
SLIM
WRIGLEY

A true and remarkable story of two families from opposite sides of the world and brought together through the 1939/45 war.

Xanthula, Michael, John and Bert

Valentini Papadopoulou, Writer

The Africa Star | The 1939/45 Star | The 1939/45 War Medal | The Pacific Star | The Italy Star | The Defence Medal | The Australian Service Medal

1st November 2009
Melbourne, Australia.

THE WAR BRIDE

PROLOGUE

This is a true story, and it has to be told now, it is long overdue. It has to be told simply and from the heart.

Early this morning, it was like an epiphany for me. The story of my 83-year-old sister Xanthoula and her husband Herbert Wrigley! I know it as well as anyone else besides herself, I lived with them for many years when I was a student, and I am living in her house at the moment. I have at my disposal, besides my sister herself still alive and well, other documents, photos, newspaper clips, letters, tapes of earlier interviews with her and her husband Bert, tapes with my two other siblings, as well as vivid memories and strong feelings of my own...

What am I waiting for to put this moving story into paper? For my sister and for Bert's memory, a man who truly cared and whom I loved and admired, for their sons and grandsons, other relatives, friends and for anyone else who cares to read it. I can just try to follow the events, piece their lives together... I am not writing this for approval, fame or money. It is a human story that needs to be told, a story of courage, generosity, self-sacrifice, and love. Not the kind of love you will read about in "best-sellers" - passionate or unrequited love to excite the readers who need a bigger-than-life tale to live vicariously and feel powerful feelings not felt in their own lives. I hope people will find that this is an out-of-the-ordinary story, and appreciate the fact that it is true, not the figment of creative imagination.

I will try to begin from the beginning: who are these two people? Where do they come from, what were their families of origin like, where did they live and what did they do in their lives before they met?

HERBERT ("BERT" OR "SLIM")

Herbert Pascoe Wrigley was born in England on the 30th of November 1919, in Ashton-under-Lyne, then a small town just outside the city of Manchester, now showing on the map as an outer suburb of the city. He was the seventh out of eight children, of Thomas Wrigley and Florence Holden: George, Tom, Emily, Claire, Florence, Harold, Herbert and Eric. His two elder brothers, George and Tom, came to Australia first, probably in 1920, it seems for health reasons. George, having suffered from being gassed while fighting in France during WWI, was looking for a warmer climate and better working conditions than were being offered in an English industrial area. The rest of the family followed late 1921 or early 1922, with Bert still less than three years old and Eric a baby, no more than a year old. The family settled in Yarraville, near Footscray, in the area of the city of Melbourne, Victoria.

Not a great deal is available in the way of history of that family back in England, and the conditions under which they arrived and settled in Australia. I will briefly give here what I have been able to find through various sources: a few family documents, some letters and photos, and pieces of oral history by members of the Wrigley family. It seems that Bert's grandfather, by the name of Frederick William Wrigley, was the son of a well-to-do family who owned a paper mill in Manchester but, having fallen in love with a girl working in the mill and having married her against his family's wishes, he was disowned by his father. They considered he was marrying "beneath his station". So that branch of the Wrigley family had to work harder at making a living than the other. The Wrigley family's ownership of a paper mill is confirmed in a letter, written by a relative in England many years later as a response to an enquiry by one of Bert's elder sisters. In 1953, Claire (the third-born) had planned a trip to England with her daughter Fay and wanted to try and reconnect with her roots. Claire had some memories herself, since she was around thirteen years old when the family left England. Her father gave her the name and address of a relative over in England and Claire wrote to her. I found the letter she received in the box in which my sister kept the Wrigley family documents and photos. Dated October 21st 1953, it includes a fairly long list of names of several members of the Wrigley family and what happened to them, and we also read the following:

The mill passed out of the Wrigley family a long time ago now, it was sold to the present owners, which is sad. I always feel there are not many Wrigleys left as there seem to have been mostly daughters in the later generations.

Among the very few family documents available, the marriage certificate of Bert's parents, Thomas Wrigley, nineteen years old, and Florence Holden, also nineteen years old, dated 20th February 1897, also gives us some details. In it, the profession of the father of the groom is listed as "Paper-Stainer" -- a skill he might have learned working in the family's paper-mill until his "disgrace". That of his son Thomas is listed as "Collier" (working in the coal mining industry), and that of the bride, Florence, as "Winder" (working in a cotton mill operating a piece of machinery with that name).

Bert's father, Thomas Wrigley, must have joined the British army not too long after his marriage and was sent to Africa to fight in the Second Boer War which ended in 1902. It seems that from the start he served as a paramedic. There is a well-preserved studio photo, in which we see a good-looking young man with a light moustache, in the British army uniform, wearing a large-brimmed hat folded up on the left side, and a white band with the Red Cross on his left arm. The photo was very likely taken before he left for Africa (a wise thing to do before going off to war), where young Thomas witnessed what is considered by historians as one of the bloodiest wars in which England became involved up until then.

There is also a service medal featuring Queen Victoria and bearing four bars across the ribbon with the following inscriptions, indicating the campaigns in which the young man participated: "Cape Colony", "Orange Free State", "South Africa 1901", and "South Africa 1902". From the medal, we can guess fairly accurately that he must have served for at least two years, probably longer. A later photo, which I will describe further on, shows Thomas Wrigley wearing that very medal. A second medal featuring King George V is from WWI, with the simple inscription of 1914-1919. A third one features a winged Victory and has the following inscription on the back: "The Great War for Civilization 1914-1919".

"Grandpa Wrigley" (as he was referred to when I met him in 1955) left his war medals, with a handwritten note inside the

box containing them, to his grandson John Stephen Wrigley, first son of Bert and Xanthoula, when he died in 1959. The boy was then only seven years old, but as "Grandpa" lived his last years with them, he must have felt closer to this grandchild than to the others -- he had another six, four boys and two girls. He writes: "I wish to give my War Medals to my grandson John S. Wrigley so that he may wear them like other children on Anzac Day." My nephew John is also the recipient of his Uncle George's war medals, two from WWI, exactly the same as his father's. George, the elder son, enlisted in the army at the outbreak of WWI and eventually reached the rank of Sergeant Major. Bert's medals, seven of them, are also in the possession of my nephew. He kindly put all of them at my disposal, with as much other information as he had, for the purpose of writing this story.

From Thomas Wrigley's war service medals, it is easy to see that during his married years in England he spent considerable time in the army and away from home. At least there was a space of twelve years in-between the Boer wars and WWI. In 1914 he was 36 years old, but he served again as a paramedic attached to a hospital ship. From those years of service, I found again in my sister's "Wrigley Family" box nine post cards that Bert's father sent mostly to his wife Florence and his elder son George. A first postcard to his wife shows the "Gloucester Castle" an eight thousand-ton steamer belonging to the Union-Castle Line, which was, as he writes "made into a Hospital ship". He also writes that they "landed" on July 4th, but doesn't say where. It must have been France, more specifically the port of Dieppe, since there are three postcards from that city, one to his wife, one to his son George, and one to his son Tom. Two other postcards are from Paris and two more from Malta. One of those two, dated 29th October 1915, is addressed to his son George, who seems to have already engaged in the war and, having suffered from being gassed, was sent back home on leave. Here is what I can decipher:

Dear Son
Thanks for your letter, I am very pleased you are getting on so well, but mind you don't overdo yourself (...) I was looking what would happen after the War is over, but if you are better in health I don't mind. It is raining like the devil but I am all right if the tent pegs hold and no wind gets up for there is only 4 inches of soil then you are on solid rock. I hope you are all in good health, your mother said she did not feel well in her last letter. Don't forget what I told you.
I remain Your Loving Father.

The last card, addressed to his brother, is a humorous one satirizing the daily schedule of recruits, featuring a fully loaded British soldier looking exhausted. On the upper left hand corner we read:

RECRUITS -- ORDERS of the DAY
8 HOURS DRILL
8 HOURS ROUTE MARCH
8 HOURS TRENCHING

GOD SAVE THE KING!

At the bottom:
AND THEN WE HAVE ALL THE REST OF THE DAY TO OURSELVES!

On the back Thomas writes: Dear brother, Is it as bad as this at your end?

It seems that his brother must have been in the army as well. The rest of the writing unfortunately isn't legible, it was written in pencil and I can only make out a word here and there. Those cards are nearly a hundred years old...

The family photos are quite revealing: A very nice one of Florence, Bert's mother, is remarkably well-preserved for more than a century. It shows her with their first-born George, who looks about two years old. Although there is no date on it, we can guess that it probably dates from 1900, since George was born in 1898, a year after the marriage. The photo is taken in the studio of "Mrs. J. Bardsley, Photographic Artist, 216 Stamford St., Ashton-under-Lyne", the same studio that had taken the photo of her husband before he went to the Boer War. It shows a beautiful young woman, in a nice though dark-colored dress, with abundant dark brown and curly hair tied in an elegant bun behind her head. She is looking lovingly at her son. The little boy is dressed in a dark velvet suit with a wide collar, wearing brand new shoes and white knee-length socks.

A much later and larger family photo, this time not a studio photo but taken in front of a brick house, so it isn't as well preserved as the previous one, shows Thomas Wrigley sitting on a chair wearing his army uniform, with his Boer War medal hanging on the left side of his chest. His wife Florence is sitting next to him dressed up and wearing a large hat, with a large white poodle on her right, and a young boy about three years old dressed in white standing on her left -- the sixth born, Harold. They are surrounded by five more children: standing up on either side of the photo are George and Tom, the two older boys, wearing suits, white collar shirts with a tie, and hats. Emily, the eldest daughter, with long and beautiful curls of hair falling freely on either side of her face, is sitting down. Two other little girls, Claire and Florence, are standing more in the background. On the back of the photo we read: "Taken August 1914". It was probably taken after Thomas had enlisted, since he is wearing his military uniform, and before he was sent away to serve as a paramedic on the Hospital Ship. Having a full family photo taken seems like an appropriate step to take before going off to the theatre of war. By now they have six children; the youngest seems to be about 3-4 years old. In awe, I am thinking that in 1914, Thomas and Florence are both 36 years old and have already had six children within 17 years of marriage. Just that fact represents quite an achievement for a couple who had no inherited wealth and probably had no help at home. It amazes me, just thinking of it. Florence had one child every two to three years, and she looks as slender as before! The seventh and next to last child, Herbert, was born five years later, on the 30th of November 1919, and Eric a couple of years after that. By then WWI had ended and the family was already considering the move to Australia.

I spent some time looking at and reflecting on those photos, because they can tell us quite a lot. What they indicate is that in spite of a large family, Thomas and Florence seemed to have been managing fairly well in Ashton-under-Lyne, well enough to feed, clothe nicely their six children and send them to school. So their move to Australia was likely to be less out of desperation or poverty-level living conditions than out of a desire to give their children a better life, in a better climate,

and in a country far removed from a war-torn Europe. And of course, their two elder sons having made the decision to leave England, they wanted to be close to them. Still, uprooting oneself is difficult at any time, and doing it with a large family is even more so. Just travelling with six young children, one of them still a baby, from England to Australia at the beginning of the 20th century, couldn't have been an easy undertaking. When they arrived, the area of Footscray and Yarraville, where the family settled, was a predominantly working-class area of Melbourne. It seems that the two elder sons who came to Australia first were able to set up a modest home in that area so the rest of the family could come. The parents were able to get jobs fairly close, George and Tom went up to Ballarat for a while gold-prospecting like hundreds of others, the younger children went to school. They all survived the change well and were able to make good lives for themselves.

That is about the extent of information available on Bert Wrigley's roots. His life really begins in Australia, but before I continue with Bert's individual story, I will say here something about this family, drawn from my own experience of meeting all of them after I arrived in Australia in 1955, at the age of eighteen. Over the five years of my living with Xanthoula and Bert, and over the total of seventeen years I lived in Australia before I left for America, I saw many of the brothers, sisters and their families on several occasions. I was witness to the closeness between all of them. During their life-time they visited, helped and cared for each other in an exemplary manner. None of the members of that original family is now alive, with Claire being the one to outlive all the others. She passed away in 2008 at the age of over one hundred and one years! Except for the eldest brother George, all of them married and most of them had a family.

With that background in mind, I will now pick up Bert's story, after about eighteen years from the time the family settled in the Footscray area. In the "Wrigley Family" box again, I found a worn and yellow square piece of a Melbourne newspaper, "The Herald". It is dated Friday June 7, 1940 and, under the title "A.I.F. Recruits March Today", we see a photo of men marching.

Heavy rain did not damp the spirits of these men who marched from Footscray drill hall to the station and entrained for Caulfield today.

Another small yellow piece of a different newspaper (probably a local one from Footscray) with a clearer photo says:

Headed by Hyde Street State School Band, 60 A.I.F. recruits from Footscray marched from the City of Footscray drill hall yesterday to entrain for Caulfield camp.

On the very first row, a tall and thin young man by the name of Herbert Wrigley, later to answer to the well-suited nickname "Slim", is seen almost smiling.

Less than a year later, probably around April 1941, another small and yellow piece of the local newspaper with this announcement:

Pte. H. Wrigley sailed on September 15th and is attached to headquarters. In a letter to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Wrigley, he stated that he had fractured an ankle and was in hospital probably in Greece. The ambulance which took him from a clearing station to hospital was a gift to AIF by Footscray citizens. He has a younger brother in the RANR. His father fought in the South African and 1914-1918 wars, and his eldest brother was in the last war.

Evidently, with a father who had fought both in South Africa and in WWI, and a brother who also fought in WW1, being in the army and fighting wars was a familiar thing for the Wrigley boys. When WWII broke out, both the younger boys, Bert and Eric, enlisted, while the elder brother George went as a Sergeant into the Reserve. In fact, it is known in the family that the younger brother, Eric, forged his father's signature lying about his age to be able to get into the navy. He was neither the first nor the last Australian boy to do this, as under 18 year-olds were not officially accepted. Many young Australians saw enlisting in the army or the navy as an opportunity to get out of farming or a small town where nothing was happening and where there was no promise of a good job. For others it was an opportunity to see the world or to have a piece of the action in a war that they sensed was having an impact on the whole civilized world. No doubt in some cases all of the above applied.

Soon after the first announcement, the same newspaper published another notice:

PRISONER OF WAR
Pte. H. Wrigley.
Mr. and Mrs. T. Wrigley, Banool avenue, have been advised that their son, Herbert, is a prisoner. He is a former pupil of Francis Street and Footscray Technical schools and worked at Mason & Cox, Yarraville. He had been previously injured and was in hospital in Greece. Eric, a brother, is a naval reservist who expects to go overseas at any moment. The Red Cross is endeavoring to locate Pte. Wrigley, upon which the family will be allowed to send one letter (unsealed) monthly and a parcel of clothing every three months.

No date recorded for this announcement either, but it has to be some time after April 1941, when Corporal H. Wrigley (he had received a promotion a few months after he left) was captured in Greece. He was sent with his Commando Squadron to fight in Greece in March 1941, but was injured and captured right after the falling of that small European country to the Germans in the month of April.

Another small yellow piece of newspaper makes a similar announcement:

FOOTSCRAY MAN NOW PRISONER

The parents of Pte. Herbert Wrigley, 21, of Banool Avenue, Yarraville, who was reported missing, have been advised that he is a prisoner of war. In a letter to his father, Pte. Wrigley said his ankle was fractured in an accident and when being taken from a casualty clearing station, he discovered that the ambulance was given by citizens of Footscray. Pte. Herbert Wrigley, first reported missing and now reported prisoner of war, is 21.

That is all his family knew, besides what he had written in his early letters from Palestine and Egypt, after he was sent there but before he was actually engaged in the war. More

facts came to light later on, especially after Bert returned to Australia over three years later and he could tell his family all about what he had been through. But he seems not to have given them many details. When I came to Australia to live with them, there were times when I asked him questions about the war, and he did tell me some stories over the years, but on the whole Bert didn't talk readily about his war experiences. He was more willing to reminisce about places he saw and people he met than about the battles he had fought and the hardships he had gone through. Many years later, I had considerable difficulty in convincing him to speak and be recorded about those particular experiences during the war years.

That happened in 1992, about fifty years after the actual events in Greece. I know he agreed to talk only to please me, and because I said that this would help me towards my project of writing the story of my family, a kind of family saga. That project has been in my mind since about 1986. He was part of that saga and I wanted to record his memories about Greece and the German occupation, about his encounter with my family in a remote Greek village near Mount Olympus.

In that interview done in 1992, which I tape-recorded, I heard his story directly from him, with considerable details about his own experiences and feelings mingled with his unique sense of humor. I can't transcribe everything here, but it is good to listen to his deep and melodic voice still on tape in my collection of tapes, now nearly fifteen years after he passed away quietly in his home in Ringwood, Victoria, at the age of 75.

I had the privilege of having this remarkable man as a brother-in-law, who had lived through so much in his youth but kept it very much to himself. As a young man, Bert chose to live dangerously for five years, and it will be evident, as his story unfolds, that he threw himself into the fight with passion.

His experience in Greece, as I recorded it, is very vivid and detailed for some events, more faint for others. It was after all some fifty years later. Fortunately, in addition to the tapes I made in 1992 during one of my visits to Melbourne, I also have in my hands other documents that help me to tell his story, reconstruct his life and draw a portrait of him. First, his own letters to his elder sister Emily, letters written between 1940-41 from Palestine, Egypt and Libya, before he actually landed in Greece. Also fortunately, there is a detailed account of a large part of his time in occupied Greece made by his fighting companion and friend, Bruce Vary. Bruce was another Australian who was captured twice in Greece, and escaped twice jumping off a moving train that was taking him to a prison camp in Germany or Austria. Like Bert, he found himself cut off, trying to survive on his own in a foreign country occupied by the enemy. Bruce was anxious to record for posterity his own ordeal and near-death experiences, and he did it as soon as he came back. In a book entitled I lived with Greek Guerrillas (story written by E.B. Burton and published in Melbourne in 1945), Bruce Vary gives a detailed record of his Greek experience and of his bonding with "Slim", Bert Wrigley. That book reveals a lot about Bert, his bravery, his generosity, his loyalty to a fellow soldier.

Other books which appeared later, such as Patsy Adam-Smith's Prisoners of War. From Gallipoli to Korea (Penguin Books, 1992), and Hugh Gilchrist's Australians and Greeks (Volume III: The Later Years, Halstead Press, 2004), also give accounts of the footprints that "Slim" left behind him in Greece. Hugh Gilchrist, himself a serviceman during WWII in Australia and New Guinea, later entered the Department of External Affairs and served in official posts in many countries, especially as Ambassador to Greece in the years 1968-72. He includes in the above-mentioned book a detailed account of events related to these two men. In Chapter V of his book, under the title "Australians in Occupied Greece", there is a special section on "'Slim' Wrigley and Bruce Vary" (pp. 65-72). What we read there was obtained directly from the two friends when Gilchrist invited them to visit him in Canberra specifically for that purpose – to get first-hand information about their war experiences. Volume III finally appeared in 2004, but the interview took place many years before, probably in the 70's, when these two men were alive and well.

I will try here to piece all of that together, like a jigsaw puzzle: the accounts given in these three books, the intimate information from Bert's letters to his sister, what I have from my own taped interview, what my sister here knows and remembers, what our elder sister in Greece knows and remembers, what his sons can tell me, and my own memories.

I actually saw "Slim" for the first time when I was nearly 6 years old, on that harsh winter of 1941-42, in my grandfather's house, up in that isolated, snowbound village from which you see the peak of Mount Olympus. He stayed with us for a while, then left but came back a few times, until he joined the Greek partisans and the British Secret Mission in Greece during the Occupation. My subsequent knowledge of this very special man, from the age of eighteen when I immigrated to Australia in 1955 until he died in 1995, will also help to fill in some gaps. With all of that, a fuller portrait of the man will emerge.

We know that after he was sent to serve overseas, he found himself first in Palestine (then in Egypt and Libya) in a reserved occupation in what was called "Employment Platoon". Between mid-October 1940 and February 1941 we have in total eight letters written to his elder sister Emily, in his distinctive handwriting and style. Of course he wrote others too, to his parents and to whomever else wrote to him -- in one letter he says he has been busy writing because he had received many letters --, but only 8 letters to his elder sister "Em" and her husband Tom have been saved, thanks to her. Bert and Xanthoula were very involved in Emily's last ten years of her life, visiting her regularly and taking care of her affairs. They cleared up her home when she died in 1993, and these letters were found among her things. My sister Xanthoula preserved them until now and she gave them to me for the purpose of writing this story. These letters reveal a lot about young Bert, his interests, his sense of humor, his feelings and his compassionate nature. Having read these letters, I now feel I know him a little better than before. So I will let him speak directly to us by quoting parts of some of them.

Here is part of his very first letter dated 16th October 1940:

Dear Em and Tom,
Just a line to let you know I received your very welcome letter. I was rather surprised to get it, but very pleased. It reached Palestine before I did, but unless you send letters air mail

I won't get them for months. I'm feeling pretty fine just at present and hope you are the same. I hope to go on leave to Jerusalem or Tel Aviv soon, then I may apply for a transfer to the infantry with my pals, the life in this camp is too quiet, a bloke would go off his nut in a few months. Some of the old hands seem that way now. We have pictures and there is a wet canteen for those who drink. I would like to go to Egypt and visit Cairo and the old Temples and tombs in Luxor so I'll have to wait for my chance while things are quiet. (...) There were only two other chaps who received letters the same time as I did, the rest looked so disappointed I felt sorry for them. Well, until later when I may have fresh news. I'll close down.

Your

Loving Brother
Bert

These few lines tell about the young man's impatience with waiting around in a quiet camp, making it clear that he had joined the army for some action. This will be a major leitmotiv in all the subsequent letters, until he actually succeeds in joining the AIF and begins his war experience by participating in the advance from Egypt to Benghazi.

The other theme that runs through all these letters is his desire to see the world. What is remarkable is that here is a young Australian, just past his teens, from a working class family, who grew up in working class neighborhoods such as Yarraville and Footscray (I remember them well, I lived there myself for four years in the mid-fifties), but who somehow knew about and couldn't wait to visit Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and more surprisingly the temples and tombs in Luxor, Egypt. I wonder how many young people of that age, in any country, with his background and education, even today, in the age of internet and easy access to information, would actually know or care about Luxor, let alone risk their life to join the army and wait eagerly for the opportunity to go and visit those monuments. My guess is that the number of such young people would be rather small.

For now, let's go back to Palestine and listen to Bert a little more in his second letter, dated 4th November 1940.

VX 24068. Pte. H. Wrigley.
Employment Platoon.

Dear Em.

Just a line in answer to your welcome letter of 21/10/40. Letters are few and far between amongst the boys, so anyone who gets a letter is considered very lucky. I hope this finds you as well as it leaves me. I feel pretty full of fight just now, so I and a pal have applied for transfer to the 2/11th Infantry Battalion. So we might get to Egypt. The 2/11th are W.A.s and bonzer chaps too, very hospitable; from what I'm told they are nearly all miners from Kalgoolie. I went on leave to Jerusalem last week end (...). We saw the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with all the various Biblical scenes and the Tomb of Christ and the stone which was rolled away from the door. We visited the mosque of Omar and the ruins of Jericho and the Dead Sea. It's a beautiful trip down along the road through the mountains down to Jordan River. Now that Syria has declared war I shouldn't be surprised if the enemy try to advance along the Jordan Valley (...).

However we'll take'em any time they care to come, things are that quiet here I feel like belting the ears of some coot just to ease my feelings. I met a lot of Pommies in Jerusalem too. I asked them about England and they told me it wouldn't be long before English troops would be back in France again. One of them had been at Dunkirk and he said it was "B—awful" (...). But he won't be sorry to even up the score. (...) I visited Gaza War Cemetery, the Arabs there keep it in excellent condition, there are lots of English lads lying there. I have sent you a cushion cover, I hope you like it. Thanks a lot for the canteen order.

You might tell Mum that sea mail is very slow, I only received her letter 23/9/40 yesterday, practically 5 weeks to get to me. Well that is all for the present, so I will close

Yours ever

Bert

xx

The same eagerness to be involved in fighting the war is expressed here, and along with it the same interest and excitement about visiting historical places. Those of us who lived with Bert, as well as his close friends, knew well his fascination with history, an interest that must have started early, which explains how he knew about the temples and tombs in Luxor, Egypt. After he returned from overseas, and throughout his life until the very end, he would visit the local library where I went with him a few times myself in the later years. He would bring home books on philosophy, cosmology, the occult, and more especially history books and novels. He also bought a few books, which are still here on the book shelves in his home. He read all his life, sometimes more than once the same book, if he really liked it.

His third letter gives amusing details about daily life in the camp, the food, the camaraderie with the others, the weather: "We had some rain you wouldn't believe possible for two days. I thought it would never stop. I did my washing and got it dry though between showers. What with being his own washerwoman and peeling vegetables in the cookhouse a man becomes very domesticated these days!" He also mentions that finally he had an interview for his transfer to an infantry battalion. But what stands out again in this letter is his compassionate nature when he asks his sister for a favor:

I wonder if you would do me a very special favour. We have a chap in our crowd called Colin Cations and he hasn't had a letter or word from his sister or friends since he's been in the country. He always looks rather wistful when we get a letter and he doesn't so if you would care to write to him his address is

VX 15869
Pte. C.E. Cations
Employment. Plat.
Corps HQ.
AIF Abroad.

Further down, he thinks of his younger brother Eric ("Dig", who had also enlisted). "How is my little brother anyhow. I've

been wondering about him, has he gone away yet. I think I'd like to bring him over here to the East after the war and show him round."
He closes with a joking remark to his sister: "I don't think you'd care for sheiks, they make their wives do all the work."

The next letter bears no date, but from the content we can tell that it was written and sent again from Palestine some time after Christmas 1940.

I received your welcome letter of 12/12/40 and thanks for writing to Colin Cations. (...) Well I wish they would hurry up if they intend to accept my application for transfer. I should never have come to Corps HQ in the first place, however being pushed into it, I had no idea what it was like. Besides the infantry need me more than they do here. (...) I think I've seen enough of this part of Palestine to last me for a lifetime, I'd like to seek fresh fields and pastures now as soon as possible. (...) They have a Roman baths 2000 years old here. I had a Turkish bath the other night in there. It cost about 2/- with massage and all (...). I had some wonderful feeds at Christmas. We had eats laid on in our tent, I could hardly cope with the supply. (...) I wonder what sort of Christmas they had up the front. The Comforts Fund chap told me he sent Xmas parcels to the front so the boys could have Xmas dinner while their rifles were cooling. By the way I told Dig I'd send him an Arab knife, but now I'm told that weapons cannot be sent through the post so I'll bring it home when (underlined twice) I come home. (...)
I saw a Bedouin in from the desert the other day, the first of them I've seen. He stood out on his own amongst the city Arabs. He had a sword about a yard long that I think I could have used for a razor. Some of the local celebrities started out on the pilgrimage to Mecca. They all stand together to be blessed by the priest or Imam I think they call him here, before they start. Another novelty here I saw was when a government official snuffed it. The priest got up on the minaret and howled the news to the town's people, you could hear it all over the town. Well cheerio for the present.

Your loving brother,

Bert

As in all previous letters, the same elements stand out: his eagerness to get into action, his thinking of others -- whether soldiers fighting in the front on Christmas day or keeping his promise to his younger brother to send him an Arab knife --, and his interest in what he experiences in other cultures: Roman baths and Mecca pilgrims, how a death is announced in the Islamic world, a quick portrait of a Bedouin and his deadly sword.

Like the letter quoted above, the next letter has no date, but it is clear that he is still waiting for his transfer so it was probably written sometime in January 1941.

Dear Em and Tom,

I got your letter today. I had letters from all the family the other day so you can bet I have been busy writing. (...) We were glad here when the British went into action. I wish I was there right now, however I'm waiting to be sent for by the infantry now. (...) I haven't done any more sightseeing yet, but if I get with the infantry battalion I'm transferring to, I'll go to Egypt, so the sooner the better. I saw an Arab funeral on Sunday, they carried the Arab to the cemetery in a sort of stretcher, all the women walking by the litter howling. His wife had put ashes on her face and cried all the way to the bone orchard. All the village was there. (...)
Well I don't think I have anything more to write about, if I am moved to the infantry, I'll let you know, so I'll close.

The next letter dated 2nd February 1941 is mailed from Egypt. The first part of the letter shows again his impatience to be actively involved in actually fighting the war and his frustration at not being able to do so.

Dear Em,

I hope you won't mind my failing to answer your previous letters but the truth is I got them at a time when it was impossible to answer them. You will see by the stamps on the letter that I'm in Egypt but I don't know for how long. I was in the advance party. It wasn't such a hot job either. The second day we were here it started to blow a dust storm and I was working out in it. We were filled up to the back teeth with dust, in our ears and nose and we couldn't comb our hair for dust. Still we haven't had another one like it yet so I don't mind this place so much now. I've given up hope of ever getting out of Corps HQ now, apparently all the chaps in Corps who want to go and fight are not allowed to go and all the infantry chaps who would like to get jobs in Corps are not in the race either. I wouldn't mind if I was doing anti-aircraft work, at least I stand a chance of getting a few shots in. This place is as tame as Palestine, if something doesn't happen soon I'll probably die of boredom.

Having let off steam about that, he moves on to his next favorite subject, his experience of the foreign cultures he encounters, his interest in seeing new places and learning about the people who live there. It looks as though he never made it to Luxor, but at least he managed to visit Alexandria.

I don't know whether I'm supposed to tell you this or not but I and my pals went on leave to Alexandria. It's a more lively place than Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. There's everything anyone could want in the way of entertainments. We had a hot shower at the YMCA club and after Tuesday's dust got washed off me I began to feel more like a human being. The four of us went and had a lovely feed of steak, eggs and chips twice, and it was OK. There are a lot of Greeks in Alex, quite a large percentage of the population is Greek and French so there were some very lovely women in the shops etc, extremely polite too. That's rather strange too, not many women in Palestine bothered even to talk to us. (...) Still give me Alex any time. I could have bought some good souvenirs but I didn't want to risk having them on my hands if we should have moved suddenly. You can never tell now, here today and gone tomorrow (...).
Well I say cheerio now until later.
Your loving brother Bert

Bert's second to last letter is dated 20th February 1941. Bert explains that he is now in Libya, and it sounds as though he is now much closer to the action he so much wanted.

Dear Em and Tom,

I hope you'll excuse the pencil but I can't get any ink because we haven't got a canteen here. You probably know I'm in Libya, but it's better than Egypt for scenery etc. There are a lot of trees and green fields and shrubs that in parts remind me of Blackburn and Eltham. I don't know how long we'll be here but I hope it's not too long. There's nowhere we can go on leave, the nearest city is bombed nearly every night so it wouldn't be much fun having to spend leave dodging bombs. Anyway it's out of bounds to us. The mail is very irregular so it will be some time before you get this as the Australian Mail plane goes from Egypt and the mail transport down there is very uncertain. We had rather a dreary sort of a trip up here, we couldn't wash and after being covered with dust in the back of the trucks we felt pretty miserable. Also I think I've seen enough bully beef and biscuits for a while anyway. It started to rain when we stopped at one place and all the dust on our clothes went into mud. We saw a pile of Italian planes that had been shot down, you've no idea the size of some of their bombers. Some of our own are beauts!
At present we are living in a Dago barracks, it's not a bad place but the trouble is water or rather the lack of it. We have to be very careful so it is only turned on periodically. There is a small Arab village not far from us where we go to buy eggs from the Arabs. They haven't woken up to the fact that when a country is conquered the currency is sometimes affected and they ask 1 lira for an egg. There is about 10 lira to 1 and a half pennies, so when we offer them 1 piastra Egyptian for an egg (about 3d) they think we're trying to rob them. So one chap bought about 10/- worth of liras for 2/- and then the Arabs talked business so we had a good feed of boiled eggs.
I tried some Italian wine, it's not bad stuff, if you can get the good wine it's very good for you, but some is just plonk. The Italian buildings are picturesque places. One city we were in, we visited a house that was typical of any villa you would see in Monte Carlo, it was a pity it had a bomb dropped on it. There was a lovely hotel in the same city that they are using now for Italian prisoners before they are drafted to the rear. The prisoners are more to be pitied, they look so unhappy and miserable we passed a lot of them who seemed very glad to be out of the war. I had an Italian officer's cap, but I couldn't carry it and had to leave it behind. We heard yesterday that our troops had landed in Singapore, but the news is never given in detail and I haven't had a letter or paper since I left Egypt.
Well Em, I think that is all for the present so I'll say cheerio till later.

Your loving brother
Bert

P.S. Am putting a Libyan stamp on the letter although it has nothing to do with the post, it's just for any collector you might know.

This second to last letter is partly devoted to describing the new surroundings, the vegetation of the countryside, the people and customs in Libya, but he is also giving an idea of what it is like to be closer to action: the long truck rides in the dust, the lack of water in the former Italian barracks, the army food, the nightly bomb raids over the closest city, the sight of the Italian bombers that had been shot down, the Italian prisoners of war looking miserable and his feelings of pity towards them. It is a letter that covers many aspects of that experience, which he takes the time to share with his family, ending with the temptation of holding on to an Italian officer's cap or the gesture of putting a Libyan stamp on the letter, "just for any collector" that his sister might know.

Bert's very last letter has no date, and it isn't clear whether it was sent from Libya or from Egypt. But we see that he has been successful in his persistence to go into active duty. The top of the letter shows his ID number as in all his letters, VX 24068, then it reads "Cpl. H. Wrigley, 2/3 Commando Sqn. AIF".

Interestingly enough, the letter itself doesn't say anything about either his promotion or his forthcoming move, as one would expect. Probably because of a sense of modesty (Bert was throughout his life very low key about any of his achievements) and also because he didn't want his family to worry about the fact that his life would now be in immediate danger. The letter is still revealing in its own way. It deals with family and friends' news and concerns -- about a friend who isn't very strong to undergo some harsh training he is going through, about his younger brother "Dig" who is in hospital with a "strain" of something in his stomach, and who perhaps should be discharged, about his older brother George, the one who had been gassed in WWI, who "ought to retire now and enjoy himself", and about his mother to whom he had sent 20 pounds for a Mother's Day gift but who said "she didn't need anything at present". This last letter shows a young man fully involved in the life of his family, even at a critical moment in his own life. He ends the letter mentioning the possibility of a leave, perhaps in July, probably to make his family feel better, although he must have known that the way the war was going, and since he was now going to fight in it, he wasn't likely to go back to Australia with a leave that soon.

It was about then that Hitler became frustrated with Mussolini's unsuccessful attempt to invade Greece after several months of fighting at the Albanian border. Bulgaria just said to the Germans "please come through" and joined them, while Serbs were putting up a fierce fight in Yugoslavia but were being decimated. Mussolini's assignment was to invade Greece. To the surprise of the rest of the world, Greece, a small country with a small army and meager armaments and supplies, said "No" to the Italian dictator's demand of surrender. To an even greater surprise of the world, the Greek army defeated the Italians on the Albanian border. After an angry letter to Mussolini in which he treated him more or less as an idiot, Hitler decided to send his own army with its tanks to break through the Greek border. Mussolini's incompetence had cost Hitler loss of precious time, so he decided to do the job himself. As soon as this became known, the Allies sent over to Greece in a hurry troops from Egypt, but it was too late. The Greek army fought to the death, but the Germans had such superiority that they were able to sweep through mainland Greece and reach Athens in a matter of days. The Allies had no time to do much, and they may not have been able to do much even if they had more time. Hitler was determined to conquer Greece and control that part of the Mediterranean. If he had found more resistance he would have thrown in more troops, more tanks, and the Luftwaffe would have done more raids and more bombings.

In the meantime, Private Wrigley receives his promotion and

is transferred to an Infantry Battalion in February 1941. He is now Corporal and is assigned to a Commando Squadron. It is as such that he arrives in Greece in March, about a month before the Germans break through the northern borders of Greece. Patsy Adam-Smith, a prize-winning author of several best-seller books dealing with the recovery of oral history, covers this part of the Australian involvement in WWII in her book Prisoners of War.
In a chapter entitled "The Road to Suda Bay", she focuses on the fate of the Australian troops sent to Greece. We read in her book that the order to sail to Greece was given by the headquarters in Egypt around the 8th of March 1941. Only 11 days later, Australians began to come ashore at Piraeus. Among them was Corporal Wrigley (his name isn't mentioned at this point in that book but a little later) who was immediately loaded on to a truck and sent north inland, towards Mount Olympus.

It was the first time the Australians were to experience large-scale mountain warfare. They were spread inland with little air support (they believe they had none, hence the lines of doggerel, 'For if in Greece the air force be, Then where the bloomin'hell are we?' (p.150).
Their only joy was that the Australians immediately struck a great and lasting rapport with the people of Greece who prized their independence and were brave fighters, courageous, skilled, resourceful. But they stood little chance against the German army and air force and they died on the narrow passes, high mountains and rocky cliffs. Greek troops hauled mountain guns up precipices only to have bombs rain down on them from the air.
On 19th March Australians began to come ashore at Piraeus. One month later, 20th April, Greek resistance had ceased and the Australian retreat and evacuation began. It had all been in vain. Another bungle by the 'Big Wigs', as the men called the top brass – when they were being polite, that is. But this bungle was followed by, or rather flowed on to, a bigger bungle (p.151).

What follows in Patsy Adam-Smith's book is an account of a catastrophic attempt at evacuation, both from the area around Athens and from Crete where "upwards of 25,000 men (including almost 9,000 Australians) were bundled off ships in the next four days, regardless of what battalion or company they belonged to and some with no officer known to them to care for them or advise" (p.152).

But that is another story for the real historians to deal with. We will stay with Corporal Wrigley in Greece and follow his odyssey in a country which had such an impact in his life and personal journey.

With the Germans advancing relentlessly, the 2/5th Australian General Hospital, in an Athens heavily bombed every day, was receiving the first AIF patients, haggard, worn out and freezing from fighting the continuous droves of Germans and their tanks in the spring snow. One of those wounded was Corporal Herbert Wrigley. The hospital was trying to tend to patients coming in and organize an evacuation at the same time. Female nurses, specialist doctors and some other sections of the hospital managed to evacuate before the Germans took over Athens completely. Ships were heavily bombarded in the port of Piraeus, some full with soldiers, some of them already wounded. The hospital's Commanding Officer was killed by shots from German planes flying low while he was literally carrying wounded soldiers aboard. We know from Bert's own words, and from the words of one of the Medical Staff Sergeants, Bill Gamble, that Corporal Herbert Wrigley was in the AGH at precisely that time. And although there is necessarily the memory factor involved, since the oral interviews I have in my possession took place many years after the events, it is amazing how vivid these memories still were after so long. They also match perfectly the account given by Gilchrist who himself interviewed "Slim" Wrigley and Bruce Vary many years before I did.

The story Bert tells in these tapes resembles in its broad lines, and in many details as well, the one that can be read in accounts made in the books I mentioned earlier. I will, on occasion, quote him word for word. He remembers that he was in the Australian General Hospital on the outskirts of Athens when the Germans broke through the northern Greek border. With a serious leg injury from an unsuccessful operation near Mount Olympus, and in a cast, he was transported to the Greek King George's yacht Hellas ready to get away from the port of Piraeus. But the yacht, like several other ships, was bombed by the Germans before it could leave the port. Some patients and crew were killed, some swam out or were "fished out" of the sea only to be taken prisoners. Corporal Wrigley was one of those.

Patsy Adams-Smith records the words of Staff Sergeant Bill Gamble who was later to meet "Slim" again and go through an aborted plan of escape with him. Bill was in charge of the male nursing staff at the Australian Hospital. He recalls that most doctors and female nurses evacuated on April 26th and that the rest of the staff still remaining were caught on the 27th and taken over by an Austrian Alpine regiment (Patsy Adam-Smith, p.159). He also recalls that three weeks later they were all moved to a big, brand new building to the north of Piraeus, where a new hospital was established. At first they didn't know why, as they had only a small number of patients, including those that were fished out of the sea during the unsuccessful evacuation attempts. But after the Germans invaded Crete they understood why. The Germans were bringing the British wounded from Crete to that hospital in Piraeus, while they were taking their own casualties to their own hospitals in Athens.

