

**Proud of Our Heritage**  
**Proud to be an American**



PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY  
by Nicholas J. Kontras

## PROLOGUE, INTRODUCTION, PREFACE, DEDICATION, & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a story that chronicles the Kontras family history, for our children and their children, and is written in honor of Dimitri and Maria Kontras, my father and mother. It is written from my own perspective so if I have slighted or offended anyone, I am sincerely sorry.

I dedicate this effort to my lovely wife, Marie Glitsos Kontras, who has for the past 38 years been the crown jewel of my life, and has patiently tolerated and humored my idiosyncrasies. What's more, she birthed and raised my three very special daughters, Demitra, Nicollette, and Maria, who are just as beautiful, inside and out, as their mother, and have made me proud and happy to be their father.

I would like to thank "Thia" Kiriaki Pantelas for her input and recollections of the "Olden Days," and my brother, Gus Kontras, for his help with some of the gaps between then and now.

I also owe a very special thanks to my Arizona friend, Arlene Lehto, without whose help and encouragement I would not have undertaken this project.

"TO E'MA NERO' THEN GEE'NETE"  
[BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER]

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## Chapter 1

### THE FAMILY TREE

The word "Contra" is defined in Websters' Dictionary as "[Kontra], n. the opposite side; in opposition; against." True, there may have been occasions when a Kontras detractor might have considered us in this light, but I personally believe that an ancient Greek saying better characterized us. "PAN METRON ARISTON" [Everything in Moderation]. Perseverance, moderation, honesty, sincerity. Sounds better, don't you think?

My father ["Patera"] was born in 1884 in the tiny village or "horio" of Kardamilla on the Island of Chios, Greece. Chios' only claims to fame are that it is Greece's brightest Island, and, according to the Chiotans, the home of Homer the legendary poet. It is also famous for farming the fragrant milk of the indigenous mastic tree for the production of "Mastiha", a delicious, aromatic gum-like delicacy so prized in that part of the world.

"Patera" was the first-born son of Kosta and Eugenia Kontras, my paternal grandparents, "Papou" and "Yia Yia", who were also born in Kardamilla. "Papou" Kosta was born in 1855 and was the second son of my great grandfather, Dimitri born in 1820, and his wife, Maria. "Yia Yia" Eugenia was also born in Kardamilla, in the year 1865, to Theodore and Eugenia Martakas, who had two other daughters, Kiriaki [Fatsis] and Calliope [Pappis].

The geographic location of the Island of Chios is such that the "Big City", called "Hora" to them, was Constantinople, Turkey and not Athens, Greece. Chios is located only 3 miles off the Turkish mainland, and Constantinople, now called Istanbul, beckoned to the hard-working and ambitious Island Greeks who felt stymied by the lack of economic opportunity in the villages. "Papou" Kosta was one of those, and in an effort to provide for his family, he emigrated to Constantinople and established a thriving charcoal distribution business there. Wood for heating and cooking was practically non-existent in both Greece and Turkey, so coal was the fuel of choice in those days.

"Papou" did well there. As soon as they became old enough to be of help, "Papou" brought "Patera" and "Patera's" younger brother, Nicola, from the "horio". The boys and their father would return to Kardamilla as often as the business would permit in order to visit their mother and their three sisters, Erini, Marigo, and Kiriaki, who still resided full-time there. The Kontras home there was in Ano [upper] Kardamilla, near Agiou Luka church where it stands until this day.

Tragically, "Papou" died in Turkey prematurely at age 45 of what could best be described as "Pono"[pain]. He is buried there in a Greek cemetery somewhere in Istanbul. Suddenly, with little preparation, "Patera" was thrust into the role of head-of-family at the ripe young age of 17!

"Patera" and Nicola remained in the family business in Turkey for some time and did quite well with it actually, having many upper class Turks [Pasha's] as friends. They would return to Kardamilla as often as possible to look in on their mother and sisters. Sometimes they went together, and sometimes, because of the press of business, one at a time. But the winds of change were blowing in Turkey; they were blowing storm clouds to say the least. After 400 years of Turkish occupation and domination, the Greeks in Turkey were being horribly oppressed and were retaliating by raising hell with their Turkish oppressors, and it marked the beginning of the end for the Greek minority there. "Patera's" Turkish friends warned him to get out in about 1912, just before the beginning of Turkey's "Final Solution" of the Armenian and Greek minorities there, more recently referred to as the "Invisible Holocaust". Untold atrocities and indignities were visited upon the Greeks by the Turks in those days, including the burning and pillaging of their homes and business'. Those who were able escaped with their lives and little more. It was certainly no climate for "Patera" and "Thio" Nicola to run a business in, and so they decided to abandon the family business in Constantinople and return to Kardamilla. This was in 1912.



