Most of the early immigrants who came to this country during the early years of the 20th century are no longer with us. The sons and daughters of those first immigrants to the United States are also fast disappearing. Amongst her siblings and friends of that second generation, my dear mother, who just turned 91, remains one of the last survivors. To preserve our heritage, the children of the hardy early immigrants must tell of the challenges and triumphs they and their parents faced: poverty, hard work, prejudice, clinging to their Greek identity in the “xenitia” (strange land). In this issue we have included several books that speak of the immigrant experience, as witnessed through the eyes and ears, tears and laughter of immigrant’s children and grandchildren.

Dr. James Roman harkens back to his own life experience in “Underwater Dreams.” His family felt isolated as the only Greek family in Tomahawk, a small town in northern Wisconsin. He says, “I wanted to create a realistic picture in your mind of what life might have been like for these other people who found themselves in the middle of nowhere, who were complete strangers at the time, looked down upon as immigrants, nobody to comfort them.”

Also based on his family’s experiences is Jason Mavrovitis’ “Remember Us,” a story of Greek refugees from Bulgaria who immigrated to America to escape unending war and hardship. This fictionalized account of the life of his maternal grandparents and their family, including his own parents, takes place from 1886 to 1936. “The Priest Fainted” is another novel informed by the personal experience of the author, Catherine Tenma Davidson, a third-generation Greek American. A nationally recognized writer, Davidson crafts a narrator in passionate pursuit of her mother and grandmother’s pasts. The narrator’s journey to Greece, the birthplace of her grandmother, extracts bits and pieces of these pasts, while offering insights on the meaning of ethnicity.

Theodore Stamos, son of immigrants, is profiled in “Eyes on Stamos” by his sister Georgianna Stametelos Savas. Young Theodore Stamos’ artistic talents drew the admiration of luminaries such as Mark Rothko, William de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. Savas tells of their growing up in Manhattan, of his talent and success, of his bitter disappointments at the end of his life. Taking a lighter note, Harry “Bud” George infuses his memoir, “By George,” with humorous incidents. He gives a lively account of the Greek community of Baltimore, Maryland, as well as his experiences as a naval officer and lawyer. He says, “I’ve tried to capture my fondest memories of a happy life punctuated by special people and amusing predicaments in which I found myself.”

We look forward to reviewing more books about Greece, from romance to tragedy. Love blooms between a modest village girl and a worldly ship magnate’s son in Patty Apostolides’ “Lipsi’s Daughter.”

The book “Mythology” by Lady Hestia Evans and editor Dougald Steer spins stirring stories of mythological heroes and villains. It contains lively illustrations, guides, foldout map, as well as a quill pen. Susanna Hoffman features huge servings of Greece’s history and culture, as well as delicious recipes in her book, “The Olive and the Caper.” This book about food stands in stark contrast to Violetta Hionidou’s “Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941-1944,” which pictures gaunt, starving children on the cover. Hionidou gives us facts and figures as well as stories about this terrible tragedy – a tragedy which should never be forgotten.

We look forward to reviewing other books about Greece or Greek Americans. Please send your English language books, whether fiction, memoirs, history, essays, poetry or translation, to The National Herald, 37-10 30th Street, Long Island City, NY 11101 for possible inclusion in a future issue of “Books.”
Greek Education, Greek Civilization and Omogeneia

It is the content of these words that I would like to convey to the readers of the “National Herald” now reading this booklet beautifully prepared by the only Greek-American newspaper circulating all over the United States in both Greek and English. The content of these words simply mean: Hellas.

**It’s all about Education.** This is the motto of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Hellas that encompasses our philosophy. For without education, without “paideia”, Hellas that we all know today, and are proud to say that we come from, would have ceased to exist a long time ago, as it happened to so many other peoples in history.

The main reason of the survival of the Hellenes throughout history is our “paideia”, in essence our civilization. For the two are inseparable, they have always been. Since antiquity, Hellas has been enchanting the world with its philosophers, their deep and analytical thought on every aspect of human life, with the progress of its people in all sciences and, above it all, with Democracy. Throughout the centuries, the Hellenic “Paideia” was the paradigm of every civilization. From the Renaissance times onward, the marriage between Christianity and Hellenism became the very foundation of what we know today as “Western civilization”. We can now understand why Hellenic “paideia” is so important for the whole world, as it lays in the foundations of our Western civilization.

We, Hellenes, are proud carriers of this “paideia”. And the Greek-Americans, Americans of Hellenic descend, really, should be proud to come from Hellas, to be carriers of such an important civilization that radiates civility and spirit throughout the world.

The Hellenic Government feels compelled to continue this legacy both in Hellas and wherever our fellow countrymen live around the world. Particularly in the United States, I am proud to inform that we send more than 170 teachers every year to teach Greek to the children of the omogeneia and gladly contribute more than 10 million dollars for the “Paideia” of the Greek-Americans.

My deep wish and strong advice to all of you is to maintain your bonds with Hellas at all costs, throughout your life; and the only way to maintain this umbilical cord with the land of your ancestors is through learning and speaking the Greek language. For the loss of it would mean the loss of your identity in this vast American land, where other nationalities strive to find their own roots.

And you have yours, your Hellenic roots. Be proud of your roots!

Evripidis Stylianidis
Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs
Loneliness, Tragedy and Love: A Greek American’s Path from the Wisconsin Woods

Dr. James Rouman, a retired anesthesiologist, was born in upper Wisconsin to parents who emigrated from a small village in the Peloponnese, Kata沃ra. His first novel, “Underwater Dreams,” deals with the life of an anesthesiologist born in northern Wisconsin to parents who originally came from a town in the southern Peloponnese, Kata沃ra. It’s quickly clear Roman’s fiction may be closer to autobiography.

He admitted as much when I spoke to him recently from his present home in Hartford, Connecticut. He spoke with a slow and gracious manner. His vocabulary sounded to me as that of a writer, speaking with accomplishment and precision.

“Underwater Dreams” tells the story of the son of two young newlyweds, Christos and Sula. They cross the ocean to America and travel by rail to Eagle Creek, Wisconsin, an area not only geographically remote, but for Christos and Sula, spiritually remote as well. With only a brief introduction, the reader is quickly drawn into the thoughts and emotions of this young couple whose lives are radically shaped by their arranged marriage and relocation. As they learn of one another, they learn more of themselves and the strange new lives they’ve been lead to live.

“I felt I could educate a non-Greek into understanding with a little more insight one area of the Hellenic Diaspora that may not have occurred to them in the past. Let’s face it, you can go for history to Halsted Street in Chicago to the restaurants, and you’re probably aware they’re creating a Hellenic Museum in the urban area there. But I wanted to create a realistic picture in your mind of what life might have been like for these other people who found themselves in the middle of nowhere, who were complete strangers at the time, looked down upon as immigrants, nobody to comfort them.”

The parents of the character Leo Sarris immigrate to the middle of nowhere, a remote deep woods area in northern Wisconsin. Clearly based on Rouman’s experience in the town of Tomahawk, Wisconsin, he remembers the feeling of separateness, and speaks on it quickly, a topic he’s weighed at length.

“One of the reasons I wanted to write this book was because I wanted to talk a little bit about a group of Greeks that have always been ignored in terms of the larger media. My book dwells on a group of people who are not usually talked about. This was a cohort of isolated people out in the Midwest who raised families without the support groups of churches and organizations. Yet they somehow managed in spite of all to maintain their language and continue with the culture and heritage and try to pass it on to their kids.

“In my case for example, it was quite extraordinary that we were the only Greek family in our community. There were no Italians; there were no Negroes. If there was a minority living amongst the Scandinavians, Germans and French Canadians in northern Wisconsin, we were it. And growing up as kids we did get derogatory comments.”

Rouman is the second of three brothers. Home schooled in Greek reading and writing by his parents, there was some initial difficulty with English during the early public school years. Once begun, Rouman labored hard to catch up with his fellow students. “We knew we had to excel in everything we did. This was not taught to us by our parents. They didn’t say, “Look, you’ve got to be better than the other kids.” We just knew it; we had to be better in terms of our achievements.”

The isolation of the area also tempered the spiritual life of the Roman family. “My father used to import the Greek priest four times a year from an Orthodox church 150 miles away, and he held services at our dining room table. In our family house there were three baptisms, and I don’t know how many liturgies and even a wedding ceremony. We had no church. I did go to the Episcopal Church; I was an altar boy. I learned to pray with the Book of Common Prayer of 1928. But, we still didn’t participate fully; we were still Greek Orthodox. At that time, the Greek archbishop, recognizing there were isolated people out in the boondocks, allowed us to get our religious instruction from the Anglican Episcopal Church. It was a very different situation from the Greeks who grew up in Chicago and other eastern cities with large communities. We strove to preserve our traditions and our faith.”

Although the novel begins with the story of Christos and Soulou, there is a shift with the birth of their second son, Leonidas. While his parents will reappear later in the novel, we now become rapidly immersed in the life of Leo Sarris. This quick jump from one set of characters to a solitary man effectively generates a feeling of abandonment. Again Christos and Sula are left on their own. Isolation, loneliness and abandonment resurface throughout the book, yet are conveyed in a more somber, introspective tone of each character’s emotional analysis rather than merely illustrating them in despair. The sense of being not only a minority, but a minority in isolation seems to play out as a main theme throughout “Underwater Dreams.” Loneliness pervades much of the early life of main character Leo Sarris. Even after he seems to find a partner, Sarris has difficulty discerning the true nature of the connection of relationships. He spends much time trying to interpret what it means to be with someone, and how it relates to being alone. Even as part of what becomes a defined couple, the characters recognize and share their apathy, always sustaining a degree of isolation.