After about four-five months in that hospital, around August or September 1941, this time as a prisoner of war, Corporal Wrigley was sent, with others, to a former Greek army barracks and prison by the name of camp "Pavlou Mela", on the outskirts of Thessaloniki, the second in size city in Greece after Athens.

Conditions there were bad. There wasn't enough food and the quarters were filthy. Prisoners were piling up every day, many of them suffered from malnutrition and dysentery, malaria, and in some cases by an occasional beating by the guards. Their ultimate destination was prison camps scattered throughout Germany and Austria. But Corporal Wrigley didn't stay in prison long enough to board a train to those countries, probably less than two months, but long enough though to contract malaria. This didn't stop him from escaping during a working party expedition outside the Greek camp. He remembers that all of a sudden he and a fellow prisoner, another Australian by the nickname of "Mac" -- Pattie McRae is the name I hear on

the tape --, had the urge to run, so they started running across a ploughed field, right out in the open with no cover, bullets hissing over their heads and all around them. They were lucky that the guards weren't good enough shots and didn't pursue them, probably concerned about leaving the group of others behind, so they fled unharmed. They made it just in time, as only one day later all POWs in the Greek prison were sent by train to prison camps in Germany and Austria. It was from that very train that his later life-time friend, Bruce Vary, escaped, as did a couple of New Zealanders who kept company with "Slim" for a while.

We met a couple of New Zealanders, they recognized me by my clothes. The day after we escaped, the Germans cleared the whole camp out and sent everyone by train to Germany. These boys got away from the train. And that must have been when Bruce got away. He must have been in the prison camp at the same time as I, but I didn't know him then. These two blokes, something happened, we heard later the story of two New Zealanders who ate themselves to death on bread and tomatoes. They were that hungry. Your stomach shrinks, you see, and they killed themselves overeating. Mac and I heard that story later, so whether it was these two or not, I don't know. Well, your normal rations are so many calories a day, we had lower than that, it was just on the border line, and your stomach shrinks. Fortunately, the old lady that hid Mac and me first under the hay, she brought us some hot soup, chicken soup, some bread and some olives. (From tape)

The two young Australians knew they had to head for the mountains, as the rest of the countryside, main roads and towns, was already overrun by the Germans.
After a while, they decided to separate so they wouldn't attract attention, especially as Bert, tall, fair and thin, didn't look at all like a native. (No mention was made again of "Mac", I wonder now whether he survived or not.) Left alone, Bert remembers not having a plan, not knowing where he was or where he was going to go. But he remembers thinking of Mount Olympus. It is hard to forget that 3,000-meter-high mountain in full view and at a short distance from the main national road linking the two major Greek cities, Athens and Thessaloniki. This was also the area where he, together with many other British and Australian soldiers, had fought hard but unsuccessfully in April trying to stop the Germans from marching down to Athens. It was where he suffered the injury that took him to the Australian General Hospital in Athens, only about a week before the enemy took over the Greek capital and the port of Piraeus.

It was probably around November and already the beginning of winter in northern Greece. Alone, hungry, and cold, he started heading towards the direction he thought he would find the mountains, avoiding roads, towns and even villages, stumbling in the night through muddy fields, into barns or even cemeteries, where he slept. He recalls, still laughing after nearly half a century, a cold morning when he woke up to see a Greek priest startled crossing himself at the sight of a live person sitting up in what was an open grave at the local cemetery.

I don't know whether I was going north or east or what. The village was down the bottom and there was a hill with a church. I thought it was the best place for me to stay. There was an open grave, it was filled with grass and it was a good place to sleep. It was in the morning, I heard somebody coming up on the path, and I put my head up. It was the priest. I never gave it a thought, I just said "kalimera Pater". He stopped, looked around, and went AH!!!!!! crossing himself. I must have scared the hell out of him. (From tape)

Hiding and sleeping during the day and moving silently at night, given a little food by Greek peasants occasionally and asking for directions in sign language, he finally saw Mount Olympus. Fortunately it can be seen from a long distance away. He kept moving upwards, towards the mountains and found himself near a remote village, where Germans had not yet set foot. Literally, one would have to go up there on foot, as there was no road to speak of for trucks to make their way up there. Trudging through the rocky slopes, he found a shepherd who gave him food and who promised to take him to a "safe house", that of the local teacher, in the nearest village. By then young Bert was desperate for some rest, food, and most of all desperate to tend to his feet, swollen and full of blisters and bruises, his boots having disintegrated from many days of harsh walking conditions. At nightfall, he was quietly taken by the shepherd to the teacher's house, where the wife, mother of four children, immediately set to take care of his feet.

This was an area of Greece where "Slim", as he was soon to be referred to, would spend many months to come, and which, many years later, would touch his personal life.

I will come back later to the village and the family that took in Corporal Wrigley, but here is a quick background for now. The village was called Ritini, the teacher, Ioannis Papadopoulos, was my father, and his wife Glykeria was my mother, native of that village. The four children were two older girls, Eleni and Xanthoula, around seventeen and fourteen years-old respectively, a young boy of twelve and a half, Stefanos, and I, the youngest in the family, about five and a half years old. Schools were closed at that time, it was still the beginning of the German occupation, so the whole family was up in the village house. The two-storey house built in stone belonged to Glykeria's father, Athanasios Dimopoulos, nicknamed "Dimonatsos", who had gone to America twice for work when he was young. The house was for many years used only during summer vacations. When our grandmother died, our grandfather joined our family in the city during the winter months. When the war against Greece was declared by Mussolini on October 28th 1940, and well before the Germans started sweeping south towards Greece, our father decided that the village would be much safer for the family than the city. In 1938, he had been transferred from being the Headmaster of a school in the small town of Katerini to the department of education in the city of Thessaloniki. But now Thessaloniki had already started being bombed. A refugee from Russia after the revolution, having lived through war and famine (he had been drafted in the Czar's army to fight in WWI, before the revolution), father knew that people in the cities would starve, at the very least. So he asked to be transferred to the school of Ritini, where he was first sent as a young teacher when he arrived in Greece in 1921, and where he had met and married Glykeria. The first three children were born in that village.

The teacher wouldn't refuse to take in an escaped prisoner of war and an Ally, the shepherd knew that, in spite of the danger involved. In fact the nature of my father was such

that he would probably give assistance to anyone who came to his door. Many people in the smaller towns and villages throughout Greece risked their lives and the lives of their families to hide Allied soldiers. The penalty, officially announced and well proclaimed, could be on the spot execution for conspiracy and treason. At best, the prison camp for the whole family and may be the close relatives as well, if British, Australian, or New Zealand soldiers were found in the house during a raid. But the people of Greece still opened their doors, shared their home and gave what they had in clothing and food.

The passage of Herbert Wrigley through our home in the village is well remembered by everyone in the family. My memories of him may be blurred a little, but I remember a thin man who was so very tall, he seemed unreal to me, like a being from another planet! In later years, after the war ended in 1945, my mother used to speak of "Slim", the Australian, and say what a lovely young man he was, but I still thought of him more like a giant. I don't remember being afraid of him, because he had a warm smile on his face, but I was little then and I just kept my distance!

After my mother looked at Slim's feet, she called me aside and in her usual soft voice, this time more like a whisper, asked me to go to some nearby relatives' homes in the village to ask for as many as they could spare leaves of a plant called "pagos" (meaning "ice"). It is a small plant, and women in the village had it growing for medicinal purposes in small clay pots inside the house. Its leaves are thick and juicy, and when the outside thin layer is peeled and applied to a wound or blister, it acts not only as an antiseptic but also has healing properties. For several days, I would make the rounds of houses in the village collecting these leaves of "ice" and bringing them to my mother. Bert's feet were bandaged for a few days with some clean cloths. Mother used to sew our clothes as well as my father's and grand father's shirts, so there were always pieces of cloth in the house.

My elder sisters, Eleni and Xanthoula, also remembered him after he had long gone to join the guerillas ("antartes" in Greek), it seems better than they remembered some other Australians and New Zealanders who came through our house in the next year or so. It may have been because of his unusual height and physique, or because he was already picking up some Greek and was trying to speak to us, or because he came to us more than on one occasion, or also because later, when he had joined the guerillas and the British Mission, he would send greetings every now and then with the messengers going through our village. It is a fact that his was the only home address we had been given. He had written it on the back of a small photo which my sister still has in her possession. It shows him in the midst of another 15 young men in British uniform (with the exception of one who is in white clothes, perhaps a doctor in the group), from the time when Bert joined the British Mission operating from the village of Pouliana, at the top of Mount Olympus. On the photo, which is rather small so faces aren't very clear, Bert marked himself with an arrow over his head and wrote his name and address on the back. He sent it to us with one of the messengers moving around transporting information, as part of his greetings to us and proof that he was alive and well. My mother saved that little photo for years, and it followed us in a box with other photos through several moves when the war ended: from the village of Ritini down to the small town of Katerini in 1944, and finally to Thessaloniki in 1946. (It is thanks to that photo that my family and Bert reconnected again many years later, in 1949). Whatever the reasons, Slim's figure had remained alive in our memories for years after the encounter, even after the war and the tragedy of the execution of our father in January 1944, more than two years after Slim had come to our house.

To return to Corporal Wrigley's journey: With his feet somewhat healed and wearing my grandfather's American boots, Slim left our house and the village to hide in a nearby monastery.

At this point, I must say something about these boots, as they were quite unforgettable – as was my grand father's gesture of giving them away. Bert still remembers that gesture fifty years later and speaks of it with some emotion in the tape-recorded interview. I remember my grand father carefully polishing these black-leather boots with laces that crisscrossed over metal little buttons. He was proud of them and he only wore them on Sundays. The rest of the time, while in the village, he wore the traditional mountain village pig skin soft footwear which he made himself, like everyone else. Bert had no shoes, and little or no hope of finding any at that time and place. His feet were also too big to fit into most Greek's shoes, like my father's for example. The soft pig skin footwear would not have given his already damaged feet enough support. My grand father, unlike the rest of the men in the village, was at least six feet tall himself, a benevolent giant for me back then! With big broad feet to go with his big frame, his boots just fitted the Australian young man perfectly. How could he not give them to him?

Slim had to leave. It was indeed dangerous to have a stranger stay very long in the house. It wasn't possible to hide him, with relatives and neighbors coming and going freely in the houses in a village, for a chat and a cup of Greek coffee, or to ask for something they needed. The teacher's house was very popular. He always had medicines, he had been the only "doctor" that village had known earlier in the years he lived there serving as a teacher. And Glykeria was known to give oil, sugar, coffee, soap, or handfuls of flour, if someone came to visit. So our house was well frequented.

The possibility of being betrayed by someone in the village didn't seem to worry my father too much, as he felt close to these people and trusted them – a trust that unfortunately would be betrayed later. But the Germans had started to raid villages in the area, and they had already set up Gestapo quarters and a prison in selected big houses they took over in the nearest town of Katerini. Rumors were growing that the Germans were likely to drive their army trucks up the rocky road to reach us, as they had already reached villages that were only a little lower. Ritini was 750 meters above sea-level, but there was a kind of narrow road leading to it and it was only a matter of time before they came.

So Bert was sent by my father for safety to the monastery of Agios Georgios (Saint George), about 1 hour's walk from the village, where two monks lived. He stayed there for a while in one of the cells whose walls were barely standing. Here are his memories recorded on my tape about that event:

Your father knew all about war. His experiences in Russia

would give him an edge over other people, he knew what was coming. I remember I would ask him for advice what to do, where would be the best place to go. He was the one who sent me to the monastery, there were only two monks there at the time. I was rather dismayed when I went there and found it was just a heap of rubble. The two monks there were very good to me, let me sleep there for a few nights.

The monks had barely enough food for themselves, although they would have shared it anyway, so the teacher's family provided. But it was difficult for this particular young man to sit around and do nothing. He moved out of the monastery and, having made contact with two other Australians, Sergeant Bill Gamble and Sergeant Ted Bryant (who both had been on duty at the AGH in Athens, and who had also managed to escape from the prison camp in Thessaloniki), they all went up to a mountain location called Fteri ("Fern" in Greek), to stay with shepherds. Only, they also had a German with them! He claimed that he was a deserter from the German army, and he had attached himself to the two Australians, but it seems that no one trusted him enough. The decision was made to get rid of him, but they couldn't just let him go, being afraid that he would betray them, , and the Greek people who were harboring them, whether willingly or unwillingly. Someone had to do the unpleasant task of shooting him. It seems that this task fell upon "Slim", the other two Australians being medics.

Here is the story as told by Bert himself:

I shot a German deserter (...). When I got up to Fteri with the other boys, this chap was with them. (...) I wasn't very happy about it. There was the possibility of him being recaptured. He knew how many we were, where we were and he also knew who was feeding us. If he got recaptured, he would have given the information to the Gestapo, nothing surer. So I shot him, and the two doctors were supposed to bury him. But they didn't, they must have covered him over with leaves, instead of piling up rocks or something like that.
The next thing I knew, everywhere I went the village people told me I had to go, I couldn't stay, the Germans were looking for me. They were looking for the tall Australian, Slim. "Where is he? We are going to hang him when we find him." It rather seems to me that the two doctors didn't take the identity disk off the German's body. The people in Morna (the closest village) knew all about it. I found out later that the doctor from Morna went and found the body, the Germans were notified that this man was obviously a German. They found out who shot him and everything. That's why they were looking for me. Until this happened I was more welcome in that village – I can't quite remember the name. Though they gave me bread, eggs, and so on, they told me to go, "they are going to hang you", they said.

After that, Slim and the other two Australians worked out a rough plan to get out of Greece. Slim brought them for a brief visit to our house in Ritini. After receiving hospitality there, got some rest and some food, they split up but agreed to meet outside another village in the area. Bert actually remembered the name of that village, Keramidi, just outside Katerini. They planned to start their journey which they hoped would lead them to freedom. All together, they would try to make their way to the nearest port and find a way to head for Turkey. Here are the words of Bill Gamble, as reported by Patsy Adam-Smith, describing that aborted exit plan from occupied Greece:

Then we met Lance-Corporal "Slim" Wrigley, also of the 2/5th AGH. The three of us decided to get guns and go down towards Bolas (actually, the correct name of the town is Volos, and it is a port) and steal a fishing boat. I had a small Luger with only one bullet in it so I left the Luger behind and decided we could get another later. My friend had a .45 with holster belt so he hung on to it. Slim had gone to another village to get a gun for himself and we had decided the three of us would meet at one of the villages.
As the two of us walked towards this rendezvous, we passed a country policeman who had been friendly previously and he suggested we wait in a copse of trees while he went into the village to get food, but what he got was the Germans. After about a quarter of an hour, we suddenly heard cars pulling up around us, and we peered through the trees and there they were, coming at us with automatic rifles (Patsy Adam-Smith, pp. 160-161).

The two Sergeants were arrested and sent to the Gestapo Headquarters in Thessaloniki for a stiff interrogation. The Germans thought that they might know something about the groups of guerillas active in the area of Katerini so they were, in the words of Bill Gamble, "most unpleasant". And he continues:

They bashed us around because they knew there were some partisan troops in the hills up above where we had been and they thought they had artillery and all sorts of things up there and that we had been with them. If we'd only known where the blooming people were we would have been with them! (p.161)

After a few days, they were sent back to the prison camp from which they had all escaped, and then later were loaded onto a train for Stalag VIII A, Wolfsberg, Austria. Bill Gamble, suffering from frequent bouts of malaria and being medical staff was released as part of an exchange of prisoners in September 1943. His friend Ted Bryant was also put on the same list but he had escaped just before. Both made it back to Australia, and met in the recovery center in Ballarat, where they found out that Slim had also made it back home just before them. The difference was that, instead of spending about two years in a German prison camp, Slim's fate was to stay on in Greece and fight the Germans, as he was sent to do, though not with other Australian and British soldiers but with the Greek guerillas, the "Antartes" as they were called in Greek. Slim first, then, at his instigation, Bruce Vary also joined the Greek Resistance fighters active high up on Mount Olympus and the mountain ranges that surround it, called Pieria. During their time with the partisans, Slim and Bruce ended up trekking through most of the mountains of northern Greece. That is the chapter of the guerilla war fare, which Slim learnt from the Greek partisans.

To pick up Bill Gamble's story and that of Slim after the missed rendezvous, here is what we read a little further on in Patsy Adam-Smith's book:

Slim had gone to the rendezvous the three of us had arranged and learnt what had happened. So he went down and dealt with the policeman and after that met with the partisans. Eventually Slim got pneumonia and these partisans organized to have him evacuated out by submarine to the Middle East

(pp. 161-162).

The meeting with the partisans mentioned by Bill Gamble did indeed take place but not for a while yet. There are the months Slim spent hiding in the town of Katerini, where he met Bruce Vary, the fellow Australian with whom he was destined to spend a long time, even before they both joined the partisans. They stayed together almost continuously until December 1943, around two whole years, when Bruce and Slim finally made an escape route through the area near the port of Volos. That area is a peninsular called Pelion, with Mount Pelion in its middle, one of the most beautiful and most tourist-frequented parts of Greece today, with picturesque villages and spectacular beaches. But every village there, every bit of stone, has a history. Bruce and Slim made it across to Turkey, as originally planned, and then, after some additional adventures, back to Australia.

But before that happy event, we will follow Slim immediately after he "dealt" with the Greek policeman, who was collaborating with the Germans and who actually received money for each "head" he delivered to them – it seems that the going price was 1,000 drachmas for British soldiers. We can take it to mean that "dealing with him" meant that Slim took his life so that he wouldn't be able to continue doing what he had been doing. Bert didn't say anything about that detail in the taped interview. But we knew from my mother in later years, and Xanthoula also remembers the event, which I don't. He returned to our house in Ritini immediately following that incident. The betrayal, his friends' arrest, and "dealing with" the man who had handed his friends to the Germans had upset and disturbed Slim to such an extent that he broke down. After all, he was only about 21 years old. He declared to his host family that he was going to turn himself in. He felt alone and desperate, all hope seemed to have vanished of ever being able to escape from occupied Greece and rejoin the Australian army, let alone make it back home to Australia. It was an understandable moment of weakness.

Xanthoula remembers that our father was away for that day. She remembers, and I also remember my mother and my grandfather talking about it after the war ended, how they all tried to reason with the young man, tried to comfort him. Finally in order to stop him from leaving and turning himself in, it seems that my mother discreetly locked his door at night, waiting for my father to return. When my father came, he was able to calm him down. He promised to hide him again and find a way to put him in touch with people who would be able to help him leave the country. One thought was to put him in touch with the partisans, as the resistance movement was already under way and growing fast. While waiting for that opportunity, our 13-year old brother, Stefanos, took him again up to the location of Fteri, to a cousin on my mother's side, a shepherd guarding his sheep on the mountains towering above our village. It was best for Slim not to return to the monastery, a place where he had already hidden and which may have been compromised. It was also a location further removed from the partisans' paths than Fteri. Both Slim and my brother Stefanos stayed up there for a while, and Slim took the opportunity to learn more Greek from our brother and from our cousin the shepherd, who later became the priest of our village.

Soon Slim found it again difficult to just sit and wait, even though he was helping the shepherd with his chores. Daring as he was, he decided to venture down to the town of Katerini, where he heard that other Australians, New Zealanders and British soldiers were hiding. The idea seemed more comforting to him, and he felt he had more hopes to organize an exit from there with some of his own people. So he left the mountain and cautiously crept into the town of Katerini. He couldn't remember exactly how a host family was found, though we believe that it was through my father's friends and acquaintances there. Father and our family had lived in that small town for nearly ten years, from 1929 to 1938, after he was transferred from being the Headmaster of the small school in Ritini to being the Prinicipal of a larger school in Katerini. I was born there myself in 1936. Two years later, father was transferred to Thessaloniki to a higher administrative position, and that is where the declaration of war found us.

In the town of Katerini, we know that Slim was given refuge in the house of a Greek Lutheran baker who had spent time in America and spoke some English. Bert had said at some point to me that they went out of their way to be good to him but didn't elaborate, perhaps he couldn't remember all that much after so many years. Bruce Vary, however, who recorded his experiences in 1945 in the book I mentioned earlier, soon after he returned home, gives a moving account of the generosity of his protective family. The father of the family had died, but the mother and four children hid him and took care of him for a total of seven months. They all slept in a single room so as to give him the only other room they had, sharing their food to keep him alive, treating him as best they could when he was very ill with malaria and nearly died. At some point, when it looked as though Bruce might not make it, the family decided that, if he died, they would bury him in their own back yard, since a grave in a churchyard was out of the question.

Bruce records many other detailed memories of his time in Katerini with his host family, this "home away from home" (p. 58). He remembers that months went by, and he could not go out because, as he says, "Katerini was ... lousy with Germans". He spent most of his time in his little room watching people go by in the street outside his window, and the Germans right opposite. He would only go out every now and then and only at night for a brief walk, sometimes looking into a crowded café through the opening and closing of a door. In his own words: "I knew a desperate loneliness, a desperate boredom" (p.62).

It is then that Bruce Vary met Slim through their respective host families. Here is how Bruce records that event:

It was at this time that I met Slim, and with the meeting of him the first definite step was taken towards a greater adventure than I had experienced up to date. For it was owing to him that I joined with the British Military Mission.

When they told me there was another Australian in Katerini, I was suspicious of such a statement. But one night I had got to the state of boredom which demands action of any kind, even dangerous action, so I allowed myself to be taken to meet Slim.

When I saw him I couldn't help smiling to myself. Over six feet, and incredibly thin, with a typically Australian face and shock of fair hair, he must have had considerable difficulty concealing his person. Not even drunk could anyone imagine he bore the remotest relation to a Greek (...). From that time

we became cobbers (p.64).

A short personal note here to say that when I met Bruce after I arrived in Australia myself in 1955, I saw a small and dark man -- and all the photos bear witness to that -- who could have easily passed as a native Greek, except of course for the language which he desperately tried to learn. It seems that Slim was much quicker at learning the language, and by the end of his stay in Greece he could carry on a conversation in Greek, with mistakes, but quite fluently. That ability he kept until the end of his life.

Bruce tells how after four months, all of the Allied soldiers, some thirteen of them being hidden by families in Katerini, had a scare. The Germans started an organized hunt and all of them had to move from house to house to avoid being captured. Trusted Greeks acted as scouts and would tell them which houses the Germans had searched and where to go (Vary, p.63).

After they had been in Katerini for several months, Slim and Bruce decided they were a burden and a threat to their respective host families. Food was getting more scarce and the Germans more and more suspicious. So the two friends took to the hills, sleeping anywhere they could find shelter, mainly with shepherds (Vary, p.69). Following another scare, a trap set up by the Germans using three good-looking girls claiming they were sent by the Red Cross to a particular house to bring parcels to the English soldiers, a trap during which eight of the thirteen men were captured, Bruce and Slim who had fortunately missed the "party", "feeling pretty sick ... with that rotten trick" decided to go even higher into the mountains for more safety.

After a 15-hour walk towards Mount Olympus, they reached a deserted village which was being used mostly by shepherds during the summer. They chose one of the abandoned homes, also occupied by a shepherd. Neither Bruce nor Bert in his tape could remember the name of that village. But for them, away from danger and in beautiful nature, still with good weather, it was an idyllic existence for a while, compared to what they had been through up until then. After living closed up in small rooms with no bathing facilities, and with the fear of the enemy at their doorstep, the two young men were thrilled with the new conditions.

Time was our own, there were no Germans; the shepherds looked after us, the sheep and the church. We wandered on the hills, bathed in the stream that ran down through the village, and at night helped to yard the sheep in the back of the house, to protect them from the wolves that howled around the village after dark (Vary, p.71).

But all good things come to an end. Winter 1942 arrived, the shepherds left to take their sheep to warmer places down in the plains, and in the plains were the Germans. Bruce, who had been sick with malaria and still seemed unable to throw it off, went back to his usual home in Katerini for a short while. Slim, himself infected with malaria but suffering attacks more rarely, was in much better health than Bruce. When Bruce left for Katerini, and keeping in mind the possibility of joining the Greek guerillas, Slim started his usual peregrinations throughout the area. He came by our house for a brief visit, then went up to Fteri once more to stay with the shepherds. But later, when Bruce left his shelter in Katerini again and was out looking for a place to hide, he sent word for Slim to come and meet him at a particular village -- a very small village "some hours walk from Katerini" says Bruce (p. 72). Slim was very close to joining the Greek guerillas, but his friend had sent for him, so he went to the village where his friend was. Bruce doesn't record the name of the village, he probably couldn't remember it. But Bert did remember it well and mentioned it in his interview with me. The village of only a few houses was called "Moni Petras", meaning "Monastery of Stone". Close-by there was an uninhabited monastery and an abandoned mine. I actually know the village, I have been there twice in the recent years -- once with my sister Xanthoula in 2006 -- and I can say that it is more than just "some hours' walk" from Katerini. Even today, it takes nearly an hour and a half by car through an uphill and tortuous road.

Close by there was also a TB Sanatorium whose now empty old buildings still stand. Later, after the war, the former sanatorium became a psychiatric hospital for severe cases. The small village became uninhabited at some point, its few residents left partly because of the proximity of the psychiatric hospital but mostly because of the post-war and post-civil-war drive of the population towards the bigger cities, in search of a safer and better life. The area and the village, which are now slowly being revived, is indeed a beautiful spot on the spur of Mount Olympus. No doubt soon tourists will seek it out, and it will be "developed", as they say -- that is, small hotels will spring up and it will be visited by people who will have no idea about its history and about what it meant to two Australian young men who hid there for months.

They both found sanctuary at the T.B. Sanatorium, whose matron hid them in the underground boiler-room and managed to get rations of food for them "in some miraculous way", writes Bruce.

It is now getting close to winter 1942, nearly a year and a half after the Australians had landed in Greece. It was a cold one too. Conditions were severely depressing throughout the country and Bruce was well informed about them when he wrote the following:

In Katerini itself hundreds died of starvation. In Athens people collapsed in the street, swelled and went black all over their bodies. German trucks went round several times a day collecting the dead. For us the main concern was foot covering. There were no such things to be had as boots or shoes, and ours had at last given up all pretence of doing their job. We may as well have gone barefooted (...) for what had once been the uppers and soles of our boots, were now unrecognizable pieces of holey leather tied with string. A serious business in a country where the chief means of travel was walking (p.73).

Bruce, with his frequent malaria attacks, was content to stay in the boiler room, but Slim, in better health except for his sore feet and lack of shoes, liked to move. The American boots had worn out by then! He sometimes visited his friends in Katerini or just went out hoping to get food and information on how they could leave Greece. But soon they had to leave the Sanatorium in a hurry as the Germans raided it suspecting that "Communists" were hiding there. For practical purposes, the occupying forces considered all "antartes" Communists. The matron just had enough time to tell them of a nearby cave

where they could hide. Bruce gives us a vivid description of the cave where they were fated to stay for several months. The scrubby and rocky surface surrounding the cave made the access to it unwelcome, and it was well protected from the wind by a bend in the dry creek and an overhanging rock (p. 74). About ten feet deep and high enough to take Slim standing up, it was to be their home for a while – for them, as well as for a third young man on the run from the Germans, a young Greek who had fought the Germans in Crete, called Kosta. Bert identifies him in my tape as Kosta Angelopoulos, a former cadet of the naval school in Greece, with a father quite high up in the Greek navy. Bruce had found him ragged and starving in Katerini when he went down at the beginning of the winter, after staying with the shepherds in the deserted village, so he brought him up to stay with them. From then on, young Kosta would go wherever they went, until the very end.

While in the cave, Bruce went through his worst ordeal yet.

I was struck with a mysterious illness. I could not put any weight on my legs, and all the joints of my body became exceedingly painful. But for Slim I would not have lasted long. He used to go across country to the little village of Lophis to find food. (Actually the name of the village is "Lophos", in Greek meaning "Hill", a relatively well-to do village then by Greek standards. It is situated on a hill, but the inhabitants owned some fertile fields located on its west side.) Kosta would go with him. They would leave in the afternoon, stay the night and arrive back the next morning, having completed the journey over wild tracks in their rugged and practically shoeless condition. What food they had – if any – they would leave within my reach. If it was cold they would make a fire, and as with the food, they would gather firewood and leave it within my reach (pp.74-75).

Bruce doesn't mention anything about Slim's and Kosta's excursions down to Katerini. But Bert recounts those trips in my tape, hitching a ride on the back of trucks to save time, energy and shoe wear and tear. The trucks, driven by Greek drivers but with a German guard sitting next to them, were carrying materials from the nearby mine, now taken over by the Germans. Going out on the main road and getting a ride into town, which they did on several occasions, was quite a risky move, but Slim wasn't known for his cautiousness. He was always ready to take risks if he set his mind to do something. He just hoped that wearing local clothes and being with someone who looked Greek would not draw attention to his height and foreign features. But if anything had gone wrong, Bert says in the taped interview, they had their guns hidden ready for action.

From Moni Petras, we occasionally made trips to Katerini. We got a lift on the back of the German trucks. They were coming from the mines at Agios Dimitrios, chrome mines or some sort of mines, they were digging ore anyway. And they had these trucks running backward and forward, with workers. We got out on the main road, between Agios Dimitrios and Katerini. You could get a lift in. Initially I was a bit apprehensive. Kostas, the young Greek lad and myself, we were walking along the road to Katerini and one of these trucks pulled up along side us. I think the driver was Greek, with a German guard sitting beside him. Anyway, we got on the back of the truck, and as soon as we got close to Katerini, I said to Kosta I will bang on the top of the truck and if he doesn't stop, you shoot the driver, leave the German to me. Well that was all right. But they stopped, so we did that a few times. We just waited for a truck to Katerini. It was like waiting for a bus service! (From tape)

And so the months went by, the two men taking care of Bruce and trying to feed themselves. Those days, in northern Greece and up in the mountains, the snow came early, sometimes as early as October or early November. Life was becoming very difficult in the cave. Bruce's text has some striking images:

All around the cave and down the creek was a cotton-wool world. The trees were scarecrows smothered in a white shroud and all around them was an unearthly silence (p. 75).

Then he continues with their constant preoccupation: food and footwear.

For us, the problem of food was serious; even if we could have found it, to get to the cave was anything but simple. The deep snow and ice made travelling on foot practically impossible, and Slim's and Kosta's condition which before had been bad, was now almost hopeless.
After a heavy fall the Sanatorium again came to our rescue. They discovered we could get nothing to eat, and insisted on our accepting their protection. We were past refusing; that white, silent and starving world outside the cave had, for the time being, defeated us (pp. 75-76).

They took refuge in the boiler room of the Sanatorium, as they had done before, but after a few weeks they decided to leave realizing that, if they were discovered there, the consequences for their hosts, and for the patients, would be devastating. Not long before, for similar reasons, the Monastery of Agios Dionysios, deep inside a gorge on Mount Olympus, was burnt down to the ground, after 40-50 monks were thrown out of their cells. The same fate would no doubt be awaiting the TB Sanatorium, but this time with very sick people having nowhere to go.

I will insert a brief note here on the Monastery of Agios Dionysios: there is also a newer one by the same name which was built after the war to replace the old one, further down closer to the village of Litohoro, in a more accessible location. But in May 2008, when my sister Xanthoula came to Greece, we visited the old monastery. You can now drive there on a partially dirt road. We saw that restoration of the monastery complex is well under way. The church in the middle of the grounds is fully restored and open for celebrating the liturgy and for visiting. Restored are also the monks' long dining hall and a couple of small cells, already occupied. Speaking with one of the monks, I heard that rumors have it that the German government may be willing to give some kind of compensation for the completion of the whole monastery's restoration.

The three young men felt they had to leave the TB Sanatorium again. Bruce, somewhat recovered from his mysterious incapacitating illness but still suffering from frequent attacks of malaria, went back to Katerini "to that home which never failed [him], no matter what conditions its people suffered" (Vary, p. 76). This time Slim announced that he was definitely going to join the Greek guerillas. Young Kosta followed him.

Bruce reminisces:

I knew for some time he [Slim] had been more than restless. Things looked so hopeless for us. I thought that probably he had found the solution for himself. Also, of late, the rumours had been growing that the British were actually back in the country. We had not paid much attention to them, but in spite of ourselves the thought was there, deep down in our minds. Perhaps___!
As far as I was concerned I knew I was going to miss him unutterably. I was going to miss him, not only because he was a man from my own country, speaking my own language, but also because, although we were completely dissimilar, we had found a companionship in those long, hard months that was impossible to define or break"
(p. 76).
Further down, Bruce describes Slim as "young and spoiling for action", eager to join the partisans, while that thought didn't appeal as much to him. He couldn't see how that would help them get out of Greece, and wasn't keen to participate in what he perceived as "a political fight". Slim left with the words "When you're better I'll be calling back for you" (p.76). He kept his word. When he later visited Katerini to see his friend, as always risking to be recognized or betrayed and arrested, he was "full of stories and plans", says Bruce (p.78).

Indeed, Slim had wasted no time: as soon as he joined a group of guerillas, they came upon a village where they found and collected weapons left behind by New Zealanders when they retreated during the catastrophic evacuation. Slim helped carry the weapons up to the highest village on Mount Olympus, Pouliana, which was also the headquarters of the British Mission. Once there, only two days later, he was interviewed by the leader of the British Military Mission, Colonel Sheppard.

While we were in Pouliana, I met the British Colonel, his code name was Hill, his real name was Rupert Sheppard. Anyway, he said he would try and notify Cairo, to say that we were still alive, Bruce and I. There were only the two of us. (From tape.)

It seems that the interview Colonel Sheppard gave Slim lasted several hours during which he had to give accurate details about his division, about what part of Australia he came from and about all the events that led up to his joining the Greek guerillas. Convinced that here was a young man with fire and endurance as well as discipline, the British Colonel accepted him as a member of the British Mission in Greece and told him to stand by waiting for the final orders to come from headquarters in Cairo. At that time, Slim also mentioned to Colonel Sheppard his friend Bruce, still hiding in Katerini, and said that he was hoping to bring him up to Pouliana soon. Waiting for the word from Cairo and for the opportunity to go down to Katerini and convince Bruce to join him, Slim decided he might as well do something. He joined a group of guerillas who were guarding villages on the southern slopes of Mount Olympus from enemy raids. The bands ("omades" in Greek) would also ambush and attack, whenever possible, German convoys spotted by special messengers who would run ahead and alert the partisans.

Slim finally managed to slip into Katerini to see Bruce, who writes:

Yes, Slim was full of praise for the guerillas. Life with them, he said, was good, if maybe rough. He described one raid on a convoy when they had cleaned up eighty Germans, at the same time only suffering fifteen casualties themselves. In addition, they had gathered up a good stock of rifles before clearing off into the hills. Then he told of how, on another occasion, they had stood guard over a village which had been raided and burnt to the ground by Italian carabinieri, while the villagers returned and dug up their belongings from holes in the ground where they had buried them. They had seen them with their bundles, their crying, ragged and excited children, safely into the hills, there to build a new village and begin like once more as best they could (pp. 79-80).

Now Slim had come down to Katerini to convince his friend Bruce to follow him up to the mountains. Bruce felt more comfortable going, now that he knew the British were involved.

Later I was to discover that originally three men had been dropped into Greece, the Colonel and two others. The third never reached his destination – his parachute failed to open. With the arrival of these two men the organization of the guerillas into an armed and fighting force began, and Slim and I had the honour to be the first and, at the time, only Australians to be in on it. For, of course, in the end I told him I would go with him (p.80).

But going up there was more easily said than done. Bruce was still suffering from his debilitating mysterious illness, as well as from recurring bouts of malaria, and it was at least a ten-hour hike, even from the village of Moni Petras to the village of Pouliana. He collapsed half-way there and had to rest in a makeshift guerilla "hospital", housed in what had been a school. Bruce has warm memories of the young doctor who attended to him, mostly talking with him, since his only supplies were "a small amount of quinine, a thermometer and some bandages". "There was nothing much he could do for me, but it was pleasant lying about in that mountain air; (...) I could feel the strength coming back into my limbs, so much so that at the end of a week I was ready to go on with Slim up into Olympus to the Colonel (p. 81).

The rocky track was good for goats, sheep and mules, less good for human feet. Bert remembered that he had to support and even carry Bruce part of the way up until he completely collapsed and had to rest for a week. There were still several hours of a stiff hike before reaching Pouliana. And then, it was clear that the partisans weren't too happy about the Australians going to work with the British. Slim had proved himself to be a very reliable, resourceful and brave fighter, or as "crazy" as they were, during the German convoy attacks, and naturally they didn't want to lose him as a combatant.

The following quote from Bruce's book gives us a clearer picture of who Bert Wrigley was at the time, and the portrait I am attempting to draw of him is greatly helped by what Bruce writes with memories still fresh, only about a year after they returned. It is certainly in much more detail than what Bert gave me himself later, during the interview, at least regarding himself and what he was like back then.

Slim was all for this. He liked the life, he tried to persuade me that I would like it too. After all, he pointed out, the British

knew about us, knew we were with the guerillas; he had given all the particulars about us. If they wanted us they could get us at any time, and probably they would only give us some job of a static nature. The guerillas offered adventure, movement and an experience we'd probably never know again (p. 82).

Bruce naturally hesitated, but after looking at the long steep climb to reach the village of Pouliana in order to meet the Colonel and join the British Mission, he felt too weak to tackle the goat track. So they stayed with the band of partisans who were indeed happy to have them. In spite of all his reservations, Bruce admits that in the months that followed "[he] lived as [he] had never lived before – among a mixture of men it might be impossible to collect together under one flag anywhere else on earth (p. 83).

Bruce also recalls that Slim and he had "a few arguments" on those days, as life with the partisans seemed to suit Slim much better than it did him.

Slim had ceased to worry about getting to the British. Life was great as it was. The sudden race down out of the hills; the swift attack on a convoy, with its attendant smells of gunfire and death, and the shouts of men; the race back to cover, had almost become life itself to him (p. 87). (...)
I came to the conclusion that in the first encounter with him [the British Colonel]Slim had given him to understand that he was perfectly happy sharing the wild, untrammeled life of the guerillas, and the Colonel had naturally assumed it was the same where I was concerned. Yet I would have given much for him to send for us (p. 97).

Life with the partisans involved a constant moving on, not staying in one place more than twenty-four hours, sleeping during the day in creek beds and caves, marching by night, sometimes getting into a village where the Germans and Italians were not seen for a while. On such occasions, they would build a fire in the village square, feast on goat meat, bread, cheese, milk and sometimes wine, if the village happened to be a "grape village", offered willingly and joyfully by the villagers, dancing and singing all night. At this point in the book, Bruce has a striking description that takes up several pages, but I will give here only a few lines:

Gradually their hunger was appeased; the fire died a little, and the shadows from its flames danced over the weather-beaten faces as the singing began. First one voice would start in the clear atmosphere and then another until all the men were singing, and a volume of harmony rose into the night that was wholly satisfying, wholly pagan (p. 89).