"Yia Yia" Eugenia Kontras in Greece (Circa 1915)





Maria and Dimitri Kontras- 1926

## Chapter 2 GETTING MARRIED

"Patera's" return to Kardamilla was good news to "Yia Yia" Kontras because she had her Dimitri and Nicola back and her family was intact once again. From "Patera's" perspective as head-of-the-family, however, the future was scary. "Patera" pondered the economic realities of trying to provide for the family there in Kardamilla and prospects were not pleasant. "Thio" Nicola saw this, and like so many other Greeks in those days, he decided to go to America where the "streets were paved with gold." Why not? He was single. He could get work in America and send money back to his mother and sisters. "Patera" encouraged him and wished him well, but insofar as his personal situation was concerned, "Patera" was still in a quandary.

He was 27 now and cut quite an imposing figure. According to his youngest sister, Kiriaki, he was "tall and handsome, and carried himself in a most dignified and regal manner." The custom in most European countries, especially in Greece, was for friends and relatives to arrange marriages. Maidens seeking husbands would be furnished with dowries of cash or property as an inducement for a prospective groom. This arrangement was called "Proxenia," an old Greek tradition.

Accordingly, "Patera" was introduced to several of Kardamilla's finest young ladies. He was particularly taken by one, Maria Vafias, a lovely, petite maiden of 19 years, whose parents, Elias and Anna Tsarouhas Vafias, my Maternal Grandparents, lived nearby and were known to "Patera". Maria and Dimitri hit it off and were engaged immediately, and they were married in 1911. Within a year they had a daughter, Eugenia, and a year later a son, Kosta.

Though "Patera" was now happily married, he was still grappling with the question of how to support everyone. By now he had heard from "Thio" Nicola in America that jobs there were available and that there was money to be made there. His oldest sister, Erini, had also married in 1911 to a villager by the name of Steve Melissas. But "Patera" still had as dependents his wife, two children, his mother, and two unmarried sisters, and it was a lot to think about. Finally, after considerable consternation, he decided to go to America and make some money, and, as soon as possible to send for Maria, Eugenia, and Kosta. It was now 1915 and little did they all know at the time that it was to be 10 long years and many hardships later before they would see each other again!

## Chapter 3

### MARIA'S TEN YEARS WITHOUT DIMITRI

Well-intentioned and financially justifiable as "Patera's" journey to America may have been, it nevertheless placed a tremendous hardship on "Mitera". To be left there in the "horio" with two infant children after only three years of marriage must have been a frightening experience for her. The fact that she was living under her mother-in-law's supervision and was dependent upon "Patera's" letters and money for her emotional and financial sustenance was difficult enough, not to mention the absence of her husbands' help in raising Eugenia and Kosta during their very important formative years. The children were too young to remember their father so they had to rely on mothers' stories about him and, of course, his letters from America.

On our last trip to Chios with my sister Eugenia I vividly recall the story she told us of how "Mitera" took Kosta when he was a very sick little boy to the Monastery outside Vrondado where she and the monks there prayed for him for a week because she feared losing him to a mysterious and grave illness that had plagued him for some time. These are the kind of things that she endured alone in those ten years without Dimitri. Probably, as the years passed, the kids' friends and schoolmates might even have taunted them a bit about the possibility that their father had left for good and was not ever coming back. I'm sure that these kind of doubts and concerns did exist in their minds.

For the most part "Mitera" got along with "Yia Yia" well enough, however, she still was a mother-in-law, so when it was time for "Patera" to send money, he quite naturally had his mother and two unmarried sisters to consider also, and this left "Mitera" feeling somewhat beholden to others for her and her children's well-being. To be sure, under the best of circumstances, this was not a good period for "Mitera", and it is a tribute to her courage and perseverance that she endured for ten years until "Patera" could send for her and the children to join him in America. Obviously, I would not be part of this story had she not persevered!



