with the name of ELLAS.

And my desire is that you keep it as a kind of a family heirloom. What more should one know better than his or her family roots? Whether one started out from a poor and humble beginning is immaterial because fate determines where the overall plan of one's path. Whoever likes it and keeps it, that person then may continue to add to it the additions to the family, and if there are name changes along the way, it does not matter. The only thing I think that is important is to love and keep three ideals: Family, Religion and Country⁶. Even if you are in a foreign land, do not forget the importance of Family.

Family: Many times I think where a human begins and how he progresses and how his end comes. How many generations have passed without us knowing what happened to those roots. I humbly bend and kiss the ground and say to myself somewhere here is the root of my Family Tree: My Father, my Grandfather, my Great Grandfather, etc. They are now on the ground below where one day I will join them. They were the roots and the trunk of the Tree and we are now its small branches.

The Greek family holds a front seat among the world's nations and it must preserve its respectable position because the first civilization and the first family was given by the Greeks to the world. I remember the days when large families had the father and children and grandchildren and lived all together with love. That is how our family lived for 42 years from 1887 and split up from my uncle in 1929. We had my Grandfather, my Grandmother, their children, us, the grandchildren, all together, it was wonderful. Grandfather, even though he was a stepfather, he managed everything fairly, with love, and without any favoritism. I think of that time and see what is happening nowadays. When a child marries, leaves the family right away because the daughter-in-law does not like the father-in-law or the mother-in-law or the brother-in-law, etc. You see many couples separating for minor differences and that is what makes us the older generation to become very sad and to

⁶ This was the motto of the Military Junta that was in charge in Greece between 1967 and 1974. Most of the rural areas of Greece were in support of the Junta so this is pretty much influenced by the philosophy of that period.

sound the alarm. Do not break up the family. There is need for more love and respect for the family.

Religion: Religion is a station in the life of Humanity, it is what holds the Humans from the road of destruction that evil leads to in this temporary and short life in this world. Humans without religion are no different than wild horses without restraints, vehicles without steering wheels, or ships without rudders. Without these restraints, then all it will lead to destruction. If a human does not have the rudder of religion, it will lead to destructive sin. Religion, the Law that God gave us through Moses and asks us to have love for God, for parents, for our neighbors. Do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, etc, and in general do not do to your fellow human what you do want done to yourself. Therefore, God does not want you to do big sacrifices which are difficult to do, but only asks you for love, which is always abundant. The Greek Orthodox belief is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity Consubstantial and Indivisible. And we have heard even today from the Mother of God and the Saints so many miracles, besides the ones that our Lord Jesus Christ did, miracles, which occur only when there is real faith. As the only guide we should have the Cross of our Lord whose blood washes away the sins of Humanity. Always walk with the Gospel and the Holy Bible. Faith and Love in the Orthodox Christian Faith.

Country: After Family and Religion comes Country and we must love it with all our power, especially our country which is called ELLAS. It is the most ancient, the most heroic and first in civilization. Victor Hugo, the great writer, said in a conference, «Do not forget the Mother of Civilization is Hellas and that all of us are her daughters.» Here is where civilization was born and we see it in her ancient monuments all over the Greek landscape. The Athletic Games were born here and we see all the stadiums and statues of athletes. The Greek art is what attracts people from all parts of the world who come to admire it. Here is where rhetoric and philosophy were born and we read about the great masters who invented these. The ancient Greeks loved religion and we see that in all the statues of gods that they worshipped and all the temples. This is the land where love of country was born. Many sacrificed their life to save their country, including kings and generals as well and simple soldiers. As we know from tradition and read in history books, the first king of Athens, Kodros, sacrificed his life to keep the barbarians out of his country. The Spartan king Leonidas and his 300 companions died at Thermopylai, Kynegiros died at Marathon and

so many others. And then there is Konstantinos Palaiologos who fought to the death at Constantinople, and in later years others died against the Venetians and the Franks and the Turks. How many thousands died in the defense of their country? We must realize that the soil of Greece is soaked with blood and bones of Greeks are buried everywhere. The country is a large cemetery with monuments to heroes, our forefathers, so today we can find our country free. Our duty is to keep it free, and if need be, we have to sacrifice our life for it just like our forefathers.

If we look at the World Map to find Greece, it is only a small dot as big as the head of a pin. It is very small and just a piece of rock from our whole planet. But its history is very large and covers bigger areas than those of what today are called Big Powers. Now, if we ask where are Greeks around the world, the answer is, wherever are people you will find Greeks, not just today, but from ancient times you will see Greek ruins that prove they were there.

That is why I dare say that from ancient times till today Greece has made very significant contributions to this world, and historically and culturally is very large, and that is why we must love it.

I have written earlier above that we need to have more love and respect for the three ideals: Family, Religion, Country⁷.

Konstantinos E. Sverkos, 1968

⁷ This motto was drilled into the Greek people by the Junta of 1968-1974.