It is understandable that if he, an unenthusiastic participant, was so taken by such experiences, how much more they would inspire an adventurous young man like Slim. Being part of these people exuding a primitive energy and passion, no wonder he had forgotten the British!
They continued in this way, attacking when they could, retreating when outnumbered and outgunned, and always on the move so that, except for a few trusted messengers, no one knew exactly where they were. Rumors of the British having come back into the country, supplying the Resistance fighters with money in the form of gold English sovereigns, guns and food through drops from the air, organizing and training the partisans, made the Germans nervous. Determined to wipe out those rumors and destroy the hopes of the Greek population, they started systematically burning off villages and killing their inhabitants at the slightest suspicion. In the towns and the cities, they arrested and sent off to prison camps not only all those who actually opposed them but also all those who were likely to oppose them – liberally-minded teachers, doctors, lawyers, bankers, as well as less well-educated people who didn't cooperate or were reported to be helping or hiding allied soldiers and the guerillas. Reprisals in the form of mass executions were taking place regularly in the outskirts of the two big cities, Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as in smaller towns, following any attack on German troops or convoys.
It was then that village after village in our area surrounding Mount Olympus where the armed resistance had begun, but also throughout the rest of Greece, went up in flames. Whole families became extinct. Fear was spread around, and yet the people continued to resist and continued to support and shelter the guerillas and any Allied soldiers who happened to still be around, stranded in Greece, like Slim and Bruce, after a helter-skelter evacuation in the spring of 1941.

All this time, the Resistance fighters, with the help of Slim and Bruce, were doing their best to harass the enemy. The general idea was to do as much damage as they could with the minimum of losses, by blowing up bridges and railway lines to prevent the enemy from moving troops easily, by ambushing convoys and getting more guns. Slim was involved immediately in such attacks, even before Bruce joined them. Bruce already mentioned in his book how Slim, with a small group of partisans attacked a large convoy of German trucks and captured a substantial number of weapons. They only took one prisoner, the one who wasn't killed during the attack and who had surrendered. Whether that prisoner actually survived later, that will never be known. The Greek guerillas weren't likely to follow the Geneva conventions and, being continuously on the run, they couldn't establish prison camps to hold prisoners until the end of the war. I am guessing that the unfortunate German soldier was probably interrogated and then executed.

Bert in my tape still had some memories of that ambush:

It was before the close of '42 we went up to Pouliana and joined with this guerilla band, "Omada 'Georgaki' Olympou" ("Band of 'Little George' of Mount Olympus"). There were two ambushes... We were heading on to the road one night, and we walked into a German patrol, we lost one man, he walked right into them. The rest of us got away. Next day, we were waiting for this convoy to come down from the mine, we were not far from the village, what was its name..., I don't remember now. It overlooked the road, there was a bit of a creek at the bottom. Anyway, we shot the convoy up, took one prisoner and then went up to Pouliana.
There were other "omades" (bands) with us at the time, there were a couple of hundred of us. For that ambush, we knew they were coming and we were waiting on either side of the road, they were walking on the road pointing their rifles on the scrub, but we were up on the sides. With light mortar and machine guns, we pulled them up quick smart, we wiped them out. (From tape)

In spite of occasional successful attacks, there still wasn't much hope of actually protecting the people living in villages and their homes. The guerilla bands were almost always

outnumbered and outgunned. When the Germans decided to wipe out a village, it was inevitable, and as a rule the villagers tried to flee before the fatal event, if they had enough warning. Sometimes they would resist, but the end result was the same, total obliteration. At the beginning -- as Gilchrist records in his book after interviewing Bert and Bruce --, they helped the people of one village by the name of Tsaritsani (again a village I know) to put on the run the Italians who came to confiscate their harvest of wheat and grapes. Bruce's and Slim's band of guerillas lured the Italians out and fired on them. The Italians left and the people of Tsaritsani celebrated with the partisans, offering them a feast of meat, bread, and wine. But then, a little later and unexpectedly, the Germans came back with light tanks and an Italian cavalry brigade and burned Tsaritsani to the ground (Gilchrist, p. 69). Few of its inhabitants managed to escape, and more families became extinct.

Gilchrist just records the facts, and Bert confirmed them later to me, when he came to Greece in 1973 and we visited Tsaritsani. But Bruce Vary's poignant account is one that brings life to this tragic event. Here is a small part of it:

They sent for the head man and demanded that he call every man, woman and child into the square. (...) The next order they received was a surprising one. The men were all to be drawn up on one side of the square, the women on the second, and the children on the third. Then the commander in charge of the enemy forces addressed them. He said the conditions of living and the governing of the country depended on each man, woman and child; therefore he proposed to speak to each separately, that was the reason why he had asked for them all to be drawn up in such a manner. That the regrettable differences which had lately occurred between his soldiers and themselves must never be repeated. There must be collaboration between the people of Greece and their protectors.
With that he summoned a firing squad into the square, and before the dazed people could grasp what was happening, short, sharp commands echoed in the still air, and machine-gun bullets ripped into their midst, dropping them where they stood, men, women and children. A few recovered their senses in time to run, but they were very few. More than seventy-five per cent of the villagers lay in heaps, their blood already beginning to stain and creep across the stones of their square. Before it had dried the flames belched upwards from the houses left empty (...). Soon the last wreaths of smoke that had risen from the ruins crept against the face of the mountain, there to hang a while, all that was left to tell that grim tale of an effort to obtain collaboration (pp.94-95).

Even though they were not present themselves at the slaughter, Bruce and Slim were quite sure of the facts, as they heard the description immediately after the event. With a few others, the two Australians were sent back to the village to investigate a rumor that amongst those who escaped the killing there were two people who had acted as agents for the Germans: a girl of twenty-two and a boy of sixteen. They caught the two young people and Slim and Bruce were invited to be present at the interrogation. What follows in Bruce's book (pp . 95-96) is a description of their gruesome fate in the hands of the guerillas, which confirms that, in time of war, atrocities are committed by all sides...

Other memories recorded by Bruce, still inseparable from Slim, are related to their biggest confrontation with the enemy. It was the time when the Germans and Italians, with enough information now about the guerilla groups and the British Mission headquarters on Mount Olympus, decided to hunt their enemy all the way to the headquarters in Pouliana. An operation of unprecedented scope and scale was underway, and Bruce and Slim were to fight side by side with the partisans:

Altogether there were approximately 5,000, and with them were four or five light tanks, but we soon discovered their equipment consisted of two-inch mortars. Mortars, in my experience up to date, were Itie's best weapons, and the ones which undoubtedly worried the guerillas more than any others (Vary, p. 98).

Their orders were to stem the attack in an area about six to eight hours down from Pouliana. The ground was not in their favor. It was out in the open, on the top of a ridge, with no other cover than some stones the guerilla leaders had ordered the men to pile up and to use as shelter. Slim and Bruce objected to that, they thought that the piles of stones stood out and gave away their position. In fact they were providing a target for the enemy. But the guerillas didn't listen. However, they allowed Slim and Bruce to find their own shelter, which they did.

The situation looked hopeless. They were 300 men, sitting on a bare ridge, against several thousand enemy troops. Bruce mentions 5,000, Bert in his tape mentions 3,000 of them on the plain, but he also mentions that an Austrian Alpine Battalion was coming from behind them, from another direction, so the total could have been close to the figure mentioned by Bruce. Either way, those figures can't help reminding us of an event in ancient Greek history: the battle at Thermopylae with the king of Sparta, Leonidas, and his 300 warriors against the hordes of Persians. History does repeat itself! At least the Spartans were fighting on better ground – a narrow pass through which the Persians had to march. Also, the Persians didn't have mortars and tanks at their disposal!

The guerillas had only 25 machine-guns, ten Italian two-inch mortars and a rifle for each man (Vary, p. 98). In addition, they had never fought a real battle until then, they were used to hit-and-run tactics. Bruce and Slim knew this one was going to be lost, but they stayed anyway. They both remember that soon all hell broke loose, the enemy advanced rapidly, replacing constantly the men who fell. "In spite of incessant firing they appeared to come on uninterruptedly" (Vary p. 98). At the same time, the enemy mortars targeted the heaps of stones, just as the Australians had expected, and the effects were deadly. Many of the partisans were killed instantly. Bruce heard a mortar shell land beside Slim and for a moment he thought his friend was dead. However he soon discovered that Slim, as if by a miracle, had not been hit, as he saw him "staggering away the other side of the ridge!" (p. 99). From that time, Slim had to put up with a perforated ear-drum and be hard of hearing from one ear for the rest of his life.

When the order was given to retreat, Bruce writes that he felt mad: "I suppose it was the only thing to do, anything else would have been suicide (...) but I had never wanted to disobey a military order so badly" (p. 99).

Here is an account of that memorable battle as Bert himself recalled it for our interview, still remembering great details

some fifty years later, especially the precise names of villages which are still there, and which he asked to visit during his two visits to Greece, in 1973 and in 1981. I remember that my elder sister Eleni and I drove him to that area in 1973.

From Pouliana, we moved out at 3.00 a.m. one morning, in the direction of Elassona. We moved down onto the plain, down onto the flat. We took up a position there because we had a report that there were about 3,000 troops, mixed Italian and German troops, with light tanks, artillery support, coming out from Elassona in our direction. There was a drive in the general direction of Mount Olympus, and allegedly out from the back of Mount Olympus, from a place called Karya. There was an Austrian Alpine Battalion coming out the back of the mountain. They were driving us back towards Mount Olympus, and this Alpine Battalion was coming out the back in an endeavor to box us in. Anyway, we were soon blown out of our position, we couldn't fight out on the flat, we had to fall back into the hills.
The Greeks were commanding.(...) Captain Sotiri, he was our chief. He was a pretty bright sort of bloke. (...)
They turned their mortars and guns on us and tried to knock us out first. At the beginning, I was with Thanassis, the machine-gunner. I had the magazines (...) I must have dropped some. I picked up some and then I dropped some, so I went back to get them. And then when we were withdrawing, I heard a mortar and I dropped down and stayed there. I was in a bit of a hollow and I was lying there shooting. (...) that's when they nearly got me. That's when I got a perforated ear drum. It wasn't only my ear, my nose was bleeding from the blast. Anyway, Sotiri came back to make sure I was dead, he wouldn't let us get caught and tortured. They'd string you up anyway as a bandit. He came and I got up and just walked, we walked back together, and he said "den tha pethaneis pote" ("you will never die"). From the blast, I first thought I was blind, it exploded very very close, on the edge of the hollow. I was saved by the fact that I was down a bit lower, I must have got hit from the splinters. I fancy it was a mortar bomb, they had heavy mortars mounted on the back of trucks. If it wasn't a mortar, it was a bloody good shot on somebody's part, only the fact that I was in this bit of a hollow saved me. (From tape.)

They withdrew. After a fast and painful hike up, back to their "throne of Olympus", as Bruce calls the village of Pouliana, the Australians wondered how long it would take the Germans to make it up the precipitous track. It may take them a while, they thought, but the Germans would do it. They were desperate to eradicate the guerillas and the British Mission. Would they all have to make a last stand up there, fighting to the last man, or was there a way out? Slim thought the Greeks would find a way out, and they did. There was another track, rarely used because it was rough, narrow and slippery, with a chasm gaping beneath it, therefore dangerous for both man and mule. And because it was rarely used it had become overgrown and therefore even more dangerous. In fact one couldn't quite call it a track. More than that, it wound down through an area so close to where the Germans had camped for the night that if one spoke his voice could be heard. And to all of that was added the fact that that particular night was going to be "one of the darkest nights possible for anyone to imagine" (Vary, p.101).

Bruce mentions that Slim already knew that track: "... he had ridden back to camp one night and had gone over the same track the next day in daylight, and realised he must have ridden the whole way with his feet hanging over into space!" (p. 103). It seemed that they were caught, like Ulysses, between the Scylla and the Charybdis. Still, the decision was to move. The British Mission had to be preserved at all costs, with all its gear: wireless, charging engine, fuel, battery, personal belongings of the men and supplies of the guerillas, as well as weapons. They were all loaded onto an insufficient number of mules, and started, into the dark night, on the perilous journey down. Bruce thought that if this venture was to succeed "it would be something in the nature of a miracle" (p. 101).

Bert also remembers, even some fifty years later, that escape from Pouliana. Here is a small segment from the tapes:

When they put on the drive from Elassona and from Karya, the other side of Mount Olympus, we fell back onto Pouliana. Well, from 3 o'clock that morning till dark we were on the move. I remember when we got up to Pouliana, a couple of antartes gave us a bowl of cream and Bruce and I ate it, and I went fast asleep for hours, they had to wake me up in the middle of the night. They had us boxed in but there was one little place they hadn't closed off at that stage, and there was about 400-500 guerillas, the British Military Mission, some other British officers who had come in the meantime, and we all finished up over the Pindos mountains. (From tape)

The Pindos mountains are actually a long way up in northwestern Greece, and getting there must have been a long and exhausting journey over rugged country. But by then, Slim and Bruce were used to considering an eight hours' walk as a short distance, like my grandfather and all other Greek people living in mountainous Greece.

The interesting thing is that, as time moves on, we are witnessing a change in Bruce's attitude: he is becoming more and more involved in what seemed like a lost cause to him to begin with -- involved enough for him to say:

But since it meant an attempt to secure months of difficult and dangerous work – work it was hoped would lay the foundation of Greece's liberation and independence – I doubt if there was one of us that didn't feel the thrill of the gamble (p. 101).
For hours it seemed we put one foot in front of the other – on rocks, in holes, knocked our shins and stubbed our toes, stumbled and recovered ourselves, got mules to their feet when they fell.
When daylight came we had not only passed the German camp and its sentries, who were certainly no credit to any army, but also were well on our way. Later I discovered we were heading for the Pindus mountains (pp. 104-105).

The one good thing about that dangerous trek was that Bruce got close to the British Colonel, the same one who had interviewed Slim earlier. He writes that he walked silently beside him for most of that night. At the end of that perilous descent, Bruce was able to tell Colonel "Hill" that he wanted to join up with his crowd. But the British group split off from the partisans and vanished swiftly, keeping their whereabouts secret, so Bruce and Slim had to stay a little longer with the guerillas. It wasn't until some weeks later that a runner came asking for Wrigley. After further delay tactics by the guerillas who wanted to keep them, they were finally taken to the British Colonel who agreed to have both Slim and Bruce work with

them. They were to begin there and then.

It wasn't long after that that Colonel Hill sent a messenger for me, one of the "antartes" came over with the message, I was to accompany him, and I was to be operative with the British. (From tape.)

So a new chapter begins for the two young men, as the only Australians ever to work with the British Mission in Greece. Their first job was to learn to decipher code messages received from General Headquarters in Cairo. They also had to learn how to report all German and Italian movements, guerilla progress and their needs and demands for support and supplies. The British Mission in Greece was also informed of the longer-range plans that GHQ had in mind for them, so the operation of receiving and sending messages had to be absolutely accurate and safe. Naturally, the Germans were always on their tail for the location of the wireless. All that had to be done through radios (there were two of them and two parties were formed, Slim went with the one and Bruce with the other) whose generators and batteries gave them constant trouble and headaches. Just their maintenance was practically a full-time job.

Slim didn't exactly like the new assignment. Here is what he says in the tape:

I wasn't over happy about it, because I didn't like being closed in, you know. I had to learn the codes for the radio, to assist the radio operator, in other words I was just helpful with the knowledge of the language and the country etc.

Somehow, he manages, at least for some short spells, to get away from what he considered a "closed in" assignment and get back into action. He recalls, again with amazing exactness after fifty years, his next assignments:

And then one of these other British officers was given the job of sabotage. He was a sabotage officer, his name was Paul Harker. And I went with him. We spent quite a while blowing up bridges and culverts, and we went up through Metsovo. (A beautiful village in the area of Epirus, in the north west of Greece.) We were up there. That's when the big tunnel coming out from Giannina to Metsovo was mined. I spent about a fortnight with Paul on that job -- we had drops of explosives. We slept on the ground, it wasn't too bad.
Then for a while we operated around Deskati. (A small town back in the Mount Olympus area, so Slim kept moving around a lot, he knew the Greek mountains better than most Greeks.) Paul was then taken off the sabotaging bit and was given an area, which wasn't too far from Kalambaka. (That is further down south from Deskati, in the well-known area of Meteora.) We were in that area and that's where we stayed for a while. A messenger was sent from each group, each group supplied information to us and we transmitted it to Cairo. (From tape)

For several pages, Bruce Vary records in detail their movements and the job they had to do. The reader will notice that the tone is different and that Bruce's profile changes considerably: from someone who suffered debilitating sickness, cold, hunger, loneliness and fear, he is transformed to an active and dynamic person, in spite of still very fragile health. He sounds eager to serve and contribute to the fight against the enemy. At last he feels he is doing something rather than being passive just trying to survive.

Now we had to protect an organization that meant the eventual security of a great-hearted country, and the upholding of our own national prestige (p. 107).

Besides operating and maintaining the radio communications between Cairo and the mission in Greece, another vital job that Slim and Bruce had to do was to find appropriate areas for planes from Egypt and Libya to drop arms and supplies. They had to locate large enough areas as far away from villages as possible, map them out and send them through to Cairo. Supply air drops were delicate and swift operations, the planes had to be guided to the right spot, most of the time in the midst of mountains and at night. That was done with lighting fires in the form of a cross writes Bruce (in the form of a diamond says Bert in the tape, not a great difference really), and then, once dropped, the supplies had to be found quickly, loaded on to mules and hidden in safe places before the light of dawn and before the Germans came looking for them. Both Slim and Bruce, always on the go, risked being captured more than once, so close they came to the Germans during their operations. Often the fires would be spotted by German planes as well, and they "would come in together with our planes, and as soon as the dropping started they'd let hell loose all over the area" (Vary, p. 111). Collecting supplies that fell off the sky in white parachutes, loading them on to mules (42 mules were needed to be able to load a plane drop), and all the while dodging enemy bombs wasn't an easy task. Bruce says that they had to sleep "with their boots on", and their getting away was often "touch and go". He recounts at least twice when they could have been caught (Vary, pp. 114-116). But it was all worth it for both of them and they continued on.

However, by the end of 1943, Bruce felt no longer fit for the job:

After twelve months with the English I knew I was coming to the end of my tether. The nerve strain of this life, coming on top of the eighteen months' fighting, starvation and sickness, made me feel in a condition I knew was no good for the job I was trying to carry out (p.117).

And Slim? How did he feel? Did he still want to stay and fight?
Well, apparently not. Slim had also come to the end of his tether, especially after he nearly died of pneumonia. He collapsed during a night of a plane drop from Cairo:

Here is how he remembers those events, fifty years later:

Every sortie, every plane load of stuff dropped, everything was organized through Cairo. The whole of Greece was gridded, different officers were in charge of different areas, and the drops were organized. Four fires in the shape of a diamond were lit, and the flares for the night would be green or red, or blue, or yellow, and so on. As soon as the plane saw that, they would let out the parachutes with arms, ammunition, food, clothing. It was on one of those sorties I got pneumonia. I didn't know it at the time, until I finally collapsed. I don't remember the name of the village. The guerilla group had a Greek doctor. He checked me and said that I had been sick for some days. And he cut my back with a razor blade and put on the cups "vendouzes". (From tape)

I had heard in the past from Bert himself the story of his malaria and of his pneumonia, together with some other stories. It was during a trip he made to Greece on his own (my sister stayed home in Melbourne with the children), in the summer of 1973. Almost exactly 30 years later, it was his first visit to Greece since he escaped to Turkey on Christmas Eve in December 1943 – exactly two years and nine months after he had landed in the port of Piraeus in the spring of 1941. When we heard of his intention to come to Greece, my husband and I, who used to go to Europe from the US and also visited Greece and my family every summer, suggested that we meet him in Paris where we usually landed. We rented a car in Paris and, after a week or so in France, we drove down through Italy to the port of Brindisi, then caught the ferry to Greece. We first visited and stayed with my brother who lived then in the city of Giannina in Epirus, close to where we disembarked from Italy. After a visit with my brother, who guided us through some of the mountain villages in the area, some of which Bert recognized (like Metsovo), we drove through the tunnel (the one he and the British officer, Paul Harker, had blown up many years before) and also through the Pindos mountains in northwestern Greece, where he had been with the guerillas and the British Mission. Bert became more and more excited and reminisced frequently as we slowly made our way, through the area of Kalambaka and Meteora (an area where he had operated with the British Mission and Paul Harker again), to the city of Thessaloniki where we visited my mother. He didn't want to see the prison camp where he had been for a couple of months, neither did we for reasons that will become clear later in the story.

Then we visited my elder sister and her family who lived (and still lives) in Katerini, a town he had got to know so well. We also took him by car to some places he knew, and he looked for people whom he had met. Some remembered "Slim" well and gave him a warm welcome. Especially my mother's cousin, Mitsos Kragiopoulos, who was the young shepherd with whom he stayed on more than one occasion up in Fteri and who had now become a priest. Father Mitsos had tears in his eyes as he embraced "Slim" thirty years later. Besides towns like Thessaloniki and Katerini, Bert wanted to see our grandfather's village, Ritini, where part of our old house still stood and where we still have relatives; the villages of Elatohori, Karya, Deskati (unfortunately, the road to Moni Petras had not yet been opened in 1973), the now small town of Elassona, and others. He would look wistfully at mountain tops and whisper "I've been up there..."

I remember that our cousin, the priest, offered to go up to Fteri with him, but Bert's feet weren't up to the task, the old frost bite and the old injuries, both from Greece and from Borneo had taken their toll. But then, after my husband and I left for the States and Bert stayed on in Greece for a while longer, I heard that another young relative took him up there by mule. Bert was wearing special orthopedic boots for some years now, but he knew he couldn't make it to Fteri on foot, let alone to Pouliana, much as he would have liked to. I remember him joking more than once about the way Greeks, those days at least, calculated distances not in kilometers but in how many hours it would take to cover them on foot. He still remembered my grand father saying, when asked how far a certain village was: "Oh, not too far, about eight hours on foot"!

Bert spent the whole summer with us. It is still for me a great time to remember, our drive through France and Italy, our time together in Greece. I finally felt I could repay a little my debt to him for bringing me to Australia and for his unfailing and generous support of me during my difficult student years in Melbourne. Unfortunately, the time in my life had not yet come when I would want to write about him, his story, our story. The family saga didn't become a project until 1986, after I had been through certain painful personal situations, and found myself teaching as visiting professor in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. It was then that I felt this was something I had to do sometime. (It still took me another 22 years to get to it!) Now, in retrospect, I so much regret not recording Bert when he came to Greece in 1973, as it was the one time when he talked more freely about his war experiences. I have enough memories from the stories he told us then, as we were travelling through the Greek countryside, but having his own words is something else. He still tended to focus on funny incidents, having a good laugh even when he described grim situations, rather than on the harsh sides of his experience in Greece. But certainly in 1973 and being back in Greece, he reminisced more readily and with much more accuracy. He was partly reliving the past, and I was there with him. I see now how privileged I have been.

Bert told us then the story of this near-fatal illness, from which he miraculously recovered, and the unusual kind of treatment he received from the partisan doctor. At least unusual to him, not to me who had seen my mother do it up in the village a few times to people who were very ill. The marks could still be seen on Bert's back. The story is very much the same as recorded by Bruce in his book, so I will borrow Bruce's more detailed description which is indeed very accurate, with only a couple of little details wrong on which I will comment.

Strangely enough, Slim was of the same mind. He had never been quite the same after the mortar episode in the battle for Pouliana. In addition, he had been attacked by pneumonia, and no one had thought he would pull through. The guerilla doctor, brought to him as he lay practically unconscious, had shaken his head. The only thing he could do, he said, was to give him the Greek treatment known as "vandoosa" (the correct Greek word is actually "vendouzes", in the plural), a proceeding in which the Greeks had great belief. He made a number of cuts at the base of Slim's back with a razor blade. In the meantime he had six or eight glasses or bottles ready (they are actually special round glass cups with a wide rim and no handle, designed especially for that purpose, and some Greek households still have them), into which, after making the cuts, he plunged a fork, at the end of which was a swab of cotton wool that had been soaked in methylated spirits and set fire to; the bottles were then placed over the cuts. They were left in position for the matter of minutes, removed while the lighted cotton wool was again thrust into them and replaced, the idea being to cause a vacuum and draw blood. But the whole set of movements had to be carried out with speed and sureness or the treatment failed. Whether or not it was due to this treatment, Slim recovered sufficiently for it to be obvious he would live, but he was a sick man (Vary p. 118).

After that, both Slim and Bruce were given permission by their commanding officer to leave the country, but they had to wait for an answer from the Cairo Headquarters. The message with

the approval finally came the usual way, through the radio, and it was Slim himself who received it. Bruce describes him "lying besides his wireless, listless, and feeling rather hopeless (.... [He]) began to decode letter by letter, word by word the permission for his and my release, the plan for getting out". And immediately he adds: "Poor old Slim was too ill even to celebrate..." (Vary, p.119).

One would think that from now on things went smoothly. Instead, now begins the odyssey of their escape from Greece, fortunately much shorter than the one before. In Patsy Adam-Smith's book quoted earlier, the person she interviewed and quotes, Sergeant Staff Bill Gamble, didn't and couldn't know the details of Slim's and Bruce's evacuation from occupied Greece. The two lines devoted to it, "Eventually Slim got pneumonia and these partisans organized to have him evacuated out by submarine to the Middle East (pp. 161-162)", are correct about the pneumonia, but not quite so about the means of his escape. A submarine coming into Greek waters to take him away sounds glamorous indeed, and swift, but it is far from the actual events. The real story, told orally by Bert himself in my tapes, and by Bruce (pp. 119-126), is also reported by Gilchrist (pp. 71-72), who of course heard it directly from both of them. It is much less glamorous, with some narrow escapes and unpleasant situations. There were also some funny moments, which, as usual, Bert remembered well.

For this segment of the story, I am piecing together Bert's memories which I had heard and are also inscribed in my tape, Bruce's memories published in the last pages of his book, and details taken from Gilchrist's book -- details he obtained during a live interview with the two friends.

Here is how it really happened.

Soon after the good news, Bruce and Slim loaded a mule with their personal belongings, and, with mixed feelings of joy and sadness, said goodbye to people they had shared so much with. There was more travelling at night on rough and tortuous tracks coming down from the mountains, until the moment of crossing the main railway line, at some point between the towns of Thessaloniki and Larissa. This was again the area around the town of Katerini -- about midway on the railway line between the two other towns --, an area with which they were both fairly familiar. The railway line was heavily guarded by German troops stationed one kilometer apart, for fear of guerilla sabotage. Once they had located those stations, they tried to slip in-between them at night. But the mule wasn't as careful as Bruce and Slim, better suited to climb up and down rough tracks than crossing a railway line! It struck the metal with its hoof and the still air was filled for a few seconds with a vibrating ring. Immediately, shots and flares went up in the darkness and the mule fell with all its load. The two escapees knew they had no time to worry about the mule or about their belongings. They ran for their lives back to where they came from, lying low and hiding into the scrub until things had calmed down. Then they attempted to cross the railway line once again, this time without the mule, orienting themselves towards the town of Volos and the area called Pelion. They had to keep a rapid pace because they had to reach their destination before dawn, as the arrangements to meet a small ship at a particular spot were very precise both in location and in time. They were given a map to guide them exactly where the boat would be waiting for them, and they were told they had to be on board that night so that the boat could leave before dawn. If they were late, they might miss their chance of getting away.

With a new-felt anxiety, they made their way to the spot of the rendezvous, a small cove beneath high cliffs on the coast southeast of the town of Volos. Eyes wide open, they waited in the dark for the signal – a quick flicker of light which was to appear a couple of times. It never did, and dawn came. Exhausted from the hazardous and tiring trip, disappointed, with no provisions, no blankets to cover themselves in a cold December month, they hid as best they could in an area near the sea, with no natural shelter. They waited for the next night hoping that the boat would come, while the thought crossed their mind that if it didn't they would have to go back.

But it did the next night, although they still were not able to leave until the following night. Much to their surprise, when they reached the boat, they found other people who were waiting for it, for example a number of guerillas who were there to help unload arms smuggled into Greece. Fortunately, for that second night and the next day of waiting, the two Australians were taken up to a village in Mount Pelion where the officer of the British Mission, Captain Michael Ward, gave them shelter while waiting for the boat to be unloaded and to be ready to sail again.

Bruce surprisingly does not mention that detail, although I have in my hands three photos taken by the British officer in a village in Pelion, and in two of them Bruce is clearly visible. It must have slipped his memory at the time his book was written in 1945. This incident is also written by Gilchrist, who based himself on Bert's and Bruce's memories at the time he interviewed them.

Gilchrist reproduces in his book a clear photo of Bruce and Slim, standing in front of the steps of a stone house, with Slim wearing a scarf elegantly tied around his neck and tucked inside his jacket, also wearing German without laces knee-high boots (!), while Bruce wears the normal shorter and with laces boots of the British army. Bert talked about these boots in my taped interview, again remembering the funny side of things. He was still amused, as he remembered the incident in 1992, that when they arrived in Turkey and were taken to the best hotel in town, he came down for breakfast the next morning dressed in new civilian clothes but still wearing his German boots. In the published photo, two copies of which are in my hands, the two young Australians look thin but quite perky. Understandably, as their ordeal was coming to an end. At the bottom of the published photo in Gilchrist's book we read: "Corporal Vary (left) and Sergeant Wrigley, in the village of Veneton on Mount Pelion, 23 December 1943. (Courtesy, Captain Michael Ward.) On the back of one of the two photos in my hands, Bert writes in his distinctive handwriting: "Veneton, Dec. '43. Bruce Vary and Self, 1943. Day before we left Greece for Turkey." The second but same photo has the following written on its back, but not in Bert's handwriting: "Slim" and "Bruce – Australian soldiers at Veneton on Mt. Pelion, 23 December 1943. Photo supplied by Michael Ward, formerly ... (illegible) and now British Consul at Thessaloniki. May 1972.

I am not going to try and guess exactly how it happened that I have here two copies of the same photo with different

inscriptions on the back, but at least it is definite that this photo, and two others, were taken by Captain Ward. He either gave them to Bert there and then if he had the means of developing photos, or sent them to Bert later, after the war ended. Bert must have given one of them to Gilchrist at the time of their meeting in Canberra, to be included in his book. These photos provide definite proof of their passing through the British Mission at Pelion, and also confirms Bert's story given in the tape about the German boots.

Two days and two nights after they arrived at the cove, the two Australians together with several others (Bruce says there were fourteen others), boarded the ship. "Greeks, Armenians, guerilla officers, English carrying important papers to Cairo or going on leave. One was going on a month's leave, we discovered later, to get married and then be parachuted back into Greece" (Vary, p. 121). Bruce forgot to put into his list the American pilots, whose planes had been shot down in Greece as they were returning from a raid on the Romanian oilfields (see also Gilchrist, p. 71). This was a daring mission executed on Sunday, August 1, 1943, with American planes flying very low for accuracy, and it was deemed a success, even though 54 of the 177 bombers that took part were lost, and 53 more were heavily damaged. The refineries' output was greatly reduced and five Medals of Honor were to be awarded to some of these American pilots, the most for any single American military action.

The meeting with six of those daring American pilots is also mentioned by Bert in my tape:

When we got to Pelion we were joined there by a group of American pilots. They had been shot down. They had gone over to bomb Ploiesti, a big oil field in Romania, and on their way back they were shot down and crashed in Greece. They came with us, they were six of them. There were a group of us that went over to Turkey.

Indeed, a third photo in my sister's possession shows a group of nine people, including Slim and Bruce, whose names are inscribed on the back of the photo in a formation according to their position in the photo: at the top "John Cook and Themie Marinos", on the left stands Slim and an "American pilot", in the center "Hutchinson", beneath him "Peter" ("American"), at bottom left "Yannis Lazaris" and sitting down on the stone steps of the house there are Bruce and "Costas Mainos". The handwriting is probably that of Michael Ward, who must have given or sent all these photos to Slim. A third photo in my hands shows a young man with a round face, light moustache and short beard, hands in his pockets, smiling and standing in front of the same steps of the same stone house. At the back, in Bert's handwriting, we read: "Mike Ward, 1943. Later British Consul in Salonika 1973". This last detail indicates that Bert wrote this piece of information on that photo at least 30 years after he had met Michael Ward in Mount Pelion. It is quite possible that he may have corresponded with him at some point.

Now back to the escape. The boat was supposedly trading onions between the island of Mytilene and the port of Volos in Pelion, but in reality it was smuggling into Greece arms for the British, and smuggling out, through Turkey -- a neutral zone --, people who had to leave Greece for one reason or another. And all of that under the onions! With German aircraft doing their regular daily patrol, and two sea planes circling over them again and again, the small boat started its voyage into the Aegean Sea, flying its two flags, the Greek and the swastika. It was Christmas Eve 1943, one that would never be forgotten by the men trying to escape aboard that boat. Bruce's description of that voyage to freedom is unforgettable, and, in spite of everything, it has its funny moments.

Those onions! Never shall I forget their stench in that airless hold, as the sixteen of us trampled on them! There were other things too – the complete and hopeless way in which we were all seasick – the failing of the engine after we had been going a couple of hours, more hours in which we drifted and continued to be ill. Then, after we at last got the engine going and were chugging along nicely between the strongly fortified islands of Khios and Mytilene, a spark blew on to an oily bag on the deck, and in a second there was a blaze that put the stars to shame. Sixteen seasick men made a dive for that bag, all swearing in different languages! (Vary, p.122)

I will sum up the rest of their journey, again using Bruce's description in his book and combining it with Bert's telling of the same journey.

After a last scare from a patrol boat (fortunately it was a Turkish one and not German), they landed at a small Turkish harbor called Alatsata, and were taken to a warehouse on the water front used by the British. After a while, they were taken to another fishing-village where they went through the Turkish customs, fumigated and vaccinated. Bruce remarks "I grant we needed it!" They were then taken again and driven for about sixty miles to the city of Izmir (Smyrna). It was finally worth the waiting, because they found themselves in the best hotel in town where smiles and a full meal were waiting for them. They were told to wait in the morning for civilian clothes to be brought to them before going down for breakfast. Here takes place the incident with the German boots. Bert says in the taped interview that, although civilian clothes had been brought up for him, there were no shoes, so he had to go down for breakfast in his German boots. There were German officers in the same hotel. Turkey being neutral ground, both the Germans and the British could actually be in the same hotel!

We were still in British uniform at that time, British clothing anyway, you've seen that photo of me with the German boots. That was because I had got my feet frost bitten a few times in Greece. We used to wear ordinary boots, in the snow they are useless because you'd push your feet in them and they'd be all wet. When I was with the guerillas, you couldn't get decent boots so you had to pluck them from the Germans. They had these high ones.
We landed on the coast, a covered truck took us into Izmir itself. We had to take our clothing off. Then we met the Turkish chief of police, he gave us the documents, then we went to the hotel in Izmir. Next morning when I woke up there was a chap from the British consulate putting civilian clothing on to our beds. There were Germans staying in the same hotel. I didn't know it at the time, I became aware of it later. I had trousers, shirt, tie, jacket, but they didn't have any shoes. So I went down to breakfast still wearing my German boots. They were of course very noticeable! (From tape)

For the first time in more than two and a half years they could luxuriate in hot baths and lie in beds with sheets. It felt like

a dream, especially as they found out that all expenses were paid, and they also received one hundred lira a day. Both young Australians were amazed at the "attention, courtesy and kindliness", in Bruce's words, they received as they passed through Turkey and Syria to Egypt, to the port on the Red Sea at the end of the Suez Canal. Bruce does not give a name here, but he is probably referring to Port Tawfiq, close to the city of Suez. Although still in the civilian clothes they were given in Turkey, at every point, there was someone waiting for them, to receive them and facilitate their getting to the next stop, the next step closer to home. In one place, remembers Bruce with amazement, five senior officers came to fetch them! Unfortunately, Bruce had a serious relapse to his debilitating and still mysterious illness.

But all the time I was getting worse and worse; only that I was able to hang on to Slim's arm I could not have gone along a street. However, I did my best to disguise my condition; above everything I did not want to be put into hospital. But by the time we had reached our embarkation port I had caved in completely and had to be carried on board. Just prior to that we had been told that if we wished we could go home by way of England. But it was with great bitterness I realised I would never make the journey, and Slim refused to leave me (p. 124-125).

So they both sailed on the "Darra", a new ten-thousand-ton cargo ship, only on its second voyage, equipped with a submarine detecting device, which they surely needed. The Gulf of Aden was, in the words of Bruce, "infested" with German submarines. The "Darra" was going directly to Australia. One more hitch for Bruce in the port of Aden -- still a British Crown colony at the time. The doctor in Aden was of the opinion that he wasn't fit to travel and wanted to put him ashore and into hospital. He couldn't eat anything and couldn't stand on his feet. But Bruce wouldn't hear of it. After a long argument, Bruce was allowed to sail. But it still wasn't a clear sailing: just outside Aden they had to rescue some seventy survivors from a boat that had been torpedoed. They had to return to Aden to unload them, together with another hundred or so that had been picked up by another boat. On their way back to Aden, a scare from a torpedo that came too close for comfort had them all up on deck, and Bruce had to be carried up as he couldn't walk. They finally left Aden for the second time in a convoy of forty ships, writes Bruce (p. 125), which made them feel safer, but after four days they left them behind because they were heavy ships carrying supplies and were moving too slowly. By then they were out of the range of German submarines, so they sailed safely and steadily into Fremantle.

Bert sums up that last part in very similar words:

There were two attempts at getting us back. There was a German submarine pack where the Red Sea opens up like the neck of a bottle. The German submarine pack was working across the Red Sea. We had to turn back, because we had picked up the survivors of a ship that had been torpedoed the night before. We picked them up and we headed into Aden and when we came out we came out in a convoy that was going to India.
(...) It was an ordinary cargo ship. Anyway, they tried to torpedo us, but they missed. We zig-zagged and the torpedoes missed us. They never had another go at us after that. And then we landed at Freemantle. Early February 1944. (From tape)

A last mention of Slim is in the very last page of Bruce's book. It sums up in a few words the bonding that had been welded between these two men.

There an ambulance was waiting for me, in which Slim accompanied me to hospital, and I believe he resented the nurses doing their job, for he insisted on bathing me himself! (p.126)

What happened after their return? Bert recalls:

We got home eventually, we came by plane, we flew from Perth, eventually we landed here in Melbourne, and I was put into hospital because I was under weight. Then I was sent up to a convalescent camp for special feeding.

After about 2 months of convalescing in a camp in Ballarat, the two friends will part company:

Bruce was on his way up on discharge, and then they asked me what did I want to do, well, I said, I wanted to join what they call the Independent Companies fighting against the Japs.

When I asked him why he wanted to do that, after everything he had been through in Greece, here is his reply, in his usual way of understating:

Well, I just thought, carry on, you know... Indeed, he did "carry on" for more than a year.
He continues:

Then I went into the Tablelands to do a Commando course, special commando training. (...)They made them into regiments these Independent Companies. (...) The Independent Companies were originally of about 200 men, you go in hit the Japs and race out again, this is what I do, this is what I had joined for. In the meantime I had an interview for the Z special force, a group of ultra-commandos. They'd sailed a ship from north Queensland into Singapore, blew up some Jap ships and then came out again. They got away with that but I believe after that they were caught. Anyway, I had an interview with this major, I told him what I had been doing in Greece, and he said "I think we can use you". He said "would you be prepared to land on the ... (I missed the name on the tape), if we landed you there with a shipment of arms could you organize a guerilla force?" I said, oh yes, I could. But I never heard from him again after that. Anyway, I went on and joined this other unit and we went to Balikpapan Borneo. (From tape)

Bert says little in that tape about his Borneo experience and fighting the Japanese, but we know that Australian Military Units were sent to Borneo as early as September 1944, as soon as US troops landed on the island of Morotai and an airfield became available. Morotai, which had fallen in the hands of the Japanese early in 1942, was captured by Allied forces, mostly American, on September 15th, 1944. This rather precarious airfield (they secured only a perimeter around it while the rest of the island was left to the Japanese!) was used as a strategic airbase for US operations in the Philippines and for the Australian operations in Borneo. The timetable I have

been able to establish based on Bert's military documents indicates that it was about then that he was sent up there. He was in the 2/3 Australian Commando Squadron which fought in the Battle of Balikpapan in May and June 1945. Borneo had been taken over from the Dutch by Japanese forces early in the war, in 1941. Because of its importance due to the existence of an oil refinery there, Balikpapan had already become a war theatre between the Japanese army and the Allied Forces in January 1942. But the only result then was damage to the oil refinery and some other buildings. The Japanese held on to that territory until 1945. That decisive battle of Balikpapan concluded the Allied Forces' Borneo Campaign, after which they took control of Borneo Island.