Rouman has drawn a great deal on his personal life for the book, not only professionally as he addresses the nature of anesthesiology, but also as he deals with personal relationships. “I wanted to tell the story of this nurse who was a dear friend of mine. Martha was a real gal, an extraordinary person. Dr. James Rouman was born in Tomahawk, Wisconsin. He enlisted in the navy during World War II. After receiving undergraduate and medical degrees from Northwestern University, he became an anesthesiologist and practiced at a major urban tertiary-care center, where he was a committed teacher of medical students and physicians entering the field of anesthesiology. The author is now retired and lives in Hartford, Connecticut.

“Underwater Dreams” is his first novel.

We shared a relationship much like in the book.”

The bond established during a long stint at a Boston hospital between Sarris and his colleague, Martha Ravitch, forms a grand inner core to the book. We are treated to the slow unfolding of a friendship blossoming into an intimacy with a rare pacing and honesty of note. The fact they sustain their lives as intelligent and respectful individuals lends credence to the value of the bond, though the pair never truly seem to form a true union. Much of the remainder of the book deals with Leo and Martha and their extended families. Intimacy is sustained through an extended interlude between the couple as they discuss Mahler and Mann’s “Death in Venice,” a conversation reflecting the somber notes in their lives. As the two converse, they reveal themselves to be more than fictive. Leo and Martha are truly real characters with great depth of spirit.

The discussion of the Mann book is no surprise. Each of Rouman’s chapters is introduced...
with a brief quote from classical writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Virgil and not surprisingly Hippocrates. Perhaps based on his early home schooling in Greek classics, Rouman is obviously well read. "Books have been very important in my life. I was only slightly drawn to the computer. I tried to write a book many years ago on the typewriter and it became a real mess when I started correcting. Finally when I couldn't buy a ribbon, I went to word processing. When I realized how easy it was, that's when I said I'm going to do what I always wanted to do, write a book. It was the computer that permitted me to do it, but I'm still surrounded by books, and I love them. There's a lot we can learn by reading the classics."

Beyond the classics, he also enjoys more modern authors. "I've read everything by Kazantzakis. There's a tremendous amount of poetry coming out of Greece today. Nicholas Papandreou is one that comes to mind. He writes novels, and he's also writing poetry, both in Greek and in English."

Rouman wondered about the nature and quality of his writing, but it's clear by his own comments he's studied not only writing but also plot mechanics. "I think my writing is a little old fashioned, not part of the modern ethos. Even at the ending of the book I used a device that's not original to me, with many of the characters coming back. What I had in mind is the Greek Orthodox church and the depiction of the Mother of God, the icon depiction of Her as she's lying in her bier, and all the Greek people who had influenced her have come back to be with her as she expires. I thought that's kind of neat. As a physician we know that as people die their brain oxygen diminishes gradually, their senses begin failing." Rouman achieves a similar effect in the book, almost as if the character enters an underground cave.

I was pleased to learn Rouman continues to write. "My next one's going to be a bit of a more comical thing, lighter in tone. I had to get the first one out of my system, but now I can be a little bit more creative." His next work will also encompass a variety of characters, based within a high-rise condominium similar to where he now resides.

We spoke of the female characters in Leo Sarris' life. I found I enjoyed meeting each one in the book, each presented fully developed, especially so for a male author. Rouman recognizes their contribution. "Much of the book is about women, very strong women and very unusual ones. I think the story I tried to tell just encompassed them. I tried to develop each one of them. And they each did something, going from here to there. They weren't just mentioned but were integrally woven into the whole combined plot."

While reading "Underwater Dreams" I felt I had to search for Leo Sarris' tragic flaw, even though Rouman may not have intended one. Ultimately he agreed the book is more tragic than tragedy. In Leo Sarris, I found a man who managed to care so deeply for others around him, he came to lose the ability to care for himself. Apparently crying out for the need for community, Sarris abandoned himself. The qualities of Dr. Sarris stand as an example of the depth of the nature of each of the characters in the story, all of whom sustain this novel. Even though Rouman told me he felt his book was driven more by plot than by character, in the end, it is the characters in "Underwater Dreams," and the depth of their feelings for one another, that remain in my head and heart. I suspect they'll be there for a long time.

Robert Krause works in two public libraries as an assistant librarian. He reads and writes in Lake County, Illinois.
Jason Mavrovitis Traces His Roots From Soyzoplis, 1881 to Brooklyn, 1936

Remember Us
By Jason C Mavrovitis
Golden Fleece Publications, 409 pages, $21.95, paperback

By Dan Georgakas
Special to The National Herald

Nearly all first novels have considerable direct or indirect autobiographical content. In the case of “Remember Us,” American-born Jason Mavrovitis has written that his novel is based on the lives of his maternal grandmother and her family, including his own mother and father. He states that as a child he was puzzled that his parents had no wedding photos. Later he learned there was a family scandal involved in their marriage that had reached the pages of the New York Times. As he became aware of the richness of the oral histories, actual events, court transcripts and various public records related to his family, Mavrovitis decided to present his family saga in the form of factually-based fiction. Much of the resulting novel’s power and many of its flaws stem from this remarkable melding of fact and fiction. An unanticipated consequence of his exploration of the pathways that had brought his family to America, was that Mavrovitis, who had always wanted to be considered American-born, chose to call his novel “Remember Us” and allow his parents to become relevant figures in the novel.

“Remember Us” begins on the shores of Black Sea villages inhabited by Greeks and Slavs. Numerous families have mixed lineages. Although the Slavic line sometimes dominates, the novel spotlights families where Greek identity is paramount. Local relations between the two groups are cordial. Men reminisce about battles in which they jointly fought against Ottoman forces. But there is a gathering tension in the air. What will happen to the Greeks when Bulgaria asserts political control of the region?

At first “Remember Us” seems to have a political agenda. What country takes what piece of territory? How will the struggle between the Bulgarian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox forces come out? What hand will the Ottomans play even as they fade away? But these political issues are mainly viewed from the perspective of individual families. A Greek girl marries a Bulgarian boy whom she truly loves. Both set of parents approve. In which community will the couple want to live when ethnic rioting seems probable? Where will they be allowed to live? A Greek patriarch has Slave roots in his family tree. Does this make him suspect to other Greeks? Should a young Greek patriot leave his village to fight on the front lines with the Greek army or should he remain to confront local problems? How do Greeks deal with Cretan guerilla fighters who show up on the edge of the village and rouse the wrath of the Ottomans with their attacks? Can the local Bishop get away with pretending to obey the “Turks while secretly leading the rebels?” As such questions play out, some of the Greeks begin to speak of “going to America” as the only permanent solution to their woes.

A fourth of the way into the novel, the reader is transported to California and introduced to a young Italian named Leonardo whose home has been destroyed by an earthquake. Leonardo will embark for America where his life eventually will merge with Greeks who emigrate from Bulgaria. Rather than fighting for ethnic turf, this set of immigrants largely cooperate with one another, often intermarry and grow prosperous in tandem. The more the story moves into 20th century America, the stronger this pattern becomes, eventually extending to the marriage of a Greek Christian with an Ashkenazi Jew. In this regard Mavrovitis is in tune with historians who are increasingly writing that although there were numerous conflicts between immigrants, more often there was recognition of similar problems and social compatibility. Rather than xenophobia, Mavrovitis shows that the Greeks usually exhibited what I have termed xenophilia.

The family lines eventually become so complex that Mavrovitis provides three pages of family trees to document the characters’ relationships to one another. This is especially crucial in this multi-generational epic, where following Greek custom the children are often named after grandparents. Thus, identical names become common. Toward the end of “Remember Us,” when there is a new cycle of marriages and births, one suspects the fictional and actual family trees have merged and that the author feels compelled to mention everyone’s marriage and offspring, making the novel unnecessarily dense.

Although “Remember Us” deals with one of the most volatile regions of Southeastern Europe during an extremely violent era, the novel does not deal substantively with the politics at hand. Major events always happen somewhere else and for the most part are talked about rather than experienced directly by the characters. Men in the kaffenia discuss politics almost abstractly. Political commitments are not truly embodied or well articulated by any of the characters. The conflict between the Bulgarian and Greek Churches, for example, is never clarified in an argument between proponents or by some dramatic event. Individuals speak of the possibility of retaking Constantinople, but the passion created by the Great Idea is never evident in any of the characters. Both Balkan wars pass quickly. The atrocities by all sides in those conflicts are only touched upon lightly. Where and why final boundaries are drawn and if they are valid are not a vital concern. The Disaster of 1922 creates barely a ripple. This political thinness stems with the author’s absorption in the details of a family saga. His chronicle may be set amid momentous historical events, but those events never resonate within the characters as they do in a classic like “War and Peace” or even a conventional best seller like “Gone with the Wind.”

Midway through “Remember Us,” the theme moves decisively from dealing with events in the Balkans to a “coming to America” story. Happiness and even physical survival for the characters seems possible only by fleeing the region, and those who flee to America are the most successful. This theme is not presented as a purdowyn of Greece so much as an appreciation of what America meant to the 1900-1924 generation of Greek emigrants. The opportunities available in the new world rather than its considerable hardships and injustices drive the narrative. The story becomes more conventional as hard work and strong family structures pave the way to economic success.

Mavrovitis employs so many Greek words in his story that he has felt it necessary to provide an eight-page glossary. The most common reason for using non-English words in English-language literature is to remind the readers that the characters are not speaking English with one another. Ernest Hemingway, for
one, was a master at using just a few words to establish a Spanish cultural context. Another valid but much less common reason to use a non-English word is that it conveys a meaning that is impossible to translate. Mavrovitis, unfortunately, shows no pattern in his use of Greek words. Especially in the chapters in America, one doesn’t know if the Greek words are being employed to

Continued on page 19

This 1924 photograph, taken in Glen Falls, New York, reflects the bond between Lily and her mother, Eleni. The story of Jason Mavrovitis’ maternal grandmother, Eleni, and her family became the basis for his novel “Remember Us.”