A postcard from Chios [Circa 1922]



The blue-domed Church and Monastery in Vrondado, Chios

## Chapter 4 COMING TO AMERICA!

No one knows exactly why it took "Patera" ten years to bring "Mitera" and the children over but many other Greek husbands did the same thing back in those days, including "Thia" Erini's husband, Steve Melissas, who also came to America alone and then sent for "Thia" and their daughter, Mary, also after ten years.

We can only speculate as to the hardships these men endured in this strange new land. They came with absolutely no grasp of the language or the culture and much uncertainty.

"Thia" Kiriaki once told us a story that might explain some of it. It had to do with "Patera's" third sister, Marigo, who married a no-account villager by the name of Paradisis against everyones wishes. "Patera" and "Thio" Nicola both knew that this guy was bad news because they knew of his reputation as a womanizer, but they could not dissuade their sister and she insisted on proceeding with the marriage. It wasn't long after the wedding that "Patera" left for America along with "Thio" Steve Melissas, and they took Paradisis along, ostensibly to keep him on the straight and narrow, and also so he could make some money and be a good provider for Marigo who had stayed in Greece. The three of them ended up in Warren, Ohio and lived and worked together there, and "Patera" and "Thio" Nicola kept an eye on Paradisis.

After laboring and scrimping to scrape together \$1000.00 which in those days took years and years, "Patera" planned to send for the family, and, trustingly [perhaps too much so], sent Paradisis with the money, to go back to the "horio" so he could bring "Mitera", Eugenia, Kosta, "Yia Yia", Marigo and Kiriaki to America. You guessed it! Almost predictably, Paradisis took off to Rumania with "Patera's" money! What a downer for "Patera"; he was back to square one and had to scrimp and save all over again, and, eventually, after several more years had elapsed, "Mitera" finally received word, and money, to bring the children and come.

According to our best information, "Mitera" left Kardamil-la by donkey with Eugenia and Kosta, now 13 and 12, respectively, sometime near the end of 1924. They went to Chios [Hora], the Capitol of the Island of Chios, first. From there they took a boat across the Aegean Sea to the port city of Pireaus, a point of departure for vessels going to America.

They submitted to the authorities there for processing, which included complete medical examinations. In a very touching message from the young Eugenia to the father she had not seen in ten years, she wrote on a post card, "Patera, hilia filia [a thousand kisses], efchomen kalin andamosin [we anticipate a safe and warm reunion], sas filo [many kisses], Eugenia".

Unexpectedly, the planned reunion with "Patera" was set back. Two times in fact. The port authorities discovered that "Mitera" had an eye condition that disqualified her for the journey, and she was not approved for emigration. "Patera's" youngest sister, "Thia" Kiriaki, had accompanied "Mitera" on the trip to this point. When she saw "Mitera's" predicament, she unselfishly volunteered to stay with them until "Mitera" was approved, or to take Eugenia and Kosta and go on to America without "Mitera". Of course this would leave "Mitera" to resolve her situation and follow at some later date. It was a difficult period for "Mitera", and she anguished over what she should do. After all, she had raised her children all by herself for the past ten years, and just did not feel good about sending them ahead to a father that they didn't even remember or recognize. What if she was rejected permanently and could not complete the journey to join her children? She could possibly end up with no husband AND no children! Finally, she decided that the only thing to do was to stay and keep her children with her, and she thanked and bid Bon Voyage to "Thia" Kiriaki as she departed, wishing her the best of luck with her new life in America.

Though she was detained in Pireaus for 6 months longer before she was approved the third time, "Mitera" had her children with her, and she was now more determined than ever to go to America and reunite with her husband. At age 12 Kosta recalls Pireaus as "a very busy port city with huge ships, bigger than anything he had ever seen before, going and coming from all parts of the world, and street cars, and high-rise buildings, etc. etc." What an eye-opener for young Kosta. Wait until he would see Manhattan!

The voyage over was on a ship named Byron, about 15,000 tons, and was hardly what you would call a cruise. The trip to New York took 21 days and it seemed even longer. These were not first class accommodations mind you, and the vessel was loaded with Europeans talking everything but Greek. While Kosta was impressed with the dining room, I can remember my sister Eugenia relating to me how difficult the voyage was for her as a shy teenager because there was no one her own age to talk to. She said that she eventually met a young Jewish boy of her own age that could also speak Greek, and that somewhat helped her get through the ordeal.