I have no other details from Bert himself about his time there, as I didn't ask him specific questions about that part of his war experiences. In 1992, I was focusing mainly on his time in Greece. But I do remember some things that he had shared with me at other times, and comparisons he had made between the two war experiences. He had said that it was more difficult to fight the Japanese in Borneo than the Germans in Greece. It was "more straightforward" with the Germans, he said. "They were out in the open, you could see them coming." With the Japanese, "they could be within a few yards from you in the jungle, and you wouldn't hear them or see them." A different kind of warfare...

Here is what I have from the tape:

Then September-October that year, 1945, I was sent home for discharge. Having been a POW I was entitled for discharge. I was on patrol, when this happened: I fell into a hole and broke the skin on my leg, by the time I went back to the camp my leg was infected and swollen (...)

My tape ends rather abruptly with that final statement. And although we talked more at that time about the war, the recording stops here. Another bit of information I remember and can add here from other conversations I had with him at various times is that the "hole" into which he fell was actually a trap, which the Japanese were so good at setting deep into the ground as part of their technique of jungle warfare.

Bert didn't recover too easily from that wound, which became even more dangerously infected. His malaria also kept recurring and he finally accepted to be discharged, something he had refused in 1944, after his recovery in the convalescing camp of Ballarat. Among the papers that my sister gave me, an Air Travel Authority document shows that he was flown from the airfield of Morotai island to Brisbane on the 28th of August 1945. Bert's official Certificate of Discharge bears the date of 12th September 1945, from Royal Park, Melbourne. It notes a "Continuous Full Time War Service in the Australian Imperial Force for a Total Effective Period of one thousand, nine hundred and twenty four days". Most of them, 1350 days, were spent outside Australia.

For his war time service, "Slim" was given seven medals, all in the hands of his son John, who showed them to me:

The 1939/45 Star, for campaigns in Greece, Crete, Syria, and the Middle East – West of Suez Canal.
The Africa Star, for Palestine, and also for those called forward to Alexandria area in Egypt with a view to embarkation for Greece.
The Pacific Star, for operational service in the Pacific theatre.
The Italy Star, for operational service in the Mediterranean area.
The Defence Medal, for six months service in non-operational areas subjected to air attack.
The War Medal 1939/45, for full-time duty personnel of the armed forces for a total of not less than 28 days.
7) The Australia Service Medal, for full-time duty of not less than 18 months.

Back in Melbourne with his family, Bert, at the still young age of 26 but with a fair share of war experiences and injuries, had to get used to living a "normal" life. One of the first things he did after he came back from Borneo was to look up his friend Bruce. For the many years that followed, although living in different places but not too far -- one in Pakenham and the other in Melbourne, Bruce and "Slim", as Bruce always addressed Bert, kept in touch and continued their friendship. They were indeed "cobbers", as Bruce had said right after they met in Greece. Bert was the best man at Bruce's wedding, and Bruce stood alongside him at Bert's wedding. There were frequent visits, letters, phone calls. They both had families. Bruce's girls came down to Melbourne to spend a few days on school holidays with "Auntie Xanthoula" and "Uncle Bert", and "Slim" and his family visited the farm for their own holidays, until the passing away of Bruce in 1988, at the age of 70. Not a bad age, for someone who had been through the kind of ordeal and serious illnesses that Bruce had. After their father's death, Bruce's daughters still kept in touch and still call my sister "Auntie Xanthoula".

But we need to go back a little. After he came home from Borneo, Bert experienced some of the difficulties faced by returned soldiers. Many of those who had taken part in battles on the ground and had seen the horrors of war, or sailed on ships that had been torpedoed, were traumatized by what they had been through. Some of them, like Bruce and Slim, were hospitalized for a time for treatment of illnesses like malaria and pneumonia, injuries from wounds, frost bite or simply mal nutrition. After the hospital, many of them were sent to recover in convalescing camps. Sometimes, in addition to bodily injuries, many suffered from shock and depression and needed medical treatment and support. Bert's younger brother Eric, serving on board the HMAS Hobart when it was torpedoed on the 20th of July 1943 in the Solomon islands, was for many years of his life troubled by a nervous condition for which he had psychiatric treatment with medication.

Feeling restless and not settling down were the lightest symptoms that returned soldiers had to deal with. Bert, with a more resilient nervous system than his younger brother, managed better the transition from the army to civilian life. But it still took him a while to find his way. He began by exploring possibilities in Queensland with his friend Bruce, and when that didn't work out he tried various jobs. At some point, he invested his savings from his war pay by buying into a milk farm in Wonthaggi, Victoria, with his brother Harold. It seems that things didn't quite work out in the farm business, so he decided to settle in Melbourne and look for a steady job. At about that time, in 1949, an unexpected event took place which helped him to turn his life around. He received a letter from Greece... He had already got a job with the Wynvale Wine Company and, in a series of decisive steps, he took over the

modest weatherboard home in which his parents and his elder brother George still lived in Yarraville, and began renovating it. He repaired and repainted the outside, replaced worn out floors and changed carpets, re-upholstered the furniture and bought new electrical appliances.

What was the event that changed him decisively? He was now hoping to get married, feeling for the first time that there was someone special out there who would share a new life with him.
We will see later how that came about. Now, it is time to start a new chapter, the life and portrait of Xanthoula, a different thread that will eventually lead us back to Bert.

XANTHOULA

Having seen Herbert Wrigley through the war experience in his youth, and seen him back home alive, I will now move to the other person in the story, Xanthoula Papadopoulou.

She was born in the village of Ritini, Greece, in 1926, the second child of Ioannis Papadopoulos and Glykeria Dimopoulou. There were four of us: Eleni born in 1923, Xanthippi ("Xanthoula") born in 1926, Stefanos born in 1929, and Valentini born in 1936. I will try to give here a brief history of our parents, how they met and lived together, in order to establish the atmosphere and the background in which Xanthoula was born and raised. I believe they form the foundations on which her character and her future actions will rest.

Ioannis Papadopoulos, or Yannis in Greek every-day speech, was the eldest son of a family of five, 3 girls, Rachel, Lisa, and Barbara, and 2 boys, Ioannis and Elias. They were of Greek origin, speaking Greek and living in the area of Caucasus near the Black Sea generally referred to as "Pontos" by the Greeks. This was an area that originally belonged to Turkey, and when hostilities began against the Greeks the family moved for more safety into Russian territory. WWI found them there, when Czar Nicholas II drafted about eleven million people to fight the Germans. The Russians were being decimated, there was widespread resentment and the bolshevik revolution started in 1917. Ioannis had been drafted to serve as an officer in the Czar's army so with the revolution he had to hide and then eventually flee the country. The whole family then decided to go to Greece as refugees. They didn't all leave together. One of the sisters, Rachel, already married, arrived in Greece first. Then the two brothers travelled separately and went through quite an odyssey before they reached Thessaloniki by boat through Istanbul. The rest of the family followed and they all settled in the northern part of Greece in the vicinity of the town of Katerini in the years of 1920-21. An interesting coincidence: Xanthoula's father and his family of origin arrived as refugees in Greece at almost exactly the same time as Bert's father and family arrived in Australia as immigrants.

After spending a certain time in a refugee camp in the outskirts of Thessaloniki, the Papadopoulos family was sent to a small village on the Macedonian plains called Sfendami, and given some land to cultivate. Later, Yannis' father, who had also been a teacher at some point and didn't particularly like a farmer's life, became a priest and served the people of that village until he died. He left behind him a reputation of a spirited and rather rebellious priest who didn't always follow the rigid rules of the church. For example, he accepted to marry young couples who didn't have the 500 drachmas -- a substantial sum in the days before WWII -- necessary to obtain a marriage permit from the local "Despotis", the head of the Greek Church in Katerini, roughly equivalent to a Bishop. Father Stefanos used to say that he hadn't read anywhere on an official Orthodox Church document that such a permit was required by God! Breaking the Church's again unwritten rules, he would marry young people who had eloped against the wishes of their parents, and who wanted to have their relationship accepted by their respective families and by society at large. He was known to disagree openly on many other issues with the local Despotis, who tolerated his insubordination because he knew that Papa-Stefanos was a good man and really cared about his people. He mixed with the villagers, frequenting the local "taverna", playing "tavli", a local game of checkers, drinking ouzo with them and chatting freely about politics and other such subjects, in which priests were not supposed to be involved. He was remembered long after he passed away, and people had all kinds of funny stories and anecdotes to tell about him.
In the years that followed, Yannis' three sisters and his brother Elias married at various intervals and settled in Katerini and in the village of Sfendami. Throughout their life, they remained a closely-knit family, much like the Wrigley family in Australia.

To go back a little: upon arrival in Greece, Yannis had fallen ill with typhoid fever in the refugee camp in the outskirts of the city of Thessaloniki. He would have surely died there, like many others, for lack of medical care, but he was smuggled out of the camp one night just in time. Carried in the arms of his brother and the oldest of the sisters, Rachel, he was taken to the only clinic available in Thessaloniki. It seems that Rachel was pregnant when she helped with his removal from the refugee camp. When someone said that it was dangerous for her to carry such a weight, she replied: "I can make another child, I can't make a brother." Yannis barely survived thanks to his siblings' timely intervention. When he recovered, still weak from his near-fatal illness, he had to look for work. He had a Teacher's Certificate from Russia authorizing him to teach both in Russian and in Greek. He was the only person formally educated in the family, with a teacher's diploma in his hands – a large and impressive document in Russian which I found among the family papers my brother left for me after he had organized them chronologically, like the good historian that he was. Yannis had his Teacher's certificated translated and submitted it to the Department of Education in Thessaloniki. He was soon able to get his qualifications recognized by the Greek government. He then presented himself to apply for a teaching position, expressing the desire to be sent not to a city but to a village with a good climate, preferably a mountain village. Nothing easier than to grant his request: many villages in Greece at that time, especially in the mountains, had no teachers, and most teachers wanted a city job.

So Yannis Papadopoulos was sent to the primary school of Ritini, a remote, fairly poor and relatively primitive village about 23 kilometers from Katerini, at about six hours on foot going up towards the mountains – only four hours if you had a good horse or mule. Yannis would still be in the general area where the rest of his family had settled, and that was a comforting thought for the family. The eldest son was loved and looked up to by everyone, including the father, to whom

Yannis often found himself giving advice to be careful and "behave himself". There was no other means of transportation available to go up to Ritini, unless one had a horse, or a mule, or at least a donkey, which the young teacher didn't have, so he actually had to go up to Ritini on foot, carrying a package with his few possessions. It was on his way there, in September 1921, that he met a villager called Athanasios Dimopoulos, or "Dimonatsos" as he was called in the village. The young teacher was fortunate, as Dimonatsos was the most "progressive" man in the village. He had been to America twice for work early in the century, having stayed there four years at a time, and had returned to Greece with liberal ideas and the habit of speaking his mind. Having left a royalist, because he said he knew no better, he returned a fervent supporter of democracy, impressed and influenced by American democracy. His was one of two votes in the area cast against having a king and in favor of having a democracy in Greece in the public referendum that took place later in 1935 – a vote that cost him a savage beating that had nearly left him for dead. This experience was repeated again in 1946, after WWII had ended and the civil war hostilities had started. Dimonatsos was preaching "love thy neighbor" to the extreme right-wingers in Ritini, saying that it wasn't right to persecute those who fought for the liberation of our country, so he was given a second good beating. His elder daughter Panagio was called to collect him from the village police station, all black and blue, like a sack of old potatoes. It took our grandfather longer to recover this second time, as he was much older -- about 76 years old. But he was still a strong man and he recovered.

But I am ahead of myself again. Let's go back to the first meeting between Yannis, who was to be our father, and Dimonatsos, who was to be our grandfather. A powerful six-foot tall man with blue eyes and fair hair, not at all the typical Greek of this region, Dimonatsos was happy to meet the new teacher. He saw immediately that the young man was frail, so he partly unloaded his horse, threw one of the bags on his shoulder and insisted that the teacher ride the rest of the way. Knowing that there was no hostel for strangers or visitors in the village, he invited him to stay in his house, which he had built and shared with his brother's family. He had a small family: two daughters, Panagio and Glykeria, just four of them with his wife Maria. He had two rooms downstairs each with its own fireplace, and one large room upstairs. There was a spare room if Panagio and Glykeria shared one, and he felt honored to be able to give hospitality to the new teacher. He held education and educated people in high regard, as he was practically self-taught in reading and writing. There was no school in the village when he was growing up during the Turkish occupation. He also knew that most villagers wouldn't have the room to take in a guest, or even if they had they wouldn't be inclined to let a stranger come in and stay.

It was nearly mid-winter when the teacher felt he couldn't stay much longer in Dimonatsos' house. Especially as he had caught himself looking more and more often at his host's younger daughter, Glykeria, still not quite 16 years old. In fact, he had to admit to himself that he was falling in love with the young strikingly blond and blue-eyed girl, gentle and shy, busy around the house helping her mother with the house work, cooking, making bread, cleaning, sowing and weaving. The elder daughter, Panagio, stronger in build, engaged but not yet married, was helping her father, as a son would have, in the orchard and the small fields. They were cultivating wheat and corn for their own use, like all other villagers. Glykeria also helped her father with his tailoring. During the winter months, Dimonatsos worked at home with scissors and a big thick needle. He became known as the best maker of winter capes for the shepherds, not only in Ritini but in the neighboring villages as well. He was a perfectionist in everything he did, our brother says in one of the tapes I have of him speaking about the family. We were all in awe of him but we were not afraid of him. He was like a benevolent giant for me. All four of us remember him sitting cross-legged for hours, cutting and sowing everything by hand. Sowing machines were a great luxury, and, even if he had one, he wouldn't be able to sow the thick hand-woven material that was used for winter capes.

When the teacher left Dimonatsos' house, his brother Elias came up to Ritini, and the two of them moved to an old house which had been abandoned, at the edge of the village. They fixed it up as best they could to make it inhabitable. Fortunately Elias was quite a handyman. He is remembered as being able to fix just about everything in the house, and he could repair shoes as well. The house belonged to the Turkish governor who was the head of that general area still at the time when the Turks were there. But all that northern part of Greece had been liberated for several years, since 1912-13, so that house was uninhabited and it didn't belong to anyone.

It wasn't long after they settled in there that the teacher asked for Glykeria's hand in marriage. Dimonatsos refused. Not because his daughter was too young -- girls were married off very early in the Greek villages those days --, but because, uneducated as she was her father felt she wasn't worthy of being the teacher's wife. She could just read and write, like her father. The young teacher was disappointed and surprised by the reason he was given. But he didn't take no for an answer. A little later he asked again, this time convincing Dimonatsos that Glykeria would indeed make a fine wife for him. He was happy to live in the village and didn't have any plans to leave. She was just over sixteen years old, he was about twenty-eight, twelve years older and a teacher, so whatever she didn't know he would be happy to teach her.

The two families had to meet for the engagement. The teacher's family made the trip from the plains to the mountains to meet the bride-to-be and the in-laws. Dimonatsos put on his good American clothes for the occasion, a white-collar shirt with a bow-tie, grey striped trousers, a nice jacket, and his black-leather American boots. His house was the nicest in the village, and Glykeria was well-mannered for a village girl. She presented herself well and was quite beautiful, with blue-eyes and blond hair in thick plaits. Nevertheless, it became known that, although they both made a good impression, the Papadopoulos family still felt that this was a backward village inhabited by backward people. They weren't too happy to see their best educated son settling for a life up there and marrying a village girl rather than another teacher for example. They would have liked to see him move at least to the town of Katerini.

But they also respected him, and he was old enough to make decisions about his life. So the engagement took place, and the wedding date was set promptly. They were married by spring 1922. The teacher moved back to Dimonatsos's house, and a first daughter, Eleni, was born at the end of February 1923. Three years later, in April 1926, another little daughter arrived,

and they named her Xanthippi – the name of Socrates' wife, which was, strangely enough, a fairly common name given to girls in Ritini. It seems that this little girl was particularly pretty, so the name soon became "Xanthoula", a diminutive of Xanthippi, carrying quite a different meaning: the "little blond girl", a name associated with the adjective "xanthos" which means blond in Greek. In spite of her name, Xanthoula ended up a light brunette!

Xanthoula grew to admire her elder sister Eleni, who did very well at school and was generally admired by her school friends. She was loved in return by her elder sister for her good nature and gentleness. Later, during the German occupation, when the family went through its darkest hour, they both relied on each other to pull through hard times. Neither of them remembers any sibling rivalry on either side at any time. But in the earlier days, her father was aware of the fact that Xanthoula was the middle child. Born between a highly intelligent Eleni and their younger brother, Stefanos, who came three years after her and who was growing to be a very smart if rather mischievous boy, she could have felt a little left out. This possibility didn't escape her father's mind. Xanthoula remembers even today with emotion her father's special attention towards her. She remembers that every time he returned from a professional trip to the big cities of Athens or Thessaloniki, he would take her aside and give her some special gift. She gratefully remembers his efforts to make her feel special and loved on many other occasions.

In 1986, when I first conceived the project of writing about our family, I was in Greece teaching as a visiting professor at the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki. The summer of that year was a very special one: for the first time since we could remember, probably since 1950 before Xanthoula left Greece, all four of us siblings were together. I decided to interview and tape all of them together as well as each one separately and, with their agreement, I set up times. The information I have from those tapes is now an invaluable help in writing this story, and eventually in the writing up of the whole family history. I could give here a summary from these tapes, to include memories from all three of my siblings, but I think that, for the purpose of this story, it seems more relevant to focus on Xanthoula, because it is her story I want to tell. It is her experience of the family life and her perception of relationships within the family that formed her character. So at this point, I would like to give here some of Xanthoula's memories of early family life -- memories that I couldn't have myself, being ten years younger than her.

I will let her speak directly, as transcribed from this tape in English, about her memories of what her childhood was like, what our father was like -- the father we so tragically lost in 1944 and of whom, no matter how hard I've tried, I have no memory. At the beginning of that particular interview in 1986, I asked my sister to describe our father and tell me what she could remember of him in her early years. Here is what she said:

Father was handsome, with beautiful black eyes, distinctive eyebrows, classical Greek nose. He used to wear summer hats. Very impressive but not someone you couldn't reach. As a child I felt close to him. Very understanding, warm, very democratic in his handling of family affairs.
Not a typical Greek man, didn't come in from work and put his feet up and ask his wife to bring his slippers and his newspaper. He would help, would work alongside mother, they worked together and did things as they needed to be done. He tried to involve us kids in decisions concerning the family. We all got involved.
I remember he used to go to Athens for school matters. Always made a point of bringing something. He probably brought presents for the others too, but I always felt that my present was better than the others' presents. He would say: "Never mind Xanthoula, I know everyone makes a fuss about Eleni, she is the eldest, but you are just as good as the others. I brought this specially for you". Once, when he came back from Athens he brought me a striped jacket, with red stripes, a cream jacket with red stripes. I will never forget it, it was so beautiful. I was probably six or seven years old, I believe I was going to school already. I have a photo wearing that jacket. I felt sometimes I had no position in the family, but father made me feel I was important.

Then I asked Xanthoula to tell me how she remembered our elder sister Eleni and our brother Stefanos, how she felt about them when they were growing up. What she says is quite revealing about what she was like as a young girl.

Mother didn't pay special attention to Eleni or Stefanos, but friends and colleagues praised Eleni, how good she was at school. I always felt Eleni was brighter than I but I was never jealous of her. Eleni and I grew very close. When I grew up enough to do things with Eleni, we did do things together. I used to follow her around, I admired her, I suppose I wanted to learn from her. I don't have bad memories from Eleni, she paid attention to me. I admired her because she wasn't afraid to try things. I was afraid to climb trees, she always did, she was the one to go up on the roof of the kitchen to lay the figs to dry, she climbed up the mulberry tree to shake the branches while we held the sheet to collect them. She was steady and brave. She was serious. She didn't play with dolls. We never had dolls anyway.
Father treated Eleni as someone much older than she was. Everyone treated Eleni as an adult. Somehow she grew up before her time.
I was closer to mother than Eleni was. Eleni wasn't interested much in cooking or sewing.

Stefanos was very bright, he could read the paper before he went to school, friends and relatives praised him. He was very young at the time, probably not at school yet. He was very active, teasing everyone, very mischievous, climbing trees, a little crazy, didn't fear anything. We all had to watch him He loved sweets, he used to go to the big cupboard downstairs where mother kept all the sweets, loukoumia (Greek for Turkish delight), etc. He used to eat the second row of loukoumia lifting the paper to eat from underneath. Father never shouted, but he tried to reason with him, explaining why he shouldn't do certain things. Mother spent a lot of her time with Stefanos, he needed watching, you never knew where he was, he was always climbing somewhere and falling and scratching himself. He always tried to be in the middle of things, probably to attract attention.

Grandfather admired Eleni a lot, she was good at school. Eleni made a name for herself. From childhood, I was the "vain" one, I liked pretty things. I might have been better-looking than Eleni and perhaps I was taking advantage of that to make

people notice me.
I was interested in what mother was doing, but I didn't feel very close to mother. Neither of us felt very close to mother, we felt closer to father than to mother.

That surprised me, because I couldn't compare my two parents, I have no memories of father, I only remember what it was like growing up with mother. When I asked Xanthoula why she didn't feel as close to mother, she replied:

Perhaps because mother herself didn't have much confidence in herself. She wasn't grown up enough, mature enough, perhaps she felt she didn't have enough to give us. She was a lovely mother, she always made our clothes, made sure we were clean and well dressed. We didn't have enough money to be always buying new clothes, so I remember mother cutting father's shirts to make blouses for us. I remember mother putting a lot of care and love to make our school uniforms. Mother was never very demonstrative, never got angry for example. I don't remember ever being told off by her. She never raised her voice to tell off anyone.

I knew that Xanthoula went to school in Katerini when father was the headmaster of the school. So I asked what memories she had of him as a little school girl.

I attended the school in which our father was a headmaster, but at school all kids were equal, and we never had any preferential treatment. We couldn't just go to talk to him at school.
He was a busy man, he did a lot of voluntary work, he was well-loved by everyone. We were very proud of our school, even the high school teachers came to borrow some things from our school.
I can't remember father doing anything wrong. If there was a perfect man, he was that. Eleni could go out by herself, she was older, but father used to take me and Stefano out for an ice cream on Sundays. It was a very special time when he did that.

When I was fourteen years old, it wasn't mother who prepared me for the pains of period. Father was the one to explain to me what was going on. Mother felt that he was the most suitable person to take care of those things. But mother was firm in her own way. She never referred to him for discipline. She didn't say "wait till your father comes home". If there was need for discipline and he wasn't there, she could take care of that.

I asked Xanthoula to tell me anything she could remember about the relationship between mother and father. Here is what she said:

I never heard them argue about anything, except once – at the beginning of the war, when he sold all the furniture in Thessaloniki and bought provisions to see us through the war. Mother was upset about that.
We had a very peaceful life at home. I remember him busy around her, I don't remember them fighting about anything. He used to show her: "Glykeria, this has to be done this way", and she would do it. Mother was a very shy, not a talkative person. For ever, she seemed to have sad blue eyes. She was brighter in the village in the summer. She probably felt more at home, more people came through the house, she looked happier up there.

I then asked her to give me her perception of the role of our grandfather. In my experience, grandfather was the only man when I was growing up in the village during the war years. My brother Stefanos was still too young for me to see him as the man in the family.

Our grandfather never took the place of the boss when father was around, he always took second place. He was helpful with mother, he had his things to do, his routine. There were no fights between mother and grandfather, but grandfather had strong ideas, if he wanted to do something he would go ahead and do it.

As for the relationship between grandfather and father, she says:

There was an admiration on both sides. I remember father always asked the advice of grandfather, especially in the village, because it was his "territory" – the garden, the trees, etc. Grandfather always left the city before us to go up to Ritini, to clean and whitewash the house, plant the garden, prepare everything for the family. I don't remember any problems or arguments between them. It was a harmonious life...

Xanthoula then reminisced about our grandfather and about the house in the village, where almost everything had been made by him. I too have vivid memories of that house, its garden, the neighborhood, and our grandfather's orchard where he and I spent many of our days, especially during summers. I lived through the war and the German occupation years in Ritini, between 1940 and late 1944, when the Germans retreated from our area. After that, even when we all moved into the city, first Katerini in 1944, and then Thessaloniki in 1946, I still spent many of my summers in the village with mother and grandfather until I left to come to Australia in 1955. But for now, I will let Xanthoula speak, as it is her reality and her memories that are more relevant to her story.

Grandfather made capes for shepherds, sitting cross-legged on the floor. He also gave a lot of love and care to his garden in Agia Paraskevi. He went everyday to work there, and he always came back with full baskets.
He had constructed a special wooden structure to support the vine with white grapes. There was a lower part and a higher part, the latter was more like a reception area, where we had the gramophone. The "paranga" (Greek for large shed) was an outside kitchen with big storage cupboards where flour was kept to make bread. There was a big wooden table with benches, on the left side there was a "baoulo" (Greek for big chest) where the bread was kept. Next to it was the big oven where bread was baked, and there was also a wash basin.
And then some final general comments:

We had a lot of visitors, especially on father's name day. The house was always neat and tidy, with the traditional "glyko" waiting (sweet made of fruit, mostly cherries, and served with a small spoon on a special glass plate). We always celebrated Easter, etc. mother made it a special occasion. On Eleni's name day, her friends, and sometimes their parents, would come to visit. As teenagers we had the same friends, the same company.

There is no need for me to comment. Xanthoula's words during that whole interview speak simply but eloquently: it

was a "peaceful" and "harmonious" life that she lived with her parents, grand parents and siblings, until the war. She was a happy young girl.
Cameras weren't exactly commonplace in Greece at the time, but we have several photos even from those early years: some formal school photos, some with father on special occasions, some with friends during excursions and picnics around the village in summertime. Special school friends of both girls were welcome to come and spend holidays with them. There are enough photos of such occasions and, as in the case of the Wrigley photos, they tell us quite a lot. For example, it isn't hard to see that Xanthoula was a pretty girl, with a smile that lit up her face, big brown eyes under well-defined eyebrows and soft waves of light brown hair. Later, in the high school photographs, she wears her hair in two long plaits that came down on either side of her face, according to the fashion then in Greece, reaching all the way down to her slender waistline. Already those photos show the promise of a beautiful young woman. That is even more clearly seen in the few photos taken after the war, when she was in her early twenties. Unfortunately, after a happy and stable childhood in the village and later in Katerini and Thessaloniki, from the age of 14 up until the age of 24, that is between 1940 and 1950, she was to live through the fear and the horror of WWII, the German occupation, her father's arrest, imprisonment and execution, and finally the horror of the Greek civil war, when our sister Eleni barely escaped the firing squad. I will go back to all those painful events one by one and try to describe them as accurately as possible, to give an idea of the kind of life Xanthoula lived during those ten years, and what led her to the decision in 1950 to change her life radically.

Xanthoula's painful personal journey and that of our whole family began when the Italian dictator, Mussolini, attacked Greece in 1940. The clouds of a World War had been gathering during the late 1930s, threatening the freedom of many European countries. Our father had been following all along the ominous events that led to it: the rise of Hitler and his Nazi Party in Germany, his expansion into the Rhineland in 1936, the pact with Japan, the alliance Hitler struck with Mussolini in Italy creating the Berlin-Tokyo-Rome Axis. The annexation of Austria in 1938, the occupation of the Sudetenland first and marching through to Prague in 1939, all of these moves left no doubt as to his plans and intentions. Here was someone who wanted to conquer the world as people knew it. As for Mussolini, after easily sweeping through Albania in his drive to conquer the Mediterranean countries, he was met with the refusal to surrender on the part of the Greek government.

The resounding "OXI" (Greek for "NO") was pronounced oddly enough by the Greek dictator, Ioannis Metaxas, who had studied military science in the Prussian Military Academy in Berlin and was an admirer of German discipline! When the monarchy was restored in 1935 thanks to a suspicious plebiscite, he became Deputy Prime Minister of Greece and a year later he was appointed Premier by King George II. Metaxas ran a quasi-Fascist government and admired Hitler, at least to begin with, but he never became his puppet or that of Mussolini. When Mussolini demanded Italian bases on Greek territory, Metaxas refused and, on October 28th 1940, Mussolini declared war against Greece. Europeans watched from close a small country raise its fist against the Italian army. Metaxas took command of the Greek army himself and achieved an unexpected victory. The Italians were driven out of Greece by the end of the year. Italian-dominated Albania started being invaded and the Greek army managed to control most of Northern Epirus, which was about a quarter of Albania. Mussolini was defeated while Hitler had turned his attention to the northern parts of Europe. But now it was obvious to those who were following the news that sooner or later German forces would strike at Greece's door, which indeed happened soon after Mussolini's failure. Just as Hitler started readjusting his forces to do that, Ioannis Metaxas died in January 1941.

As soon as the war broke out, the teacher thought of moving his family away from the city of Thessaloniki. He thought that the village would provide more safety from bombardments and from hunger. He could foresee what was to come, as he had already been through the havoc and destruction caused by war. As a young officer in the Russian army during WWI, he had seen the devastation brought by the Germans. Wanting to protect his family from that experience as much as possible, he discussed it, in his usual "democratic" way, with grandfather, his wife, and the two older girls, who were by now participating in major decisions concerning the family. Everyone but our mother thought that moving to the village seemed like the most sensible thing to do under the circumstances. We had a home ready and waiting for us in Ritini where we spent every summer, a couple of small fields and an orchard that could feed the family. Clean air and a dry mountain climate were also a plus, away from the city that he knew would be devastated and very likely infested with illnesses. As it happened, mother had just recovered from a serious illness during which she spent quite a time first in hospital and then convalescing with father's own family in Sfendami, where I was also taken at the same time. In Ritini, Glykeria would have relatives close-by and, as far as his job was concerned, he would ask for a transfer, as soon as possible, back to his very first position as a teacher in the village school. He knew well that school, he had worked hard there for eight years, six of them as Headmaster, before he was promoted to the headship of the First Municipal School in Katerini. He had also been otherwise involved with the people of the village: he helped them with support and advice, medicines and first-aid treatment when necessary, treating wounds, giving injections or dispensing quinine for malaria. Apart from having been the only "doctor" most of the village people would ever see, he helped in many other ways. He submitted to the proper authorities the paperwork for widows' pensions -- the widows and orphans of the men who had been killed in the disastrous war with Turkey. They couldn't even read and write let alone fill papers and apply for war pensions. For several years, he had been given by local authorities the responsibility of collecting in Katerini the money and distributing it to the soldiers' families. After all that, he felt he knew the people of the village well. Being pure of heart, he didn't think that there also waited those who were envious of him. While he was able to foresee just about everything else, he did not foresee that the transfer back to Ritini would lead to his death.

Here is a good moment to add a little more information about our father and his life as a teacher. These facts will fill out further the portrait already drawn by Xanthoula in the taped interview, and should give a better understanding of her background and upbringing. Being proud of our father and trying to live up to his example and his principles have been major factors in shaping all of us, his children as well as some

of his pupils, and our lives – in the professions we chose and in the decisions we made. Xanthoula especially, who loved her father very deeply, was particularly affected. I will try here to sum up his life before I give an account of the circumstances of his death. All of that is connected to the story of Xanthoula and Bert, because if our father hadn't believed in the things he believed, and hadn't lived the way he lived, he wouldn't have died the way he did. And all of our lives would have been different...

Through sheer hard work, dedication, enthusiasm, a progressive vision of a profession he loved, and a profound love for humanity -- a characteristic every true 'teacher' should have --, our father, Ioannis Papadopoulos, although he had come to Greece as a refugee with nothing but a teacher's diploma in his hands, was recognized over the years by his superiors as an outstanding teacher and administrator. He received praises and prizes, high evaluations still in my collection of family documents, and the promotions he deserved. They enabled him to create in Katerini a model school when he was moved there from the village of Ritini in 1929. Within a year of his appointment as Principal, the First Municipal School of Katerini was unrecognizable. Its grounds were cleaned and tidied up for the children to run and play without fear of hurting themselves, the piles of rubble and debris filling the basement were cleared away, and previously unusable spaces were turned into functional rooms. A plan to serve the students milk and bread was established first, and was implemented every morning in that very basement. The poorest were given priority. Xanthoula remembers that she, her sister and their little brother Stefanos were not allowed to go down for that morning treat, or later for the meals served through the goodwill of charitable people in the community. The Headmaster considered that there were many children who needed it more, while his own children had already had breakfast at home. All of my siblings remember that the only time they could have such meals was if everyone who was hungry had eaten, and if there was anything left over they had to pay 2 drachmas to eat. There were no exceptions.

Within the nine years of his service to that school, he completely transformed it. He had the stairs to the entrance rebuilt and widened, added balconies with railings around the classrooms and exit doors and new stairs all around as a safety measure. New furniture was bought for the school, broken desks were replaced, encyclopedias and other educational materials were brought into the library. It was the only school in the area known to possess a life-size transparent copy of the human body brought from Germany, showing in detail all internal organs, systems of arteries, veins, and so on. Even high school students were brought in to see this as a 'field trip', and the Principal was again praised in the annual evaluation.

Here is a short excerpt from a hand-written evaluation carried out by the District School Inspector:

Instructor of exceptional character. Nature created Papadopoulos to be a teacher. Indefatigable, he takes the lead in all matters. Work does not tire him, it is sustenance for him. Of incomparable zeal, and assiduity. He is studious and follows the new pedagogical methods which he successfully implements. He has outstanding administrative abilities, and he instills in the school an atmosphere of love, one in which disagreements are calmly and peacefully resolved without becoming known outside the school. He has a special genius in organizing schools. He succeeds in creating resources and thus his school is not deprived of anything. Papadopoulos is the pride of school teachers. It has been said about him before that he is "Petros Anezis".

G. Poullos
Katerini, May 15, 1934.

Reference is made here to a Greek hero, Petros Anezis – a teacher who had transformed the life of a small village, and took part, together with some of his own pupils, in the 1912-1913 war of independence when northern Greece was finally liberated from Turkish rule. The teacher, an inspiration to his pupils, went to fight with them and died in that war of independence. The District School Inspector who wrote the above evaluation had followed what the teacher had done in the school and the village of Ritini, and could appreciate what he was doing in Katerini. So the reference to this earlier outstanding teacher, Petros Anezis, seemed to fit well. He couldn't foresee that ten years later Papadopoulos would also die as a martyr in another struggle for freedom of the Greek people.

The other teachers too, some young and others older, were inspired anew and began putting forth their best efforts. By now, when people said 'O Daskalos' (The Teacher), those who knew him understood that this was referring to Ioannis Papadopoulos. He enjoyed the esteem of his colleagues, as well as of the people in the town where he lived and worked, and his activities soon extended into other areas. He became an active member of the church board, organizing events not only for the benefit of the school but for wider charitable aims as well. He had a way of inspiring others and was able to mobilize an unprecedented number of ladies in Katerini, who not only opened their wallets but also gave of their time, volunteering in order to help the teacher in his work, serving breakfast and working soup kitchens for poor school children and needy families.
How did the teacher find the resources he needed to manage all of this? The inspector who wrote the individual report quoted above may have known more details but didn't write about them in his brief but highly praising report. Fortunately, some of the ways the teacher raised funds survived in the memory of his oldest daughter, Eleni. She recalled that her father had created, among some of the more affluent residents of Katerini, a circle of donors whose contributions were honored in various ways. For example, at school fêtes, the first few rows of seats were reserved for these benefactors, and bore their names waiting for them to arrive. Even if deceased, the seats would continue to bear their names and remain empty out of respect, thus expressing the gratitude the school had for them.

His interest in promoting education was not limited to Katerini. The villages of the region had many needs and some of them had no school at all. To learn to read and write, many children had to walk through mud and fields to reach the nearest village with a school. The village Rahi (meaning 'Ridge'), only a few kilometers outside of Katerini, was one of them. Although there is now a paved road all the way, one doesn't reach it that quickly by car, situated as it is on the ridge of a high and prominent hill. There is now a bus that goes up there at various times through the week, but at that time there were no means of transport other than horses, mules or donkeys,

or just walking. Yannis Papadopoulos heard the plight of the people of Rahi and set out to establish a school there. With his good name and his fine reputation in the service of the District School Inspectorate, he succeeded in the founding of a public school in that village. Ioannis Kourtis, one of the oldest living residents and a prominent man in the village, now 83 years old, still remembers the teacher who paved the way for the literacy of the children of Rahi. He also remembers receiving private lessons from him, together with Xanthoula who was of the same age, to prepare him for the entrance exam into high school. He was the first boy from his village to be admitted to the high school in Katerini. He later made sure that Papadopoulos was honored and recognized as the founder of the village school, and a framed photograph of our father with the proper inscription still hangs on the new school's wall. As fate would have it, we are now related to the Kourtis family by marriage: his son, Nikos, married our brother's daughter, and my sisters and I have, as a result, visited the village and discovered our father's photo in the school. Rahi is considered now as one of the most forward villages in the area. In the younger generations there are people who distinguished themselves in various fields, and every year the Council of the village hosts a cultural conference lasting 3 full days. Two years ago, I attended that conference and was surprised and moved to hear a University professor speak about my father and his contribution to education in the area.

Two pages cannot sum up such a man and his life, there is a lot more to be said about him. I have a separate full biography almost completed, but this brief outline of the figure of our father gives an idea of the kind of environment in which Xanthoula grew up.

We can now return to the sequence of events, to the point where it was decided that we move to Ritini. The decision was also made to sell all big household items and use the money to buy provisions from Katerini. Our mother felt uneasy, to say the least. She was upset with the dismantlement of the household, which they had put together less than two years before. It takes long for a family to settle into a new town, make a home, find schools for the children. All that had been achieved and now they had to leave. Eleni remembers that mother was also upset at the thought that her husband had worked hard for many years to get to where he was, and he was now going to move backwards to where he had started. It was like demoting himself. The idea was discussed for the family to move, and for father to stay in the city with the hope that we could all move back once the hostilities were over. But father wasn't that optimistic. He refused to be separated from us longer than absolutely unavoidable, and he believed that what was happening would not be resolved or remedied quickly. He expected that we were in for a long period of struggle and hardship, and he was right.

There was more than the loss of prestige and the new uprooting that was worrying our mother. She had a foreboding premonition. She had been aware, all those years, of the envy of some of the villagers, some of them even relatives. There were those who loved her husband, more especially the needy people in the village. But there were also those who felt that the teacher, a stranger to the village (in Greek 'xenos'), had risen too fast from a poor refugee to the envied position of being the Headmaster of their school, and then promoted to the position of Principal of the First Municipal School, considered the best school in Katerini. Being called to the 'big city' of Thessaloniki a few years later for an even higher position in the Department of Education only increased their envy -- one of the seven capital sins, and a common one universally.

Glykeria may have been unhappy about the return to the village, but she could also see that there were good reasons for it. She couldn't foresee what was coming for the people of Greece, but she trusted that her husband knew better. Air raids and bombardments had already started in Thessaloniki, and I remember my very first traumatic experience of hearing sirens and being taken in hurry, almost tumbling down the stairs, to hide with my mother, my two sisters and my brother, in a tiny shed under the cement external staircase of our house.