This 1910 photograph is of the family of Athanasios Mavrovitis, grandfather of Jason Mavrovitis. The children in the front row (from left to right) are Aristedes Mavrovitis and Thomas Mavrovitis. In the second row are Dimitrios Mavrovitis (Jimmy in the book, “Remember Us”), Zoe Mavrovitis (Athanasio’s sister), Athanasios Mavrovitis, Kalliope Mavrovitis (Athanasio’s wife). In the back row are Constantinos Mavrovitis (Jimmy’s older brother), Anastasia Mavrovitis (Athanasio’s daughter from his first marriage). Both Athanasios and Kalliope had lost their first spouse. The photo was taken in Mavrovo, a village on Lake Kastoria whose name is now Mavrohorion, probably to distinguish it from a village with the same name in the FYROM.
Gina Savas Remembers Brilliant Artist: Her Brother Theodore Stamos

Eyes on Stamos: A Sister's Memoir—A Brother's Wishes

By Georgianna Savas
Zacharias G. Portalaakis, S.A., 205 pages, $44.99 paperback

By Penelope Karageorge
Special to The National Herald

Towards the end of his tempestuous life devoted to creating brilliant art, Theodore Stamos’ younger sister, Georgianna (“Gina”) Savas urged him to write an autobiography. “I'll help you with your files. I'll contact people. I'll type,” Gina promised him. “I'll give you all the help you need.” Unfortunately Stamos, one of the world’s leading abstract expressionists, died in 1997 before writing even a paragraph. Now Gina has produced a beautiful “sisterography” of her late and much-beloved brother, “Eyes on Stamos.”

Gina’s book forms its own work of art. It’s a special repository of memory, poetry, occasional Zen-like insights (Stamos was deeply influenced by Eastern art), photographs and documents related to the life of Stamos.

Athen’s financier Zacharias G. Portalaakis, 61, the world’s foremost collector of Stamos and a loyal friend of the artist, published the book with a few caveats from the author. Gina refused to accept a euro or even a penny for the manuscript. She also insisted that the book not be for sale, because she did not want to profit from Stamos’ talent. “What can I say?” Gina says. “He was my brother.” Gina has already given away over 500 copies to friends and associates, as well as to the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center in Chicago, where it will be sold only as a fund-raising venture for the museum. Says Portalaakis, “We did it for Stamos.”

To appreciate the story behind the book, one must tune in to who Stamos was. Born Theodore Stamos in New York in 1922, “Stami,” as his mother called him, grew up in railroad flats on Manhattan’s East Side, one of six children. While working in his father Theodoros’ shoe shine and hat-blocking shop on St. Mark’s place, he also drew and painted. Early recognized for his talent, he would become simply “Stamos,” the youngest member of the famous, avant-garde group the “Irascibles,” the founding core of the New York school of painters that included Mark Rothko, William de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. Stamos was known as the “Wonder Boy.”

During a long career, Stamos’ artistic stature grew. His work was collected and shown in the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, nationally and internationally. Stamos continued to change artistically, his style moving from poetic “biomorphic paintings” to his “light boxes” and finally his dramatic Red Paintings.

But there were emotional upheavals. His companion, the poet Robert Price, died suddenly of a heart attack. During the difficult period that ensued, his close friend, the older artist Mark Rothko, a father figure, proved an emotional support. When Rothko suffered a painful separation from his wife, he turned to Stamos. On a morning visit to Rothko’s studio with a dealer, Stamos found Rothko lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Rothko had committed suicide by slitting his wrists. Stamos became so ill that he had to be hospitalized. But he loyally interfered the “homeless” Rothko in one of his own plots in East Merrimac on Long Island. A stone from Gina’s property marked the grave.

Rothko had named Stamos one of the three executors of his estate. In 1971, guardians acting on behalf of Rothko’s children filed a petition against Stamos and the executors. In 1975, Surrogate Millard A. Midonick ruled that Stamos and the other executors were guilty of negligence and conflict of interest, and levied a whopping $9.2 million in fines and assessments. Stamos paid his share by signing over to the Rothko estate his Manhattan house, valued at $425,000. Many believed the ruling was unjust and unfounded.

Writing in “The New Criterion” in 1973, John Bernard Myers, well-respected art critic and dealer who knew all the parties involved, mounted an in-depth defense of Stamos. Gina has included a reprint of the Myers article in her book. But Stamos never really recovered from the Rothko debacle, which dealt him an emotional and financial blow. He felt that his reputation in the United States was tarnished. Stamos began spending more of his time in Greece, on the island of Lefkada, birthplace of his father, keeping a small apartment in New York.

After Stamos’ death, Gina yeamed to tell her brother’s special story. “I felt all along, I’d like to write a book about him, but I thought, what am I going to write? How?” During a forced bureaucratic wait, Gina took out a piece of paper and began scribbling. “I thought, let me see if I can get started with a poem, and it came—it slowly came, the first stanza. And then I continued when I got home. It took me a month to write that poem. I thought, maybe I can write a book.

To jog her memory, she created a handwritten chart of the respective ages of herself and her brother, from her earliest memory. “That’s how I wrote the whole thing. That’s what I referred to. Because I couldn’t always remember his age, but I remembered my age. I have a very keen memory.” As for research, “What research?” Gina laughs. “It was all up here.” She taps her head. Working up to nine hours a day, typng on a 53-year-old manual Royal typewriter, Gina completed the entire work in three months. “And I said, ‘That’s very easy. I’m ready to publish it.’ And everyone said, ‘You’ll make changes,’ and I said, ‘Oh, no no.’ But it took four years to make all the changes, to polish the writing. The thoughts were always there.”

Four years younger than “Teddy”, Gina and her older brother formed a special bond. One of the great charms of the memoir is the portrait Gina paints in words of those early years in Manhattan, a time of wood stoves and street games, of neighborhoods. Gina and her brother played pick-up-sticks at the kitchen table and took long walks, discovering Manhattan.

Art dealer Betty Parsons, who gave Stamos his first show, called Gina “the feminine side of Stamos.” Gina posed for his sketches, and later pursued a career as a dancer and artist’s model before marrying chiropractor Louis Savas and having six of her own children. She remained close to Stamos, provided an emotional and practical support, and was the one who...
looked after his bills, paperwork, house, and now his reputation and legacy.

Before he died, Stamos wanted to will his entire estate to Gina, including his Athens apartment. She urged him to give the apartment and all the art he had produced in Greece to cousins on the island of Lefkada, where he had a house. Stamos, gravely ill, complied. Unfortunately, the cousins would turn their backs on Gina, in what she considered a terrible betrayal of herself and her brother. Returning to New York, Gina became severely ill and was hospitalized after the enormous strain of events in Greece. While recovering, she pondered the future of her brother’s collection that remained in her hands. She made the decision to give all of the paintings, papers, sculpture and work to Portalakis, and shipped them off to the grateful and deeply committed collector.

While in Greece, I met Portalakis in his office downtown Athens, a space graced by several Stamos originals. His daughter, Elleftheria, who is studying art history in London, sat in on the interview, and helped act as translator. A man with boundless energy and enthusiasm, Portalakis’ workday extends from about 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. A native of Crete, Portalakis worked his way through the University of Piraeus with scholarships and part-time jobs – writing and publishing notes for other students. In Athens, he founded a brokerage firm, as well as the Association of Greek Brokers, of which he was the first president.

Despite enormous financial success, Portalakis derives his greatest satisfaction from collecting contemporary art. He now owns more than 2,000 works of artists ranging from Samaras to Andy Warhol and Stamos, the centerpiece of his collection. Says Portalakis enthusiastically: “All of the money I made is now colors.”

He recalled meeting Stamos for the first time in 1987. “My daughter and I went together to his place. I didn’t understand anything about this type of Expressionism, so I asked my eight-year-old daughter to choose a picture. What I found most interesting was Stamos’ personality, when he started talking about art. It wasn’t just some colors on the canvas, but feelings and values and ideas. From that time on, I loved his work because I could understand what was behind it. And so I bought the first one without really wanting it, and then I became the biggest collector of Stamos’ work. I bought from auctions, galleries in New York, from Stamos, from everywhere. Every August I would go to meet Stamos on Lefkada.”

Portalakis contributed $100,000 to the National Gallery in Athens to mount a major retrospective of Stamos’ work. Unfortunately Stamos died a month before the hugely successful retrospective. In conjunction with that show, Portalakis published a 505-page catalogue, “Theodore Stamos, 1922-1977, a Retrospective,” with stunning reproductions of Stamos’ work, and text in English and Greek.

Portalakis has established a splendid art gallery on another floor in his office building, where he presents art shows every six months. On Jan. 12, 2009, he will have the first exhibit of Stamos’ Red Paintings. These large, dynamic Stamos works manifest a special spontaneity, and seem to reflect the Stamos’ ethos. Stamos was known for his temperament, his lighting mood changes. In her memoir, Gina writes: “But Teddy in his better moods was better than anyone in his best moods. Teddy’s enthusiasm, during such moments, was like no one else’s. You were thoroughly captivated with his exuberance.”

Portalakis plans to organize a large retrospective exhibition from his collection in New York in three years, and he’ll insure that the artist’s memory and work has a special place in the Greek sun. “My plan is to make a unique museum for Stamos here in Greece,” Portalakis says. “I have many of his personal objects, like gloves, tools, palette, what he was wearing when he drew and painted, as well as the Stamos collection.” Gina also contributed photographs and other Stamos memorabilia.