It was no picnic for "Mitera" either because she had so much time to herself to think of her fears and trepidations about going to America in the first place. "Does Dimitri still love me? Why didn't he call for us sooner? Does he really want us there? Will things be the same between us?" Her worries understandably made a long voyage seem even longer.

The trip across the Mediterranean was not bad according to Kosta, but the Atlantic crossing was a stormy one and one that he says he will never forget. Eventually they arrived in the port city of New York. Their hearts pounded at the majestic site of the famous Statue of Liberty and the magnificent Manhattan skyline! " After all those years, are we really in America?"

They were immediately sent to the Immigration Processing Center on Ellis Island where the medical examination once again detected the same potentially infectious eye condition in "Mitera". Once again, she was detained. Only this time they quarantined her due to the possible contamination of others. This, of course, left Eugenia and Kosta on their own, and they were scared to death! They could not recognize any of the languages spoken in this huge, impersonal, building filled with immigrants from all over Europe. And few of them knew English, particularly Eugenia and Kosta.

They expected their father to come at any moment but they did not know what he looked like. For the longest time they walked up and down the hallways of Ellis Island crying and tugging on the pants legs of every tall, mustachioed man that walked by crying out "Mbamba?"[daddy?]. "Patera" was late in arriving to pick them up, and "Mitera" was detained in quarantine for several days. When "Patera" showed up he was showered with relieved hugs and kisses saved up over these many years apart. While renewing their bonds with their father they related the predicament that "Mitera" was in to him and begged him to do something. Fortunately, "Patera" had by this time acquired a reasonable working knowledge of English. He began inquiring about his wives' whereabouts and was able to locate the hospital ward where she was quarantined. He took the children with him for a reunion with their mother. In a few days "Mitera's" condition cleared up enough for her to be approved for entry and, at long last, Dimitri and Maria were together again!

## Chapter 5 GETTING REACQUAINTED

Dimitri and Maria had some catching up to do insofar as their new "togetherness" was concerned. After all they were still young, and ten years was a long time for young marrieds to be apart! Part of the result was two quick babies, Elias[1926] and Nicolaki[1927]. Both were light-haired and blue-eyed Kontras look-alikes.

When "Patera" first came to America he started in a small town, Butler, Pennsylvania. Later, before "Mitera" and the children joined him, he moved to Warren, Ohio, which was not that far away, but it provided him with a better job with the steel mill there. Also, "Thia" Kiriaki and "Thio" Kosta Pantelas had just married and settled in Warren. It was heavily populated with Greeks and many of these were from the Island of Chios ["Patriotes"].

When "Patera" brought "Mitera" from Ellis Island, it was Warren, Ohio where he brought her, and this is where she and the children started their life in America and where Elias was born in 1926. This part of Eastern Ohio, including the surrounding towns of Canton, Steubenville, Martins Ferry, as well as Wheeling West Virginia, were all steel mill towns, and attracted ethnics of all kinds with the work opportunities. My parents were comfortable in this environment for there was a natural affinity with the people who lived in these communities.

"Patera" worked hard in the mill and made a good impression on the boss with his conscientious attitude. When his boss was transferred to Granite City Steel in Granite City, Illinois, "Patera" was asked to go along with a raise in pay. While this certainly was a feather in his cap, nevertheless he went home from work that day to discuss this with his family because Warren was comfortable for them. It represented an easier first-step in being integrated into the strange, new culture called America.

Granite City on the other hand seemed a million miles away at the time, and, because it was a second move, would be doubly difficult for Eugenia and Kosta who were sensitive teenagers of 14 and 13, respectively. Kosta described how hard a time he had, being so big and being placed in the first grade because of the language barrier, and the prospect of moving again and having to go through all the embarrassment again was unsettling to both him and Eugenia.



Nevertheless, "Patera" was young and strong, and his responsibility as head-of-family required weighing the financial aspects of the move. He was still sending money back to Greece to his mother and sisters, not to mention his own growing family here in the states, which I was about to join at that particular time. So, the decision was made, and with "Mitera" now pregnant with me and with the knowledge that they were leaving a certain comfort-level there in Warren, the family, like many others before them, packed up and moved West, to Granite City, Illinois, where I was born in 1927.



A postcard from  
Pireaus  
[Circa 1925]

The Great Hall  
where  
immigrants  
registered to  
enter the United  
States.

Ellis Island, N.Y.



