Memories in Lace

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Testimonials of Greek Women in Diaspora

By

Sophia Emmanouilidou

Prologue by Francisco A. Lomelí

Illustrations by Thaleia Xenou-Xenaki

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-5613-9
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-5614-6

To Babis.
I am blessed to have him in my life.
He knows “the backstage” of life and oftentimes allows me
to explore it with him.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Memories in Lace is a spark of light amidst stormy reflections and turbulent emotions. What triggered the words below is the vivid memory of the hours I spent with my grandmother and mother, their sharing stories from the past and I recreating them in painterly—yet unspoken—images of the mind. Special thanks go to my mother (*μητέρα*) who always joked over what (to some) seem unsophisticated tales, while for others the familiar fabric of a lifetime woven into heartbreak. My sincere gratitude to the School of English at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and the Department of American Literature and Culture for allowing me to complete the current project which began in 2017. The sabbatical leave in spring 2023 was most decisive in putting together this interlaced narrative. I also extend my gratitude to Professor Yiorgos Kalogeras who once prompted me to write on Greek Diaspora. His guidance and support have been instrumental—the most inspiring force through the years. Deeply thankful to the award-winning poet Tino Villanueva for reading the book's sample pages before submitting them to CSP and to Francisco A. Lomelí who returned my hesitant request to write the prologue with: "Anything for you, Sophia"—and to Nina Rutherford Christou who proofread the final version of the book. Last but not least, I am thankful to the storytellers who shared their testimonials, paved the way for most of us and endured life's tribulations with valor. Some of them will receive copies of the book, some of them will see it traversing the seas of the mind from above.

FOREWORD

SOPHIA EMMANOUILIDOU
IONIAN UNIVERSITY, GREECE

> Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and "get a life" by telling and writing their stories. (Langellier 2001, 700)[1]

In February 2017, I received an unexpected invitation to give a talk at an international symposium titled *Revisiting Objects, Encountering Identities. Material and Non-material Evidence of Greek Diaspora and Immigration*. Co-organized by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the University of Western Macedonia—both in Greece—the event boasted the participation of distinguished scholars and acclaimed experts in the fields of Philology, Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, History and more. The list of speakers included the names of renowned scholars, thinkers who have dedicated a considerable part of their career to the enrichment of academic bibliography on Greek cultural identity. And yet, I was a researcher whose obsession was Chicana/o Studies and the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. So, I initially hesitated to accept the invitation—let alone submit a title or an abstract. However, prompted by Professor Yiorgos Kalogeras's enthusiasm, I took the challenge of writing a paper on Greek immigrant women through the lens of their complicated experiences in diaspora, ambivalent connections with the homeland (*patrída*) and their perplexing appreciation(s) of the host country. Above all, the aim of the undertaking was to highlight the significance of Greek immigrant women's testimonials as personal narratives that have been unfairly pushed to oblivion.

Memories in Lace is part of my ongoing research—mostly qualitative—into the Greek immigrant woman's self-identity. To this day, twenty-one women have been kind enough to participate in this endeavor with their memories. This title was partly reinforced by mere coincidence and due to my lifelong and unyielding desire to live on a Greek island. To explain,

[1] Langellier, Kristin M. 2001. "Personal Narrative." In *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, edited by Margaretta Jolly, Vol.2, 699-701. London: Fitzroy Dearborn.

when I began looking into Greek womanhood and immigration, I happened to reside on the island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea, a stretch of land not far from mainland Greece. The island seemed to me a sheltered space which favored earnest communication and offered ample time for research, especially in winter. My literal and metaphorical remoteness from an institution of higher education and my disengagement from the formal requirements of academic writing allowed me to enter the peculiar or liminal space between the objectivity of disciplinary tasks and the subjective lens of a personal narrative. In other words, free from the commands of theoretical study and almost released from the drudgery of deadlines and obligations, I could easily and genuinely reach out to Zakynthian women—both immigrants and repatriates—who would share their recollections of successes and failures—joys and traumas—all entangled and experienced in their rites of passage from a post-war, ravaged, earthquake-stricken island in the 1950s to an unfamiliar destination across the oceans and then back home.