After the publication of “Eyes on Stamos,” Gina received a letter from the Rothko family asking permission to disinter Rothko’s remains, and to bury them again near his wife’s at a different location, a request Gina rejected. “Rothko is there with the good graces of Stamos,” said Gina, who saw this as evidence of their great friendship and trust. She did offer the family space to move their mother’s remains near Rothko. The judge recently ruled in favor of the Rothko family. Nonetheless, Gina plans to erect a nearby memorial to Stamos. “Teddy is buried in Greece,” she says, “but I would like to have him commemorated in the East Marion cemetery.”

Gina has never sold a drawing, painting, or piece of paper of her brother’s, despite frequent requests, nor does she have any intention to do so in the future. Gina keeps her personal collection of Stamos’ work in her home, including one he did of her galoshes, and another, an early seascape she rescued from behind a trunk. She sees herself as the keeper of the Stamos flame.

In an epilogue to her book, she writes: “A harmonious whole of individuals is now working together committed to the legacy of Stamos, fulfilling his last wishes and his last words, ‘Gina, you’re going to save my work. The right people will help you at the right time – it’ll happen. After all, the art hasn’t changed.’ Writing the Stamos story has been both painful and exhilarating while spreading forth his last words. What better way to have impressed the world at large than with these parting thoughts – At last the reappraisal of Stamos, master of infinite forms.”

She also writes, in Greek: “His life was his art – his art was his life.”

To order the book, send a check for $59.61 (includes shipping and handling) to the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center Gift Shop, 801 W. Adams Street, Chicago, Illinois 60607. The book can also be purchased at the museum for $49.99.

A freelance journalist, Penelope Karageorge is the author of two novels and has made short films. She is currently pursuing production of a film script set on the Greek island of Lemnos, “Drinking the Sun,” and is writing a crime novel, “The Hype Artist.” Her work appears in the just-published “Pomegranate Seeds” from Somerset Hall Press, edited by Dean Kostos, the first ever anthology of Greek-American poetry.
**Straight From the Heart**

Romance and Poetry from Patty Apostolides

By Aphrodite Matsakis
Special to The National Herald

Reading Patty Apostolides’ romance novel, “Lipsi’s Daughter,” is like taking a trip to a shimmering Greek island where even the presence of topless beach es has not corrupted its clear blue skies or its strong communal bonds. Indeed, the heroine, Ipatia, is like a fresh island breeze. While other young women her age are busy manipulating men into marrying them, Ipatia is an open-hearted hard working young woman who loves her donkey Kitso and her goats as much as she does her English books and medical journals. Unlike the more citified women who attempt to transform themselves into Western style supermodels and try to cultivate a hyper-sexualized “come-hither” look, Ipatia wears her hair in a bun and black mourning clothes for her parents who died when she was a child. Even when her traditional grandfather urges her to take off the black, she refuses, so deep is her love and respect for her parents.

Ipatia is pure, not only in a sexual sense, but in her sincerity and in the depth of her loyalty to those whom she loves and to the spiritual values of her faith. Even more profoundly, she is loyal to herself — her intellect and her emotions. Similar to her namesake, a famous female mathematician and philosopher named Ipatia who lived in Alexandria around the year 400 or so, the Ipatia from Lipsi loves learning and wants a university education. Unlike other village girls, she shuns marriage, arranged or otherwise. She wants more for herself — until she meets Tony, the handsome son of a shipping magnate. It’s love at first sight, for both Tony and Ipatia. Yet Ipatia is not willing to forsake her plans to go to school or her grandfather’s strict teachings about her plans to go to school or her parents; and Ipatia’s leaving Greece to attend college in the U.S. where she is pursued by men who consider her exotic and alluring.

Tony and Ipatia’s romance is innocent, yet engaging. Even though one anticipates a happy ending (for that is what romance novels promise — a happy ending), following the trail of the two lovers as they wade through the labyrinth of their lives until they finally land in one another’s arms, is full of adventure and delight. The characters are sufficiently developed and realistic so that the reader can become emotionally involved with them.

Apostolides chose the island of Lipsi, not only because it is the birthplace of her parents, but because, she explains, “I wanted to write about purity and innocence of youth, about faith and religion and somehow I could not see it happening in today world, in the U.S. The island’s tranquil, religious setting was a perfect backdrop to the story and a perfect environment for Ipatia’s character.” Lipsi is a Dodecanese island located south-west of the island of Patmos and north of the island of Leros. Allegedly, in ancient times, this little piece of paradise was called Calypso and was much larger than the Lipsi of today. Apparently part of the island sunk into the water where divers continue to find archeological evidence of Lipsi’s past. Approximately 700 families reside on the island. Yet it boasts almost 40 churches, most likely because in early Christian times Lipsi was ruled by the monastery of Patmos, where St. John wrote the Book of Revelation.

Although Greece is the perfect location for a romance novel, not many writers have Apostolides’ intimate knowledge of island life as it was, and as it is today. Readers, both those of Greek origin and those who are not, frequently comment on the book’s compelling and authentic description of Lipsi’s physical beauty and its people. In one particularly touching scene, the night before Ipatia is scheduled to leave Lipsi in pursuit of a university education, she says goodbye to her goats as she milks them for what, perhaps, might be the last time. She and her grandfather then sit down with a cup of warm fresh goat milk, their parting words to one another are moving and poignant. Apostolides aptly weaves traditional village life, with its close personal ties, its hospitality, its belief in “thi,” its various superstitions and its ever-present fear of gossip, into her love story. She also reveals changes in the island as more and more young people (including girls) learn English, go abroad to study and are exposed to computers and other aspects of modern culture.

Apostolides was born in Piraeus, Greece and immigrated to the U.S. when she was about five years old. She and her four sisters grew up in Cleveland, Ohio where they were immersed in Sunday school, Greek school, Greek food and music – the works! She obtained her biology degree from Case Western Reserve University with minors in music and theater. She has co-authored several medical articles and is currently co-authoring a paper on cancer with her husband. Her husband, however, is far more than a professional colleague. She describes him as her soul mate and as the reason she chose the romance genre as her medium of artistic expression.

“I had always wanted to write a novel, but with a busy career schedule … I could never find the time to write a 300-page manuscript. I wrote poems and articles instead. The opportunity to write a novel presented itself when I became a stay-at-home mother with time on my hands … As I wrote, I realized that I needed to decide the genre. I felt that the love in my marriage was a great inspiration for a romance story. So the decision came naturally; it would be a romance novel, she states.

She plans to continue writing romance novels, not only because they compose over 50 percent of the fiction market today, but because she believes that “we were born to love” and that love is an “uplifting positive experience … that brings people together.” Her second romance novel, “The Lion and the Nurse,” set on the island of Kos, was recently published by iUniverse. For further information on Apostolides’ works, visit her web page: www.pattyapostolides.com

The theme of love, as well as the spirit of the Greek islands, also pervades Apostolides’ book of poems, “Candelit Journey: Poetry from the Heart.” For this reviewer, it felt as if these poems could have been written by Ipatia, the heroine of “Lipsi’s Daughter,” some 20 or 30 years down the line, who although hav-
NICHOLAS J. BOURAS
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We would like to Congratulate
All the Greek American Writers
Who are Making
Literary Contributions to Society
A Happy Life Punctuated By Special People

Immigrant’s Son Recounts his Memories of a Childhood in the Greek Community of Baltimore, through his Navy Years and to the Challenges of Practicing Law

By George
By Harris “Bud” George, edited by Clarinda Harriss
248 pages, BrickHouse Books, $20, paperback

By Elaine Thomopoulos
Special to The National Herald

“What started out many years ago as notes jotted down during my naval service has grown in time to be a glimpse into my life — from a childhood in the Greek community of Baltimore, through my Navy years, and finally to the challenges of practicing law. With brief encounters to the streets of Athens, the harbors of Hong Kong and Manila, and the mountains of Kythera, I’ve tried to capture my fondest memories of a happy life punctuated by special people and amusing predicaments in which I found myself.”

In the delightful book, “By George,” Harris “Bud” George has done just that -- with vivid word pictures and anecdotes that enliven the people that have had an impact on him. His matter-of-fact prose and liberal use of conversation make this book an easy read of some 90 life experiences. Although each one of these episodes can stand alone, they come together to give a glimpse into the philosophy, challenges and humor that punctuate George’s life.

George’s father’s positive outlook and gumption shows itself in his son, who packs the book with uplifting messages. His father, an orphan, immigrated to the United States at age 16. He worked in a New York restaurant and sent money home to support his brothers and sisters.

In 1912, he became the first Greek businessman in Towson, Maryland. His gratefulness to the United States is noted in this letter sent along with his first income tax payment: “Sir; I enclose a check for my income taxes plus an additional amount as sincere thanks for being in this wonderful country. Respectfully, James T. George.”

In his later years, James George kept defying the doctor’s prediction of death. In one case, he was out walking two months after they pulled his life support.

James T. George married Tassea in an arranged marriage. Here is an excerpt of the letter that James T. George received from his elder brother: “I have taken it upon myself to write to Mr. Souris, suggesting that you would visit the family in Missouri in order to meet his daughter and, further, that your intention is marriage.”

A lot of the book is focused on George’s experiences as a naval officer. One story after another recounts life aboard the ship and the adventures in various ports. I like this book because George can laugh at his own mistakes. For example, he is asked to issue the command to “Light the Ship” after a period of enforced darkness. Instead he says, “Lighten the Ship.” After the order is broadcast throughout the ship, the response via phone comes, “Would you prefer that we jettison personnel or gear in lightening the ship.”