## Chapter 6 FEARS AND TREPIDATIONS

Granite City proved to be a challenge to us all. "Patera" of course had a big adjustment to his new job environment and co-workers, never easy when you are a foreigner and have a strange new language and culture to deal with. Fortunately, as it worked out, not unlike Warren, his new employer, Granite City Steel Company, was also full of immigrant workers. While there were only two other Greek families in Granite City in those days, the Kefalas's, there were many other ethnics in the same boat. They ended up being kindred spirits in a way. In the absence of a common language, or possibly because of it, they all related quite well.

In this respect at least, their apprehensions of moving to a new community were allayed.

At least "Patera" could speak some English. After all, he had been here for ten years already. On the other hand, "Mitera" was lost! Completely lost! From daybreak each morning when "Patera" left for work in the morning until days end, "Mitera" struggled to get Eugenia and Kosta off to school, care for one year old Elias, clean the house, and haul herself [remember, she was hauling me around too], to do battle with the grocer. Her English was non-existent at the time and some of the stories of "Mitera's" shopping trips are legend! Somehow, however, she always came home with enough groceries each day so that we were all fed and happy. I suspect that most of the communication was sign language, punctuated with an awful lot of Greek. It worked for her, and, all things considered, she was quite productive and up-beat in her role as caretaker for us all. I shall never forget her good-natured efforts to get Elias and I out of bed for school, singing a cute rhyme in Greek---"Sikothite, sikothite, ke ston po'lemo na mpi'te" [Up and out, and into the fray you go!].

The biggest adjustment was required of Eugenia and Kosta. As the new kids on the block, these two teenagers obviously had no neighbor friends to start with. When they started their new school there with little grasp of the language, they had to again suffer the indignities of being the oldest and biggest kids in their respective classes. School would not be a happy place for them until they could overcome this. I can recall a discussion that I had with my sister Eugenia just before her death. She confided in me about her fears and apprehensions of this period in her life; her low self-esteem because of the language barrier; and the long-term affects that this produced as far as her self-confidence was concerned.

On a more positive note, the addition of Elias and Nicolaki to the family nucleus provided a happier period in the lives of Dimitri and Maria Kontras.

They were together again after years of separation; Maria had a husband; "Patera" was together with his family again; Eugenia and Kosta had a father again; and we were all well-fed and healthy. In retrospect, I would say that these were probably the happiest days of "Mitera's" life!

## Chapter 7 BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Though "Patera" and "Mitera" struggled to adapt to the demands of this new land, the biggest transitional challenge fell upon Eugenia and Kosta. Eugenia was now 15, a teenager, and her life was becoming more complicated. "Patera" was a compassionate man with a no-nonsense approach and a centuries-old value system from a Greek village. Most Greek males, were, and are, chauvinistic, and "Patera" was certainly no exception. In his view, sending a teen-age daughter to an "Americanico" school full of teenage boys was tantamount to sending her to the Devil himself. Certainly, no self-respecting "Gambro" [prospective groom] would have anything to do with a daughter that had been exposed to so much! "Patera" was 45 years old now, and there was no way that he could change and adapt to the value system of this strange new culture.

Kosta was also caught between two worlds. He too was a sensitive teenager needing to assimilate and be accepted by the "Americanakia" in school and in the neighborhood. But his biggest obstacle was not the language barrier but his own father, who was well-meaning enough, but misguided in his beliefs that work and money were more important than going to school and getting an education. "Patera" was hard on Kosta in this respect, and as the ever-dominant influence in the house, he did his best to impose his will. Always respectful of his responsibilities to help support the family, Kosta finished up grade school and started night school so that he too could work at Granite City Steel Company, just like his father, but to his credit it was not to be for long. Being a Kontras, he had a mind of his own too. Indulging a latent entrepreneurial spirit, and completely independent of "Patera", he sought out a local merchant in Granite City and offered him a proposition the merchant could not refuse. He offered to work for the man, without pay, after his regular shift at the mill, in return for on-the-job-training. This was the beginning of Kostas' road to independence.

## Chapter 8 THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The stock market crash of 1929 was a precursor to the "Great Depression" of the Thirties. Many wealthy people lost everything in the crash; some even took their own lives in desperation. The nation became a wasteland of economic despair that cut across class lines and affected almost everyone.