My intention was and still is to collect, evaluate, analyze and circulate the oral histories of women who had to leave Zakynthos in the 1950s and 1960s. These women ventured their departure from the island either voluntarily or involuntarily but most of them gladly received the promise of improved living conditions, even if this was to happen in a foreign land (in *xenitiá*). The individual life stories I collected encompass varied patterns of behavior: submission, compliance, astuteness, insubordination and at times shrewdness (*poniriá*). The subtle differences in the stories that the Greek women shared with me cemented my critical principle with regards to narrative analysis: a resolute avoidance of generalizations and homogenizations. Indeed, in the process of excavating the past, I realized that, by comparison, the interviewees presented varied life experiences. Some of the women emigrated because they had to obey the directives of the male members of their families. Others embraced the opportunity to escape rural Greece and the misery of domestic life with their in-laws (*petheriká*). Some of them expressed ambivalent feelings about the host country, all of them were utterly disillusioned with the Greek social scape and most of them became emotional when discussing their wavering relationships with husbands, children, daughters-in-law and grandchildren (*eggónia*). Soon, I realized that the Greek women I talked to had confronted prescribed gender roles, cultural constraints and historical crises in their own peculiar ways. Nonetheless, they all somehow succeeded in modifying patterns of patriarchy and during the interview sessions, they claimed the power to reformulate stereotypes or "'get a life'

by telling and writing their stories" from the immigrant's or the repatriate's angle (Langellier 2001, 700).

What began as academic research in 2017 soon transformed or acquired a new narrative texture. It became creative nonfiction—although I prefer fictionalized ethnography in terms of genre. The storytellers in the book are fictional, but the tales they vocalize are real. All incidents, events, emotions, decisions and interpersonal crises have been transcribed from recorded material or paraphrased from the piles of notes I jotted down after the interviews. The book presents readers with a cluster of memories collected and "crocheted" by Xénia. This narrative voice is a third-generation Greek American and a PhD candidate at a Texas university. Xénia is a storyteller—another character who unexpectedly took shape while I was revisiting my notes. She is also an astute researcher who probes metacriticism. And just like all the characters in the book, she is based on a real person despite her being depicted with fictional colors and contours. Xénia visits the island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea, Greece, with the intention of completing studious, field-focused research into the lives of elderly Greek women—some expatriates, some repatriates, some never having left the island. Just like my involvement in this project, she soon realizes that the stories she collects are endowed with their own vitality, generate imagination of their own and defy the "mandates" of disciplinary analysis. The separate tales Xénia records converge in this work as all the women are connected via their similar and yet distinct experiences. Above all, in the textual yarn that Xénia works with, the most decisive, intangible material is the strong emotional bond that ties the characters together, making their storytelling vibrant and worth telling.

Memories in Lace puts to test borderlines between fact and fiction in oral history or between women's storytelling in its authentic form and in the more artistic flair added to writing literature. With variable focalization, the title is a narrative palimpsest of "ordinary" women, a book that attempts multiple *travesías* (crossings) including narrative voice, the categories of fiction and nonfiction, space, time, national borders, physical barriers, unwritten laws. Drawing from the principles of the Public Humanities and the growing need for communal engagement, the book endeavors to transform individual experiences into choral storytelling. The inclusion of these personal stories—either from the distant or recent past—offers insights into the power dynamics of self-representation, emphasizes the commonplace and recasts "ordinary" women as heroic and valiant.

PROLOGUE

MEMORIES IN LACE: WEAVING WOMEN'S STORIES THROUGH MEMORY AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

FRANCISCO A. LOMELÍ
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA
MEMBER OF NORTH AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE

What starts off as a dissertation topic to study women's storytelling on the Greek island of Zakynthos soon evolves into a gendered epic that unfolds narratively like a game of dominoes. The initial purpose is simply to document an inter-generational set of women's voices (young, middle-aged and elderly) as attempt to understand their comportment and actions between themselves and in relation to men. We soon discover that there are at least two worlds that mesh, clash, titillate, tease and ultimately come together in either long-standing or brief contacts. The main focus—a subculture of women who adapt in part to a man's world—cleverly reveals more subtle wrinkles that go beyond single, monolithic constructs. This can only be achieved by interviewing and collecting a wide range of women's stories who retell their personal recollections from their youth to their elderly status and how they change within their rural island culture to become full-fledged women as pillars of family but who also, more importantly, confront their challenges, secrets and silences. What quickly unfolds is a creative, nonfictional testimonial of adaptation and survival which documents the vibrant culture and cultural wealth of Greek women as they exercise their time-honored practices.