The immediate plan was to move us and our most necessary possessions first. Father would then return to Thessaloniki to finalize the rest – empty the house, sell furniture, etc. and get the approval of his transfer. The move wasn't a smooth one by any means. Xanthoula, then about fourteen years old, remembers getting on a full train from Thessaloniki to Katerini, and our brother Stefanos tells the same story in one of my tapes. On the way, just outside of Thessaloniki, an air raid warning made it stop in the middle of a plain. Trains were always primary targets. Everyone had to get off quickly and run away from it through the fields. Father, with me on his shoulders and mother to his side, told the other three to separate from us and hide in a field barn. The two girls went into the barn, Stefanos, about 11 years old, says that he continued to run, got lost and ended up with others in an old abandoned building. He later found his way to the barn and rejoined the two sisters.

The older children later understood that splitting the family up was a precaution on the part of our father so that the whole family wouldn't be wiped out in case the enemy planes came down low shooting at us, or in case a bomb exploded. Fortunately the planes left, the train was not bombed, and eventually we all went back on it, only to find out that the railway lines had been blown up further down. That particular train couldn't get to Katerini. According to the memories of my older siblings, we had to walk to another railway line to pick up another train with a different final destination but still going through a station called 'Makrygialos ('Long Beach') about 5 kilometers from the village where father's family lived. Father had to quickly improvise and change the route. That second train was by now so full, my brother described the people hanging from everywhere, like "bunches of grapes". But we managed to get on it and continued our trip to the safety first of the village of Sfendami where father's own family lived, then a few days later to our own house in Ritini. It seems that a couple of horses were borrowed from our relatives to load up some of our things and carry me and my mother, who couldn't walk that far – probably around 8-10 hours between these two villages. From that episode, I do have a vague memory myself of getting off the train and moving through fields of wheat on my father's shoulders. Again it is the traumatizing sound of the sirens that stayed with me over the years. But the rest of the trip is completely forgotten. It was a cold day of November 1940 and I was only four and a half years old.

In the years that followed, our father's predictions were proven correct, Xanthoula says. People suffered more in the cities and

died of bombardments and hunger. Schools closed for winter 1940-41, then opened sporadically for most of the following school year. Two years of schooling were condensed into one, to make up for the lost year. Once the German occupation was firmly entrenched, permission was granted for schools to remain open, at least in the bigger towns and cities. But there were problems of space caused by the occupying forces. In many of the cities and towns the school buildings were taken over to house the invaders' army. Our brother Stefanos recalls with graphic accuracy classes being held at various locations in Katerini during his first years of high school: in the big church near the central square, or in the park, if the weather was good, where classes took place under trees with a piece of cardboard stuck on the trunk indicating what year class was being held under that particular tree. In the colder but still bearable weather, they would sit under makeshift roofs and dividing walls with blankets hung in-between trees, wearing as many heavy clothes as they could. And in very bad weather, they were just sent home. School principals were always on the lookout for some space that could house their classes. In the villages, many of the schools closed for various reasons, one of them being that the local teacher, if he/she was young enough, had decided to join the Resistance movement. Or because, suspected of helping the Allies and the partisans, they were arrested and sent to a prison camp. This was the case with our own school in Ritini when our father was arrested in the summer of 1943. The school closed and children of my age had to wait until the Germans left to go to school for the first time.

Xanthoula remembers that, after missing year 1940-41, she and our elder sister Eleni went back to school for 1941-42. The two girls first stayed with various relatives or friends in Katerini. They couldn't all be accommodated together, so Stefanos, by now at high school age, stayed with another family of friends in Katerini. Being the youngest, I stayed in the village. I have no memory of this, but I have been told that my father taught me to read and write before he was arrested in 1943. It seems that he spent hours with me, day after day, teaching me to read and write for a year before I was to attend school, but I don't remember... After his arrest, the school in Ritini closed and I never attended formal school until 1944, at which time I was asked how old I was and was placed to the class where I should have been according to my age. By then I was nearly 9 years old. I was lucky that my father had taught me to read and write before he was killed, lucky that there were many books around the house and that I liked reading.

Eleni started University in September 1942 and had to stay in Thessaloniki while Xanthoula was still attending high school in Katerini. Eleni first stayed with friends and it was in the following year that Xanthoula joined her. They stayed at the YWCA together with many other young girls doing their studies away from home. Life in the city was as my father had predicted. The Greek currency, the drachma, was devalued and couldn't buy much, but even if it could have, food supplies had become very scarce. People were seen selling everything they had, clothes, jewelry, household items, for a bag of flower. Hunger was widespread in the cities and people were dying in the streets begging for food. Through the Teacher's Association, the two girls had access to food rations, which they could go and collect daily. On the way back, they saw such misery and hunger out in the streets that these meager food rations often didn't make it back to the YWCA. Eleni remembers handing the food out and crying all the way. They were lucky that they lived at the YWCA which was partly supported by the International Red Cross.

The cities suffered particularly from hunger, but even life in the villages wasn't easy. Apart from the usual geographical isolation of villages and the traditional poverty of most families, the food shortage was aggravated by recurring raids from the invaders in search of whatever they could confiscate to feed their own troops. And when the Resistance groups started forming, their needs for survival took further toll on the already heavily burdened villagers. Those who risked their lives coming to the mountains to fight the invaders also needed food.

Some of our personal experiences of that period could be given here, to conjure up images which have been marked indelibly in our memory. The first incident is a combination of my memory and that of my brother, as he recounts it in one of the tapes in my possession. It was sometime towards the end of 1942 when the more ruthless and systematic burning and killing had started. The Germans were raiding villages in the hope of finding and killing groups of partisans, or getting information regarding their whereabouts. They came to our village. We were all instructed to gather at the village square where the church and the school stood. A Gestapo man, who must have been in charge of this operation, spoke through an interpreter and assured the villagers that nothing would happen to them if they cooperated. Children were given candy and people were invited to come forward with any information they had on partisan activity in the area. But people didn't volunteer freely, so the next thing I remember is German soldiers with guns making a circle around the school. We, the children, were isolated and taken inside the school for interrogation while parents and older people stayed inside the circle, in the school yard. I remember steely black eyes set deep in a thin and pale face, looking through black-rimmed glasses, asking questions which were translated to us. My brother has exactly the same memory of the same steely eyes. I don't remember speaking, probably none of us small children did. We were old enough to understand what was going on but were frozen with fear. With no decent information from children, the next step was the interrogation of the adults. We had to change places. They were taken inside and we stood outside, surrounded by the German soldiers with the guns behind us.

Nothing dramatic happened on that occasion, at the end we were all allowed to return to our homes. I will never be sure why. Was it that they didn't want to alienate us, hoping that the people of the village would be more forthcoming in the future? Was it that they were satisfied that we didn't know where the partisans were hiding and decided to leave us alone? Or was it because someone did give information, and the Gestapo left content that this village wasn't against them, hoping for future collaboration? I will never be sure, but later events and rumors seemed to confirm the last supposition.

Xanthoula, Eleni and I have visited Ritini several times over the years. We are always drawn to the village square where the church and the school still stand. The original church was demolished and a bigger one is now in its place, but the old school, built with local stone, has been carefully preserved and restored in its original form -- stone walls and slate roof

– and serves as a local cultural center for the village of Ritini. A good part of our father's life was spent at that school, and the three of us sisters stepped with emotion inside the small office of the Schoolmaster in our last visit in 2006. On that beautifully sunny day of May 2006, and in order to exorcise any bad images and sad memories, I took a photo of my two sisters on the back steps of the beautifully restored old school, overlooking the yard where, over half a century ago, I stood with other children in fear with the German guns surrounding us.

Another memorable event of my childhood is a tragic one. Xanthoula also remembers it, in fact all three of my siblings did in the 1986 tapes, as it was summertime in 1943 and the whole family was up at the village. I remember I was playing with some neighborhood children in my grand father's garden beside our house. Children came to our house often to play with me, I liked to think then because they liked me, but later I realized that it may have been also because my mother would cut thick slices of bread, spread over them a little oil and salt, and distribute them to all of us, often with a handful of dry raisins. On that day, we suddenly heard the distinctive noise of machine guns, not too close but close enough to be clearly heard in the stillness of the mountain air. Then, looking up towards the mountains, we saw smoke. Everyone could tell that it came from the village of Elatohori ('Village of the Tall Pines'), the next village up from ours, about ten kilometers away.

People feared the worst, but many started going up the road that led to it to see what happened. Many of us children did too, and we were about a third of the way up when a man came down agitated with the dreaded news: the Germans came up from the other side of the mountain, not the rough and narrow road that linked more directly the town of Katerini to our village -- and that was the reason why we didn't know about their coming. They rounded up everyone in Elatohori, mostly older people, women and children, as most adult males had already joined the Resistance movement. Having found traces of ammunition in the village school, and having interrogated the people without getting any information, they set the houses on fire and ordered the people to start marching down on the main road towards our village. When they were on the road, they opened fire on them. Most of them were hit and fell on the ground, some were badly wounded, a few survived miraculously. The road was covered with blood, some of the small children still alive and crying next to their mothers' bodies. The Germans then left, moving up to the next village, rather than down to ours...
When these news reached us, we, the children, were told sternly to go back home. As soon as the Germans left, people from our village went up to clear the road and bury the dead, some 40 or so.

After the war, Elatohori was rebuilt by a few survivors, slightly lower, on a ridge overlooking the plains of Katerini. The old site remained untouched, with some walls of its stone houses still standing, like ghosts, the black holes in them like gaping wounds. I saw them some forty years later, in the seventies and even eighties, still in that same condition. The people who returned didn't want to live there, but perhaps they didn't want to forget too soon either. So they left things untouched in the old village for a long time. Nearly half a century later – it probably takes at least that long for wounds to heal - the growth of the new village and the more recent location of a ski station on the neighboring slopes have helped to revive the old village. When feasible, the old houses are slowly being rebuilt more or less as they were. A few small guest houses have opened, rebuilt in the old style with stone walls, wood floors and open fireplaces. The old school is also restored and is now a picturesque restaurant run by the grandson of one of the old residents of the village. Elatohori is now a village visited by tourists, mostly Greeks, who may know, as I do, about the tragic events, or may not. They mostly come to spend a day away from the city looking for a quaint old village and a good restaurant. But the attentive visitor will notice a modest and now worn with time marble memorial on the side of the road with a long list of names carved on it. They are the names of the people who lay on the road, one summer day over sixty years ago, near that very spot.

I also remember, on later occasions when our village was alerted that the Germans were coming, how my grandfather would put me on his shoulders so that the family could move faster (I was by far the youngest), and would take us to a secret hideaway he had made outside the village, near our orchard, camouflaged with branches and leaves under a rock. My brother had an even clearer memory of that hideout, and he describes it in detail in one of the tapes. He stayed there for a while with two other young men, two cousins, Takis and Alekos. They needed to hide because Takis' father, a former Major in the Greek army, was a well-known leader in the Resistance movement. They first stayed in our house, but with the fear of the Germans raiding the villages, they went to the hideout for more safety. The harboring of these two young men was later to become part of the accusations accumulated against my father.

There we would all hide during raids to our village, with some food and blankets for sleeping the night, until the word went around that the Germans had left. For some reason our village was never burnt down and there were no mass executions. In fact, the case of our father was a unique one in Ritini. No one else from the village was arrested by the Gestapo, taken to a prison camp and executed. The rumor went around that our village was spared because the mayor of the village was friendly with the Germans, and a couple of other men, prominent in the village, gave information and collaborated with the Gestapo. The enemy troops that came to our village seemed to be content with taking anything they could find in the way of food: chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, flour, corn, wheat, dried beans, onions, even fruit and vegetables.

On that subject, there is one incident that I could never forget. Once, when for some reason I don't remember why we didn't flee, I saw a young German soldier dragging a live and screaming pig up the hill near our house, towards the village square where their truck had stopped. It was quite funny, seeing him sweating and probably swearing, trying to get this unwilling pig to move, while it sat on its short hind legs, resisting and letting out shrill sounds as if it was being slaughtered. I know I was proud of it, thinking "even the pig is resisting"! The black-and-white pig belonged to our relatives' house next door. Ours was a two-storey house under one roof but with two separate entrances, built by my grand father, who had brought money from his years of work in America, and by his younger brother, Nikolas. His and our family shared the house. The pig belonged to our close relatives. I remember

it well, because I watched it being fed and grow fat in our relatives' back yard. It was white with black patches all over, or black with white patches, I am not so sure now which color was the dominant one, but either way it was black and white. As far as I remember, we never fattened a pig ourselves, because by the time I was born we no longer lived in the village, except for summers. But almost every other house in the village would have one, if they could afford to get a little one in the first place and then had enough food and leftovers to feed it. The families would fatten the pig, then slaughter it themselves before Christmas for everyone to have meat for the holidays and salted fat to be used for cooking for the rest of the winter.

To come back to the pig scene – what broke my heart then, although I was little, was the fact that my auntie -- a woman of a certain age since she was the wife of my grand father's brother --, was following the German and her pig, begging him not to take it away, explaining that it was food for the whole family for the winter months, talking, talking, without him understanding a word. Soon she was on her knees begging, dragging herself on the dusty road behind the German soldier and her pig, but to no avail. He kept going ignoring her, and so the Greek black-and-white pig met its fate in the hands of the Germans. Later, thinking about the scene, I was surprised that my auntie wasn't shot. There were probably strict orders. And I continue to wonder why I can remember so clearly the pig scene, and so many other things, but not my father teaching me to read and write...

Both my sisters and my brother remember that, from the outset, our parents began sharing the provisions they had brought with them, or those my father would buy when he went down to the town of Katerini to collect his salary. Women of the village would come to our mother with a couple of eggs, some goat's milk, or sometimes nothing if they were too poor, asking for some flour to make a little bread, for a cup of oil to stir in with the vegetables, or 'or the vigil light'as they would say, a little sugar, some coffee, some soap, or aspirin for fever. Glykeria always gave. In the afternoons, she would cut slices of bread for the neighborhood children who came to play with me. It seems that our father resumed not only his duties at the school when they were allowed to reopen in 1941-42, but also those of 'doctor' in the village. Nothing much had changed since he left Ritini. The poorest of the village, the widows and orphans, found again their protector. And the others, the envious, kept a watchful eye on him.

It must have been spring 1942, and, at the first national day celebration on March 25th, a day commemorating the declaration of the Greek revolution in 1821 against the Turks, our father felt he had to honor the Greek national heroes as it was customary – and still is in Greek schools today with speeches and parades, and also military parades. But he also felt he had to include in his address a message about the present occupation of Greece. This speech is not preserved, but it is known that the teacher spoke in favor of freedom for all people, and that of the Greek people from the invaders. He must have felt it was his duty as an educator and he may have felt safe within the small community of the village.

But he was wrong. This speech was reported to the Gestapo in Katerini. Eventually it became part of the accusations accumulated against him. Someone in the village, who had been collaborating with the enemy either out of fear or out of desire for power, and who was consumed by an old envy rekindled by the teacher's presence in the village, took the opportunity to do him harm. He also had another more significant accusation to add: the harboring of Allied soldiers.

The teacher was 47-48 years old, the father of four children and the head of a school full of children who needed him. He was past the stage of fighting wars with a gun, and he considered it his duty to stay and teach. He decided however to help not only the village people but also contribute to the fight for freedom by assisting as much as he could those active in the Resistance movement. Some Allied soldiers (British, Australians, New Zealanders), mostly escapees from prison camps or from trains transporting them to prison camps within and out of Greece, found themselves in the region of Mount Olympus and the mountain range called Pieria just above Ritini. Hunted down by the Germans, they needed shelter and food, at least for a while, until they could find a way to leave the country. The word went quickly around that the schoolteacher of Ritini would open his door to them. Progressively, several of them were sheltered in our home although our father knew exactly what punishment awaited him and his family if Allied soldiers were discovered: as a rule, on the spot execution.

The teacher's harboring Allied soldiers, giving hospitality to the two young men related to a leader in the Resistance movement, and having made that speech during the 25th of March school celebration, openly condemning the occupational forces and praising the pursuit of freedom, made enough of a case to the Gestapo in Katerini. All of these were just accusations made by an informer, there was no tangible evidence other than the word of someone from the village. But that was enough. The Germans were becoming increasingly nervous about the British intervention in Greece and about the resilience and insubordination of the Greek people. The Gestapo may not have considered the teacher dangerous enough to come all the way up to the village to find him, but they were informed that he came down to Katerini on a regular basis. At the first opportunity, they were ready to arrest him.

During the summer of 1943 the whole family was up at the village as it was summer vacation. Eleni had already finished her second year at the University, while Xanthoula had just finished high school and was also planning to enter the University.
What Xanthoula remembers, and this is confirmed by my elder sister and by my brother in my taped interviews, is that around late June, father prepared to go down with a small group of other people from the village with horses and mules. That would cut down the travel to four hours from six, if he had to go on foot. It was his usual trip down to collect his salary, get some necessary provisions and, this time, to visit the dentist – a couple of his teeth needed to have fillings. Bad omens, which village people took seriously those days, made both my grandfather and my mother feel uneasy: the family dog, Rozakis, was howling during the night for many hours, it seems for no reason, and in the morning my father dropped a bottle of ouzo which broke as it fell on the ground. He was using it to ease the toothache. My mother begged him not to leave, but he laughed off those signs and said he had already made arrangements to go with these friends from the village. And his teeth needed to be taken care of. So he

left. Xanthoula and Eleni remember it all, I don't have any personal memory of it. But I know he never came back... What we learned on the same evening, when the others came back, was that he was arrested while having lunch at his brother's restaurant in Katerini. Evidently the Gestapo was alerted that he was coming down, and his movements must have been watched. Someone betrayed him, Judas must have been someone familiar to him, probably one of the people he travelled with was willing to inform. Someone would have pointed him out to the Germans, otherwise they wouldn't have known whom to arrest.

He was transported by Gestapo escort to the prison in Katerini – a large house that had been designated for that purpose. He was interrogated but there was no evidence that he was mistreated physically. In a letter he was allowed to write to his family he seems optimistic about being released. During his temporary confinement, the Gestapo was gathering evidence to support the charges against him. Back home in the small village, the news spread quickly. Everyone knew that during 1942 the teacher had sheltered the son and nephew of a Major in the Greek army who never surrendered to the Germans, had even kept his army uniform and had become an important figure in the Resistance. The two young men left Katerini where they were known and sought refuge in the teacher's house in the village. They eventually went up into the mountains to hide, but they had remained in the teacher's house long enough to draw the attention of informers. Such people exist everywhere and Ritini was no exception. They may have kept the village from being burned, but the price was paid by the teacher and benefactor of the village.

In his first letter from prison, our father writes that his brother Elias and some fellow compatriots were trying to find a way to get him out. There seemed to be some hope, as the German investigator said he might be released in two or three days. Locher was his name and was to be remembered for a long time in the area of Katerini for his atrocities. Our father was under the impression that having given hospitality to relatives of a partisan wasn't a serious enough charge:"the children of rebels and insurgents are not wanted persons themselves", he writes in his letter. However this didn't mitigate the charges against him. And there were other charges that were more serious, such as being a Communist, which he rightly denies. "Those who denounced me said that in Ritini I am a propagandist for the Communist struggle… unfair and untrue. God is righteous and fair and the truth will hopefully come out. But if I should die because of the lies of evil people, I will not fear death. I will die as is worthy of a Greek."

His own family, as well as others who knew him and appreciated him, knew well that his activities, such as helping the officer's children and offering shelter to foreign soldiers, were driven first and foremost by humanitarian principles and sympathy toward those who were suffering, rather than by any political agenda or ideology such as Communism. It was quite ironic that he was accused of being a Communist, when he actually had fled from Communist Russia! His love of humanity was so strong that he would even attend to a wounded German soldier if he appeared before him. It was obvious, and would later become even more obvious, that the teacher had a profound faith in God and was particularly inspired by Christian values. His humanity and compassion had been demonstrated many times throughout his career. But speaking in favor of freedom and human rights, particularly those of the Greek people, didn't help his case. The Germans knew they weren't dealing with someone who would take up arms against them, but with someone who might be dangerous in an indirect yet equally effective way. They were rounding up people like him using the flimsiest of excuses. There was no actual proof or tangible evidence that any of the accusations were true. So at first it seemed that he was going to be released. Finally, however, the informers must have prevailed, especially with the intervention of someone else from Katerini who was openly a collaborator. To play safe, the Germans decided to hold him and move him to the concentration camp in Thessaloniki, where he would face a military court that would ultimately determine his fate.

The family heard that while he was kept prisoner in Katerini he was allowed to go to the dentist, accompanied for his appointments there by a Greek policeman who knew him well. His hands weren't even tied during those outings. The policeman was seen just walking side by side with the teacher. The family heard later from him that he had prompted our father to make an escape. He told him to start running, he would shoot a few times up in the air until he disappeared. But the teacher's answer was a categorical "No" for two reasons: the personal danger to the policeman himself, as the Gestapo could take it out on him and punish him for his prisoner's escape, and the possibilities of reprisals against his own family and other relatives, like his brother Elias, who had already been compromised. So he stayed. On September 1, 1943, approximately two and half months after his arrest, the teacher was transferred to Camp "Pavlou Mela" in Thessaloniki, the same camp that had housed Slim for a couple of months in the autumn of 1941. There, the Germans had installed their own Commander above the Greek prison warden. Soon after that, and as hopes had now severely diminished of having our father freed, his brother Elias quietly closed the restaurant and left for Athens to hide in the anonymity of a bigger city. His wife and two daughters locked the house and followed soon after that.

Meanwhile the Greek people, with the exception of those who collaborated with the occupiers, kept putting up a fight. Within a year of the invasion resistance flared up all over Greece. The highly symbolic act of tearing down the swastika from the Acropolis within a month of the capture of Athens, carried out by two young Greek students, fired up the population. From the beginning of 1942 resistance was organized in the cities, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki, with massive strikes. They were brutally suppressed but kept recurring. In the countryside, small groups sprang up -- some were remnants of the Greek army increased by civilians who joined them, others formed independently. Mount Olympus became the first headquarters, and later several other bands sprang up all over the rest of Greece, including large islands like Crete. Fighters gathered under two main groups, ELAS or EDES, and other smaller bands. They were all keeping the occupying forces busy with sabotage and ambushes, often very successful. Then the news went around that the British were now involved again: a British Military Mission was first established in the area of Mount Olympus, in which, as we saw, two young Australian soldiers participated, Bruce Vary and "Slim" Wrigley. Soon, plane drops were providing arms, ammunition and provisions to the partisans.

The occupiers labeled the strikes "sabotage", which carried

the death penalty, and declared that belonging to "gangs of armed rebels" would also be punishable with the death penalty by hanging. A swift execution by firing squad was for those caught helping rebels or the allies. They were sent to prison if the charge couldn't be substantiated. This is why the camp of "Pavlou Mela" was functioning right from the start, and why by 1943 it was already filled beyond capacity, in spite of periodic group executions. The highlight of the Greek resistance was the blowing up of the bridge of Gorgopotamos ('Fast River') on the 25th of November 1942 -- a key railway bridge for the transport of enemy troops and arms down to Athens and the port of Piraeus. This significant operation was a combined effort between the British and the two main branches of partisans, ELAS and EDES. It was not only a big blow to the pride of the occupiers but it also delayed for over a month the enemy's army supplies going to Egypt. After that event, and while it raised the morale of both Allies and Greeks, arrests and executions increased as they were the only means the invaders had of terrorizing the Greek people.

The few letters sent by the teacher mentioned nothing about the living conditions in the camp where he spent the last four months of his life. We know more about that from the journals of prisoners who survived. The buildings, originally a Greek army camp, had been converted to a prison as soon as Germans entered and settled in Thessaloniki. By now those buildings had deteriorated: rooms with broken window panes, dirty concrete floors, horrible cells without the most basic essentials. In his book, "Martyrs. Persecutions 1942-1945" (Damascus Editions, Athens, 1949), Father Dionysios Haralambous, who arrived at the camp in November 1942, writes (translated from Greek):

April 10, 1943. The terrible, bloody executions do not diminish our numbers. On the contrary, we continue to increase. They're bringing prisoners in by train two, three hundred at a time!

Father Dionysios continues in his diary on the same date:

They shut them in one miserable cell – low, pitch dark, the one skylight blocked with cardboard, at the mercy of the north wind and the rain; they were lying on wet concrete. No bed clothes, nothing to cover up with. Two hundred and more souls crammed into that freezer. Two hundred and more sheep. Hungry, tortured and threatened by the terror of horrific execution (p. 52).

On December 27th he writes:
The icy north wind blows. One sees nothing outside, only black crows streaking through the air – harbingers of great calamity. When I was outside for a moment, I saw a long line of elderly people, men and even children. It breaks your heart. Unshaven, covered with dust, broken. Many days on the road. Without bread, without any food, without clothes, without blankets.
The Germans went out searching for insurgents, and so as not to return empty-handed, pulled these unfortunate people from their homes and brought them here. And now they are taking them to Cell Block 6.
It's a horrible place on the roof, with a low ceiling and dark. Wind and rain beating down, with now windows or glass. Here they pile all of them up and lock them in. And those unfortunate people will lie on wet concrete, no mattress, no covers.

The next day he continues:
The drama of last evening flashed before my eyes all night long. As soon as they camp gates opened, they were sent straight to Cell Block 6 – all of them freezing, blue from the cold, particularly the little children. Their teeth chattering from the cold. They are crying and whaling. Such a sight tears up your heart (pp. 73-74).

Executions are frequent and increasing. Father Dionysios describes the atrocities of the occupiers:
April 12, 1943. Again, chains and cages. They are dragging out some fifteen people, like the butcher drags out without a thought sheep destined for his knife. They bind them together, throw them in prison vans and send them to the slaughterhouse (p. 52).

A few pages further along:
July 3, 1943. We learn today that the Germans executed fifty – such was yesterday's "harvest". They were executed to 'pay', according to their announcement, for 'crimes' of the Greek people against the occupying forces! (p. 57)

There is more that could be given here, but just these few quotations give ample testimony to the conditions under which the teacher lived the last four months of his life, and which only became known at the end of the war from surviving witnesses such as Father Haralambous.

When the teacher was transferred to this Camp in September 1943, it was already brimming beyond capacity. According to his letters, his location was "Cell Block 1". His two elder daughters were already in Thessaloniki: Eleni, 20 years old, a second-year student at the University, and Xanthoula, 17, in her last year of high school. They were both living at the YWCA and had great difficulty meeting their needs for survival. People were hungry, food in the free market disappeared quickly and daily life was precarious and full of despair. But at least the girls were not starving. The International Red Cross provided small food rations to organizations like YWCA and YMCA and to student cafeterias at the University. The village was too far away to be of frequent assistance. And there too, provisions were running very low, except for the fruit and vegetables produced by our grandfather in the summer.

Under such circumstances it was impossible for the girls to do anything for the release of their father. All they could do was visit him, as often as regulations permitted, and bring him a little bit of food – most often from Eleni's student food rations, and at other times something from the Teachers' Association rations. Twice a week beginning in September 1943, and later when winter fell in Thessaloniki and 'Vardaris', the northern frosty wind blew in icy cold, the two girls made the journey on foot from the YWCA located in the center of the city to the camp, a good 8-10 kilometers outside the city, to see their father in the camp courtyard through two rows of barbed wire. If they had anything to give him, they would hand it with a name on a piece of paper to the guards, hoping it would get to him. To exchange a few words, they had to shout as there was a space in-between the two rows of barbed wire. As they left, they would look up at the building where the cell blocks were to see him waive his hand in front of a window. They were lucky later when the Greek prison warden, who according to the description by Father Dionysios was far from lenient, asked

the teacher to tutor his little seven year-old daughter. In return he allowed Eleni and Xanthoula to come up to his office to see their father more closely. This was a great privilege indeed. Nevertheless, their father's life was in the hands of the German Commander and even more so in the hands of the envious. The informants of the village had done their job well. But the teacher's final fate would be decided by someone else.

For this episode in Xanthoula's life and for the writing up of my father's own biography, I have in my hands letters he wrote to us from the prison camp, carefully preserved by our mother through many moves and changes, then by our brother. I am now the holder of these documents. Going through and translating my father's letters has been a painful process, but they are important to this story. So I will quote from them directly.

In his first letter to mother from the camp, in September 1943, he continues to hope that he will be released, or at least he pretends to: "I believe that a Mighty and Just God will help us in our sufferings because I am completely innocent". Then he mentions our grandfather, asking to be forgiven if he had upset him in the past with anything he said or did. It seems he was preparing for the worst, although he was mostly preoccupied with the survival of the family. In the few letters he managed to send, he didn't fail to give the most detailed advice:

Now that the weather is still good, remember to ask my father to send you 2-3 loads of wheat to have your bread for the winter. Both my father and my sister Rachel will send you some. Send down with Stefanos to my brother Elias the gramophone so that he can sell it to get money for Stefanos' books and shoes. The girls can take my winter coat and have it modified for one of them.
And further along: "Have patience and endurance. God will help us. Be concerned only with taking care of the children, don't worry at all about me. Eleni comes twice a week and brings me what I need. With much love, your husband, Ioannis Papadopoulos.

In another letter, dated October 10, 1943, this time written to his son Stefanos, now fourteen years old, he again gives some instructions, but also moral advice:

Be wise and steadfast in all things, be sure to obey your mother and grandfather, and love your sisters, especially the little one, making sure to comfort her by telling her that her daddy will be free to come home soon if she remembers every morning and evening to ask the Virgin Mother of Christ to help us.

On October 20, 1943, he writes to Eleni and Xanthoula giving them advice on their studies, but above all on their survival, insisting they take care of themselves and the rest of the family, and not worry about him.

For me, it is imperative that you do not worry at all. Thank God, I am not alone here. There are lots and lots of people. Our country's fate is also my fate. Your duty is to survive. (...) And again, I repeat, no unnecessary expenses for me, no sacrifice and no worry. I am old enough in years and in good health. I can sacrifice myself for the good of my fellow men... If anything unexpected should happen to me, be brave and comfort your mother, look out for your brother and help him become a young man with good sentiments.

At this point in the letter he mentions the names of those in the village and in Katerini responsible for his arrest and imprisonment. Such acts cannot forever remain hidden in the dark, at some point they are revealed in the light of day. And it is likely that newcomers to the camp were able to confirm certain suspicions that he already had. He mentions someone who gained freedom at the expense of his own, and speaks of his own simple-mindedness, and of the trap that was set up for him. He finally realized that those who were jealous of him in the past were the very ones responsible for his imprisonment. "Always these people, in the past, now, and in the future." The bitterness of having been betrayed is obvious and he openly warns his children about them. But he finds the generosity to write: "If I am mistaken and have sinned, then may God forgive me." He appears to be prepared for the worst, and tries to prepare his family in every detail, such as how and when to apply for a pension from the Greek State, should an 'accident' befall him.

In November 1943 there were more executions. Pits were dug just outside the barbed wire fence of the camp. At the end of the month, with an additional 200 prisoners from the town of Giannitsa, the number of prisoners rose above 800, and the situation was at its worst. Soon there would be more executions in order to make space for new prisoners. Father Dionysios writes on November 27th that nine pits had already been dug outside, and "another seventeen large pits 'waited with open mouths'. There is talk of mass executions, with 300 and 400 victims. The poor people from Giannitsa who had been brought in just a few days ago know they are candidates for the executions and feel literally lost…
Evening. The news Nikos, this good guard, brings us is reassuring. He said the executions are suspended for the time being" (p. 69).

In that atmosphere, the teacher was preparing himself, even though the decision of the military tribunal had classified him as a "prisoner of war", a category from which they didn't usually execute for reprisals. However, with the November executions he had seen with his own eyes, and with the larger ones that had been announced but temporarily suspended, on November 26th 1943, he decided to write his will on the blank pages at the front and at the end of the Gospel of St. John that he always carried with him. In early December he also found paper and wrote letters to all of us.

On December 12, 1943, he writes four short letters in green ink, in his steady and calligraphic handwriting. He separately addresses each member of his family who were in the village and therefore unable to see him – his wife Glykeria, grandfather, Stefanos, and myself, now seven years old – as if he wanted to say goodbye to each of us individually. The few lines he writes show his feelings and his sensitivity. The entire record deserves to be noted here:

The letter to our grandfather addresses him as "Most respected Grandfather". Dimonatsos was for some years now 'grandfather' to him, as he himself was 'the Teacher' for Dimonatsos. The girls never remember hearing their grandfather call their father 'Yanni', it was always 'Teacher' which sounds strange in English but not so in Greek.

Thank you for your greetings and for your good wishes. I hope

that God will soon unite us. I have confidence in your big heart and brave soul, and I am sure that you will comfort Glykeria, and that God will reward you for this.
Merry Christmas.
With respect, your son-in-law, Ioannis Papadopoulos.

The second small piece of paper, with the same green ink and same beautiful handwriting was for Glykeria. The letter for her is different, full of comfort, knowing how our mother was prone to distress. He mentions nothing that would make her even unhappier than she already was.

My dearest Glykeria,
I am in good health, and as I mentioned in my previous letter, there are many good people here who respect me and who have entrusted me with the teaching of their children. Thus the hours pass quickly and imperceptibly. I hope the good Lord will help us come through this ordeal unharmed. Have courage and patience, and 'this too shall pass'. There are greater misfortunes than ours. May God help to end the suffering of humanity. The girls are well – they come once, sometimes twice a week and bring me food. I don't lack in food, and the prison feeds us quite well. The Good Lord be praised. I wish you Merry Christmas. Greetings to Auntie and the children.
I embrace you, your husband, Ioannis Papadopoulos.

The letter to his son Stefanos is full of advice:
My dear Stefanos,
I wrote in my last letter to you that if the high school opens and you go down to Katerini you should stay with Mrs. Sophia Athanasiadou, as Alexandra and her father wish you to do. You should always stay there and should not go to any other home except for that of Costas Kragiopoulos, so that you can borrow a book from him every now and then. You are never to speak with anyone about anything other than your school classes. You are still young and you have an obligation to help your mother and your sisters because only God knows what fate awaits us. Respect and obey your mother and grandfather, and love Valentini.
I embrace you, your father, Ioannis Papadopoulos.

For little Valentini the letter is all comfort:

My dear Valentini,
I am well, and I thank you for the fervent prayers you offer to the Mother of Christ so I may get out of prison. Here in the prison I am teaching several girls, one of them is very good, little like you, in the third grade, reads well and writes beautifully. Her name is Panagiota, and every night in her prayers she asks the Holy Mother of God to grant me freedom. Kisses my 'Ntina', and wait for me for Christmas and Saint Basil's day. I'll bring you a New Year's Day present.
Sweet Kisses, your Father, Ioannis Papadopoulos.

The last letter he wrote is dated December 25, on Christmas Day, to send to his son Stefanos his best wishes for his name day. He again shows his kind and generous nature, advising his son to love his fellow men, even if they are enemies.

My Dear Stefanos,
For the great Feast of the Nativity, for your name day, and for the New Year, I wish you a happy life, that you become a good Christian, a virtuous citizen, and a caring son. Remember your father, respect your mother and love your sisters more than yourself. Never harbor hatred for anyone, strive constantly to keep burning in your heart the flame of true Christian love for 'your neighbor', and maintain undiminished your devotion to your country. Life, in particular these times, presents great difficulties. Take care from now to strengthen your faith, love and courage so that you will not falter at times when the road ahead might become difficult.
Embrace for me your mother, grandfather and Valentini. I bless you and embrace you with much love, your father, I. Papadopoulos.

With this last letter to his son Stefanos, the voice of the teacher is forever silenced. The two young girls had one last occasion to see their father after Christmas, for his name day on the 7th of January, according to the Greek Orthodox calendar. For some time now, since the teacher started tutoring the warden's daughter, they were allowed to see him in the warden's office. On that occasion, something very good happened: the German Commandant came into the office, and announced to them, through an interpreter, that their father's life was not in any danger from now on. His case was judged and the court's decision was for him to be held as a prisoner of war, to be released at the end of the hostilities. That was indeed a moment of joy for the two girls, their minds were finally set at rest. At least our father wouldn't be included in frequently held mass executions for reprisals.

But this joy was not to last. Just seven days later, on Thursday January 13, the 'harvesters' visited again the cell blocks to gather their 'crop' for the day – forty to be precise – who would join five others brought in for that particular execution from the prison of Eptapyrgio ('Seven Towers') in Thessaloniki. Among the forty was the teacher.

The description of this day is found in two books: in the book "Martyrs" by Father Haralambous already mentioned, and in the journal of another prisoner and good friend of our father, Leonidas Giasimakopoulos from Katerini. The journal was published in two volumes by George Kaftantzis in 1999 entitled "The Nazi camp 'Pavlou Mela' in Thessaloniki, 1941-1944." This is an extraordinary document, painfully accurate, as it is the only diary known, at least in Greek publications, to be entirely written while in prison, and on a daily basis. Mr. Giasimakopoulos gives the most detailed description of the day of our father's execution. It is a fairly long quotation but it is a faithful record of what happened on that cold January day, a day that was to have such a profound effect on young Xanthoula and on the whole family of the teacher. (Translated from the Greek.)

Thursday, January 13, 1944.
After midnight, I woke up feeling uneasy without knowing why, and I remained awake until 6:00 a.m., at which time I got up and, after a small preparation, I prayed devoutly begging relief from the Most Merciful. Before I had even finished my prayers around 6:50 a.m., Andreas, one of the guards, came into our cell block and called out some names. Another guard called names in other cell blocks. Then we realized that something terrible was happening. Indeed, by 7:15 the mystery was revealed. This was to be a mass execution in retaliation for the killing of German officers in the region of Ardea.
From our camp the Germans took 40 to be executed. Among them: Georgios Papadopoulos, B. Zogas, Elias Parastatidis, K. Zarkalis, Sym. Mylonas, and my dear friend and companion

in suffering, Ioannis Papadopoulos, the teacher of my children – he was the last one called. When he was leaving the cell, he gave me his will, his money and personal effects for me to pass on to his daughters. He asked me to support the girls and say goodbye on his behalf. It was a very difficult task. We embraced for the last time. He addressed everyone in our cell with a "Goodbye", and walked out calm and proud, without showing any agitation and with admirable resoluteness, following the guard to go and submit to his martyrdom for glory and National honor. May your memory be eternal, dear friend Yanni!
As we learned from people working in the prison who observed the horrible scene of the gathering of those to be put to death in front of the prison trucks, all of the victims of the barbaric invaders demonstrated incomparable boldness and bravery. Not one of the forty waivered! With heads held high, smiles on their faces and eyes flashing, two-by-two, shackled in heavy German handcuffs, they walked up into the prison truck having expressed their abhorrence for their cowardly and lawless death. First, Vasilios Zogas from the town of Veria, a handsome curly-haired youth of 26 years, addressing himself to the Germans and to the Greeks who were serving as guards in the prison, said: 'From our blood will spring forth thousands of other young Greeks. Now it's your turn. Tomorrow it will be ours. Fellow Greeks remember us and avenge us.' Second was Georgios Papadopoulos, from the village of Palatitsia near Veria, who said: " Fellow Greeks, courage! They are mean cowards, and what they do is cowardly. We will die as Greeks, honest and brave. Do not wince! You who are left behind, avenge us!' Yannis Papadopoulos called out from the prison truck 'Goodbye'. Everyone shouted 'Long live Greece!' And so departed the two armored prison trucks, with forty victims from our camp, five from the prison of Eptapyrgio, forty-five martyrs in total for the homeland, along with ten armed guards and two officers. The national anthem was sung as the prison trucks drove away. The execution was carried out at 8:30 at the site of the new slaughterhouse where 45 open graves waited since the night before. The National List of Martyrs increased by another 45 victims for our beloved country.