He also recounts his triumphs. He encourages two dropouts from Brooklyn under his charge to complete their G.E.D.s. He gives them one word each day to replace the swear words he initially heard from them and introduces them to literature. A few years later, he is rewarded by this letter: “I owe to you and to the U.S. Navy my University degree and my clear shot at the brightest future a poor high school drop-out could ever have.”

Harris “Bud” George explains this cartoon regarding U.S. Navy Officer Candidates’ School: “The cartoon was drawn by someone who lived on the deck below the deck occupied by Section K-5. The cartoonist showed 3 K-5 section mates as causing the noise that kept the section below awake at night – Lundegaard, Greene, and George (me).”

Harris “Bud” George graduated from Duke University. After leaving his tour of duty as an officer in the Navy, he served as a law clerk to the Honorable Hall Hammond, and then worked for a Baltimore City law firm. He opened his legal office in Towson Maryland in 1960. He continues to practice in a multifaceted practice which has ranged as widely as foreclosing a chattel mortgage on a herd of cattle to defending the accused in Maryland’s first savings and loan scandal.
George gave this example: “My Navy buddy, Chris Sakellis, and I were bachelors in a Jacksonville, Florida hotel lobby, waiting for an elevator. A curvaceous young lady joined us. Chris murmured to me, ‘Tee o-ray-o Ko-ma-tee (What a lovely piece.)’ Glowering at Chris, the young lady interjected, ‘Allah o-hee yia ta don-tee-a-sou (But not for your teeth.)’”

In 1969, the 13 members of the George family traveled to the island of Kythera to see family from whom they had been separated since 1933. They met Aunt Mary, a childhood friend of George’s mother. She had gone back to Greece at age 60, after she was diagnosed with a terminal illness and given only six months to live. Aunt Mary, who was now 75, suggested that the family go on a picnic to the “miraculous” springs that had given her life. George’s father decided to stay behind.

George, who was 6’2” in stature, towered over the others on the journey. George, lugging two watermelons as he laboriously walked up and down the hills, had difficulty keeping up with the frail looking but sprightly Aunt Mary. After the picnic, an exhausted George carried a container of spring water back. The priest blessed the family with the water, proclaiming, “Today the blessed waters have united the George family from America with those who welcome them to their ancestral home of Karava.” As George describes it, “A smiling Aunt Mary, putting her arm around Dad’s shoulder, shouted to me, ‘Bud, your father has been blessed and is now fully rested. Grab some watermelons and let’s have another picnic.’”

For me reading this book was a picnic. It is filled with delectable treats in the form of well-defined characters caught in real life situations, which at times are more a scream than the best TV sit-coms. It can be ordered through Itasca books.com, subject: Biography.

Elaine Thomopoulos writes about the Greek American experience. She is curator of the exhibit, “The Greeks of Berrien County, Michigan,” now on permanent display at the Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church in New Buffalo, Michigan.

This is Section K-5, U.S. Navy Officer Candidates School, Newport, Rhode Island, class of February 1954.

Harris George sits in the middle of his sisters Mary (to his left) and Boo in 1956.

Harris George, author of “By George,” served as a legal officer aboard the U.S.S. Forrestal in 1955.
Mythology: Gods, Heroes, and Monsters of Ancient Greece
By Lady Hestia Evans and Dugald A. Steer, editor
Candlewick Press, 32 pages, $19.99

"Mythology: Gods, Heroes, and Monsters of Ancient Greece" is a fresh, exquisitely produced exploration of an ancient subject — Greek myths. An ideal gift for children over eight and adults with a love for Greece and classic storytelling, it is one of the best-produced books of the 'OLOGY' series. This series includes "Pirateology," "Wizardology," "Egyptology," "Drago

logy" and "Monsterology." These large-format books are in a league of their own, with high levels of art direction, and engaging, unexpected, thoroughly researched content. Famous for their "novelty items," the 'OLOGY' books contain elaborate inserts. "Mythology," is an ingenious "facsimile reproduction" of a well-thumbed 1825 edition of a classic student primer on mythology. It features an assortment of ancient Greek and 19th century artifacts, including a gold "obole" coin to pay the River Styx ferryman, oracle leaves for divining the future, a card game featuring the 12 Olympic gods, a pop-up Pandora's box (with hope still inside), a piece of the Golden Fleece, and a miniature death mask "found in the chamber of a warrior king." The only items not included in this book are plane tickets to Greece — an oversight that hopefully will be corrected in a subsequent edition.

LADY HESTIA EVANS: ADVENTURER, ARCHAEOLOGIST, HISTORIAN ... FAKE?!?

Lady Hestia Evans is a clever literary invention by Dugald Steer, the visionary genius behind all the 'OLOGY' books. As Candlewick Press explains at the candlewick.com website: "In the early nineteenth century, an English nobleman embarked on a tour of the sites of ancient Greece. He brought as his guide a primer on Greek myths written by his friend Lady Hestia Evans, a devotee of Lord Byron who had recently taken the same voyage."

An adventurous, androgynous woman, "Lady Hestia" is portrayed in a small frontispiece painting wearing an "Albanian disguise" of flowing silks and headdress. She appears to have been a kind of dashing Philhellene — a cross between Margaret Meade and Indiana Jones. Her relationship with the book's diarist, the "nobleman" John Oro, is unclear, but appears to be an innocent and a mentoring one. Oro's handwritten journal entries form an escalating narrative that reveals his visiting many ancient sites and inventing his own "methods" for divining oracles.

Besides the nobleman's ill-advised summoning of Zeus, the Gods are invoked with poetic reverence throughout the book — such as in the opening invocation, written in Athens by "Lady Hestia Evans" herself, in which she captures not only the spirit of Lord Byron but also summons the good will of the Gods for the creation of her book: O Muses, Who Sing of a World Long Gone Of Mighty Heroes, Olympian Gods, Of Terrible Monsters and Fabulous Beasts, Help Me to Tell of These Wonderful Things, For I have Come to the Land of Greece To Speak of Her Myths and Her Mystery. STYLE DAZZLES, BUT CONTENT IS KING Beyond the jewel-bedazzled, gold-plated cover, and in addition to the gorgeous illustrations, paintings, etchings and other period-style renderings of mythological deities and beasts, is a very intelligent and refreshing telling of the major myths and legends. We are informed, for instance, how the Gods, "drew lots" to decide upon their dominions: "Zeus ... drew the sky and all the distant regions of the heavens. Poseidon drew the sea, becoming lord of all the creatures that lived there. Their brother Hades drew Tartarus, the dark underworld far below the Earth. No God became ruler of the Earth, for she was a goddess in her own right: Gaia." In the section entitled "Monsters and Mythical Beasts," the Sphinx is presented as a most chimerical and intelligent monster: "With the face of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird, it terrorized the city of Thebes, strangling anyone who could not answer its riddle: 'What goes on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?'" The answer to the riddle is man: crawling out of bed (on four legs), later walking (on two), and using a cane (after much dancing, no doubt).

The "Origins of Mankind" section admits that the myths "do not agree whether it was Zeus himself" who created humans, "or a Titan named Prometheus," and explains how human beings were thought "to stand upright so that they could gaze up at the heavens, while most animals gazed down at the earth." The dazzling layout here includes a fold-out Pandora's box ("DO NOT OPEN") and the myth of Prometheus — eternally punished for giving fire to mankind. It also includes how Deucalion's son Hellen (not to be confused with Helen of Troy!), survived Zeus's devastating flood, which was designed to wipe out the human race, and emerged from the arc after nine days at Mount Parnassus to become ancestor of all Greeks. All Olympian Gods are profiled, and let's not forget them lest we rouse their anger! — Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Ares, Aphrodite and Hephaestus, Apollo, Hermes, Demeter, Athena, Artemis, and Hestia. Other significant deities and heroes are also vividly described, including Hercules, Jason and the Argonauts, Hades and the Underworld, and Theseus and the Minotaur, complete with Minotaur's maze.

The level of detail is impressive and sparks the imagination. Take, for instance, the explanation concerning Zeus's post-Titan battle with the Giants, and how he "defeated them too, burying them deep in the Earth ... Legend has it that Zeus ... imprisoned one of them beneath Mount Etna, a Sicilian volcano that still spews forth lava whenever he writhes in rage." The myths are also informed by the poets of antiquity, including Homer and Hesiod:

"According to Hesiod, the ancient Greeks believed that if an avulve were dropped from Heaven, it would take it nine days to reach the Earth ... After being ferried across the River Styx and receiving judgment, heroes and righteous people would obtain their reward in the Elysian Fields, while the wicked would be punished forever in the fiery regions of Tartarus, which was, according to the Iliad, a further nine-day avulve fall from the main area of Hades."

"Mythology" artfully presents mythological summaries to help any scholar get a handle on this vast subject. It includes a massive map of Greece depicting ancient
This full page spread from "Mythology; Gods, Heroes and Monsters of Ancient Greece," features the Minotaur’s maze (right), the Twelve Labors of Hercules (left) and (far left and right) the handwritten journal entries of the mysterious John Oro. He was the supposed owner of the original edition. Each page in "Mythology" features gorgeous paintings, etchings and other period-style renderings of mythological deities, heroes and beasts.

sites from Troy to Macedonia; an abridged version of Homer’s Odyssey; an architectural ‘plan’ and mini-history of the Parthenon; an ancient Greek primer with Greek alphabet, featuring the an ancient Greek primer with an ingenious “facsimile reproduction” of a well-thumbed 1825 edition of a classic student primer on mythology by the fictitious Lady Hestia Evans, pictured above.

who devotes a whole part of “Don Quixote” to its supposed earlier edition’s piracy, and E. A. Poe who spent much time setting-up his novel “The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym” as a bona fide “factually true” account.” In terms of implementing the story-within-the-story illusion, “Mythology” pulls out all the stops, offering a parallel flashback narrative in which one of the most tragic of Greek myths comes to life. All Midas touched turned into gold, rendering the things and people he loved useless. This is a brilliant myth through which to construct a narrator with whom we can both empathize and pity at the same time — as we observe the nobleman diarist (John Oro’s handwritten notes degenerate into a pure golden smear.)