Part of the objective of the collection is to capture echoes of a fleeting past within an isolated island community where time has stood still. In the process, a rich tradition of a mythic and legendary treasure of storytelling is unveiled within a rhizomatic structure where tales are interconnected in

a nonhierarchical way, while spreading out into various directions. A constellation of women serves as the foundation or anchor of lived experiences as they cultivate their silenced memories to retell and relive communal tragedy, dilemma and hopefulness. Time becomes experiential, oftentimes subjectively measured by family connections and even recipes of food. At other times, stories appear as endless stacked Babushkas in which women reluctantly unleash flashes of personal memories that they are unable to contain. This is when the ethnographic interviewer—named Xénia—collects such stories in a notepad from her *yiayiá* (grandmother), Kate, Katerina or Kikitsa, and others to create a maze or master-narrative of voices that are too often obstinately faithful to tradition thus appearing to be invisible or of little import. But the pure synergistic quality of the storytelling becomes transformative and acquires a power of relevance in terms of legacy and feminine transcendentalism. As Xénia's *yiayiá* once suggested, people live most of their lives forgetting. Here, a series of women manifest their deep-seated silences without filters by seeking new avenues of expression and, at the same time, removing any metaphorical mechanisms of psychological suppression including other barriers that have shaped their inner lives.

Great insight is provided into Greek women's mentality and sense of self-worth that holds them together, such as the transnational communities they create as Greek Americans, Greek Australians, Greek Brazilian and others or simply as Greeks. What slowly emerges is the cognizance of a bedrock of cultural factors that make them distinct which reminds them where they come from and how they form the fulcrum of their national heritage. This work essentially reaffirms the fact that a *matrimoine* actively exists equivalent to a "feminine patrimony" to disprove the Penelopean features of blind loyalty, undivided abnegation, infinite sacrifice and colossal patience. Similar to Penelope, however, Greek women here exhibit a quiet resilience that often goes unrecognized or unacknowledged because their social roles also go beyond to encompass cleverness, steadfastness and durability. They are the makers and shakers of a meaningful ancestry couched within a sense of homeland. The stories are interlaced—often into visible doilies—to show the ability to create patterned memories of family, womanhood and cultural wealth. As Kate explains to her granddaughter, Xénia the ethnographer: "These *gynaíkes* (women) fear that what you might see them as just a bunch of old, uneducated women who are obstinately faithful to traditions and have never had a life of their own" (163). But she makes an important distinction to refer to a subculture of strength in these terms: "Rebellion does not always come about with explosions and fireworks. Defiance is

not always performed in outspoken … ways. There are cases where the uprising happens in noiseless methods" (163).

This collection of stories precisely captures this sense of an acute sentience among women as they deal with feelings, their awareness of identity and how memories are constructed and maintained. They consequently weave doilies as reminders—just like Penelope—to leave physical imprints of their inner world so they can state with conviction: I have been here. The interviews as narratives represent a pleasurable form of telling their stories in a most accurate way to dispel stereotypes and facile impressions of Greek women as complete members of society. These stories needed to be told in a bold manner in order to capture the essence of their visibility and their irrepressible Greekness. The reader will be intrigued, mesmerized and moved to see beyond the surface of these characters as complex and redeeming members of a society, women who struggle to maintain a sense of their nationality and homeland vis-á-vis the ever-changing modern world.

List of Illustrations/Images

By Thaleia Xenou-Xenaki

By Sophia Emmanouilidou

A personal story [is] a shared one with the community to which the *testimonialista* belongs. The speaker does not speak for or represent a community but rather performs an act of identity formation which is simultaneously personal and collective (15).

George Yúdice.
"Testimonio and Postmodernism," *Latin American Perspectives*
vol. 18, no.3 (1991): 15-31.

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing," I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before (48).

Gloria E. Anzaldúa.
Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza.
San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.

We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are (124).

Anais Nin.
The Seduction of the Minotaur.
Denver: The Swallow Press, 1961.

What on earth might charm a well-read person to hear my stories? I am just an unrefined, uneducated old woman from a village. An offshoot of the land. One more traveler in time.

A Storyteller who chooses to remain anonymous (2017).

σεμεδάκια **(doilies)**: handmade knitted pieces of cloth made with the crochet technique; they are well-known works of art performed by every Greek woman in the past decades; they were not to be missed from any home.

MEMORIES IN LACE:
TESTIMONIALS OF GREEK WOMEN
IN DIASPORA

Xénia

April 2017

Packing for the transatlantic journey to Greece. Until September. This is the third time I have visited the island of Zakynthos, the proud and honored birthplace of both my grandparents.[2] I wonder if the summer months ahead will give me enough time to collect the tales—the testimonials—I need for my research.