After the horrible separation from my brotherly companion in sorrow and fear, I was overcome with uncontrollable emotion and I sobbed, heavily and continuously. I cried for a whole hour for the gentle 'teacher' against whom such a bloodthirsty act and betrayal were perpetrated by ***. (Note: To avoid perpetuating animosity and spare the Greek collaborator's descendants further shame, I decided to suppress his name.) The entire cell block shared my sorrow and all were keen to comfort me. I was particularly consoled by Father Dionysios and D. Kalligeri. At 11 a.m., I concentrated and collected the personal effects of the deceased. I had a package and a basket to hand over to the girls when they come. I notified a friend, Theophilo Nikolaidi, to take care to prepare the girls. (…) At 4:30 we were locked in, and when I approached my bed, I was again subjected to a flood of emotions for the loss of my dear friend Papadopoulos (pp. 242-245).

The following day, January 14, 1944, Mr. Giasimakopoulos continues writing about the teacher and his daughters, and agonizes over how he will fulfill his duty. He is notified that the second daughter, Xanthoula, came to the prison alone to collect the things their father had left behind. It fell upon a 17-year-old girl to face this horribly painful moment. The eldest daughter, Eleni, was sick in bed with high fever. My sister Xanthoula even now reminisces with a trembling voice that event that took place fifty-five years ago. It is as though time stood still in-between, and she relives that painful memory which brings tears to our eyes. As a seven-year-old, I didn't realize then the bitter blow dealt to us. I measured its impact later, going through life without a father, our good father.

Xanthoula remembers that the bad news was given to them by the two ladies working in the YWCA office, when they came home from school on Thursday afternoon. The friend mentioned in Mr. Giasimakopoulos' journal didn't find them there and left the message with the office ladies. How could he console them anyway? The two young girls received the tragic news and were devastated. Fortunately they were not alone. They had made good friends at the YWCA, and those young girls tried to share their distress. But certain steps had to be taken, and one more trip to the cursed prison camp was the first one. Then they had to face the task of telling the family, which meant they had to leave Thessaloniki, miss their classes and go to the village in the middle of the winter. They knew that their mother wasn't very strong, that she would fall apart, and they felt they had to be there for her.

More recently, since I have started on this project of writing, I asked my sisters how they felt to have to carry such a burden. I myself, even now at such an advanced age, can't begin to imagine how two young girls of 17 and 20 could live through this tragedy. They both said that, in spite of their own grieving, they felt they couldn't allow themselves to break down, as they had the responsibility of the survival of the family. As it happened, Eleni had fallen ill with high fever and a bad cough just before that Thursday and couldn't make it to the prison. A friend offered to go with Xanthoula, one of the girls who also lived in the YWCA. She walked with her the long distance to the prison camp, in January, the coldest month of the year in Thessaloniki. The name of the friend was Thiresia Sarafi, and mentioning her name here is a small tribute to friendship in the face of hardship and danger. Such devotion needs to be recognized. There were other times when Xanthoula was accompanied by other friends to go and visit her father, when Eleni couldn't make it. Kostas Kyratsos, a young medical student at the time, is one of them, and he has remained a friend ever since. He, his wife, and his children are still in contact with us, and we always see each other when we go to Greece. They are always happy and moving reunions. When Xanthoula couldn't go to the prison camp, which was rare, some other friend would walk with Eleni, mostly Katerina Vogiatzi, a fellow student of hers at the University. These have been friendships of a life time, and memories of such generous gestures created an indissoluble bond between these human beings. Xanthoula never fails to write or speak on the phone, or visit, when she goes to Greece, the friends who stood by her one way or another at those difficult times. And Eleni and Katerina, both now 87 years old, still talk to each other on the phone, since Katerina now lives in Athens, and see each other whenever possible. It has been an uplifting experience for me to know these exceptional people who have also become my friends over the years. Sometimes they can't quite believe that Xanthoula still remembers them and honors them from so far away, after so many years have passed. That is another uplifting thought. It says a lot about them, and also a lot about my sister Xanthoula who remains faithfully connected to these people -- her "companions in sorrow", as Mr. Giasimakopoulos would say.

Let us join him now on the difficult moment of facing young Xanthoula:

After an agonizing and interrupted sleep, I awoke at 4 a.m. and without getting up the whole previous day flooded my memory, bringing with it the horrific incident. Our cells are opened at 7 a.m., and I am waiting for the Papadopoulos' girls to come. I am thinking of the difficult task ahead of me and I try to concentrate on being able to speak calmly to them. I took refuge in Father Dionysios' cell where Kalligeris did everything he could to take care of me and console me. Around 10 a.m. the warden's office notified me that Papadopoulos' daughter had arrived to collect her father's belongings. Ioannis Argyropoulos and Nikolaos Oikonomopoulos helped me to transport the clothes and the basket of the deceased to the office were Xanthoula was waiting. Overcome with grief, she fell into my arms and sobbed. I, too, overcome with emotion was unable to speak, but could only execute her father's wish. I kissed her on the eyes, I gave her his will, money, glasses, and the rest of his personal belongings. I tried to console her as best I could and told her that, as long as I was alive, they could call upon me for anything. She said her farewell and left crying (p. 245).

Father Dionysios Charalambous, mentioned in the diary of Mr. Giasimakopoulos as the 'Abbot', writes about that day himself in his book "Martyrs", very moved as he refers to the unexpected execution of Papadopoulos.

January 13, 1943: Without warning the 'death collectors' stormed in.
In a short time those selected to be executed walk by. Two… four… eight… ten… twenty… forty. Right at the end of the line comes the teacher, I. Papadopoulos. I was stunned. I never expected to see him. When he reaches me, I can't hold back:
-- And you too? And you? I approached him quickly.
"Yes", he replies. His voice doesn't tremble. His gaze is steady.
"Goodbye! Pray that the Lord give me strength".
I let him go. Without closing my hands...
The guards come and go. I am afraid that these bloodthirsty monsters will not be sated with the blood of those they had already taken. And I send forward Dimitri to find out. He comes back in a couple of minutes:
"They are gone", he says. "They took them. I admired their spirit. No one cried. Quietly and calmly they gave their clothes and anything of any value they had to the prison office, to be sent to their homes. And when they got into the death truck, first Papadopoulos called out: 'Courage, my friends! We are Christians, and now we can show our faith.' At the end, all of them cried: "We are brave. They are cowards, they kill people shut up in prisons. Goodbye, friends, goodbye!"
I can't bear not to say here what I know of these people.
The teacher, Ioannis Papadopoulos, was a pure soul, full of splendid dreams and beautiful ideals. He became a teacher with a profound consciousness of his sacred mission. He dreamed of a great awakening of the Nation from the spiritual lethargy into which it had sunken. His life was founded upon devotion to Christian principles, which inspired him as head of the family and as a father. During his service in a village of Katerini, he protected two children whose mother had died and whose father was fighting for the freedom of our enslaved country. That was enough to put him in the Lion's pit and to stand soon in front of the firing squad. I remember once when he took a small New Testament from his pocket, opened it and gave me to read something written inside the cover pages: "It is my will", he said. It seems to me that where we are now we must be prepared for everything."
I read it very carefully two or three times, and each time I always found something more to admire." (pp. 76-77)

At this point, ten years after the fact, Father Dionysios records our father's will as he remembers it. It is remarkable how well he recalls it, with little difference from the original which was among his personal effects and survived in the Gospel of St John on whose front and back pages it was written. This little booklet with our father's will has been preserved as a family relic, first by our mother, then by our brother Stefanos who had made copies for all of us, and now, some 65 years later, by me, the youngest in the family. The following is the text of the original:

My Will
In the event of my death as retaliation by the German Army, I bequeath the following:
1) To my wife Glykeria, daughter of Athanasios Dimopoulos (of Ritini in Pieria), my children, my Christian morals, my good name, my endless and pure love, and my home in Katerini.
2) To my daughters Eleni and Xanthippi, my name, which they will bear with pride, the commands of the Holy Gospel, and my noble and honest profession.
3) To my son Stefanos, his mother and his sister Valentini, the commands of the Gospel, and absolute devotion to our Country.
4) To my Country "Greece", my thirty years of productive service, my good name, my son Stefanos, and my ultimate sacrifice.
5) To my enemies, if such exist, my forgiveness.
Thessaloniki (Camp "P. Mela")
November 26, 1943. Ioannis Papadopoulos (teacher).

Xanthoula has told me before about that dark day in her life, but I asked her to tell me again how she remembers it, knowing that we will both cry. To help me write this story, she agreed to relive those painful days, and I am immensely grateful to her. I have my own memories, but they are not of this time, I was not there with them to face that ordeal. I was ten years younger than Xanthoula and in the village, relatively protected, at least from all that went on in Thessaloniki. So for this part of the story in particular I rely heavily, almost entirely, on Xanthoula's memories.

The icy cold wind, 'Vardaris', which often blows from the north down through the city of Thessaloniki in winter, was blowing on that Friday morning. It made it even more difficult for the two girls to walk the long road to the prison. Xanthoula still remembers the numbness that took over her body and her mind until they reached the prison. She was let inside the gate of the front yard, Thiresia, her friend, had to stay outside. She remembers Mr. Giasimakopoulos coming down the entrance steps of the prison with her father's things but she doesn't remember what was said. Mr. Giasimakopoulos, who wrote his journal every day, gave us a fuller account of that scene. Xanthoula says that she felt as though all this was happening to someone else.

Still to this day I feel the anger, the need to confront the

prison warden and the German Commandant, to keep them accountable. I asked Xanthoula if she didn't feel like confronting the German Commandant who had assured them only days before, in front of the Greek prison warden and in front of her father, that her father's life was not in danger. What would he say? But the young girl wasn't even given a chance to see these people. She was kept to the steps of the prison. And what would have been the point? She asks, with tears in her eyes. The deed was done, it couldn't be reversed. Xanthoula though just today remembered that she saw the Greek prison warden, Mr. Glastras, about a year or so after the liberation, when the family had to get a certificate from the prison stating that our father had been held there and executed. The camp 'Pavlou Mela' was still a prison and he was still in charge. On that occasion, he remembered her and said he was very sorry, he was shocked at the time but he knew nothing about it until after it had happened. It must have been a mistake, he thought, neither he nor the German Commandant were present so early on that Thursday morning when the names were called. It was actually true, and we learned some years later exactly how it had happened.

Xanthoula remembers breaking down and crying in Mr. Giasimakopoulos' arms, receiving her father's things and then leaving. The way back was long and it was freezing cold. She and her friend walked back to the YWCA in the bitterly cold Friday morning, carrying what was left of her father. There she would have to face yet another painful situation. Her brother Stefanos had only just arrived from Katerini to visit his father for the first time since he was arrested. Stefanos was too late. Two days earlier, only two days, and he would have been able to see him at least once, he would have been able to embrace him. Xanthoula remembers speaking to our brother standing in the entrance hall of the YWCA. The tall and thin not yet fifteen-year-old boy, hearing that his father had been executed the previous day, became pale and tightened his lips without crying. In the taped interviews I have, our elder sister Eleni describes his state as one of "silent rage". Stefanos then left to stay for the night with a family of friends, after agreeing that the three of them would leave together the next day for Katerini. Eleni's fever had subsided, and she felt she was up to the trip. She felt she had to make that trip together with her sister Xanthoula. They both knew it was going to be a long and difficult journey: first by train to Katerini, then on foot up to the village, in the cold and snow of January. But they wouldn't have it otherwise. It was better that mother and grandfather heard the bad news from them rather than from someone else. They were worried about mother and thought that they should both be near her when she heard the shocking news. Xanthoula remembers that as soon as they arrived in Katerini they decided to continue their trip up to the village, trying to get there before dark. Stefanos stayed in Katerini. He had enough pain as it was, the two elder sisters thought, how would it help for him to come up? They wanted to protect him as much as they could. And he shouldn't miss any more school. So they took the road alone, to walk for six hours in the heart of winter.

They arrived in the village late on Saturday evening and thought it was best not to go directly to the house that same night. They spent it with auntie Panagio, mother's elder sister, who lived high at the upper edge of the village, near the main road. Sunday was not the best day to deliver bad news, but they had to come down to our house. That Sunday when Eleni and Xanthoula reached the village bringing the news of our father's execution remains indelibly marked in all of us. I was seven years old and for some reason I have no memory of our father – as if I was born an orphan. But for the rest of our lives, both my sisters and I will carry with us the crushing memory of our mother sitting up on grandfather's bed in the back room of the house, sobbing and crying out, holding tight to her chest our father's clothes, her long and still blond hair loose and uncombed. Mother was barely 36 years old. It was a terrifying scene for me as a little girl, and I remember my oldest sister gently pushing me out of the house to go to our auntie next door, so I wouldn't see and hear our mother's mourning. To make things worse, the Germans, in their continuous efforts to get information about the guerillas and spread fear to the population, happened to come up to Ritini on that very Sunday. Xanthoula remembers that the two of them presented themselves to the school where everyone was summoned. They let it be known that their father had just been executed in Thessaloniki and their mother was in no condition to come. To their great surprise, an exception was made and they were allowed to return home!

Xanthoula says that our mother's immense grieving went on for days, until she could no longer keep her eyes open. She fell asleep only for brief moments only to wake up and start sobbing and wailing again. She wouldn't eat anything for over a week, the girls could only force some tea in her lips with a spoon. She couldn't get herself dressed, and her gaze was blank as though she was looking for something beyond the immediate surroundings. Our grandfather was at a loss to find words to console his daughter. He was deeply bereaved himself, but he took over the household, chopping wood and lighting the fires as usual, and also cooking and cleaning with the girls. Close relatives also came to give a hand until our mother was up on her feet again. The family didn't do any of the customary rituals that accompany a normal death – a funeral, the three-day memorial, the nine-day memorial, and so on, rituals that bring family, relatives and friends together and help the bereaved.

Eleni and Xanthoula couldn't stay for very long, both of them being in the second last year of their studies. One more full academic year and Eleni would finish her courses at the University, while Xanthoula would graduate from the Teachers' Academy, a two-year course of studies. When Xanthoula finished high-school in the summer of 1943, she had planned to go to the University, like her elder sister, but father, who was arrested in that summer and had been transferred to the prison camp in Thessaloniki in September, suggested that she go for the two-year diploma for primary school teachers. In that way, both girls would finish their studies at the same time, summer of 1945. Father was always thinking ahead and preparing for the worst.

Many people grieved when they heard the teacher had been killed. Candles were lit for him in many houses around the village. Many cursed the Germans, the traitors of the village and the Gestapo in Katerini. The good Teacher, their doctor, their support, had met a violent death, and his wife Glykeria would never recover from it. The two elder girls courageously faced the situation and undertook the obligations of the family without a complaint. It was decided that we should no longer remain in Ritini. Grandfather and mother felt not only bitterness and despair for the betrayal by someone from

the village, but also feared for our lives. The Germans were stepping up operations in the area because of the activities of the partisans. Would the death of the teacher be enough for them, or would they also turn against the rest of his family? I also needed to go to school. It had been closed down since our father was arrested. My two elder sisters took now my fate into their hands, and they were not willing to leave me in the village to grow up as a near illiterate. With great sorrow still in their hearts, within a few days, and as soon as mother could be moved, they gathered some essentials and took us down to Katerini. The house in the village was closed down and grandfather came with us.

When the decision to move from the village was made, the plan was to stay in uncle Elias' empty house – he had fled with his family to Athens the year before, when father was transported to Thessaloniki's prison camp. We still owned a small house in Katerini, but it had been occupied by a family since 1938, when my father moved us to Thessaloniki having accepted a new position there. Our uncle's house in Katerini had been empty for about a year, and he got word to us that he and his family were not planning to return to Katerini. It would be good if someone could live there, houses deteriorate if they stay empty. So we moved in for the time being. Early winter of 1944 found mother, grandfather, Stefanos and myself in our uncle's house in Katerini, while Eleni and Xanthoula went back to Thessaloniki. The ultimate aim would be eventually for all of us to move there, but it was difficult at that moment so the family remained divided. Greece was still occupied and the girls were still students. Eleni was in her third year at the University, so she needed another full academic year to finish. Xanthoula was in the first year of her Teacher's Certificate, and had another full year to go.

After the girls left for Thessaloniki, our uncle's house, partly because it belonged to the brother of an "enemy" of the Germans who had been executed, partly because it was considered available since we were not its owners, was assigned by authorities to a family that had come to Katerini. They fled their village for similar reasons to ours – safety – but for them, the danger came from the guerillas. The inhabitants of that particular village were perceived as friendly to the occupying forces, so they became the target of the partisans. This family was in fact from the same village in which the two Australians who were to meet with Slim were betrayed and arrested. The family consisted of an older woman, her son, his wife, their two children, both boys, and the older woman's daughter who had a newborn girl. Her son-in-law, drafted and armed by the Germans to guard the wheat harvesting machines in the villages of the plain was, rightly or wrongly, killed by the partisans. By a strange coincidence, the last name of that family was the same as the last name of the man who collaborated openly with the Germans and who, as we found out later, was responsible for my father's execution. The two families didn't seem to be closely related and my mother didn't want to ask or find out. She felt there was no point in knowing, these poor people had nothing to do with our misfortune. They had their own misfortune to bear.

The mystery surrounding the execution of our father remained unsolved for some time. Long after it, questions like "Why?" and "How?" were still lingering in our minds. My two sisters especially wondered what precisely had happened that led to his execution, after the German military court had decided that father would be held as a prisoner of war, and only days after the German Commander had assured them of his safety. He had also given his permission for the girls to see father in the Greek prison warden's office.

What happened? Why was our father executed? Did the Germans change their minds? Were new accusations added against him? Had there been a mix-up in names? Ioannis and Papadopoulos were both very common names. Had they taken our father by mistake? Were there two prisoners in the same cell block with the same name? If so, wouldn't Mr. Giasimakopoulos know about it? Such questions tortured us, but to no benefit – the irreparable had been done. We had to stop scratching our wound, especially as our mother could not bear any talk about father. Her grieving and sadness remained intense, and she struggled every day to carry on with her duties as mother and housekeeper. But I feel compelled to add here that, in spite of her depression, we all remember our mother always up early in the morning, dressed and combed, to help us get ready for school or work. We remember our modest place always clean and tidy, and whatever food we could afford always ready for us when we came home. She never failed to do all that, and tirelessly take care of grandfather, no matter how she felt inside her. And she was always ready to receive and feed, to the extent that it was possible, any young friends we brought home, or anyone who came to visit with a need. When she was free from housework, she always did something with her hands, either crocheting or embroidering. At such moments, she hummed sad tunes in her soft voice. All of us have, and keep as family heir looms, many of her works: hand-embroidered small and large tablecloths, whole blankets or bedspreads crocheted, real works of art, the result of many months, sometimes years, patient and skillful work.

A few years later, when I was about 13-14 years old, the mystery of our father's execution was solved. We finally learned what exactly had happened from a former German 'sympathizer' (not exactly a collaborator) and former student of our father who was well informed of the events. Some seven or eight years after the fact and when wounds had healed a little, he revealed to us that the well-known and highly-placed collaborator in Katerini, a former school teacher himself and former colleague of our father in the First Municipal School of Katerini, was directly responsible for the execution of our father. We already knew that he was one of those responsible for our father's charges and imprisonment. His name was included in the letter in which our father mentioned those who had betrayed him. (The name of a second collaborator from Katerini who was believed to also have contributed in father's arrest is given by Mr. Giasimakopoulos, but I chose to omit all names here – this is not about revenge or about causing shame to their descendants.) It seems that at the time of the arrest, the teacher who turned Gestapo man was able to convince the Germans that Papadopoulos was a dangerous communist and an enemy of the German State. He pointed out that the teacher had come from Russia and spoke the language fluently, as he was educated there. He protected the children of a renowned rebel, Captain 'Vouros' as he was known, he made speeches against the German State and incited people to resist the occupying forces. It was also reported by 'reliable sources' that he was helping the rebels and harboring Allied soldiers.

It wasn't enough that this man, now dressed in German

uniform and carrying a German gun, deprived his former colleague of his freedom, and ensured his transportation in the concentration camp, where he would likely be executed for reprisals, like many others. When he heard that the military court put Papadopoulos in the category of POW and that as a result he wouldn't be included among those for execution, he decided to take matters in his own hand. Envy had consumed him for some years, even though it was Papadopoulos who had advanced his career by helping him obtain a scholarship for study in Germany. On that occasion, he had learned German and was, therefore, well prepared to integrate himself with the occupiers. What was there for him to be envious of? Here are some of the reasons: why had this refugee become school Principal and not he? Why was Papadopoulos so successful as a Principal? Why had the Education Department in Thessaloniki selected Papadopoulos and not him? Why did Papadopoulos receive teaching excellence awards and he didn't? Why did everyone in the community respect and appreciate him so much? Why, why, why…..

It appears that this man took the train and went to the prison Camp in Thessaloniki, where the German Commander would have, of course, welcomed him, had he shown himself. His reputation certainly would have preceded him. But he didn't come in an official capacity or for an official visit, and didn't ask for any favors. Instead, he sneaked in the evening before the next execution for reprisals was to take place on Thursday the 13th, and bribed the Greek guard who kept the execution list. Only a slight change of first names was needed, as the last name was already on the list – Papadopoulos, a common name. In fact there was another Papadopoulos as well, Georgios, listed by Mr. Giasimakopoulos. God only knows how many by that name were executed! The price paid for this small alteration, the symbolic 30 pieces of silver: ten gold sovereigns and two bolts of British cloth.
And finally, what tragic irony that this man was returning to his base in Katerini on the same train as his latest victim's children! Stefanos had said at some point that he had caught sight of him on the train. He knew him well, he had him as a teacher one year, he had even received a slap across his face as a young boy in his class for some disobedience, or speaking up to him.
I heard the above account with my own ears as a teenager, in the presence of my brother Stefanos.

Soon after our father's execution the partisans sent a secret message to my mother with their condolences. They also said that they now had the names of those in the village who had betrayed the teacher to the Gestapo, and the names of those in Katerini who were responsible for his arrest and for convincing the Gestapo to send him for trial and possible execution in Thessaloniki. They were well-known informers and collaborators with the Germans and were responsible for the loss of many other lives as well. The guerillas intended to avenge those deaths, to 'clean up', as was the expression, these traitors swiftly as soon as the opportunity presented itself. But our mother never felt the need for revenge. Although deeply mourning, she quickly sent a reply 'not to touch one hair upon their heads'. She didn't want any other wife to experience the pain she was experiencing, or for any other children to be left fatherless like hers. If punishment was to come, it would come from 'above', meaning God.

It isn't likely that the partisans listened to my mother. We heard at some point later that the one they had named from Ritini was found dead, unfortunately together with his son, who may not have been collaborating with the Germans like his father. As for the man who put our father's name on the execution list, we heard after the liberation that he was killed wearing the German uniform in a decisive battle, known as the big battle of Kilkis, which took place just north of Thessaloniki. He was retreating with the Germans when they were attacked by the partisan army. By the end of 1944, his wife and children were also in mourning, also walked the streets of Katerini wearing black, like us. Revenge has no meaning... Many lives were lost on both sides in that last stand between Greeks and the occupying forces, but losses were greater on the German side. Many young German soldiers didn't make it home, many mass graves were opened in that location, many families in Germany would be mourning.

With the requisitioning of uncle Elias' house in that cold winter of 1944, we would have been thrown out into the street, had it not been for the generosity of the elderly woman who insisted that we all stay in the same house and share it. The other larger family took over most of the house, while we kept one small bedroom in which mother and I slept. It opened up to a kind of extension that uncle Elias had made, still with concrete floor and at a slightly lower level. It served as an extra large kitchen and storage room for provisions. There we installed a wood stove which served both for heating and for cooking. This is where grandfather slept and spent his day reading the newspaper. This extension had a separate entrance from the back yard, so the two families could in fact have some privacy in their daily life. Stefanos stayed at first in that same kitchen-room with grandfather, then for slightly better conditions he went to stay with family friends, as he had done when he started high school in 1942. For nearly two years and under the same roof lived four women in mourning, having lost loved ones on opposite sides of the conflict. Their sorrow brought them closer together rather than divide them. They saw each other in daily life and spoke compassionately with one another. And I played with the two boys in the back yard. One of them, Nikos, was my age, about eight years old.

For its human interest, I will insert a personal note here: about half a century later (!), he and his wife walked into my high-rise apartment in Houston, Texas, to visit. It was in the early '90s. They had come to America to attend their son's graduation. I then found out that the little boy I used to play with, Nikos, was the father of a Greek graduate student who frequented my house, like many others, during his studies in Houston for two years. On that occasion, Dimitris brought his parents to meet me, his father having already made the connection from his son's account and from my name. When I first met that student, his last name began by bringing up painful memories. But I didn't probe to find out if this student was a relative of the man who was responsible for my father's death. I didn't want to know. Dimitris was a lovely young man, what did he have to do with that old story? Nothing. So until his father walked in to my home and reminded me of our past, two little children about seven years old who played together in a back yard, I didn't know. Nikos had become a high school teacher, like my elder sister Eleni, then went on to become School District Inspector and knew my sister and her reputation as a teacher. It felt good to see him...

To pick up again the thread of the story: the long-awaited

liberation finally came nine months after our father's execution. In the early part of 1944, the Germans stepped up operations in the area of Mount Olympus in a desperate attempt to regain control. But the forces of the Resistance were becoming stronger. ELAS in particular had by now grown into an army and more successful in its operations against the enemy. By summer 1944 it was becoming evident that Germany was losing the war. By October, the invaders started evacuating Greece, beginning from south and moving towards the north from where they had come three years earlier. They were leaving behind them devastated cities, burnt villages and thousands of dead – Greeks as well as their own.

The official date of the liberation of our little town Katerini is recorded as the 25th of October 1944, and the family was there. According to accounts made by Captain Kikitsas in his memoirs, a 516-page book entitled National Resistance in Macedonia, 1941-1944, published in Athens in 1978, and by the well-known historian of Katerini Savvas Kantartzis (Memoirs, vol. VII, published in Katerini in 1984), the Germans had already started days before blowing up various installations, such as a small airport outside Katerini's north side. They started burning records and files – among them probably all the Gestapo files they had accumulated over the last three years. By the 23rd and 24th October they had abandoned Katerini and had gathered around the local train station. Further German divisions retreating from Thessaly, the area south of Mount Olympus, in a move towards the north also gathered there, some 6,000 of them with light as well as armored tanks and mortars. Many of them were in that last big battle of Kilkis, outside Thessaloniki.

It was on the 25th of October that the 10th Division of ELAS, by now a full army of the Resistance, marched in through the main street of Katerini under a swiftly raised wooden arch of triumph just before the town's square. Xanthoula remembers that day, as she came to Katerini for the event. She was in the youth resistance movement EPON and was one of the young leaders chosen to say a few words of welcome to ELAS from the balcony of a house overlooking the square. In the crowd crying with tears of joy and cheering "Christ is Risen", "Happy Resurrection" and "Long Live Freedom", I remember the town's marching band playing a particular march, which is still played during military parades in Greece. When I happen to hear it, I have to this day an uncontrollable urge to sob. At the age of 73, I still can't witness a military parade in Greece without crying, which is hard to explain to bystanders. Last year, I happened to be in Katerini during that celebration and my sister Eleni reminded me of it. I couldn't bring myself to go out and see the parade for fear of this uncontrollable weeping.

After the official end of WWII in 1945, when my sisters were in Thessaloniki and the rest of us still lived in Katerini, the government of Great Britain gave our family, and I imagine other families like ours, an official certificate signed by Commander Alexander of the Allied Forces. It expresses gratitude for offering assistance to the soldiers of the Commonwealth in time of war. That was the time when Xanthoula went back to the prison to get proof that our father had been held there and executed, and it was then that she spoke with Mr. Glastras, the prison warden. Xanthoula, in the last months of her studies for the Teachers' certificate, remembers having to borrow a better dress and a handbag, an accessory she didn't possess, to present herself to the British Consulate in Thessaloniki to receive the Certificate of Honor. This piece of paper, now in my hands, reads as follows:

This certificate is awarded to Ioannis Papadopoulos (deceased), son of Stefanos Papadopoulos, as a token of gratitude for and appreciation of the help given to the Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen of the British Commonwealth of Nations, which enabled them to escape from, or evade capture by the enemy.

H.R. Alexander
Field-Marshal
Supreme Allied Commander
Mediterranean Theatre
1939-1945

This recognition was of some satisfaction to the family and contributed to the feeling that the death of our father had meaning. The certificate was followed, sometime in early 1947, by a monetary compensation of eighty gold sovereigns. Money can't pay for the loss of life, but I must recognize immediately the importance of that money which was earned with my father's blood. It served the family well: it began by paying for the first year of my education in the best private high school in Thessaloniki, run by French nuns. Much more importantly, it helped save Eleni's life a year later. Otherwise, the post-war years were very difficult for us, as a new period of horror and misery opened. Another story should be written about that period, for example the full story of our elder sister Eleni, who was the central figure in a script of further agony for the family. I will mention here some of the events that followed only to describe the conditions under which Xanthoula lived and how these conditions affected her decision to leave Greece.

As I mentioned earlier, leaving the rest of the family in Katerini was, for my sisters, a temporary solution. All the time we were separated, from early 1944 until mid-1946, their dream was to unite the family. They came to visit us a few times, but there was no question of them returning to live in Katerini. Bad things had happened to us both in the village and in that small town. Also, they had made good friends at the YWCA and in their student environment during the last two-three years, friends who had stood by them during the ordeal of our father. At the time of the liberation, we still had a small house in Katerini, but they both felt that the anonymity of the bigger city was a good thing for the family. Mother and grandfather agreed. And there would no doubt be more work opportunities for them in the bigger city. Other good reasons were that Stefanos was soon finishing high school and would be going to the University, and then I was to follow with my school needs. So it made good sense for us all to live in the bigger city. They waited for the appropriate time to relocate us, as the daily problems of survival with which the girls were faced were many, trying to finish their studies and find work. The immediate priority was for them to finish their studies.

This was achieved by summer 1945. Xanthoula received her diploma in that summer and started looking for a job, having submitted her papers for a teaching position within the State system. Eleni was also looking for a job at the same time. At the end of the academic year 1944-1945, she had taken all the necessary courses for her degree in Classics and History but had not finished her final exams. Those days, the finals

before getting a University degree in Greece involved long and difficult exams on all the subjects students had taken during their four years of study. So she still had a lot of work ahead of her to obtain her degree, but she could do it in her own time, there was no compulsory attendance. She was able to find a full-time job as a cashier and book keeper in one of the most central shops in Thessaloniki. In fact it was called 'Central' written in Greek letters! It was one of the best shops which sold material for clothing – for men's overcoats, suits, shirts, and for women's dresses. Xanthoula was hired as a part-time secretary in a lawyer's office. With this extra income, they decided that it was time to move the rest of us to Thessaloniki. The move was done over summer of 1946, in time for both Stefanos and me to start the new school year, usually beginning around mid-September. They had already sold the house in Katerini early in 1945, unfortunately for a much lower amount than its value, and used some of that money themselves to live in Thessaloniki for that last year of studies and to support the basic needs of the family in Katerini. Money from the house was also used for removal expenses and for renting the second floor of a small house in Thessaloniki.

There was little that was actually ours in uncle's house in Katerini in the way of furniture and other household items, so it was the house money again that was used to buy the necessary furniture for our installation in Thessaloniki. Eleni and Xanthoula, especially Xanthoula, looked mostly in used furniture shops and bought what was fairly decent furniture for a family like ours at that time: enough beds for all of us, mattresses, a wardrobe with a mirror, a modest table and chairs, a stove for heating the house, a small gas cooker and some cooking utensils, even plates, cutlery and glasses. They even bought an ice chest to keep food from going bad in the hot months. For many families that was quite a luxury. I remember, especially in the summer months, the "ice man" going by our street and calling for people to go down and buy a big block of ice.

We also acquired a few pieces of furniture that were fairly ornate: a sofa, two armchairs and a cabinet with a glass front. The sofa and armchairs were covered in green and gold brocade fabric. I was very taken by them, spent time looking at them, not daring to go and sit there. Not that anyone stopped me. I just felt they were too good for me to sit on. It was our best furniture in the small living room, for guests. My sisters bought these pieces from the young man, Takis, who had stayed with us up in the village with his cousin Alekos, hiding from the Germans because of his father being in the Resistance. Captain Vouros – his real name was Thomas Tselefis -- had come down from the mountains to Thessaloniki after the liberation, but as soon as the right-wing government took over and started making arrests, he fled and went back to the mountains he knew so well to continue with the second guerilla movement. We never found out what happened to him, he was most likely killed in one of the numerous cleaning up operations that the Greek National Army undertook between 1946 and 1949. After his father left, Takis, who was the same age as my brother Stefanos, was looking for a place to stay. His sister Loula, married in Katerini, had died from TB and he was alone. His father had remarried before the war, and his wife lived in Thessaloniki with her daughter, his half-sister, but Takis didn't want to live with his step mother. He had claimed from his father's house some furniture and was looking to sell it in order to live. When he found out that we were now in Thessaloniki, he preferred to come and live with us and my mother was happy to have him. He brought this furniture with him, and my sisters paid him some money for it.

Takis lived with us for nearly two years, but late in 1947 we found out that he had contracted TB. There was still not much that could be done about TB in Greece in that post-war period. It was about then that news broke out with the discovery of a new therapy for TB with Streptomycin. My sisters found a way to order, using some of the British gold sovereigns, a series of Streptomycin injections which unfortunately arrived too late from France. Takis, having been told that he was ill with TB, an almost certain death sentence at the time, and having found out that his own mother was still alive in a small village of northwestern Greece, he went to be with her for the few months that were left of his life. He had been told that she had died many years ago, probably by his father. We were all very fond of him, he was like a brother to me, and we all grieved when he died, but my mother grieved the most. We were left with the Streptomycin injections, which were finally given to me, as it turned out that I was infected and at the beginning stages of TB myself. I don't remember exactly how many there were, but the process seemed interminable to me.

But I am again ahead of myself and I need to go back to the main events.

Having both finished attending school, having found jobs that were bringing in some income, and having reunited the family, the next priority for my sisters was to pursue the matter of our father's pension to which our mother, as his widow, and his children, at least the ones who were still under 21, were entitled. At that time, such matters took much longer because public services had been interrupted by the occupation. Xanthoula believes that the pension which sustained our family, keeping it above poverty level, didn't come until later, probably during 1947-48. Eventually, one thousand and two hundred drachmas would be paid to my mother every month, and that meant that at least we wouldn't be reduced to starvation. Anything my sisters could earn was still necessary for the rest, such as paying rent, electricity, for clothing and shoes, and so on. The money from the sale of the house had now finished. Without thinking too much, I recently asked Xanthoula why she and Eleni didn't buy a little place for us with the money they got from selling the house, so we would have a roof over our head. She answered that had they done that we wouldn't have had any food to put on the table for nearly two years, and then went on to explain everything that the house money had been paying for. The same thing happened with the eighty gold sovereigns from the British government. Again, we could not buy with that money a place to live, it wasn't quite enough and we needed it to supplement our daily existence, especially when my two sisters were not working. And just as well we still had some of it left in 1948, as it helped saving Eleni's life.

Eleni and Xanthoula both had jobs, father's pension was approved, and mother now collected a small but regular sum every month. We were able to pay the rent and managed with careful spending to have food on the table for us, and for young friends in need, mostly students living away from home. Upon finishing primary school, I was sent to the best school in town, the French nuns' school, with a gold sovereign per month fee – a cost that would have seemed impossible for us if it were

not for the money that was given to the family by the British government. I was also enrolled at the music conservatorium for violin lessons. My sisters felt that I had missed out on a lot of things living in the village through the war years and wanted me to have the best education available. From growing up in a remote village and not having gone to school at all during the occupation years, by 1947, I was on my way to becoming a real 'city girl'.

Things would then seem to go well, on the surface. But it really wasn't so. When the euphoria of the liberation had subsided, the political climate changed dramatically within a few months, leading Greece into one of the darkest hours in its modern history, the civil war. It saw the rise of another guerilla movement and perpetuated the devastation of the country for several more years. What was to follow for the next four years or so was more battles, more bloodshed, more arrests, more interrogations, more beatings, more imprisonments, more executions... It was the saddest time in our lives, much worse than the German occupation. This time Greeks were persecuting and killing their brothers and sisters. Much has been written by modern historians about the Greek civil war, and everyone knows how it has taken the country all this time to recover from its consequences. But this is not the time or the place to explain what happened or take sides. As I have said earlier while telling Bert's story, in time of war, atrocities are committed by all sides. I will only mention here how the civil war affected our family, how it impacted Xanthoula's life in particular, and how it contributed to her leaving war-torn Greece for a better life in Australia.

The fact is, under an extreme right-wing government that came to power after bloody events too many and too complex to even outline here, we were branded as 'Communists' because our father had been killed by the Germans. We, and thousands of others like us, as well as other liberally-minded citizens like students and intellectuals became the target of the newly established right-wing government. It is said for me to say this, as I still live in America, that government came to power with the blessing of the 'naïve' Americans. In their excessive fear of Communism, they gave their support to extreme right wing elements in Greece. In a tragically ironic way, many of those who had 'favored', and sometimes collaborated with, the occupying forces found themselves in key positions. In addition to the regular police, a secret police was organized, files were re-established, people were watched, informants found a fertile ground on which to grow and prosper. We had our own version of Gestapo called 'Asfalia' (meaning 'Security') raiding and searching homes, arresting people, holding them without any specified reason, interrogating them to exhaustion, often with beatings and torture. Free speech was not tolerated, open political discussion was reduced to a minimum, left-wing party members were persecuted, the communist party outlawed. In many cases specific charges were formulated and trials by military courts were held in the bigger cities, especially Athens and Thessaloniki, to decide the fate of people who were considered dangerous to the State. Death sentences were given and executed frequently and indiscriminately. Young people, most of them students, who never held a gun in their hands found themselves in front of the firing squad. Their main crime was to speak against the government, belong to an organization like EAM and EPON, publishing underground leaflets and promoting liberal 'leftist' literature, or simply refuse to sign a piece of paper called 'dilosi' ('declaration') in which they renounced their political beliefs.

The new government moved swiftly to silence and marginalize a large segment of the population, most of those who had fought to liberate Greece from the occupying forces. Those who were likely to oppose the established authority because of their liberal ideas also became the target. Ironically and tragically at the same time, those same measures were taken later by the Communist governments in countries like Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, etc. However, from what I can gather from books and documentaries, there was severe persecution in those countries, but comparatively speaking few executions. Perhaps because these events took place some 20 years later, and the world paid a little more attention.

At war's end, in countries like France, members of the Resistance were awarded medals, while in Greece they were thrown in prison, tried, executed, or sent to camps set up on desert islands. Some, like Captain 'Vouros' mentioned earlier, made it to the mountains once more and began a second guerilla movement. They were hunted down during extensive military operations by the Greek National Army, constituted of the drafted young men doing their compulsory national service – which meant that the young soldiers had no choice but to kill or be killed by other Greeks. As tragic fate would have it, there were battles in which relatives, evens brothers, found themselves at opposite sides. In some remote villages inevitable atrocities were again committed by both sides. The Communist block found the opportunity to play its role. It gave support to that second guerilla movement, since they were too busy fighting the Germans themselves to support the first one. The Communist block hoped that the new rebels, if victorious, would help bring Greece under its own sphere of influence. The Greek people found themselves bitterly divided.

Under that kind of climate, the two sisters waited for a teaching appointment in vain. It began to feel like their father had died for nothing. There was no freedom, there was no justice. People who should be honored and free were in prison, those who should be in prison were often in power. The unfairness of it all... Where were our Allies, the British? They, more than any other nation, knew and understood what was going on. Until only a couple of years earlier, they had helped organize the partisan groups, sent them food and arms, even fought side by side with some of the people who were now in prison or hunted down over the same mountains they had walked together not too long ago.