John Oro’s journey begins optimistically enough with this incoherent entry: “June 1st, 1826, Portsmouth, aboard the Hyperion: By August the humble narrator has kept them for himself, instead. report them to the museum — wonderful antiquities, but does not recommend the museum — keeping them for himself, instead. By August the humble narrator has gone completely mad, after having consulted the Oracle at Delphi seeking Zeus’s approval for “looking after” his stolen antiquities. His entry reads: “August 26th, Arcadia: I have decided that I will not trust anyone with my relics. Zeus led me to them: they are mine. And the more I travel, the more I shall surely find!”

Greek overtakes the man — a tragic theme in Greek mythology, and through his duplicity, he has upset not only the Gods but possibly a body just as grave: the Athenian museum!

After casting Midas’ spell upon himself, the only thing left of our humble narrator John Oro is his diluted copy of Lady Hestia’s book (which forms the template for “Mythology”), and his yellow feather quill pen — still glistening with golden, tell-tale signs of his fate. A replica of the pen is included so that the reader may write notes to friends (and presumably museum curators) on the handsome 19th century stationery conveniently enclosed.


 Eternal summer gilds them yet, But all, except their sun, is set.

Here we have an artistically rich, very entertaining encapsulation of the Greek mythological heroes, monsters and deities, and how their complex interweaving ultimately forms an entirely self-contained view of the world — one that helped fertilize western arts and philosophy. “Mythology” is one of the strongest of the OLOGY books and is recommended for any student of Greek mythology, young or old, for it not only brings to life the ancient Greek myths and legends, but does so playfully, sparking the imagination in ways that would have pleased Homer, and, dare we say, the Gods themselves.

Nile Southern is a writer and author of “The Candy Men; The Notorious Novel, CANDY.” He is currently producing a public radio series about the Greeks who immigrated to the Intermountain West, entitled “Greeks Out West; A Story of Migration Through Song.” For more information see www.kgnu.org/greekswest.
Cooking with Greek History
Chef and Anthropologist Suzanna Hoffman Serves Hellenism with Timeless Recipes

The Olive and the Caper: Adventures in Greek Cooking
By Susanna Hoffman
Workman Publishing, 589 pages, $19.95 paperback

By Nile Southern
Special to The National Herald

If you’re looking for the one book which tells the story of Greece and Greekness on every level, including historical, cultural, geographical, musical, architectural, linguistic, religious and even pre-historic — and you’re looking for an all-embracing Greek cookbook at the same time, “The Olive and the Caper” is the Hellenic kaleidoscopic “gourmet” experience for you. “The Olive and the Caper: Adventures in Greek Cooking” by Susanna Hoffman features stories of Greece’s first peoples, the Minoans and Mycenaeans, as well as classical Greeks, the Byzantines, the `klefts,’ the Ottomans, and modern Greeks. It explores the origins of words as well as mythology and archaeology. It is as much a history and anthropological book as one about preparing delicious food.

Over 250 recipes are interspersed with thoughtful and informative explorations of traditions (contemporary and ancient, religious, urban and village), regional variations and sometimes completely unexpected contextual offerings. The title itself belies a whole way of thinking about how Greek cuisine and culture have always intermingled and enriched each other, at times metaphorically. As Hoffman explains in a recent interview, “The title is a sort of homage to the nature of Greeks. Having, on the one hand, a long, and very refined history — like the olive, which the Minoans domesticated from the wild trees in Greece. On the other hand, there is the totally wild caper: capricious, tough and tenacious.”

Hoffman leaves no Greek horticultural resource unlauded — even water is given its due. “No word can describe what water is to the Greeks; more than “osios” (blessed). It is the word from which we derive “pious.” To Greeks water is life … Greeks compare the water of different towns and fountains, describing in detail the taste and clarity as they would wine.”

The exploration of bread is just as surprisingly informative. We have Country Bread, City Bread, “paximadia” (twice baked toasts) and a preface dedicated to Greece’s first bread bakers. Those bread bakers’ lineage dates back to the Neanderthals who around 200,000 B.C.E. “had moved into a cave in ‘three-fingered’ Halkidiki, near where Mount Athos’s monasteries now sit.” Soon after, “as the earliest farming settlements pop up in Knossos in Crete and in Thessaly in about 7000 B.C.E.,” a new people emerge, indeed, the first (Greek) bakers who planted “free-threshing wheat from Asia Minor, the first sort of wheat suitable for bread.”

As any Greek island-visitor knows, the “fourno” (bakery) is literally a Byzantine institution with myriad offerings. So, when it comes to bread, there’s much more in addition to pita: various koulouria, olive garlic bread, Cyprus-style olive flatbread, Easter, Christmas and New Year’s breads. We are also reminded of forgotten trimmings, such as the ancient tradition of candied ginger coins to ring-in New Year’s Day. To add more zest, the author gives us an illustrated history of “testa” (behave/bell) ovens, bread “rings,” and a description of how villagers today continue to make the “stubbbornly resistant barley flour” rise through the use of sourdough starter.

For pita fans like myself, besides instruction on making “filo,” the author offers many wonderful pita recipes. They include: cheese: spinach, field greens, fennel, ouzo, Epirus commal and greens pie, leek, potato, and olive pie, mushroom and retsina, squash and cardamom pie, chicken pie, lamb pie, Byzantine-style shrimp-filled filo rolls, and meat and cheese bourrekakia.” The latter, Hoffman points out, have various permutations, including steaming and deep-frying, making them the quintessential finger-food of Greece and all the Near and Middle East.

Hoffman’s first-person accounts (resembling pages cut out of a journal) round out the historical analysis by providing an intimate portrait of the anthropologist/chef’s gradual integration into village life — critical to her absorbing the ancient wisdom of Greek cooking:

“When I first lived in Greece I noticed that the older village women often carried a little bread in their apron pockets. The bread could be a bit of pita or country loaf, but more often was from Sunday’s “prosforo,” or holy bread. Then I saw new mothers placing a smidgeon of bread under the mattresses of their babies’ beds and under their own pillows …. I was told that both customs were to ward off the evil eye …” (145).

In addition to being a cookbook, Hoffman’s tome is an informed celebration of Greek taste that explores the cultural and historical lineage behind the growing, preparation and enjoyment of Greece’s savory, myriad foods. By revealing the lineage of each dish and its ingredients (some going back to Alexander the Great’s time and before), it becomes clear that a powerful ‘thread’ through the times still connects people to the soul of their land and its Mythic history, and that this culinary heritage will continue to be enjoyed by future generations of Greeks.

With over 250,000 copies of her book in print, “Olive and Caper” has received a great many positive reviews, such as a lengthy one on amazon.com by a reader/reviewer B. Marold, who writes: “I did graduate studies in Philosophy and was an avid reader of Greek Mythology, and I find things here that I did not know. The reference to the mysterious Scythians, a culture which lived in Hellenic times across the Black Sea, shows they had culinary and trade connections to the Greeks, before they were erased from world history by the Tartars … I also find practically no overlap between this book and Diane Kochilas’ classic, “The Glorious Foods of Greece.”

Fresh, in-depth explorations of Greece’s history are provided in tasty historical nuggets — whether concerning the Minoans, the rise of Pericles and Athens’ Golden Age, or the invasion of Cyprus. What do these events have to do with Greek cooking? Most of Hoffman’s historical flourishes feature a culinary angle.

For example, she explains the Ottoman occupation’s influence on cuisine:

“Influenced by Mongol and Chinese foods, the Turks had acquired dumpings and stuffed vegetables. As they passed through Persia they had picked up dishes from that land. They had yoghurt and made various cheeses; they acquired “yakni” stews, kebabs, and pilaffs, as well as the Arab taste for eggplant and spinach. As they spread across the Byzantine empire, they adopted a great deal from the Byzantine menu and the foods of the Greeks. They began to make honey cakes, macarons, fritters, flower and fruit preserves. They adopted wheat and olive oil.” (563)

Many of Hoffman’s sidebars provide spotlights on dishes and Greek regions famous for them, including: the potatoes of Larisa, the ducks of Mikri Prespa, the mazes of Crete, and the goats of Arcadia, “Constantinople Quail Pie,” and the Greek Jewish dishes of Thessaloniki. Dishes with ancient roots are also provided, often with quotes from classic texts, including: “Archestratos and his Fish,” “Aesop’s Morals with the Meal,” and the outrageous “utopian” meals imagined by Plato and Socrates. The author’s literary allusions enable one to re-create epochs and fateful meals, such as “Lavish Palace of the Ancient Persians,” or, as inspired by Homer: “Odysseus’ Roast Pork Welcome.”

Hoffman intersperses her colorful “adventures” in Greek cooking throughout the book, such as cooking fresh shrimp with a taverna owner in Corfu, giving rise to the boldly-flavored “Shrimp with Fenel, Green Olives, Red Onion, and White Wine.” With her neighbors on the island of Santorini, she gathers herbs and wild greens, to complete “Big Beans with Thyme and Parsley,” and “Field Greens and Ouzo Pie.” On Santorini, she hunts down the last of the barley-ring bakers in Pyrgos and takes four va beans with some locals to a man who rigs a two-stroke motorcycle engine to split them.