I should brush up on my Greek. I wonder what words I should use to establish a channel of communication with the locals. Is this the case, though? Should I be reading these people as standard segments or samples of a localized identity? What I have come to understand or, to be precise, what I have been instructed to regard as the representative identity profile of a Greek may have evolved over the years. Immigration, migration, and booming tourism have certainly added a cosmopolitan flair to the old Zakynthian *mien*, at least as described to me in my grandparents' stories.

Last semester was 'super draining' for a doctoral student in Ethnography. The gathering stages have been more demanding than one might expect or imagine. So much theory to probe. At times, the literature review confuses my already blurry understanding of life. Instead of clarifying my limited knowledge of human affairs, the mandatory lists of books and articles, which I am supposed to fully apprehend, make things even more entangled. All this reading does not really shed any light on the dark abyss of life. And as if the reading lists are not convoluted enough, people on campus converse in quotes. I sense a nerve-racking lack of authenticity and a camouflaged tendency to downgrade one another even during breaks.

A friend says I am showing signs of burnout. She tactfully implied—over coffee and in a transitory moment, when she shot bullet-like words of assumed concern at me—that I should embrace failure as a learning opportunity. She spoke the words quite casually but then again in an odd, offensive tone of voice. It was an awkward moment for me. Not for her, now that I think of it. I felt exposed to her thin eyes as they were poring

[2] Zakynthos is a Greek island in the Ionian Sea, named after the son of the Arcadian King Dardanus. First inhabited in the Neolithic Times, the island has a long history of conquests, dominations and occupations because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean and its fertile land. Mentioned in the Homeric epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Zakynthos is the birthplace of acclaimed poets including the National Greek poet Dionysios Solomos and the celebrated romantic Andreas Kalvos.

over me. I am a Greek, though. A descendant of the almost fading proud warriors from antiquity. My breed is of the fearless kind—people who would rather die than surrender to intruders, interlopers or any of the outsiders who covet pieces of us. "Remember the Spartans!" my *pappous* (grandfather) used to exclaim now and again.[3] "When weakness creeps in our lives, it slowly transforms into a sickness of the mind which shrouds our vivacity, our high spirits. Fight this feeling off with all your inner strength and inborn fortitude. Don't let them take your dreams away."

Well, I think I'll follow my *pappous*'s advice and embrace my Greekness, although I'm not really a descendant of the celebrated Spartans. Yes, I will live up to my *pappous*'s expectations. I cannot possibly forfeit my dream of academic excellence simply because my reluctance to play by systemic rules or my hesitation to speak the language others expect me to master might be seen as failure. I most certainly cannot accept the peculiar diagnosis that I am in poor health. The state of mental and emotional exhaustion that my friend suggested I suffer from is not my problem. Maybe she is into gaslighting, or she is mirror-projecting her own fears onto me.

I do hope writing the dissertation is less laborious or complex.

Collecting data and organizing my thoughts at times seems like a severe punishment. No doubt about it. It often feels like being exposed to a severe consequence that comes with success. What an irony! Or an oxymoron (by the way, this is a beautiful Greek word).[4] And I must do my time for the doctorate, make amends for the fuss I've been creating around the house for the past four years and reward my family with the immense pride of introducing their youngest daughter to friends and acquaintances as a Doctor, a PhD holder. The fervent, almost echoing image my family has created of themselves over supper lately is that they will walk with print copies of my degree like peacocks in mating season. Go figure.

There are lots of us in the family and we often get together to talk and connect, to catch up with our latest news and stir up sonic havoc. Especially on Sundays. My father, my aunt Tasia, my eldest sister, Maria,

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[3] Sparta was a militarist city-state in ancient Greece. Located in south-eastern Peloponnese, Sparta was also known as Lacedaemon (*Λακεδαίμων*). The Spartans were educated to be proud and brave warriors, free from the corruptions of commerce and money.

