

Christina Lappas

In the small town of Krenti, Konstandinos and Vasiliki Lappas lived with their two sons: Dimitrios and Apostolos (my father). There they had a home, a farm, and each other. Eight years after my father was born an earthquake hit their village. Suddenly, the homes in the village were unsafe or destroyed; they were left with each other and their culture. Everyone in the village without safe housing lived temporarily in tents while other arrangements could be made. My father used to tell us because he was young and small that he had to sleep by the edge with the tent right above his nose. After several months in the tent, my papou built a small cabin to live in while he and yiayia debated the future of their family. About a year later, my papou decided change was necessary in order to get his family back on their feet after losing everything. The one idea that offered hope to my papou was that his brother -- Thanasi -- lived in Rogers Park, Illinois, all the way in the United States. Theo Thanasi offered to sponsor his older brother and his family. They were about to embark on the journey of their lives, leaving behind the only life they ever knew in exchange for "The American Dream."

My dad arrived with his family in the United States instantly recognizing the pivotal differences between Krenti and Rogers Park. There were toilets inside the houses instead of outhouses, electricity instead of kerosene lamps, and the English language. Moving halfway across the world is hard enough, but not being able to understand the language or customs is formidable. My papou took a job as a busboy at Johnny's Steakhouse with his brother, and yiayia worked at Hart, Schaffner & Marx as a seamstress. Although my father was only ten years old at the time, he too, took a job as a busboy.

By constantly working hard and seizing every opportunity they could, they were able to move out of Theo Thanasi's apartment and get an apartment of their own in the same building. It was small, so my dad had to sleep on the couch, but it was theirs. Not only were they in a position to afford their own place, but they were also able to save money in order to rebuild a home in the beloved hometown that they dearly missed. Their lifestyle in Rogers Park differed tremendously from life in Krenti, but the abundance of fellow Evrytanians they encountered along the way made a monumental impact. My father always said that his family drew great comfort from having so many people from his village in Greece living in his apartment building. He would tell me stories about picnics in the suburbs and family road trips to Virginia. As always, his family from Krenti remained supportive and close-knit.

My yiayia and papou were presenting their sons with the opportunity of a lifetime: education and possibilities. Life in the United States was intended to set up my father and my theo with new opportunities and successes. After almost 20 years of living here, my father and theo had settled into their lives here and were thriving, meaning the time had come where my yiayia and papou decided they could move back home. My papou returned to build a house -- breaking the stone and constructing it himself -- in which he still lives to this day. From the example set by their parents, my father was left with the understanding that hard work pays off. Fortunately, that lesson has been passed down another generation to me and my brothers.

I learned from my father the lesson of what being an Evrytanian means, which is something he in turn learned from his parents, my yiayia and papou. Being an Evrytanian, this mindset is shared amongst each other. This intimate culture instills the beliefs, traditions, and values of Greece. Throughout the years there are a variety of events my family celebrates in which customary Greek food is prepared. The number of people you encounter at these events is never-ending: family, friends, friends of family, cousins. Over the years, event after event, these people are all part of one connected family. Collectively we share in the values our families have introduced to us, expanding our culture even more. Day by day, I attempt to live with my head held high knowing I'm an Evrytanian. My ancestors have taught me to understand the importance of having a strong work ethic, and for that, I am forever thankful.

Although sometimes it can be challenging to duplicate the Greek lifestyle outside of Greece or the village, my parents and family have taught me important core values. The Greek family and friends that I have met along the way have made it seem like there's a little piece of Greece right here in Illinois. Although living in Lincolnwood does not compare to living in Krenti like my father, I am able to practice the same beliefs with the people I love.

When my father and his family immigrated to the United States in 1966, the American Dream was only but a thought in the minds of the Lappas family. 53 years later, the American Dream has been turned into a reality. The unfortunate incident of the earthquake had ironically opened doors for generations to come; it turned an adverse situation into the creation of a bright and promising future. While my papou still resides in Greece, my father, and my theo have been able to accomplish a great deal in their time here. They have shared the teachings of how to carry on the life of a proud Evrytanian while handing down their stories and Evrytanian values to a new generation; preserving memories and always moving into the future.