While at first glance the book might appear to be a jam-packed hodgepodge, it is well-organized and has a wonderful rhythm in three parts. Part One features...
“Honored Drinks” (including mountain waters, wine, potons and ‘tsikoudia’) as well as “Meze, and Savory Pies.” Part Two, “The Banquet of Dishes,” includes breads, soups, salads, eggs, grains, vegetables, fish and shellfish, meat, birds, wild game, sauces, toppings and marinades, and fruit. Part Three, “Confections,” covers sweets, from syrups to “filo” concoctions, ceremonial sweets, fried pastry, mastic, cookies and puddings. The book is eye-popping, with photographs, maps, drawings, mosaics, and illustrations appearing on nearly every page. Sixteen full-color pages start off the book, inviting the reader to “savor an array of dishes that have welcomed visitors for countless centuries.”

Hoffman’s friends in this section include: “Chicken Neo-Avgolemeno,” and “Fall-off-the-bone Lamb Shanks seasoned with garlic, thyme, cinnamon and coriander,” and “siren-like sweets, from world-renowned Baklava to uniquely Greek preserves.”

The book’s production history is Herculean: The Oakland-Berkeley firestorm of 1991 destroyed the original manuscript, which was a life-long project. Hoffman lost her house, work and possessions. Victoria Wise, her long-time collaborator (they’ve written three cookbooks together) and co-owner with Hoffman of Chez Panisse restaurant, reconstructed the recipes and, coaxing Hoffman, they began the project anew, together.

When not in Santorini or on the high seas giving food lectures and presentations, Hoffman resides in beautiful Telluride, Colorado. Here are a few thoughts she kindly provided in answer to questions I had about her book:

**TNH:** What interested you in telling the story of Greece and Greek cuisine?

**Hoffman:** I simply adore the people and the culture. With my anthropology background I learned a lot about Greece and Greeks from the most ancient time to now, and I thought that wrapping this love and information around the glorious food of the country would be not only a labor of love, but the best way I knew how to convey the knowledge. Finally, most people around the world spend their days doing three things: procuring food, preparing food and eating food. I learned most of the life and customs of Greece in the context of these three activities, so it seems right that I should represent them in this fashion.

**TNH:** What’s your ideal Greek “oreo trapezi” (grand meal)?

**Hoffman:** Well, for starters, Greek water and wine are exceptional! For appetizer, I would have olives, fried cheese, a bit of octopus, and a spinach-like pie of wild greens or leeks. Crusty bread, chickpea soup, “roka” (arugula) salad with walnuts, retsina marinated sultana raisins, and cheese. For entrée I would have my favorite, “papoutsia” (meat-stuffed eggplant slippers) and maybe a “skorthostoumbi” (a beef stew with 100 cloves of garlic). I’d have two sauces — “skordalia” and “tzatziki.” Then, of course, a platter of fresh fruit in season. Served with just a paring knife. Later, well into the evening, I’d have a cup of Greek coffee, a slice of ancient style sesame cake, and maybe a pear poached in chamomile and topped with mastic ice cream.

**TNH:** And your ideal Greek spring meal?

**Hoffman:** My ideal spring meal would be:

- Shrimp just from the sea, lightly poached,
- Pie of baby leeks,
- Sesame soup for Lent,
- Greek fried egg in a sea of olive

Olive trees have only a single taproot and do not hold the soil. Trees that have root systems and hold the soil need to be planted and the Greeks know this. I’m worried about the replanting because Greeks so rely on tourism now. Few are continuing agriculture. They need to replant barley (they had a lot of famine in the past and not enough wheat and barley to feed the people), but also citrus trees and vegetables. The herbs and the capers will return on their own.

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Continued on page 24
Scarce Food and Brutal Restrictions in Greece During the Occupation Caused Life and Death Struggle for Survival

Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941-1944

By Violetta Hionidou

Cambridge University Press, 261 pages, $90

By E.G. Vallianatos
Special to The National Herald

On Easter Sunday 1943, my mother and aunt were roasting a lamb when, suddenly, two Italian soldiers rushed to the kitchen and demanded the entire lamb. The women did not understand the soldiers. However, they were not about to give the lamb away and watch their children go hungry. They started screaming and put themselves between the lamb and the soldiers. Their screams brought my father to the kitchen. He immediately grabbed one of the soldiers, putting a knife to his throat. The other soldier aimed his gun at my father, but he hesitated to shoot, knowing his colleague would also die. The deadly confrontation ended without deaths because my 10-year-old sister rushed to the police station and brought an Italian officer who knew my physician grandmothe who spoke Italian. The officer drew his pistol and ordered the soldiers out of the house.

This incident in a village of the Ionian island of Kefalonia under Italian occupation during World War II mirrors an extraordinary food crisis and famine that threatened the very survival of Greece, which was rarely food self-sufficient. On the eve of the war, Greece, overwhelmingly rural, imported 20 percent of its most important food, wheat.

Once the Germans were in Athens in April 1941, they and their allies, the Italians and the Bulgarians, divided the country into zones of military occupation, freezing everything under their control. They confiscated or purchased at low prices all available olive oil, raisins, figs, tobacco, cotton, leather and most pack animals. They prohibited fishing. They took over all means of transport, including bicycles, and all fuel. These measures effectively brought all movement of goods and people to an end. Add to this strangulation, many of the demobilized Greek soldiers became stranded in Athens, finding it difficult to go home. Then, as if this suffering was not enough, England treated Greece as an enemy territory, blockading it and diverting ships carrying its imported wheat elsewhere.

A combination of scarce food and brutal restrictions by the occupying powers precipitated a famine that became a life and death struggle for survival, especially for Greeks living in cities. The occupiers used food as a weapon to kill Greece. Despite the importance of this singular struggle where occupation became synonymous to famine and famine to occupation, neither the Greek state nor scholars have done it justice. In contrast to the silence of Greece, Ireland will never allow England to forget it was responsible for its violent famine in the 1840s. Violetta Hionidou, teaching Modern Greek history in England, is bringing the Greek famine where it belongs, the light of history. Her “Famine and Death in Occupied Greece” is extremely interesting, telling a story that goes to the core of the violence of the occupiers. Her book is illustrated with pictures of hungry and dead Greeks, famished women, malnourished children and corpses. She also uses figures and tables, statistics illustrating the impact of the military occupation on the economy and lives of the Greek people. Her book is an academic study, which, however, speaks eloquently to all, especially Greeks.

Hionidou used the documents of the International Red Cross Committee about the food relief operations in Greece. She enriched her narrative with the politics of feeding Greeks after England ended its disastrous blockade of the country. She also focused her study on what happened in Syros, Chios and Mykonos because those Aegean islands have reliable data. She also interviewed survivors of the famine in those islands.

Chapter 1 examines the historical background, the crises Greece lived through, especially the severe dislocation more than in the previous centuries. Greek refugees from Turkey had on the economy of Greece in the 1920s. Then Hionidou summarizes the early effects of the occupation of Greece by Germany, Italy and Bulgaria.

The British blockade made the Greek food crisis worse, in fact, exacerbating the famine. The Greek War Relief Association, a Greek American organization, was instrumental in convincing President Roosevelt to urge the British to abandon their blockade of Greece, which they did in February 1942.

Chapter 2 looks at the impact of scarce food supplies all over Greece, connecting the arbitrariness and violence of occupation to the different coping mechanisms of Greek rural and urban communities.

Chapter 3 is about the administration of Greece, how the occupiers used a puppet Greek government in Athens to run the country. Soon that government had no authority outside of Athens: Greek citizens, including in some instances civil servants, ignored the edicts of this government. The Germans, Hionidou asserts, were for “minimal intervention” in contrast to the Italians taking over Greek authority surreptitiously, especially in the Cyclades and Ionian Islands, which they intended to annex. In mainland Greece, the Italians followed the Germans’ minimal interference. Hionidou argues that all these administrative regimes in Greece, and the disappearance of the power of Athens, resulted in the “administrative anarchy in the occupation years.”

Chapter 4 deals with the “requisitioning of foodstuffs,” how the Germans, Italians and Bulgarians confiscated food from the Greeks. Hionidou, however, says that “plundering by individual soldiers,” like the Italian soldiers who tried to steal the food from my family, rather than plundering by the occupied forces “reduced the availability of food” in Greece. She does not deny that the invaders often stole the little food Greeks had. She supports rather that the occupiers grabbed only stored “cash crops.”

In Chapter 5, Hionidou challenges the assumption that the famine was largely a result of low food production in 1941-1944. She suggests that during the occupation Greek farmers concentrated on growing wheat and certain pulses and, otherwise, they did as well as in “normal” years.

Chapter 6 examines failed and extreme Greek government policies to control trade in food and how the occupation powers extorted vast levies from the Greek government. In a real sense, the occupiers tried to kill Greece. Hionidou is right that the occupiers dismembered Greece, their policies bringing about anarchy and the “cessation of all traditional trading patterns and routes.” The “indefensible” black market in food became the universal means of buying and selling whatever food the farmers raised. Under such conditions, Hionidou says, inflation reached “intolerable levels.” For example, in 1939, two pounds of bread cost 11 drachmas; in August 1944, that same amount of bread cost 72 million drachmas.

Chapter 7 goes into foreign efforts to stave off or, at least, lessen the effects of famine in Greece. The relief down to the fall of 1942 was all about “setting up of soup kitchens.” After 1942 the Joint Relief Commission, working closely with the British and the occupiers, replaced the soup kitchens and tried to control Greek agricultural production, essentially continuing the policies of the occupiers. Canada, the United States, Sweden and Switzerland funded the food relief in Greece. By March 1943, that relief reached about half of the Greek population, about three million people.