[4] A rhetorical device, an oxymoron describes words or phrases that when placed together create paradoxes which are simultaneously pointed observations about the world. Etymologically, the word oxymoron is a compound: from Greek *oxys* (*οξύς*) "sharp, keen" and *mōros* (*μωρός*) "foolish." In Greek, the word *mōros* is at times used to refer to an ingenious person who chooses to act out as unwise.

who is married with three children, my brother Kostas, who is four years younger than Maria and six years older than me, also married with two children. I'm not counting husbands, wives or partners because when they are around, we choose to behave ourselves. And of course, my paternal *yiayiá* (grandmother), a widow who chooses to mourn in blue colors instead of the Greek traditional black and grey. My *yiayiá* is a beautiful woman. She is tall and always stands upright with eyes that speak of mythic and legendary tales—either eye-witnessed or received through storytelling at the communal gatherings she attended in the Greek village where she grew up. These are the types of stories that have not been recorded in books, chanted in verse lines or celebrated in literary symposia. Yet, they are there, and they seem to be embedded or somehow still thriving in her village. They are narratives which grow roots—like the undergrowth that resists eradication. And these stories keep emerging from the soil of the island. They are memories not necessarily solely her own. I think she has been harvesting them over the years and now they sprout seedlings of their own every time she invites us over for one more of her delicious spreads on a Sunday afternoon.

I will be traveling to Greece with my *yiayiá*. Just the two of us. We are making the long journey from Austin to Zakynthos Island in the Ionian Sea. Switch and transfer flights, long waits at boarding gates, dehydration, the looming threat of blood clots, as my father keeps mumbling, and bad quality food with lots of additives and preservatives. But my *yiayiá* appears so mysteriously serene and unwearied. She is charmed by the images of home she carries with her. True. Whenever she talks about the village, her eyes are somewhat dim, unconnected from the tedious practicalities of everyday life. And then she packs her bags and does her best to remove any second thoughts she or my father or I might have about the long flights to Zakynthos.

> *There is no walking or carrying things. We only change seats.*
> *Hop on, hop off planes. No ships, no seasickness.*
> *And the air conditioning is such a relief for travelers.*
> *What might cause all this distress to your father or you* mikrí mou *(my little one)?*

My *yiayiá*'s baptismal name is Katerina but everyone in the States calls her Kate. Some Greeks prefer the more playful Kikitsa. Others favor Kaiti. My grandfather would always call her *gynaíka* (wife or woman). I cannot remember a single time he used her actual first name. The funniest thing ever, if you examine it in terms of Sociolinguistics. So many *gynaíkes* (women) in a room, but my *yiayiá* would be the only one who

acted in response and rushed to serve him or attend to any of his needs each time he called out in a bouncy tone: *gynaíka*. She couldn't fool me though. I always detected tiny, little traces of annoyance on her forehead—most certainly between her eyebrows—whenever she fetched him some water or helped him find his slippers. I never asked why she acts so servile because this is a touchy issue among older Greek women. And no one really wants to shake things up in a relationship which has gone through fire. This is the kind of marriage my grandparents have held together through the decades.

This is the third time my *yiayiá* will have visited the island since she immigrated to the US as a young bride. She has always insisted I should be making the long journeys to her ancestral homeland with her on the very few occasions the idea dawned on her. Her motto, her defense against my father's objections to rerouting our travels to the Greek island, was that one of us needs to save the stories and images of patrída (homeland). What a courageous life this woman has led so far. But she denounces quite modestly the valor, fortitude and spirit I see in her. And this humbleness is almost always gallantly performed. My *yiayiá* is a stoic woman. She bears the skin layer of a true warrior, the one who has lived through hardship and extreme poverty. As she always says, "those who stayed behind are the true heroes." "They are the headstrong ones," she often complements in a reflective whisper.

My *yiayiá* grew up in a small village on the island of Zakynthos. Her village has always reminded me of a liminal space, a hub of declining human presence, emerging in a geological crack: a community enveloped by mountains. Yes. The village is a locale of perplexing but also favorable in-betweenness. It is not located in the mountains or in the prairies and it is quite far from the sea—unless you have a car or any other means of transportation for a quick dive into the crystal-clear waters of the nearest bay. But the inhabitants can pore over all earth formations from her village without ever receiving or claiming or petitioning any geographical labels or fancy words in memoriam. My *yiayiá* pronounces her village as the place or "thee" place, where things happen miraculously, wounds are cured and memories spawn from the divine reservoir of being, which somehow represses forgetfulness.

Funny how the elderly in the village—including my *yiayiá*—still read human personality based on the earthly characteristics surrounding their community. For them, there are basically three categories of human temperament: the *vounísioi* (those from the *vouná*, the mountains), the *kambísioi* (those from the *kámbos*, the valley) and the *thalassinoí* (people who grew up near the *thálassa*, the sea). I really need to find out more

about the peculiar behavioral traits of each group of people. I know most of my friends and colleagues are into star signs and zodiac symbols. Yet, I grew up believing that the land, the horizon and the direction parallels envelop us all from dawn until dusk, and they are the most definitive factors in determining how people turn out to be in life. I keep these theories to myself most of the time. I am still quite cautious about sharing my *yiayiá*'s ideas and understanding of a person's identity profile with any of my friends, let alone colleagues.