Eleni had finished her studies but was still involved in student circles, still a member of the organization called EAM, an underground organization of civilian resistance which she had joined as a student during the Occupation. With the arrival of the family in which she was seen as the head, and now working full-time, she had become less active, but still kept close company with some very active members. Full of enthusiasm and high ideals about freedom, justice, equality, and so on, like many other young people, she could not but support freedom of expression and human rights. Xanthoula, still only around 19 years old, stayed with the youth movement, EPON. Our brother Stefanos, although not yet seventeen years old and still in high school but a very articulate young man and angry about the turn of events, started becoming active in

the same movement. Only ten years old when we arrived in Thessaloniki in 1946, I spent the next couple of years listening to heated but quietly spoken political discussions that took place behind carefully closed windows and shutters in our home – the walls had ears, those days. Eleni's and Xanthoula's friends, bright and idealistic young people, some of them still struggling to get their University degrees in a post-war Greece, would come to our house of an evening to sit and talk. Mother would bring out any food we had and put it on the table, served with Greek mountain tea or coffee. Bread, olives, some feta cheese, yoghurt, a tomato and cucumber salad, desalted anchovies in oil and vinegar – my brother's favorite.

But one day in February 1948 some of these friends didn't come. They were arrested, and our sister Eleni was among them. 'Security' had picked her up from work. A new ordeal started for us and for many other families, as we were trying to find out where our sister was detained, how she was treated. Everything was done under the utmost secrecy, but we soon found out where she was and started taking food to her. Those kinds of temporarily set up prisons, usually in dark basements of local police stations, provided neither food nor beds and bedding clothes. February is a cold month in northern Greece, and the place where she was held was a basement with no windows. Eleni described it as a long narrow hallway with a series of small cells on either side, with nothing but a concrete floor, not even a wooden chair. We were allowed to take her a thick hand-woven rug (in Greek called 'Velentza') that could serve as mattress and cover at the same time, as she could roll herself in it. Eleni still has that red 'Velentza' carefully folded up, she says it saved her life.

Eleni was twenty-five years old at that time. During that bleak year of 1948, I was twelve and in my first year of high school, the expensive high school where my sisters had decided to send me in spite of the high expense. I remember well myself the sequence of events, was part of them, I also heard Eleni speak of her experiences in prison after she came out and at various times in later years. In 1986, I gave her a special interview about the prison and military court episode, so with all of that documentation, and with Xanthoula's as well as my own memories, I believe I have a very accurate account of what happened. This was an experience that profoundly affected Xanthoula and was a major factor in her later decisions. For those reasons, I will give here a brief account of the events of that part of our lives. It was at the end of that dark episode that Xanthoula decided that she wanted to change her life. In the process of changing hers, she also changed mine in a big way...

After she was arrested, Eleni went through some harsh interrogation but physical pain was not inflicted on her, just a few slaps in the face. They wanted a confession about her involvement and wanted her to give out names of people with whom she collaborated in 'unlawful' activities. She kept saying 'I don't know anything, I don't know anyone'. She told us later, and also recalls in the tapes I have from the 1986 interviews, that the worst experience for her was spending over a month in isolation, in a tiny concrete cell, some nights without her rug. When the interrogator wanted to put more pressure on her he would take her red rug away from her. Those nights seemed interminable, she says, not being able to sit or lie down, in the freezing cold and in darkness. It was the time when she got bronchitis which left her with a chronic cough, a cough that is revived even today in cold weather. The cells had no light, although electric light was on 24 hours a day but only outside the cells in the long hallway where the guard stood or walked up and down. What saved her was that she was able to keep awake doing mathematical exercises -- she was always good at math --, and the fact that one of the guards, an older family man, took pity on her. On those nights when her rug was taken away, he secretly took off and gave her his pullover. He also kept talking with her during the night through the small window on the top part of the door, to help her stay awake and not lie down on the concrete floor. She remembers to this day with gratitude his voice repeating to her 'don't lie down' 'don't lie down', and giving her little quizzes that he was giving to his children just to keep her awake. In that way he had become her guardian angel.

There is a little sequel to this unusual friendship: after the prison and the trial ordeals were over, between 1949 and 1952, before Eleni was finally given a teaching position in Katerini and had to leave Thessaloniki and us, she always made sure to visit a butcher in the central market of Thessaloniki, whether we were buying meat or not. After Xanthoula left in 1950, I used to go shopping with her, and I finally asked her why we always went to that particular butcher. She smiled and told me that he was the now retired policeman who had been so good to her during her isolation and interrogation time.

During the time of interrogation, we weren't allowed to see her and we found out nothing about what was going on until the newspaper 'Ellinikos Vorras' ('The Greek North') published, on the 26th of September 1948, the names of 56 new 'suspects' who were going to be tried in a military court in Thessaloniki. Our sister's name was among them. Our hopes that she would be released were dashed, and even more anxiety set in since we already knew how easily the military courts were now dispensing the death sentence.

Once charges had been made and the date of the trial had been fixed, while waiting for the trial to begin, we were allowed to 'visit' her and take clothing and food. I wrote the word in quotation marks, because the way it was done it didn't deserve the word 'visit'. The prison was an old former tobacco storage building, in red brick in one of the upper suburbs of Thessaloniki, a kind of industrial area. Mother and grandfather didn't take that walk to the prison, but Xanthoula remembers going once and Stefanos a couple of times. It was mostly I who visited Eleni and took her food and clean clothes twice a week. With Eleni's arrest, it was best for Xanthoula to remain as invisible as possible. The same applied to Stefanos, by now 19 years old and a University student himself, already known as a fiery orator during the youth organization's secret meetings. I had just got into high school, so at twelve I was too young to be arrested for 'terrorist' activities, although I had done my share: I remember on a couple of occasions, when Eleni felt she was being followed, I was sent to meet someone at the little park opposite the University, under the still standing white marble statue of a national hero of the revolution against the Turks. I was to pick up some money collected by students to pay for paper and printing expenses for what the 'Security' had labeled 'subversive' literature.

As for the 'visit' to see Eleni, I remember going up a dark and steep staircase whose entrance was guarded on either side by a policeman. For years after that, the sight of the khaki green uniform gave me heart palpitations. I was pushed up by

many people in a hurry to catch a glimpse of their relative or friend, out there in the large barn-like room behind two rows of thick bars. One would expect that the people behind them were dangerous criminals. The noise and the shouting were so loud that I couldn't exchange any words with my sister. We just looked at each other and tried to smile. I would pass to the guards the basket or a pot with food, a small parcel with clothes, or whatever else mother could send, and after having stood there for a while smiling at each other I would go down the dark stairs again. I did this after school, whenever 'visiting' times would permit. Eleni was in prison for about ten months, so most of 1948 was spent in that way.

The trial was set for the month of October. But a few months after she was arrested, Eleni sent word for Xanthoula to leave Thessaloniki and hide. Xanthoula remembers it was already summertime. Eleni had heard in the prison that the 'Security' forces were now cracking down on the younger organizations as well and wanted her younger sister to go into hiding. In the tapes made in 1986, Xanthoula recounts how Eleni got the message to us. It was the first time I heard this, or if I knew it I had forgotten about it: when returning a small pot in which I had taken Eleni some food, she put in a small piece of paper on which she had pierced with a pin small holes to form two words "Leave Thessaloniki". The little piece of paper got dirty in the unwashed pot and went unnoticed. They were given water to drink but there was no water to wash pots and pans or clothes. The guards must have known that and they probably never bothered to open the pots, although they checked the clothes.

Xanthoula had just lost her job anyway. She had worked as a cashier at the 'Central' store replacing Eleni for several months in 1946, while Eleni was studying for and taking her comprehensive exams. When Eleni finished her exams, she returned to the store and Xanthoula returned to her part-time job at the lawyer's office. Xanthoula supplemented her income with private lessons to the children of the four partners who owned the store. After Eleni was arrested in February 1948, Xanthoula took over the full-time job as a cashier and book keeper at the store and, to make up for the income Eleni was no longer bringing in, she continued the private lessons to the children of the owners. Xanthoula worked about 12 hours a day for a while to help the family make ends meet. The owners of the store liked the girls and had the highest regard for their seriousness, their honesty and hard work, they trusted them completely with their books and their money. But they were now afraid that there would be reprisals against themselves in some form or other for employing the sister of someone who was in prison and was being tried by the military court. They themselves were reputed to have leftist ideas and couldn't afford taking any further risks. With many apologies they asked Xanthoula to leave. So as soon as Xanthoula got the secret message sent by Eleni, she was free to pack quickly a small bag and leave for Athens to stay with Uncle Elias' family. The rest of us would manage as best we could.

For this period, the family turned to the gold sovereigns to supplement mother's monthly pension. I was to begin my second year of high school in September 1948, but the monthly fee of one gold sovereign a month looked now like impossible for us. The decision was made that I should attend the free public high school. Fortunately, after it was explained to the nuns that the family had to withdraw me for lack of funds, the nuns offered to keep me for free. I had topped my class in my first year there. The French school had no formal policy of awarding scholarships, so the arrangement had to be a secret between us. I didn't have to perform that highly to stay in the school, but the nuns' generous gesture and the obligation I felt towards them were the major factors in my becoming the top student in my class for the rest of my high school years, until I was eighteen. From then on, a pattern was set in my life.

Stefanos was supposed to be studying but he was now looking for work himself. He found a job in a truck depot managing the small, dusty and noisy office where he organized schedules making sure that the right load went on to the right truck destined for the right place. His work was not too far from my school so I sometimes dropped by to see him after classes. He was very busy, either on the phone or talking to drivers, but he always gave me a nod and a smile as I stood outside for a few minutes. His studies at the University were pretty much suspended, as there was no time for him to attend classes during the day. But he went back to them later and finished with high honors, which led him to do a doctorate in Modern Greek History at the University of Thessaloniki and eventually become a well-known and respected professor.

The ordeal of the trial started in October, and we followed anxiously day-by-day the reports in the newspapers. It lasted about a week or so. The military courts expedited the proceedings although there were 56 people involved only in this one trial. They were all supposed to be members of the organization EAM. There were no lengthy defenses put forward, some of the people didn't even have a lawyer. They had to say a few words in their own defense, if they could, if not they were judged on the case file that had been compiled against them and on what the prosecutor presented to the court. None of us could attend the court proceedings which were held in the mornings. Stefanos was working, I was at school until three in the afternoon, and Xanthoula was in Athens hiding. It was Katerina Voyatzi, Eleni's fellow-student and closest friend from the YWCA, the one who used to walk with her to the prison camp a few years earlier, who attended the actual proceedings every day of the trial. She would then come to our place to tell us what went on. Eleni and all of us remember with emotion and gratitude that friendly presence and we all value and honor her friendship to this day. Katerina was not involved in any organization, but she nevertheless risked being labeled as a 'leftist fraternizer' by being a close friend of Eleni. She was a beautiful girl, tall with a stunning figure and a spectacular head of wavy light brown hair. Although a village priest's daughter brought up with strict principles, she sought to and succeeded in meeting one of the five military officers who were the judges in Eleni's trial. She even went out on a date with him to try and influence him in favor of her friend. She may in fact have helped a lot.

It also helped that most of our gold sovereigns went to hire the best lawyer we could find in Thessaloniki, someone who would be well-known and respected by the military courts and who would accept the case. Oddly enough, this lawyer, Mr. Makris, was recommended by the person who was to tell us only a little later how our father's execution took place. I am not giving his name here, I believe he is still alive. He may have been a German sympathizer during the Occupation, but he had been our father's pupil and had high regard for Eleni and our family. Mr. Makris, the lawyer, gathered any evidence he could

that would be in favor of Eleni and, according to Katerina, pleaded eloquently in our sister's favor. He brought to court the certificate of honor given to us by the British government, argued that our father couldn't have been a Communist since he actually had fled from Communist Russia to come to Greece as a refugee, he read out to the court our father's will, and also brought in one witness who gave a good character reference for Eleni and high praise for the whole family. This man was the father of a good friend of Stefanos. He was known to be of right-wing political persuasion, but he accepted to appear as a witness for the defense. With some sadness, Eleni recalls in the taped interviews that it was very difficult to find people who would come as witnesses in her defense. It seems that mother had addressed herself to various people who knew us well, but everyone was so intimidated by the harsh measures taken by the government that they didn't dare to appear for fear of reprisals against them. One man dared, and he will not be forgotten by us.

Eleni had said all along that she didn't know anyone, and all but one of the others in the group had already denied knowing her. In fact most of them didn't know her. In these organizations, which had become 'underground', no one knew everyone, they simply had one or two contacts. Some of them, Eleni still claims, were simple people, weren't even members of EAM. They were just leftist enough to try and raise some funds, small sums of money to be used for the activities of the organization. They were never involved in anything that had to do with arms or arm supplies to the guerilla movement, or with any real sabotage against the government. EAM was a strictly civilian organization. Anyway, Eleni wasn't really known by most of these people. The one who was a leading member in the organization and who knew her, Giorgos Mertzios, a fellow-student and close friend who came often to our house and with whom Eleni spent months studying for their final exams, would rather die than say anything to endanger her life. And he did die. He was one of those who were sentenced to death and executed. A beautiful human being, he had become like a member of our family. We all sensed that he loved Eleni, but she says that he never spoke of love, they were just close friends. Those were difficult times, young people like them were devoted to and fought for ideals. Those were powerful, more collective bonds that seemed to transcend personal intimacy. Young people then gave little time to personal feelings.

Following the trial and then waiting for the verdict was a traumatic experience for all of us. Earlier during interrogation, a young girl, Emilia, under stress and fear for her life, had said that she recognized Eleni as a member of the organization. While they were all detained together in the tobacco storage building waiting for the trial, she asked Eleni to forgive her. She confessed that during one of Eleni's interrogations, they had hidden her behind a curtain so that she could see Eleni and identify her. She admitted that in a moment of weakness and fear she gave in. But on the day of the trial she, like the others, said that she really didn't know Eleni, and that she only said she knew her to avoid being thrown back in the isolation cell and being further interrogated. Eleni says that indeed, she didn't know this young girl either. There were clearly grounds for 'reasonable doubt', argued the lawyer, who also pointed out that this young woman was now the head of an orphaned family, and shouldn't be convicted on unfounded suspicions.

At long last the verdict was announced: ten out of the group, including our good friend Giorgos Mertzios, were sentenced to death, others to prison sentences of various lengths. Eleni and a couple of others were acquitted and set free. We never found out what the actual vote was, whether it was unanimous or not. It would have to be at least three out of five in her favor to be acquitted.

It was a great relief for the family and, amidst our sadness and shock about the death sentences, we prepared to receive Eleni back home, as well as Xanthoula who read the news in Athens and reserved a passage on a boat from Piraeus to Thessaloniki. But our hopes for a family reunion were dashed. By the time Xanthoula made it to the port of Thessaloniki, instead of Eleni she saw grandfather waiting for her at the pier. Within a few days of her release, Eleni was arrested again, not by the 'Security' but by the local police station. The Chief of the local police station believed that anyone who had been accused and was tried in a military court, even if they were acquitted, presented some threat and was better off deported. Eleni was a liability for him, he would have to spend resources which he didn't have -- someone to keep an eye on her, follow her to see with whom she was keeping company, and so on. So he thought it was simpler to send her off to one of these camps set up on desert islands scattered through the Aegean Sea.

Nearly a month went by and nothing happened. The Chief of the local police station was compiling information to make a case for her deportation. Eleni then started protesting and asking the guards to take her to their superior. She finally succeeded. She remembers boldly defending her position: she had gone through a long interrogation, a long detention and a military court trial, but she was acquitted of all charges. She asked that she be given the chance to be a useful citizen, to put her studies to use and exercise her profession, which was to teach, rather than be rendered useless in a camp full of other people who were rendered useless through isolation from the rest of society. She remembers that she overcame her fear and spoke with fire and persuasion. It seems that she was able to convince the Chief of the police station, and he set her free.

It looked as though we were to have a family reunion after all, and some sort of Christmas and New Year's celebration. Eleni recalls in the tapes of 1986 that in a desperate attempt to save our friend Giorgos' life, mother handed over the last few gold sovereigns to another lawyer, the one in whose office Xanthoula had worked previously. He made promises that he would go to Athens and appeal our friend's death sentence to a higher military court. Nothing came of it. It seems that his were empty claims, and that he simply pocketed the money and did nothing. Giorgos Mertzios and the others were executed early in the New Year. We can still see our friend in a couple of small photos. With warm and smiling eyes, he was always attentive and tender towards me and took an interest in my schooling. We missed his comforting presence in the house, and his memory still brings tears to our eyes. All these lives wasted... Eleni even now can't speak about him without a quiver in her voice, and mother grieved quite a while for his loss. It seemed that any new loss had a cumulative effect on her and added to her previous bereavement.

That was the last time our sister Eleni saw the inside of a prison. But her personal odyssey was not over yet. Nearly twenty years later, in 1967, another black chapter opened in

the modern history of Greece: a military coup took place and Greeks suffered the seven-year-long reign of a military junta in Greece (1967-1974). Based on her past 'criminal record', Eleni was dismissed from her position as a teacher in the state high school in Katerini, but at least she wasn't put to prison or sent to a desert island. Her husband, Takis Dimitriou, a veteran of WWII who had fought at the Albanian border as an officer in the Greek army, and had also fought as a partisan until the end of the war, was sent to a desert island after the new government came to power. Eventually he was released. He married Eleni in 1951, followed her in Katerini when she was finally appointed there to teach in the boys' high school, finished his interrupted degree in mathematics at the University of Thessaloniki, and eventually made a name for himself as a mathematics teacher. After much hard work, he had opened a night school where working boys could do their high school studies at night after work. As soon as the Greek Generals took over, the 'Security' was revived and once again it ruled over people's lives. Eleni's husband was forbidden to teach or even approach physically his school. He was ostracized from his own home and school in Katerini. In despair, he retreated to his village home, about five kilometers away. There he tried to occupy himself with his garden and fruit trees, but one day in 1969 he died suddenly barely fifty years old, sitting under a tree in his garden. Everyone who knew him felt he died of a broken heart. Eleni was left alone to survive with no visible income and keep her two children alive and safe. It was the time when we all had to help financially, Xanthoula and I from overseas, our brother Stefanos from within Greece. She ultimately found a way of getting some income from the school, which was run by a family friend, and who paid Eleni a percentage of the fees collected. In 1974, at the end of the military dictatorship, Eleni was reinstated, taught for several more years, and finally retired with the rank of High School Principal. She is widely respected and revered by her former students in the town of Katerini where she still lives. Her spirit remains strong and undaunted, she is a superior role model for me, other people in the family and beyond. In 2006, at the age of 84, together with other old students, she was awarded a medal by the Chancellor of the University of Thessaloniki in recognition of her contribution to the Resistance movement during the war and for upholding the principles of democracy during the civil war and the military dictatorship. Xanthoula was present for that significant and moving event.

I went ahead a few years to sum up our elder sister's story, as that story is closely related to Xanthoula's, and the bond between them is indissoluble...

With Eleni's release from prison around November 1949, life in our family took on a more normal course. Stefanos continued working with the truck depot, trying to fit in taking a course here and there at the University. I continued to do well at the French school and practiced the violin every day. The two sisters looked again for jobs. Xanthoula found one in a men's clothing store as a cashier and book keeper. Eleni also worked as a cashier and book keeper in a wholesale store that sold china and glassware. It seemed that their hard-earned degrees were not going to be put to use. It was all about politics, and the stigma of being considered a leftist wasn't going to be lifted easily. They waited for a teaching appointment in vain. Towards the end of '49 we moved to another house, smaller and less expensive, in the higher and older part of Thessaloniki, not far from the medieval walls that surrounded the old city. The civil war was still on, there were still political prisoners and every now and then trials and some executions. The great disadvantage of the house in which we moved was that it was on the main road that led from the lower, newer part of the city and the shopping district to the area behind the old walls, where most of the executions took place. I shudder at the memory of hearing the noise of a truck laboring up the narrow and cobbled street past our place, and the sound of voices singing well-known partisan songs. I made the mistake of asking why these people were singing so early in the morning. I was told reluctantly by my sister Eleni that they were people who were taken to be executed behind the old walls. Now, sixty or so years later, there is a thriving and new part of Thessaloniki behind those walls which have been repaired and are maintained by the City. It is full of cafes and good restaurants as well as homes. There is a small park along the walls, and in one corner of it now stands a small plaque in honor of those who fell there in the late forties. I don't know how many people actually go to stand there in silence, but I and my two sisters did when we were there together in 2006.

By now the military operations were successful in either annihilating the guerilla groups or driving those who were left outside the borders of Greece into the Communist countries – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Russia. Their fate in those countries, and their ultimate return, at least for some of them who came back when eventually Greece opened its doors to them, was to be another sad chapter in the history of modern Greece.

It was in the winter of 1949 when, one night, sitting around the heating stove, the family was looking through old photos our mother had kept in a box. Among them, she picked up a small photo showing a group of soldiers in British uniform -- they were actually mostly Greek guerillas dressed in British uniforms. In their midst stood a tall thin young man with an arrow marked on top of his head. At the back of the photo, we read in English: Herbert Wrigley, 9 Banool Avenue, Yarraville, Victoria, Australia. Mother immediately remembered 'Slim' and had the idea of asking Xanthoula to write a letter to find out if this young man had made it back home alive. Xanthoula was the only member of the family who had a little English, she had started going to evening English classes. She wrote a simple letter, and after not too long, a reply came from Australia from Slim. Mother and grandfather were particularly happy with the news. Again, our father's death was not in vain, we had helped someone.

A correspondence started back and forth between Slim and Xanthoula writing on behalf of our family. He learned about our father's death. He was still in Greece when our father was arrested, but in the last few months of his stay he was away from our area serving with the British Mission so he hadn't heard about it. After a while, Slim sent us a photo, all dressed up in a suit with white shirt and tie, high forehead, straight hair combed back, warm and laughing eyes, a big radiant smile. I am looking at that photo now and I am thinking: what a beautifully open face, one can 'read' it like an open book. We all liked that photo, a warm and engaging personality came through. A while later, Xanthoula sent a couple of photos of herself. She was quite a beauty those days, with a slender but feminine figure, light brown hair surrounding a lovely face that, in spite of hardships, had preserved an air of gentleness and innocence. The correspondence and the photos,

accompanied by some parcels Slim started sending with gifts, all of that was something new and nice in our life. We all looked forward to receiving his letters which Xanthoula tied to translate for us. Sometimes she would take the letters to her English class and ask her teacher to clarify any questions she had.

Some months passed, and then in one of his letters Slim asked if Xanthoula would like to visit Australia. In it, he explained that he was still unmarried, and, having tried out different places and different jobs, he had now settled in Melbourne living with his parents and his elder brother George. In that letter he asked her if she would accept to come and meet him and be a guest of the Wrigley family. If she felt that she could make a life with him there, he would be very happy and honored for her to stay as his wife, but if she didn't there would be a return ticket for her. Enough money for a return trip, a kind of bond, was also required by the immigration department for young women being sponsored as brides-to-be. This ensured that the brides-to-be could change their minds if they wanted to. The length of time given for such a decision to be made was three months. If they didn't marry within three months, then they could return to their country of origin, or they could apply to remain as immigrants without marrying, but the bond would be lost.

Grandfather immediately pronounced himself in favor of Xanthoula to go. Having been beaten up twice for his liberal ideas, with father's betrayal and execution and the civil war nearly costing Eleni's life, he was disenchanted with life and politics in Greece. He still read the newspaper every day, was still interested in the events that unfolded, but with his American experience in mind he felt strongly that every other country, especially a new country like America or Australia, would be more 'civilized' than Greece. So he was very much in favor of Xanthoula going to Australia. Eleni says in the taped interview I have of her that her heart was trembling at the thought, that she hoped Xanthoula wouldn't leave, but she felt she shouldn't try to influence her to stay, this would have been selfish on her part. Mother, who had been so happy with the news of Slim's survival, was less than happy with the idea of Xanthoula leaving, and understandably so. Xanthoula had been a pillar of the family and a joy to have around, her beauty, her gentle and generous nature softened the blows that life had dealt us. She was the 'artistic' one in the family, she could draw and sow clothes, and was always the one to find ways to make our home beautiful with little touches – buying an inexpensive but pretty roll of material she found in a store, bringing it home and making new curtains and covers to beautify old pieces of furniture.

None of us remembers whether our brother expressed an opinion on the matter, or if he did he didn't express it strongly. I hadn't asked him that question during the interview in 1986, and he is no longer alive for me to ask him now. As for me, I remember feeling quite panicked at the thought of not having Xanthoula in my life. She took such good care of me, fixing her old clothes to fit me or sowing a new dress for me with a piece of fabric that she would pick up. But above all, she included me in her outings with friends whenever possible. That is how I ended up with much older friends, some of them now in their advanced eighties, with whom I kept in touch all these years. I look forward to seeing them every time I am in Greece. Whether it was a free concert or a movie, or a walk along the seafront promenade, or sitting down at a little tavern with her friends, I was welcome. Her friends took an interest in me, took pride in my success at school, made me feel I was important. They used to call me 'to mikro', in Greek 'the little one'. So the thought of losing Xanthoula was unbearable to me. If she was going to go, I declared immediately that I was going with her. I was then 13-14 years old, about half-way through high school.

Xanthoula didn't rush into making a decision one way or another. She asked for time to think about it. Slim understood and waited. The correspondence continued, letters were coming and going, and her leaving or not became the topic of conversation with close friends. She even showed some of Slim's letters to her English teacher, Mr. McKenzie, to ask him for his opinion. None of her friends wanted her to go, as she reminisced in the tapes of some twenty-three years ago. There were a couple of young men who liked her particularly but could not declare themselves openly. I know this well, because one of them told me, with tears in his eyes, some ten years later when I returned to Greece from my first seven years in Australia, that he let her go because he felt he had nothing to offer her. He came from a poor family, he was without a job and still finishing his University studies at the time she was thinking of leaving. Her first romantic attachment, Kostas, the young medical student who often walked with her to the prison camp when she was visiting her father, was in the army at the time, having finished his medical degree. Before he left, his father, for fear that his son may be branded as Communist, even arrested because he was seen with Xanthoula and her sister, made him promise that he would break up with her and wouldn't look for her when he came back from the army. When Xanthoula learned this from Kostas, she said goodbye to him, gave up the thought that they could be united and closed her heart. So at the time Slim wrote with his proposal, although she had quite a few good friends, there was no one special in her life. Disenchanted with life in Greece, with no prospect of a teaching position for which she had applied nearly five years earlier, still under the shock of what her own sister had gone through, Xanthoula felt that she was at a dead end. About a year after Slim had proposed, she replied that she was accepting his offer to go to Australia. In the family, we all knew that one of the reasons she had made that decision was that she thought she would probably be able to help us from there.

Grandfather gave his blessing to the dismay of mother who could not hide her unhappiness at that decision. She cried secretly quite a few times about it, but she felt she had to accept it. She had never been the kind of mother to tell her daughters what to do or not do. Eleni, as she says in the tapes, was able to convince herself that this was not a final decision. Xanthoula would probably go for a trip, stay the three months and then come back. I was devastated and cried a lot on the day of Xanthoula's departure. I still remember standing in the train station in Thessaloniki, and the pain I felt when the train left with my beloved sister in it, one cold day in December 1950. I made her promise she would send for me. To calm me down, Eleni also promised that if Xanthoula stayed in Australia, they would let me go and join her but only after I finished high school. It took nearly five years before that could happen...

Xanthoula spent a few days in Athens to say goodbye to

Uncle Elias's family. They had taken her in like a daughter in 1948, and she continues to feel very close to our two cousins, Aphroditi and Fifi who still live in Athens. Then, just a few days before Christmas, she boarded a ship to take her to the Italian port of Genoa. From there she boarded the Greek ship 'Cyrenia, a relatively small ship for such a long voyage, but one of the few that transported European migrants to Australia. On that trip, 'Cyrenia' carried more than 1,000 passengers. With more and more people choosing Australia for a new life, the P & O Line came into the picture later on. Five years later, I was to travel in grand style compared to Xanthoula, on the maiden voyage of the ship 'Arcadia'. It was a 30,000-ton ocean liner, a huge and luxurious boat compared to 'Cyrenia', which wasn't even half its size and an older vessel as well.

Xanthoula though says that she had a lovely trip, with no problems of any kind, and made good friends on the way, especially two Greek sisters, Elli and Anastasia Argyros, who were coming to join their brothers in Melbourne. After the kind of life Xanthoula had in Greece for the last ten years, this was indeed a wonderful experience. They celebrated Christmas on the boat, and there were parties and dances almost every night of the thirty-five-day trip. They went through the Suez Canal, down to Aden, then on to Fremantle and finally to the port of Melbourne – a similar route that Slim had taken to return to Australia in 1944. A couple of nights before they arrived in their destination, there was on board a major event: the Captain's ball. It was customary to have a beauty contest in which there was a vote for the most beautiful girl on the ship. Xanthoula recalls that there were girls from many countries – Italy, England, France, Germany, Holland, Lebanon, and others, but no girl presented herself to represent Greece. The Greek people on board who had met Xanthoula pressured her to run for the title, but she hesitated, she wasn't used to showing herself off. She was assured that girls just presented themselves wearing their best dress, it was a conservative affair, there would be no bathing suits or bikinis. So she decided to join the group of girls, who all looked much more beautiful to her. But when the time came for the vote, decided not only by the captain's table but also by the volume of applause from the passengers, then it became evident that Xanthoula was by far the favorite. She remembers that people kept applauding and cheering when she came on the stage with a Greek flag wrapped around her upper body. To her surprise, the title of 'Miss Cyrenia was given to her. She says that everyone was very happy for her, including he girls who were up for the title.

When 'Cyrenia' docked in the North Wharf of the port of Melbourne on the 22nd of January 1951, everyone crowded on the top deck looking down on the wharf, some searching for relatives, others, like Xanthoula, trying to recognize people whom they had seen only on photos. As Xanthoula remembers and has recounted on several occasions over the years, a cabin boy came to find her and tell her that someone was looking to speak with her. A young reporter and a photographer looking for a good story, having heard of the Greek girl who was chosen "Miss Cyrenia", had asked to meet her. In the process of interviewing her, the reporter found out that this young Greek girl was coming out as a bride-to-be, sponsored by a former Australian soldier who had been to Greece and had fought the Germans with the Greek partisans. Further questions gave him the information that the Australian soldier had been sheltered by the girl's family after he had escaped from a prison camp and that the girl's father was later executed by the Germans for helping the Allies. It didn't take him long to decide that this was a story worth following, so he attached himself to Xanthoula to see what more he could discover.

After taking a few photos of her on the deck, he and his photographer took her down 'unofficially' through the customs to look for Bert. Soon she spotted a tall figure she recognized as Slim from the photo he had sent. He had just got permission to get on the boat himself, accompanied by his elder sister Claire wearing her best hat for the occasion and holding a bouquet of flowers. Xanthoula timidly approached him from behind, touched his arm and timidly asked 'Herbert?' Looking up she realized how tall he was! The reporter had a photo of them taken down there and then followed them upstairs to the boat. He insisted again on taking photos of the two of them in the cabin, and had Xanthoula sit very close to Bert. Xanthoula says in the tape, "he had me sitting practically on Bert's knee!", so close that she felt a bit uncomfortable as she didn't really know him. Letters don't usually prepare one much for intimacy. After several photos and more questions, the reporter finally left them alone, but not without getting full name and address. He planned to follow up on that story.

Bert took Xanthoula through the customs and ordered a taxi to take the three of them home where the other sister, Flo -- short for Florence, after her mother's name -- had prepared a welcome table with food and wine. Bert's father, his brother George, and his younger brother Eric were also there to welcome Xanthoula. She spent that first night sleeping in Bert's bedroom while he slept in the living room. Xanthoula felt she had enough excitement for one day, and she says she fell sound asleep after the two sisters Flo and Claire left to go to their respective homes.

Next day, 23rd January 1951, three major Melbourne newspapers broke out with several large photos of Xanthoula and Bert on their first meeting on the boat and with the story of the 'War Bride'. Those days, the ships bringing European immigrants by the hundreds were big news. 'The Argus' featured two large photos with the titles 'Reunion After 9 years' and 'Nine years – but worth the waiting'. One of them shows Xanthoula looking down from the deck of the boat with a big smile greeting someone below, and the other with Bert sitting very close to her. Xanthoula with a rather shy but radiant smile looks at the camera, while Bert is looking at her with a big smile, really pleased. This one especially is a lovely photo of a happy young couple. No wonder the article in 'The Argus' starts with the word 'romance':

The romance you see in the pictures of this story had its beginnings in Greece nine years ago during the war. Xanthoula Papadopoulou – at left she is looking down from the migrant ship Cyrenia for a sight of her future husband – was 15 when it all began, but by the time she left Greece recently she had become a school teacher.

Then follows a brief summary of Bert's activities in Greece, how he was captured by the Germans, escaped, fought with the Greek guerillas, etc. But everyone loves a good love story, and the newspapers were ready to make of this a 'war romance'. To be fair, Bert is quoted at the end of the article as saying that 'we didn't really get to know each other until we began corresponding after the war', which was the truth. But

most people noticed the word 'romance'. Bert also stated that 'we won't even talk of a wedding date for a while'. In fact, at that time, he wasn't sure that there would be a wedding at all, given the precise terms under which Xanthoula was coming to Australia.

The 'Herald Sun' also picked up the story, and on the same day it printed a large photo of Xanthoula and Bert, a different one from the two published in 'The Argus', with a slightly different version. The title reads: 'Greek girl comes to wed soldier she sheltered.'

A young Greek girl who befriended a fugitive Australian soldier during the early fighting in Greece nine years ago, arrived in the boat Cyrenia yesterday to marry him.
High in the mountains of Greece at Retini, near Salonica, Herbert Wrigley, of Yarraville, escaped from a German prison camp and, with the Nazis at his heels, met 16-year old Xanthoula Papadopoulou. Lovely, brown-eyed Xanthoula, now 24, was selected as Miss Cyrenia by nearly 1,000 passengers on the voyage to Australia. Wrigley, now 31, had not seen her since he bade farewell to the Papadopoulou family nine years ago.

In that same article Bert is quoted as saying about our father that 'John Papadopoulos, a school teacher, was a typical Greek hero of those days – and one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew.'

What I find interesting, as I am reading through these newspaper articles, is the fact that none of them mentions that our father was executed, and yet Xanthoula assures me that both she and Bert had talked about it. It may be that in their effort to present a happy love story, the newspapers didn't want it to be overshadowed by a tragic event such as an execution.

The 'Herald Sun' article continues with more details about Bert fighting with the Greek guerillas and the British Mission, and embellishes everything a little by implying that there had been a romance between Xanthoula and Bert. For example: 'He and the young Greek girl enjoyed many walks through the mountains and forests ...' etc. Xanthoula and I can't help laughing a little as we read those articles today. It all sounds romantic but the reality was that even if they wanted to go for walks, they couldn't have done it. Xanthoula was certainly already a pretty girl when Slim stayed with us, and he may well have noticed that, but, being hunted down by the Germans and with severe frostbite in addition to his original leg injury, not to mention the malaria he had contracted, survival rather than romance must have been prevalent in his mind. It was out of the question for him to go out on romantic walks, he had to remain as hidden as possible in our house while he was recovering. Xanthoula was only fifteen years old and not likely to go off for walks in the forests with strangers, especially with someone who couldn't walk anyway because of severe frostbite! They couldn't communicate anyway, as Slim's Greek was minimal at the time and Xanthoula's English yet non-existent. I remember Bert staying with us, and I remember mother taking care of his feet, but I don't remember any particular exchanges between my sisters and him. Xanthoula says that their contact was limited to Bert sharing the family's daily life, having meals with us and being taken care of, mostly by our mother. She also remembers him coming back at some other time with a couple of other Australians, but on those occasions they didn't stay long. She also remembers when he came back alone and devastated after his two Australian friends had been betrayed and arrested. As far as she can remember, Xanthoula says she was there to help our mother prepare and serve meals or mend clothes, and participate in other household duties. On the whole though, 'The Herald Sun' got the facts straight about Bert being captured, then escaping, being sheltered by our family, fighting with the Greek guerillas and the British Mission, getting pneumonia and being evacuated from Greece through Turkey.

'The Age' featured yet another radiant photo of Xanthoula standing on the deck of the boat, with the title 'Here to Wed Man She Hid from Enemy'. I have to say, the photographer was really good! The article continues:

A small vivacious girl who, in 1942 when only 15, helped to hide an Australian soldier from the enemy in Greece, arrived yesterday in the migrant ship, Cyrenia, to marry him. (...)
The romance began soon after Mr. Wrigley escaped from the Germans who had taken him prisoner while he was in a Greek hospital. (...)
The fact that they had not seen each other for nearly nine years brought a certain shyness to their meeting yesterday.

The story continues with some details about Bert's war experiences in Greece and how he finally returned to Australia.

Finally, there is in my sister's file a little cutting from another newspaper featuring a short article, without photos, but with the word 'romance' quite prominent on the title:

All Helped Romance

"Digger" comradeship is helping the romance of Herbert Wrigley and his attractive Greek sweetheart, Xanthoula Papadopoulou.
Xanthoula arrived in Melbourne yesterday to marry Herbert. Nine years ago she befriended him after his escape from a German prison camp.
Help from fellow diggers started when Xanthoula went through Customs at Station Pier.
The Customs officer had also been a prisoner of war in Greece, and speeded formalities.
Then Herbert's boss – another digger – allowed him to leave ("We'll expect you when we see you") and wished him luck.
And Herbert's mate in Greece, Bruce Vary, agreed to be best man.
Xanthoula brought only a few dresses with her, so today Herbert is arranging with his relatives to take her trousseau shopping.

These articles all appeared on the day after Xanthoula's arrival. A week later, the original reporter went to the house in Yarraville to find out how the Greek girl was doing. He discovered that Xanthoula wasn't staying in the Wrigley home but had gone to stay with Bert's sister Claire, who had two young daughters, Marcelle and Fay. He got the address and visited her there. Xanthoula is photographed with Claire showing off two new dresses, while Bert is quoted as saying 'I will give Xanthoula a little while to get used to being in a new country', probably as an answer to the question about the wedding date.

The local Footscray paper interviewed Bert's father and, under the title 'Yarraville Soldier Re-united With Greek Beauty', Tom Wrigley was happy to talk about his own war experiences and about the new person in their lives. Xanthoula is described as 'a sparkling beauty', but the article doesn't use the word 'romance'. After mentioning Bert's capture and escape from the prison camp, the article continues:

One day, he, with other Australians, came upon the mountain home of Xanthoula's father. A schoolmaster, the father gave them shelter for some time and is described by Bert Wrigley as a "typical Greek hero and a fine gentleman".
The friendship which sprang up between the fugitive Australian and the schoolmaster's pretty young daughter had a new beginning this week.

Again, there is no mention of our father having lost his life. All newspapers seemed to shy away from that fact.

Xanthoula remembers that the month or so that followed was like a whirlwind of outings, meeting the various branches of the Wrigley family and going shopping. I asked her what she was thinking during that time, and she said that honestly she didn't have the time to think. To communicate with all these people, learn their names and get to know them even a little, she had to concentrate on her English and improve it fast. Bert would come up to Claire's on weekends so that they could talk and get to know each other a little. But during the week he was at work, so the time they spent together was relatively limited. He travelled from Yarraville to Blackburn by train for the day, as he had no private car. Owning a car wasn't easy or common in the early fifties, and he was spending all his money on home improvements. I also asked Xanthoula whether she felt there was some unspoken pressure on her to marry Bert, given all the publicity from the newspapers. She answered unhesitatingly that what made her decide to stay was the fact that she really liked Bert from the very start. The publicity was a nice thing that came along unexpectedly but it didn't affect her decision. She says that sometimes she felt that all this, and all the attention she was getting from the family as well, was not happening to her.

