

Who I am

Hi, my name is Irene Soteres, and my family is from the part of Greece where legend says that Hercules fought monsters. Greece was worlds apart from Atlanta, Georgia, where I grew up, so most of my generation tried to forget about their culture. But in my family, we spoke Greek at home. My mother was my strongest woman role model, and she made sure that my sisters and I understood our language.

This instilled in me a strong sense of identity. After college, I went to Greece to teach English, and stayed for years. There, I marketed my Americanness. I grew as a woman, and I finally felt like I belonged somewhere. I was complete in knowing who I was, and my language was a portal to that. When I had my own children, I knew that they would be fully bilingual as well.

I wanted to give that to other people too.

The place where I belong?

My younger sister, a Greek teacher, remained in Atlanta. We stayed in touch through weekly phone calls, which often centered on teaching Greek. She often complained about the lack of resources. That got me thinking: Why do we teach language so out of context? Why do we tell kids to memorize isolated vocabulary words? Who cares if they can say "carrot?"

Eventually, I revisited the legend of Hercules, and realized I could adapt the story into a fun electronic game which could teach both the language and the culture. I could gamify Greek!

In 2017, I arrived in Georgia again, and started teaching Greek at the Atlanta International School. There, I emphasized my Greekness: While there were now two Greek-language schools in Atlanta beside the International School itself, there were few modern resources for Greek speakers.

That year, having incorporated as Epikon LLC, I began introducing young students at all three of these schools to a game, which I developed, which depicts Hercules fighting the Hydra. They cut off its heads by matching parts of speech. Everybody loved it, and everybody wanted more. So did I.

Now, I've connected with a team of developers. Together, we are recreating the other 11 classic Hercules legends. Now, Greek-American children from the tablet generation are more excited to learn about their heritage than they ever were when they were sitting at a desk, with pencil and paper. I did for them what my mother did for me.

Empowering others

Even so, dozens of other languages face death as their younger generations are subjected to globalization, monoculturalism and all the other diseases of modernity.

Pull out your phone and check the app store. Most of the language apps are devoted only to languages that already have millions of speakers. Mandarin, Spanish, French, German. But I could do for rare languages, worldwide, exactly what I'm doing for Greek in Atlanta... help people to keep their heritage alive by gamifying their traditional legends. Why let kids forget their language, when you can reinforce it while they're young?

The Bottom Line

With your help, this could be a reality. If WomensNet awards Epikon the sum of \$10,000, it would fund most of either the coding or the animation of my proof-of-concept game series through the end of 2024, which would feature all twelve of the classic Hercules myths.

If we were awarded the additional \$25,000, WomensNet would cover both coding and animation straight through to the Greek project's completion. That way, when I connect with speakers of marginalized languages, I will be able to prove to them that my idea works... and it can be useful to them in preserving their own languages.