Chapter 8 is about internal migration, escaping from regions of hunger and famine. For example, thousands of Greeks from Chios and Samos landed in Turkey, which did not want them. With funding from the Greek government in exile and the British and American governments, these refugees were shipped to Cyprus, the Middle East and the Belgian Congo until the end of the war.

Chapters 9 to 11 examine the demographic effects of death by starvation. These chapters give a chance to Hionidou to show off her skills in the esoteric statistics and fancy theories of demography. Nevertheless, the lessons of this story are clear: Some five percent of Greeks died. During months of famine deaths would increase by 300 to 1000 percent. Adult males died faster than adult females, and old people died at higher rates than children.

In Syros, Mykonos and Chios, starvation became the main killer. The upper classes, bank employees, civil servants and farmers did not suffer as much from the wors...
Violetta Hionidou, author of “Famine and Death in Occupied Greece,” is a lecturer in Modern History at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. She has taught at Southampton, Crete and the Ionian Universities. She has published widely on the demographic and social history of modern Greece.

To conclude, Hionidou’s book is a timely, informative, and thoughtfully written study of a tragic period of Greek history when invaders brought the country to the verge of death by starvation. The pain of famine, who lived and who died, and the use of food as a weapon exacerbated existing class division in Greek society, all of which exploded in the civil war.

Read this book. It opens a page into a world of people and places that often carry different names and spellings, and where the idea of coming “home” to America.

Continued from page 7

J. Mavrovitis traces his roots from Soyzopolis to Brooklyn

Mavrovitis is drawing on an actual family history. Moreover, he is not afraid to assert an uncomfortable truth: his characters miss the old world to some degree but not that much. They reminded me of many immigrants of that same era whom I knew well while growing up in Detroit. In their twilight years, they liked to visit the old country, but always with the idea of coming “home” to America.

Perhaps the charm of “Remember Us” is best captured by the six photos on the front cover. They are printed in deep sepia tones that suggest a treasured family album. We see well-dressed immigrants at a picnic, a woman attired in an elegant evening gown, a loving couple with their arms around one another, a young man sporting a white handkerchief in the pocket of his double-breasted suit, a large family surrounding a seated patriarch wearing a fez, an abandoned building. I would have been delighted if inside captions identified exactly who and where these people are. But the anonymous nature of the photos actually facilitates using them as a springboard for thinking about the many Hellenes who left for America from homes in what had been the last domains of the Ottomans. These Hellenes were profoundly grateful to become accepted by a nation that provided them salvation from seemingly endless cycles of war and poverty. The photos give us their images. “Remember Us” tells their story.

Dan Georgakas is director of the Greek American Studies Project at the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at Queens College-City University of New York. His most recent book is “My Detroit: Growing Up Greek and American in Motor City.”
In the making of ethnic food earns her cultural knowledge while forging intergenerational links. In this kind of activity, smells, touches, scars, memories and images leave indelible marks in her body. Ethnicity experienced in this manner – family members coalescing around a shared practice that engages all the senses – is deeply felt and remembered. Tactily, the narrator offers a template, a sort of cultural lesson, to those readers who search for ways of transmitting ethnicity to their children.

The paths tracing the narrator’s connections with food and language crisscross within a larger route, the narrator’s quest for roots in Greece. This journey underlines the depth of the longing to connect with the places and people associated with family history. But the seemingly irresistible urge that initially pulled the narrator to Greece gradually loosens its grip; it even evolved into a seemingly irresistible urge that initially pulled the narrator to Greece. This journey underlines the depth of the longing to connect with the places and people associated with family history. But the seemingly irresistible urge that initially pulled the narrator to Greece gradually loosens its grip; it even evolved into an irresistible urge that initially pulled the narrator to Greece. This journey underlines the depth of the longing to connect with the places and people associated with family history. But the seemingly irresistible urge that initially pulled the narrator to Greece gradually loosens its grip; it even....
narrator ends up setting in motion a biting cultural critique, particularly of Greek patriarchy, eventually leaving Greece. Not unlike her experience with the "magiritsa," the yeaming for full belonging via roots will never materialize.

The narrator ventures to rewrite the myths in order to correct their misplaced representations. In her retelling, the versions portray women as strong, wise and powerful, mutually supportive and indepen dent. In this respect, she invents an ethnic past that women can use as a model to empower themselves and craft their own life trajectories. Hence her motto, "Every woman needs a story." Positive stories about the past offer a tapestry upon which women may draw to weave their own stories of personal fulfillment.

If the reader wonders why the narrator allows herself to be subjected to an unnatural sexual relationship, it will help to recall the narrator’s view of her story as a deliberate construction, not a reality in itself. One could attribute a didactic purpose in the recounting of this experience, in all its shocking details. The lesson to be learned may have to do with the profound power of erotic desire to reconcile itself to the exercise of male abuse.

The narrator underlines the vital need to overcome such passions, though her telling of this process remains on the surface. Once it is read against the narrator’s references to Greek mythology, the traumatic affair cautions women about the danger of certain relationships, urging alertness against oppression.

“The Priest Fainted” may dazzle readers with its insights and richness of language. In a novel where the narrator stresses the power of stories to shape identity, the author invests in the craft of writing accordingly. But this book may equally irritate and annoy for the superficial treatment of many of its insights. There are simply too many threads, too many trails that are only touched on the surface, fleetingly mentioned, trivially engaged with, and then forgotten; their possible interrelations remain suspended, unexplored. How does, for instance, the narrator’s ability to discern distinct American and Greek views of history entangle with her quest for identity? The fact that the novel consciously organizes itself around loosely connected fragments; and the narrator’s position that knowledge of the past is fundamentally incomplete, should not grant the license for convenient narrative closures, and the reduction of serious issues to glittering aphasirons.

Enter the book and be prepared for additional challenges. The telling of the story may disorient some readers. To be sure, the memoir-like aspect of the novel will anchor your reading experience. Structured as a series of poetic entries in a diary, parts of the narrative are crisply clear. But lucidity works alongside with ways of telling that may exceed a reader’s comfort level. A mere couple of pages into the novel, you will find yourself in a shifting literary universe. The narrative is laced with abstract metaphors, often fired up in rapid succession. Buckle up for additional challenges. As the novel lacks linear plot, you will have to meander through a narrative that moves back and forth through time and across space. Be ready to stretch your reading alertness in order to connect the various narrative fragments.

As this novel encourages women to fashion lives of their own making, it will no doubt earn the praise of some feminists for its agenda to empower women. Yet the narrator’s brand of feminism may unsettle feminists of a different persuasion. In weaving a story of self-liberation, the narrator haunts Athenian “clubs favored by models,” hunting, as she puts it, in places where good looks and sexual allure earn women free drinks and flirtatious partners. Is this a kind of female empowerment, as some have argued, or is it untethered conformity to the rules of the beauty and desire industry?

One must also attend to the novel’s undertochond of silence. Unexplored remains the thread of the grandmother’s political activism, tantalizingly evoked: “My mother says she still has her mother’s union card; she promises to send it to me. … (a) promise unfulfilled.” It is hard to miss the explo sive silence clothing this trail. The narrator’s search for roots does not include the interest to excavate the story connecting the grandmother with labor struggles. Her quest for roots centers on the display and overcoming of personal wounds, not telling of economic abuses, past and present. Clearly, the agenda of self-empowerment does not include attention to the wider social structure. The grandmother’s participation in the labor movement cannot possibly square with the daughter’s passion for self-discovery in Athenian expatriate hubs, the ancestral village, and the Greek islands. To recover the dramas of working-class immigrants as well as alternative cultural connections one must look elsewhere.

Viorgos Anagnostou is associate professor of modern Greek at The Ohio State University and the author of numerous articles on the anthropology, history and popular culture of Greek America. His book “Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography, Counterpoises and the Making of Usable Past in Greek America” is forthcoming from Ohio University Press.
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The Grecian Plate
By Joan Marino, Lena Mousmoules and Helen Paliouras
Hellenic Ladies Society of Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, 253 pages, $21

By Elaine Thomopoulos
Special to The National Herald

By hosting fun “tasting parties” at their homes, the women of the Hellenic Ladies Society of Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church of Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina carefully selected which recipes to include in “The Grecian Plate.” This award-winning book, edited by Joan Marino, Lena Mousmoules and Helen Paliouras, is packed with 300 favorite recipes of parish members and local restaurateurs. I found it fascinating reading and filled with recipes that reminded me of the dishes by mother and yiayia used to make.

Today’s nutritious Greek food has its origins in ancient times, with many of the same ingredients used, such as olive oil, garlic, yogurt and honey. “We are indebted to the unknown Greek chef who more than 20 centuries ago created the versatile white cream sauce so widely used today,” the book in-
Cooking with Greek History

Continued from page 17

oil (eggs would finally be available),
A beet salad with feta,
Lamb stew with artichokes and dill, or,
Swordfish in Muscat wine and kumquat,
Baby lettuce fritters,
Apricot (the name means early ripening, same root as “precocious”),
Easter cheese tartlets.
Who else, but an “Amerikana” such as Hoffman (Ph.D. in anthropology, 30-year bi-continental resident of Santorini) would take the time to ponder and explain the unspoken history and tradition behind Greece’s most touchstone dishes?

I highly recommend “The Olive and the Caper” to anyone looking to broaden their understanding of Greece’s great history and superb taste.

Nile Southern is a writer and author of “The Candy Men; The Rollicking Life and Times of the Notorious Novel, CANDY.” He is currently producing a public radio series about the Greeks who immigrated to the Intermountain West, entitled “Greeks Out West; a Story of Migration Through Song.” For more information: www.kgnu.org/greekswest.

“Sizzled in the greenest olive oil, no egg in the world can top a newly laid egg, fried in the Greek style.” This is the description given by Susanna Hoffman in her book, “Olive and Caper.”