As for my *yiayiá*? I tend to think she consolidates all three temperaments. She is a *vounísia*, a *kambísia* and a *thalassiní*. All profiles 'smooshed' together into the fascinating woman she is. Absolutely. It is almost impossible to fit her into the mold of just one category.

Yiayiá still identifies herself as a paternal orphan, the kind who has endured the untimely death of many loved ones. Even though she has saved us from the nasty details of her life experiences as a young girl, I know in my heart of hearts she has confronted loss and now bears the brand of it, the trauma that smears one's colorful dreams with tears and then turns mourning into a steady, *au fait* heartbeat. She lost her father, brothers and sisters, all from illnesses which couldn't be cured. It wasn't warfare that cost them their lives or turmoil of any kind that grants heroes grandiose memorials in central squares. My *yiayiá* has had her share of real-life tragedy but, as she often rounds out her dreamy and somewhat distracted recollections, "those were the familiar contours of rural life back then on the island and, most likely, everywhere in Greece, other than Athens where the mighty decision-makers resided."

Her mother died of "age" or a "prematurely aged heart" when she was fifty-something. Fifty was "old" for them? I still ask myself questions about this scalar category called "age." Does the meaning of a number change who you are when you find yourself in a specific setting? Is a young person thought to be younger here in the States, while deemed middle-aged or elderly across the Atlantic, in the Mediterranean, in Greece or in the past? Maybe our age is one more method to pigeonhole and safely shove people into specific cultural categories, while the implied meanings or connotations in one's years of life are always pertinent to the social environment they find themselves in.

Yiayiá's little sister Neféli was the only living relative left behind in the village when young Kikitsa, my grandmother, embarked on the obscure voyage to America as a newlywed. Neféli was too much of a task to handle not just for my *yiayiá* but for most in the village or in Greece at the time. Poor thing. Neféli was hard of hearing—then referred to as "deaf

and mute," to use *yiayiá*'s exact words. And she has absolutely no intention of offending people who cannot produce oral speech.

I need to ask *yiayiá* about Neféli. She passed away before I was born but her story is well-worth recording. *Yiayiá* says I look a lot like her little sister. What she sees in me are Neféli's suppressed or restrained magical qualities that a genuine storyteller always displays. She was thought to be mystically conversant with nature, the world above and those below. Not successfully communicative with people, though.

Years ago, my *yiayiá* traveled to America with my grandfather, a decent, honest, hardworking, muscular man. She hastily accepted the marriage proposal from the almost-stranger *pappous* when he proposed to her. She had her own reasons to marry him, I would say. Reasons she has never revealed and, apparently, she will not provide any closure to my persistent questions about her decision to dare to emigrate with a man she barely knew.

Yiayiá is a smart woman. Reserved as well. It used to bug me that she is full of secrets and meaningful stories which only she can readily untangle. She once told me that the meaning of a story is like a root system: a downward, *rhizomatic* structure. I tried to find the underlying message in this bizarre comment—or so it seemed to me, a ten-year-old girl at the time. But she just vanished. She left me in the kitchen, completely on my own with a glass of orange juice in front of me and the sound of her *tsourápia* (woolen slippers, socks) as she continued moving around the house.[5]

My *yiayiá* always advises me to tell the difference between curiosity and privacy, professional success and personal achievement. I think her reluctance to share the captivating details of her marriage to my grandfather is part of the cultural induction she attempts with me—the unruly and audacious grandchild, the girl who is meant to be the storyteller in our family, as she often whispers to herself. She says the others have the all-too-familiar imprint of science and technology on them. My father is a pediatrician, my sister an accountant and my brother an engineer, and so their stories cannot speak my *yiayiá*'s heart. She makes no comments about my aunt Tasia, which is a bit odd and disturbing. According to my *yiayiá*, other than me, the rest in the family cannot retell her tales with the colors they deserve to be painted with. Or so my *yiayiá* thinks. She always adds that I have inherited some of my mother's flamboyance but she never pursues the topic in detail, especially after my parents' divorce.

[5] *Tsourápia* are woolen, knitted socks created with a knitting needle. They were mostly worn as slippers by the poor in villages. Quite popular even today in Greek households, one can buy them in open flea markets in urban centers.