Before she knew it, the time had come for her to decide officially whether to stay or to leave. Paperwork had to be done and submitted to the Immigration department, one way or another. The prospect of returning to Greece didn't appeal much to her, she says, and Slim had made an excellent impression on her. She had decided to stay if she liked him, and she did, even though they had little time together. She had a strong feeling that he was a lovely and generous person, very honest, an attentive gentleman, he made her laugh and was fun-loving as well. I must say that this is exactly how I would describe him, and he kept these characteristics throughout his life. Xanthoula liked being with him and he seemed quite thrilled with her, in fact all photos show him quite 'smitten' in the way he looks at her. All his relatives received Xanthoula with much warmth and enthusiasm, they were all taken with her, so she was determined to make this work. She accepted to get married, and wedding plans had to be made fairly soon to meet the three-month deadline.

When the wedding was announced, there was another flurry of newspaper articles and more photos the week before. When 'The Argus' reporter visited her he took a photo of her ironing a shirt and Bert looking at her with a big happy smile. I find it quite revealing that in almost all these photos Bert is looking and smiling at Xanthoula and not at the camera.

At the top of the article we read: 'Wedding day Sunday'.

P.O.W., a girl – and a happy ending!
It took one month and six days for one of the newest Australians to be perfectly satisfied for life that her new country was all that it was said to be – and more. (...)

Then her future brother-in-law, the elder brother, George, is quoted as saying 'We are glad she'll be living here after she is married', and he adds candidly 'we are a bachelor household of three'. They also say they are looking forward to having some Greek food.

On that subject the article quotes Xanthoula's opinion of Australian cooking.

You people cannot cook at all! You have the best of everything in the world in the way of food, but you spoil it in the way you cook it!

I can't believe that my polite and careful sister would actually say that! She says now that she wasn't as direct as that -- you know how people exaggerate or distort things when they supposedly repeat what you say!

Bert insisted that the wedding should take place in the Greek Orthodox Church, to honor Xanthoula's family and culture. He had originally said to one of the newspapers that they were planning on 'a quiet wedding', but he underestimated the effect of the publicity and the Greeks. Thanks to the newspaper photos and articles, many people unknown to the Wrigley family, and of varied nationalities, sent cards with good wishes. Xanthoula remembers receiving cards and little gifts such as horseshoes covered in white satin with pearls and flowers. The Greek community was naturally alerted, and many people contacted Xanthoula to welcome her to Melbourne, offer their help, and sent flowers before the wedding. Xanthoula says that one of them, an older lady, even said to her that if she didn't want to marry the Australian, there were plenty of Greek young men, with shops and businesses of their own, who would be happy to have her as their wife. Xanthoula thanked her politely but didn't take her up on that!

When the decision was made to have the wedding ceremony held in the Greek Orthodox Church, they both went to arrange a date and meet the priest, the Revered Father Patsoyannis. The first thing they learned was that, because of Easter, the wedding date had to be advanced considerably to take place before Lent. Otherwise, they would have to wait until after Easter, in which case the three-month deadline from Immigration would be missed. So they set up a date for Sunday 4th of March, much earlier than they had anticipated. The other problem that came up was that of the best man. Bruce Vary had already declared that he wanted to be the best man, just as Slim had been his best man at his wedding. But while there was no problem about the groom not being Orthodox, the best man had to be! The role of the best man ('koumbaros) in the Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony is quite an active one. He assists the priest in performing the rituals. That may be the reason why he/she has to be of the

same faith. It is noteworthy that women can play that role in the Greek Orthodox Church. Anyway, this was a strange situation which had to be resolved. They had to find, and quickly, someone in the Greek community willing to be best man officially, while Bruce would stand beside him. The word went around and the solution actually came more easily than they had expected. Flo's sister-in-law was married to a Greek gentleman, Mr. John Raftopoulos, who recommended for best man a young nephew of his, Peter Raftopoulos. He himself would give Xanthoula away, since she had no father and no other family member available to take on that part.

The Raftopoulos family was thrilled to become involved in this by now quite 'famous' wedding. Peter, a tall and good-looking young man, already familiar with Greek religious customs, was quick to learn what he had to do. His two sisters, Helen and Chris, were actually florists as well as business girls. They helped by providing the bouquet of flowers, a richly flowing arrangement of frangipani. They also helped the bride to choose her veil and crown. Claire took Xanthoula to one of the major department stores in the city, Buckley and Nunn, to choose the material for her wedding dress, and found a special wedding gown dressmaker in Blackburn. Bert's mother had died about seven months before Xanthoula arrived, but she knew that a beautiful Greek girl might be coming and had left money for the wedding dress.

Everything had to be done faster than they had planned originally, but it all worked out well. Wedding ceremonies in the Greek Church usually take place on Sundays, after the morning liturgy. On that Sunday, Father Patsoyannis announced at the end of the service that the young Greek girl about whom they had read in the newspapers was getting married on that day. He invited the congregation to stay on and fill the place of the relatives and friends of the bride. When the wedding party arrived, they were surprised to walk into a church packed with people they didn't know! The ceremony usually lasts about 30 minutes, but it went on longer than that. The relatives and friends of the groom had to be patient, witnessing a ritual first in a language they didn't understand, then translated quickly into English by Father Patsoyannis himself. At the end of the ceremony, they had to be even more patient as about two hundred people lined up to congratulate the newlyweds, including the close relatives and the two best men! Bruce Vary remembered for some time how, being short, he was at a disadvantage: he got kissed by all the Greeks, whereas Bert, being so tall, couldn't be reached by most of them!

On Monday the 5th of March 1951, the Herald Sun splashed a large wedding photograph on its front page with the title 'P.O.W. weds the girl who helped'. After a brief summing up of the 'war bride' story. It goes on to give a description of the bride's dress: 'For her wedding she wore a flowing lace gown with a full, billowing train. Her tulle veil was caught with a coronet of orange blossom.' The article also says there were 200 'guests' as the newspaper didn't know about Father Patsoyannis' earlier announcement after the service. Among the real guests were Elli and Anastasia Argyros, the two sisters who shared the same cabin with Xanthoula on the boat. Fifty-nine years later and both in their eighties, Elli and Xanthoula still talk to each other on the phone and even manage to see each other every now and then. Those early friendships lasted a long time.

The Argus also published a large front-page photo in which both Bert and Xanthoula look radiant, with more imaginative titles: 'Grecian finale' features above the photo, and below we read:

It may look just like any other wedding picture, but it's the story behind this one that counts. The bride who is facing life with Mr. Herbert Wrigley, of Yarraville, was the young Xanthoula Papadopoulou, who helped Mr. Wrigley when he was an escaped prisoner of war in Greece in 1941.

The story continues on page 2 of 'The Argus' with the title: 'Escape Route Led to Altar'.

While the Rev. Dr. C. Patsoyannis recited the wedding service in the Greek Orthodox Church, Victoria Par., the bridegroom, Herbert P. Wrigley, of Yarraville, and his groomsman, Bruce Vary, of Morwell, thought back to the day in 1941 when they first met.
Fugitives from a German prison camp, they had joined forces on the lower slopes of Mt. Olympus, in Greece. And the pretty Greek bride, Xanthoula Papadopoulou, thought back to the day, six months later, when the two Australians, tired and hungry, sought shelter at her father's home. Yesterday's wedding was the sequel.

All the world loves a lover, and the romantic story of Xanthoula and Bert Wrigley, told in The Argus when she arrived in Melbourne last month, and again on Saturday, was responsible for the church being filled with well-wishers. (...)
The bridegroom stood rigidly at attention throughout the 35-minutes' service. He relaxed when the service concluded, but only temporarily. Following Greek custom, well-wishers, men and women, filed past the bridal group, kissing each on both cheeks, bridegroom and groomsman included.
"I'm lucky I'm a six-footer", Mr. Wrigley said later. "The men couldn't reach me easily, and I was able to get away with a handshake. But poor Bruce, he's not much over five foot six – he got the lot!"

The family and very close friends gathered in the Wrigley family home after the wedding for an intimate dinner. The newlyweds were then driven by Bruce to his home in Morwell for their first night, and then the next day he drove them to a cabin they had reserved for a week at Lakes Entrance. No expensive hotels or resorts for their few days of honeymoon, just beautiful nature and a quiet time to start getting to know each other better.

On their return, Xanthoula took up her new duties as wife, housekeeper of the Wrigley home and caretaker of two elderly men: her father-in-law, seventy-two years old, and her brother-in-law George, fifty-two. Tom Wrigley hadn't had an easy life. Having fought in two wars and having worked in factories for most of his life – even when Xanthoula came he still worked as a part-time watchman in a factory in Yarraville --, he didn't enjoy glowing health. George, although only fifte-two years old, had already retired from working in the railway depot as he had some serious health problems. He was suffering from respiratory difficulties having been gassed as a young soldier in WWI, and he had had a stroke which nearly left him paralyzed before Xanthoula arrived. Fortunately he had recovered well enough to walk -- with a slight limp, but he was able to walk

to the shops and take care of quite a few things in daily life. He was also partially deaf, probably the result of working for many years in a noisy environment at the railways. But he was a truly gentle soul, had never married, and indeed was very helpful to Xanthoula in her first years in Yarraville. He would go shopping with her and do whatever he could around the house. After 1952, when the first child arrived, George was often seen in the neighborhood pushing the baby's pram, and later taking the little boy for a walk. He spent a lot of time with little John, freeing Xanthoula to do her work around the house. John learned to walk holding Uncle George's finger. A deep bond was formed between them and, many years later, it was John who took care of him for quite a while when Xanthoula and Bert took a trip to Greece.

In Yarraville, George lived with Xanthoula and Bert until I arrived from Greece in April 1955. Some months before I arrived, Bert had helped him find and buy a nice block of land up in the hills of Melbourne. A modest home was built for him surrounded by beautiful nature and lots of birds. He loved living up there, and it was certainly a much healthier environment for him than that of Yarraville -- an old suburb with many factories and not the cleanest air in Melbourne. George lived in Upwey for at least fifteen years. He became known and loved by all the children in the neighborhood. Young mothers would leave their children with him when they went shopping, and his back yard was often full of children playing. I remember going to visit him with Xanthoula and Bert, taking the train up there and back, it was like a day's excursion to the country. Compared to Yarraville it was the country. Xanthoula prepared food to take with us for lunch, and also to leave for George, who was capable of cooking for himself and even feed a few children from around the neighborhood, but always welcomed something that Xanthoula had made.

Soon after the wedding, Bert decided to join the Victoria Police Force, applied, was accepted and took the training required. Not that he needed that much training, at least not on the practical side of things. No doubt the duties of a city policeman required him to know rules and regulations which he didn't need to know in the army or in his fighting with the Greek guerillas, or in his commando special training which he took before he went to Borneo. But the Victoria Police Force must have been happy to welcome a veteran with experience, especially as he turned out to be very good at all the other subjects they had to take. Xanthoula remembers young recruits coming to the house to get help from him in English, and he sat working with them for hours. After a break of more than four years in the army and overseas, Bert had gone back to reading again any time he wasn't working or doing jobs around the house. He had an excellent command of the English language, especially compared to young people who were coming out of high school. He was about 32 years old when he went through the police force training, much older than most other recruits, and he sailed through everything. Xanthoula remembers that she went to his graduation ceremony holding John in her arms, and for the graduation ball, one of Bert's sisters came to baby sit.

In 1954, after I had finished high school, I hadn't forgotten that I wanted to go and be with Xanthoula, and Xanthoula hadn't forgotten that she had promised to send for me. The sponsorship papers were submitted, and it was approved that I come and join my sister as a legal immigrant. Life in Greece had somewhat improved, at least there were no more military trials and executions, but prospects for young people were still few and our family was still 'stigmatized' by the execution of our father and the continued branding of our family as leftist. The 'Security' was still making decisions about people's lives, and you couldn't get a job unless you were able to obtain a 'certificate of social beliefs', meaning a piece of paper that certified that you were not of the leftist persuasion. This is where my papers got stuck, since the Australian Immigration Department required a certificate from the police that I had no criminal record.

Almost a year went by and the approval hadn't come. I finally decided to do what Eleni had done at the time of her second arrest: I put my best dress on and I presented myself to the chief of the local Security Office in Katerini. I demanded an explanation why my papers were not being approved. I remember a long and pale face with an ironic smile saying that the reason was because I belonged to a family 'famous' for its leftist leanings. He said that my father had been labeled as a communist and was executed, and that my eldest sister had been tried by a military court. I remember feeling the anger welling up in me, especially when he mentioned my father. I reminded him that my father had been executed by the enemy who had invaded Greece, and said that my father was a hero and I was proud of what he stood for. I went on saying that he was repeating the same old stuff we had heard before, and that my sister was, since 1952, a respected teacher in his community, probably teaching his own sons, if he had sons, in the boys' high school. I pointed out that she had been acquitted in the trial and that, if the 'higher-ups' had thought she was worthy of their trust, since they allowed her to teach, then he should show the same trust towards me and allow me to leave. Surely, I couldn't be more dangerous than she was! And what were they afraid of? That I would contaminate Australian society with liberal ideas? Australia was liberal enough, and Thank God, not a police state like Greece.

I was eighteen years-old, I had 'lost' it, as they say. I was so angry, I stood up and left without waiting for a response. Back at my sister Eleni's place, I broke down thinking that I had ruined my chances of ever leaving the country. Strangely enough, I was called the very next day to go and get the clearance certificate! I marched in, picked it up and left without thanking them.

Mother looked very sad but quite resigned this time. In my excitement, I didn't want to dwell on her sadness – although for many years to follow I suffered from guilt feelings that I also left her. My passage was booked, first class cabin (!) on the Arcadia, which I was to pick up neither in Italy nor in the Greek port of Piraeus but at the very southern tip of the Peloponese, in the historically famous Navarino bay. As it turned out it was the ship that literally picked me up! The rendezvous was for late March 1955 – I don't remember the exact date. My brother Stefanos accompanied me all the way from Katerini, crossing the whole country, first by train to Athens, then by bus to the town of Kalamata. The trip took three days and two nights. In Kalamata, on a very early misty morning, a small boat with an outboard motor took me, with my brother beside me holding my hand, quite a way into the sea to where the big liner had anchored, waiting for me. There wasn't a port where a 30,000-ton ship could dock. I had to

climb up on a special ladder that was lowered, and my small suitcase was carried up by a cabin boy dressed in sparkling white clothes and wearing white gloves! I looked down as the little boat was leaving with my brother and I felt like a forlorn child. My heart felt like jumping out of my body to go back with him...
I regret never having asked him how he felt back then.

I was the only passenger the Arcadia picked up from Greece in its maiden voyage, probably only because I was travelling first class. I couldn't believe that Xanthoula and Bert had actually booked a first-class passage for me! I was shy even to look at the well-dressed British passengers going down to the luxurious dining-room. Many of the women wore long gowns and men wore black suits for dinner. Did I feel I didn't belong there? You can guess the answer. Fortunately, one passenger, an Irish priest, must have sensed how I felt and made a point of coming to speak to me. He spoke some French and we spent many hours playing scrabble with French words. And no, I wasn't chosen 'Miss Arcadia'. So far as I remember, there was no such event on that ship, probably that was a tradition only on the Greek ships.

This isn't the place to continue with my own experiences and feelings during that voyage, but I wanted to record the extraordinary fact that a poor immigrant girl was travelling first class on the maiden voyage of a new ocean liner full of people who seemed to be on a luxury cruise to Australia! And although it isn't my story, I also want to write about some of the things that Bert and Xanthoula did for me, which show their generosity and their caring. Making their portrait as complete as possible is the main aim and some of these details seem relevant to me.

As both of them admitted to me more than once, they were both concerned when they came to pick me up from the ship which docked on the same wharf as did the 'Cyrenia' five years earlier. They said that I looked so thin and so lost, with long hair tied back and flat shoes, they wondered how they could help me to become more like a 'normal' young girl. Xanthoula set to work immediately. She took me to have my hair cut, bought me new dresses, a new coat, black shoes with medium heels to get me used to them, and a bag to match. They also made sure I ate as much as possible. Within a month or so, I had put on some weight, wore lipstick -- which felt very strange to begin with and made me self-conscious --, and learned to walk on higher heels. Xanthoula remembers that I made it clear I wanted to learn English as quickly as possible, so we agreed to speak English at home between us. She started teaching me the daily things. We went food shopping together, making every occasion, every outing a lesson. Bert gave me a red pocket-book size Greek-English dictionary, which Xanthoula still has in her desk. I carried it with me all the time and looked up every word I came across. I also gave myself the task of learning twenty new words a day, and continued testing myself on them until I had memorized them. Xanthoula would take me to the local cinema to see films so that I could get used to listening to English.

Many immigrants lived in Yarraville because of the proximity of factories and therefore the possibility of jobs. Bert found out that the local elementary school offered free English lessons at night for immigrants. Xanthoula took me to meet the local teacher. He was a nice gentleman, very patient, trying to teach a fairly large group of people who on the whole had little preparation in their own language and who came tired from a day's work. I attended regularly, but after a while there was little I could learn as this was a class for beginners aiming to teach the basics. Every time new people joined the class, the teacher would start from the beginning. I gave him to understand that I needed to move forward a little faster, as I planned to go to the University. He looked at me with a bit of a smile, probably thinking that this was too ambitious for an immigrant girl. Anyway, I left the class and continued to study on my own, with books from home and my dictionary. It was then that I fully realized the value of having been taught strict rules by the French nuns, who had for years insisted on grammar, verbs, and the structure of sentences. All of that helped me to learn English faster than most immigrants, and without attending any other special classes. Within a year I managed to enroll at the University. The rest is part of my story!

Five years later, when I received my degree from Melbourne University, I took Xanthoula and we went to visit the school teacher. My sister was very proud of me. He was very surprised but pleased and congratulated me for my perseverance. I remember it felt good to be able to prove to him that immigrants could actually get an education in Australia, if they really wanted to.

In addition to bringing me to Australia, both Xanthoula and Bert gave me a lot of encouragement and moral support in my plans to study at the University. But their finances were very limited with just one person working, a second child on the way, and 'grandpa' Wrigley living with them. They had already spent a substantial sum for my trip and I found out later that they had actually borrowed most of it from Bert's brother Eric. They were now slowly paying it off. When I asked them why on earth they had paid for a first class cabin for me, they said that, given the conditions under which I grew up, they wanted me to have a really nice trip over. They had also repainted and refurnished Uncle George's room for me, bought me new clothes, fed me well, and they also paid the fees for me to attend a technical college in the neighborhood where I learned to type. Now I had to earn some money in order to pay for University fees, travelling expenses, books, etc. My English was improving fast, and with typing skills I was ready to enter the work force by the end of five months.

In order for me not to have a long commute, Bert had the idea of speaking to the owners and the manager of a factory just across the street from the house. It was called Australian Porcelain Insulator Co. and manufactured porcelain insulators for electricity. The owners knew Bert and the Wrigley family from across the street, some of them worked there at various times in the past. Bert explained that I was still fresh from Greece and my English wasn't perfect, but he could vouch for me as I was a serious young lady. I went across to meet me and they hired me as a kind of secretary-typist also answering phones in the general office. I was very lucky. Mr. John Crowe, the owner, had studied ancient Greek at Melbourne University and treated me with great courtesy and gentleness. He was impressed that I could speak French. He brought me a very large Greek-English English-Greek dictionary which I used at all times. My English kept improving by the day. The manager, Mr. Russell, was also a nice gentleman, he made an effort to speak slowly and clearly when he was dictating a

letter, and joked about how our accents were similar -- he was from Scotland and I seem to remember that we both rolled our Rs! Mr. Crowe's two sons, Peter and Malcolm, treated me kindly and were very helpful when I started taking night courses at the University. They took turns in making a detour going home to take me there, so I wouldn't be late for class. If I had to run after work to catch the train into the city, then the tram to Parkville, I wouldn't have made it. So I had great support from everyone in what they all considered a noble effort on my part to educate myself.

These classes were on twice a week during the first year. On those occasions, when I came home late at night, my dinner would be waiting for me on a plate kept warm, and Xanthoula also waited up to ask me how things were going. There is no way I could have done what I did without the understanding and the support of Xanthoula and Bert, and the least I can do is acknowledge this here. It is with their actions that they both showed their generous and caring nature. These early studies for which they both stood by me laid the foundations so that I could have later an academic career in the US.

A year after I arrived (1956), a second boy was born, Michael. Grandfather was declining now, his health was deteriorating, and he needed more attention and caretaking. He had been a smoker all his life, and I could hear him cough for a long time in the mornings. One would think that, after all the glamour of the arrival and the wedding, settling in to an old house, though improved with some renovations, for the first five years with two older men needing their rooms to be cleaned, their washing to be done and meals to be cooked for them, Xanthoula might have become somewhat depressed and unhappy. At least I think I would have... I caught myself thinking quite a few times that that couldn't have been the best environment for a young and beautiful bride. It was fine that Bert wasn't well off, she knew about that kind of hardship and trying to make ends meet. The last ten years in Greece had trained her well for that. But being just twenty-four years old, just married and having to live not only with a man that she was still getting to know, not only get used to new places, new customs, a different language, not having around anyone she knew from before, but also to have to share her life with two old men with ill health and handicaps -- all that seemed, and still seems, very difficult to me. It requires great inner resources, a big dose of generosity and courage, and I wonder how many young girls would have been able to not only accept such a situation but also be happy in it. In addition to what ten years of her life had been in Greece, these were also the things that made Xanthoula so special, so 'heroic', in my mind. She made the most of a difficult situation: she rolled up her sleeves, spruced up the house, sowed new curtains, mended clothes, tidied up cupboards that had accumulated canned foods for years for easy to prepare meals, and brought warmth, beauty and love in the house. She quickly made friends with the neighbors, especially with a young couple next door, and integrated herself in Bert's family and in that new life.

I asked her to remember how she felt then, having to live with and take care of the two old men, and if she regretted at any time having stayed. I was surprised with what she had to say: 'It seemed natural to me. They were family, that was all there was to it. It was their home and I had accepted to come into it. I knew the situation before I married Bert. Someone had to take care of them, so why not me? And everyone was so nice and appreciative, I was really happy to do it.' Before I arrived in Melbourne at the age of eighteen, I suppose I had an idealized vision of how my sister lived in Australia. Of course, I loved all the newspaper photos and the wedding photos that Xanthoula had sent us. My sister was a star! Later, I saw photos of the outside of their simple weatherboard house, it was a bit of a surprise, but it looked nice enough. But I was only eighteen years old when I arrived, and there were many things for which I wasn't prepared. For example: although I had lived with my own grandfather for many years, I wasn't quite prepared to be with an old man like 'grandpa' Wrigley. Our own grandfather was so different from him! To begin with I couldn't communicate with him at all, as I had no English. He smoked cigarettes which he rolled himself, and he liked to have rum in his tea. Both smells of tobacco and alcohol were unpleasant to me, but during the four or so years I lived in Yarraville with them, I never heard Xanthoula make a comment, lose patience or complain about it. She gave the old man haircuts, kept his room and his clothes clean and, having learned that he liked blood sausage and tripe, she would buy those things to cook especially for him. I can understand why he loved Xanthoula and preferred to live with her rather than with his own daughters! In 1959, he declined even further, and although he never became bedridden, Xanthoula had to ultimately wash him and help him get dressed. One morning, he asked her to prepare him and then quietly died in her arms.

In the meantime, with the two children growing, Bert wanted to give them a better quality of life, with more nature and cleaner air. He and his brother Eric had bought two adjacent blocks of land in an outer suburb of Melbourne, Vermont, that still had tall trees, birds and even some wild life like rabbits, lizards, etc. Eric had already built a house but it wasn't convenient for him to live that far because of his work. So the house was empty, not quite finished but inhabitable. After 'grandpa' died, Bert and Xanthoula decided to move out there, live in brother Eric's house and start building their own next door. By then, I had a scholarship that allowed me to study full-time and work only part-time as an interpreter at courts. I said goodbye to the good people of the Australian Porcelain Insulator Company, and moved out to Vermont with Bert, Xanthoula, John and Michael. I loved it living out there, waking up with the noise of the cookabarras and the bell birds, stepping outside both front and back doors and seeing green, smelling the eucalyptus trees. I organized my classes and commuted to the University by train and tram. It was a long walk up to Heatherdale station, but I was happy to do it, with nature all around. That lasted a year. For the senior year of my studies, I was awarded a residential scholarship by the Women's College on campus, and I moved there for the academic year 1960-1961. Living on campus, being able to just walk to the library and my classes, come back for ready meals at the College, participate in that life with other fellow students, was a truly wonderful and memorable experience for me, especially as I could still go and spend the weekends with Xanthoula, Bert and the boys.

In 1961, exactly ten years after Xanthoula sailed on the 'Cyrenia' to come to Australia, and with two little boys, John eight years old and Michael not quite five, Bert felt it was time for her to go back and see her family in Greece, and for the boys to have an experience of their Greek roots. He couldn't go himself, but Xanthoula could go with the two boys and stay as long as she liked. Money for the tickets was put together by a common effort by mother, Stefanos and Eleni, and Bert had

saved enough for some spending money. I had graduated and had been awarded a French government scholarship to continue studies in Paris. I was preparing to sail back to Europe myself, so it was great! Xanthoula, the boys and I would travel together on the Greek boat 'Patris' and would have a full family reunion during the summer of 1961 before I was to start my studies in Paris in September. We finally didn't travel on the same boat. Through the University, I was offered a free passage on a large liner, the 'Southern Cross, and left about a month earlier than Xanthoula. We met later in the summer in Greece. The trip being long and costly, it was decided that Xanthoula and the boys would stay as long as possible in Greece. It was arranged for lessons to be sent by mail from John's school, so that he wouldn't miss a school year. Michael was not at school age yet, but our brother arranged for both the boys to attend a private Greek school close to the house. In that way, they would interact with Greek children and learn the language.

The decision was made, the passages were booked, and Bert was to live by himself for a whole year allowing Xanthoula to have this time with her family and old friends in Greece. It wasn't a small sacrifice on his part a whole year of living alone, but he insisted that he was happy and that he was quite capable of taking care of himself. Generosity was the essence of Bert's character, never putting himself first. He enjoyed Xanthoula's happiness at being reunited with her family in Greece, pleased that her family could see how happy and well-looked after she and the boys were. It took twelve more years before he could make it to Greece himself with leave from his work, going alone in his turn and Xanthoula staying home this time. He was only gone for three months. They went to Greece together only once, in May 1981, when my husband and I spent a month with them travelling through Greece. It was a very special time, I think, for all of us.

During those ten years that Xanthoula was away (1951-1961), the situation of the family in Greece had improved quite a lot, especially after I left in 1955. Mother and grandfather stayed with Eleni in Katerini until 1956, while Stefanos stayed with relatives finishing his studies in Thessaloniki. During that time, he worked hard at various jobs, teaching at coaching colleges and night schools, while he completed his doctoral studies. In 1956, he took mother and grandfather to live with him in Thessaloniki. He was now assistant to the Professor of Modern Greek History at the University where he had been a student. He and mother managed to put aside enough money for a down payment and in 1957 they bought a small apartment on the sixth floor of a new building in a central part of the city, close to the University. This was comparative luxury compared to other places the family had lived after the war. Grandfather was very proud of Stefanos and thanked him all the time for bringing him to a 'paradise', as he called the new place. He sat out on the big balcony reading the newspaper and looking out on to a square and even the sea above the roofs of other lower buildings. Stefanos had also got married to a beautiful girl whom he loved for some time, who had graduated from the same University and was teaching in a private high school. Grandfather was still alive early in 1961, but unfortunately he died only three months before we arrived. Our mother, though still dressed in black now mourning grandfather, and still thin, seemed well in her own health and active as always keeping house. Xanthoula's arrival with the two boys gave her a new lease of life. She was happy to have a nice place, by Greek standards, for Xanthoula and the boys to come and stay. Mother, Stefanos, his wife and their little baby daughter Glykeria, named after our mother, Xanthoula and the two boys all lived together in the same small apartment in Thessaloniki. The year went by and, by the time of their return the boys spoke fluent Greek, especially Michael who had no accent at all and had adopted manners and expressions of a little Greek boy. He spoke fast, mixed well and played and fought with the neighborhood children. Xanthoula helped John with his school lessons, and both boys wrote frequently to their father in distant Melbourne.

We all eventually made it back to Melbourne in 1962 including myself from Paris at the end of that year. I was offered an instructorship in the same French department in which I had been an undergraduate at the University of Melbourne. I was also offered a resident Instructorship at Women's College, and was given a nice independent apartment. I bought a little French car and was able to drive and spend my weekends with Bert, Xanthoula and the boys in the new house in Vermont. There were many happy days there with family and friends who used to come on weekends, for an excursion to the 'country'. Vermont continued to remain green and unspoiled. Unfortunately, the place we lived is now not recognizable, the house having been demolished to make room for four large independent units. The block of land was large enough for that kind of 'development'. The road once lined with big eucalyptus trees both on the sides and in the middle is now a four-lane major thoroughfare. I prefer not to go by there now, the memories of that place as it was in the past are too dear for me to destroy...

This was the home in which I left Bert and Xanthoula when I got married in 1964 and moved to Brisbane with my husband. It was in that same year that they bought their first car and invited our mother to come to Australia. Mother stayed for six months, spending four months in Melbourne and a couple of months with me in Brisbane. She had a great time, even started to wear grey instead of black, she let Xanthoula dress her up with new clothes and she started to laugh. What a wonderful feeling was that! I had grown up with mother always being sad. Xanthoula and Bert were thrilled too. This was a good time in our lives, to see mother come alive after all she had been through.

Two years later, in 1966, Xanthoula, who had chosen to stay home to take care of the two old men and then to see her children grow up, was now more free to do something outside the house. Their sons, John and Michael, had moved on with their own lives, and although Uncle George was soon to come down and live with them, she felt that she could go out to work, do something with her skills and still manage the house. Bert was always ready to give a hand around the house. She could have taken up her career as a teacher of the Greek language, but it would have meant commuting into the city. She preferred to find something in the area where they lived so as not to waste time, and be able to get back to the house quickly if necessary. A new chocolate factory had just opened up not too far from the house and she presented herself there for a job, any job. Starting as an ordinary worker on the production floor, she was soon selected to be in charge of a section. After a while, she was again chosen by her bosses and placed on a responsible position in the packaging department consisting of eight people designing the presentation and the

packaging of the various products. She worked for fourteen years and when she decided to retire at the end of 1979, after Bert himself had retired, her colleagues gave her a farewell party, and a card was signed by 73 people. Many of them wrote funny farewell lines to her, such as 'We'll miss your finesse/The department will be one hell of a mess!', or 'I have been a Xan fan/Ever since the job began./ Going to miss your laugh and cheek/but good luck to you – you lovely Greek!' A young man in a wheelchair, Tony, who worked beside her at the beginning, used to call her affectionately 'Mrs. Wriggles'. 'A better "Wriggles" I've never seen./Xanthoula, you've really been a Queen./ In moments of loss I would twist and shout/But you would always be there to help me out.'
She was liked by everyone for her good nature and respected for her good work. She is loyal to the friends she made there and still meets regularly, once a month, with a small group of women who call themselves 'The Cadbury Girls'.

Bert and Xanthoula lived in Vermont for twenty years until Christmas 1979, and their children grew up there. It was also the house into which they moved Uncle George after he became too old to take care of himself. He came down from Upwey to live with them again for another ten years. Xanthoula was thinking just recently how there was someone living with them most of their married life.

Bert had made a good career and a good name in the Commonwealth Police Force. He had originally joined the Victoria Police soon after he married Xanthoula but he soon changed Forces. His previous experience and his knowledge of Greek may have been the main factors for this move.
He was highly regarded and given important assignments throughout his career. On December 17th 1967, when the Prime Minister of Australia Harold Holt was reported missing, Sergeant Wrigley was one of the first officers to be called on the scene. Photos in 'The Sun' the next day show him walking right behind Mrs. Holt and her two sons. A few days later, when President Lyndon Johnson came to Australia for Mr. Holt's funeral, Sergeant Wrigley was called to be on the US President's personal guard. 'The Sun' of Sunday 23rd December 1967 features a large photo of the US Presidential car flown in especially from America, with President Johnson outside holding the hand of Mr. Holt's grandson, Christopher. Two steps behind President Johnson, standing in front of the car door, Sergeant Wrigley stands tall in his dark suit and tie, keeping a watchful eye.

He was also called for other special situations, such as student demonstrations. Pulling away young people gathered outside the National Service Registration Office wasn't one of Sergeant Wrigley's favorite jobs. No doubt he felt divided on that issue. It was in fact paradoxical that he had to obey orders and intervene to prevent people from having the right to freedom of speech and to protest, when in fact he had fought to protect such rights. So he intervened as 'gently' as possible. On July 2nd 1969, a small number of University students staged an anti-conscription sit-in in Melbourne's Commonwealth Centre. Sergeant Wrigley was called in with other colleagues to remove them. Reporters were there, of course, and 'The Sun', as well as other newspapers, published photos of that event the next day. Most of them focused on Sergeant Wrigley, this time in uniform, shown not dragging young people, as another of his colleagues does on another photo, but actually carrying them in his arms! Under one of the photos we read:

Most of the demonstrators police evicted from the Commonwealth Centre in Melbourne yesterday were dragged out feet first, but the girl above got more gentle treatment from the Commonwealth police sergeant. One of the sergeant's colleagues is using a less considerate method in the picture below.

These were just a few emergency situations. There were other more secret missions and the press didn't know about them. At least they admit not knowing much about them. A reporter by the name of John Sorell, in a column called "On the Spot", published in The Herald on October 1st 1971 an article with the title "The 'quiet men' hit the headlines: ENTER THE FEDS". Most of the article is devoted to Bert.

I know a Commonwealth policeman. He is a big, red-faced, chunky fellow who often disappears mysteriously into the night.
"Special assignment for Bert," says his wife with more than a touch of pride. "Don't know anything more about it."
A couple of days later Bert will re-appear. He never volunteers and I never ask what's been going on.
Once he came back with sticking plaster on his chin, and on a second occasion had a bandaged arm. But Bert, who fought the Germans through Greece is a tough old hand.
I was ignorant of Bert's special duties until one day I picked up the morning paper. There on page one was middle-aged Bert, brilliantly captured on film, flying through the air in a superbly executed rugby tackle.
The tackle was a midnight arrest of a student who had been holing out on Commonwealth property.
So now I knew. And I suppose Bert was involved the other morning at the Melbourne University fracas. I hope he wasn't hit on the scone by a chair.
I dare not ask. Commonwealth or Federal police are more inclined to secrecy than our State lawmen. They are generally a non-committal bunch, who rarely gossip even to journalists. They have an ability to blend and pass unnoticed through crowds. (...)
Nowadays, Commonwealth police make lots of news. Their activities are expanding, so are their powers, so is their strength.
They are more or less an embryo FBI operating as the central law enforcement agency for the Federal Government. Among other things, they police the controversial Crimes Act and guard VIPs and rocket ranges.
(...) There are about 900 in the force, including 300 in Victoria (...)
Commonwealth policemen have had some bitter and bloody clashes with students in recent memory, as they battle the widespread resentment against the National Service Act. They would much prefer to just guard rocket ranges. I do know that from Bert.

What we know for sure is that, for the most part, Bert's official assignment was the Greek immigrants, whether legal or illegal. He was probably one of the few, if not the only Australian officer who could speak Greek. The Greek community loved him as he always tried to help within the law even those who 'jumped ship'. Those days, it was the most common way of getting into the country illegally but quickly. Periodically and at specified times the government would grant amnesty to illegal immigrants. Sergeant Wrigley would drop in to cafes,

restaurants, fish and chip shops, green-grocer shops run by Greeks, and let them know that if he found anyone who was illegally in the country he would have to arrest them and deport them. As a 'by the way', he would at the same time let it be known that there was an amnesty coming up, and for those who wanted to stay in Australia to 'lie low' until that time so that he couldn't find them. Then they could go to a particular office in the Immigration department, present themselves and apply to become legal immigrants. I am guessing now, and I don't think I am wrong, that he felt that was a way to repay the Greek people for their help and protection they gave him, risking their lives, when he was in Greece.

Bert was, perhaps partly because of his share of 'secret' service to his country and the community, a private and low-key individual, who didn't talk about his adventurous past or his assignments. But one always felt in his presence that there was more to him than what you saw. At the same time, he had a great sense of humor, enjoyed friends, even if they just 'dropped in' unannounced according to Greek custom. He enjoyed a good meal -- although he was easy to please and liked to cook himself when he was home -- and a nice bottle of wine. He was very much liked by his colleagues and appreciated for his kindness and concern, but also for his dedication and, when needed, his toughness on the job. In the Force, he was known for his team spirit and camaraderie. When the time came to retire from the Commonwealth Police, 25 years after he had joined, he was given a warm farewell party and presented with a gigantic card signed by seventy-one people – a respectable number, although Xanthoula beat him by two more signatures! It reads:

We all worked so well together just like one big machine... But now you're leaving... and we'll have to get another nut!

In all the years I lived with my sister Xanthoula and Bert, and in all the later years we spent time together either in Greece or when I was visiting them in Australia, I saw a couple who loved and respected each other deeply. My sister was never 'Xanthoula', it was always 'love' -- or another loving but funny way he had of addressing her, which stays in the family and which she probably doesn't want me to mention here! 'Bert' was also rare in Xanthoula's lips, unless she was referring to him. I was never witness to any friction between them, and when I asked Xanthoula if she was ever angry with him, she could only remember the occasion when he went ahead and sold a caravan they had without discussing it with her. To his defense, she says that he did it on the spot where the caravan was located, one day when he went there to cut the grass around it and he was made an offer there and then. Cell phones didn't exist at that time, and he had grown a little weary of taking care of the land around it. His feet and leg injuries were making themselves felt with age, and for some years even before he retired he had to wear specially made boots with supports. It was becoming increasingly difficult for him to walk normally.

Bert died in 1995, seven years later than his friend Bruce, at the age of 75. It wasn't a bad age to reach for someone who went through the hardships of war, fighting the Germans in a foreign land, and then the Japanese in another foreign land.

He thought deeply into the meaning of life and death, and was the most comforting person for me when our brother Stefanos died in 1992. That is when I took time off from teaching and came to Melbourne to visit from America for three months. It was the time I did the taped interview of him. He maintained a high sense of moral integrity, of right and wrong. He was also generous, kind-hearted and compassionate. He read a lot and possessed, in my mind, a kind of other-worldly wisdom. That is how I will always remember Bert.

I am indeed very fortunate to still have my sister Xanthoula alive and well, this Christmas of December 2009. She is 83 years old, the mother of two good sons and the grandmother of four good-looking grandsons. She is the same beautiful, thoughtful, generous, forgiving, and brave person she was in her young days, still active and creative around the house and beyond. Her present home, my apartment in America, my seaside place in Greece, and many homes of relatives and friends both here and in Greece are decorated with her art works, and, as her greatest fan, I have the greatest number of all: oil paintings, painted tiles, china plates with the finest flowers I have ever seen, crochet pieces. She has hand-knitted countless pullovers and countless fancy scarves and has given them all as gifts. I especially have been favored throughout my life. She used to make my clothes through all stages of my youth, and I remember in my student days that she would buy a piece of fabric one day, and in less than forty-eight hours the dress would be ready for me to wear! Now she buys clothes for me. Every time I come to visit her I find some new clothes waiting for me in her closet and in the drawers assigned to me. I have received much thought and care from her throughout my life – from the time she was dressing me up and taking me out for a stroll as a baby, showing me off to her friends, to today. I am 73 years old, but she still 'dresses me up' and is still 'showing me off' to her friends! Her home is like a haven for me and I like to come and stay here as long as I can. But we also travel together. Over the last fifteen years, since Bert died, she has regularly joined me in Greece to visit our elder sister and other relatives and friends. She has been a great travelling companion and I am very fortunate indeed that she stood by me while I have been writing this story. Without her assistance and her warm and loving presence, I wouldn't have been able to do it...

Valentini Papadopoulou

Christmas 2009
Melbourne, Australia

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