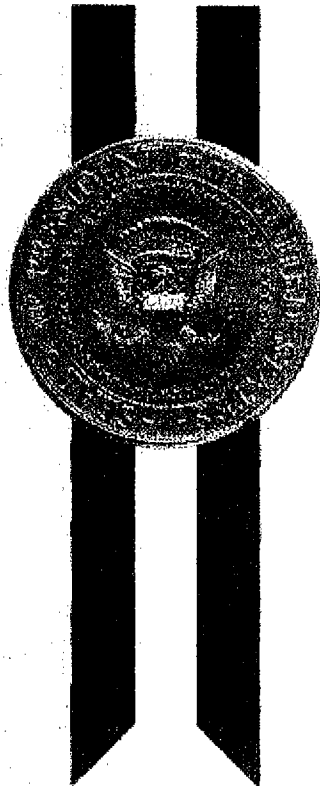
In our case, I can recall experiencing the hoboes and the hungry coming to the back door and asking for something to eat. "Mitera" was always ready to do what she could for those less fortunate than ourselves. Though we were certainly in the middle of it, I can honestly say that we never went hungry or did without anything that was necessary to our health or our sustenance. "Patera" always had employment and, no matter how modest it was, "Mitera" made his paycheck go a long way. Kosta also pitched in. After all, he was 18 years old in 1931, the heart of the depression, and his paycheck contributed a great deal to the family welfare. In addition, his penchant for cars paid off in that he rehabbed an old solid-tire Model "T" truck and started an after-hours business selling coal and cantaloupes out of his truck. This helped the cause. "Patera" was proud that his family was not on "Relief", which was the name for the Government-assistance program during the Great Depression.

"Mitera's" frugality played a key role in the Family survival through the depression. Not only did she wear out the butcher at the market with her half-Greek half-sign language method of negotiating for the best possible cuts of meat and free soup bones, but she could be seen in our neighbors' yards picking dandelions. This was of course a near-staple vegetable on our table during the depression, but you can imagine our embarrassment when our "Americanakia" playmates would ask her what she was doing and she could not respond, or would respond to them in Greek because she could not speak English!

I do believe "Mitera" had the last word, however. She had remarkable tenacity; her perseverance in uniting her family and overcoming many obstacles along the way is certainly a tribute to that tenacity. Another example of "Mitera's" perseverance involved her years of study and subsequent failure in her attempts to obtain her American Citizenship which she prized above all else. Practice as she would on her reading and writing, she failed her Citizenship examination time after time. But this was very important to her, and she hung in there. I truly believe that she just wore out the immigration authorities, and that they finally relented just to get her off their backs. Eventually, however, "Mitera" did become an American Citizen, and I do think that this was one of her proudest moments!

"Mitera" lived a long and healthy life celebrating her 100th birthday at Columbia House Nursing Home on February 2, 1992. She passed away on July 3, 1993, just before we went to press on this publication. We pray that she has an ample storehouse of good memories to draw on "Es Teen Makarian Zoen"; [ In this, her new and better life].

"Eonia tes E' Mnimi"; May her memory be eternal!



*The White House  
Washington*

*Congratulations on your birthday! At this time of rejoicing and remembering, we are happy to add our best wishes on your special day. May you enjoy God's richest blessings - peace, contentment, and love.*

*Bill Bush Barbara Bush*

Congratulations to Mother from the White House!



Merry Xmas "Yia Yia"! - 1981  
Nick, Maria, Demi, Marie, and Nikki



Mother's 100th Birthday - 1992

Chapter 9  
EUGENIA AND KOSTA SPREAD THEIR WINGS

The dual effects of the "Great Depression" and the paternalistic environment that prevailed in our home caused stirrings of independence in both Eugenia and Kosta. This was quite natural inasmuch as they were being exposed by their neighbor friends and schoolmates to the fads and dress of the "Americankia". In Eugenia's case it was doubly difficult because "Patera" had difficulty comprehending this strange new culture. With his kind of mind set, keeping a lid on outside influences, particularly on one's unmarried daughter, was of primary importance to a father who wanted desperately to deliver a virginal and unspoiled bride to a prospective "Gambro." My sisters' generation did not have an easy time, that's for sure! She was grown up now, and had her own thoughts independent [god forbid!] of "Patera" and his well-intentioned, paternal influence. But to her credit, she did a marvelous balancing act, dutifully obeying her father's old-country rules while at the same time incorporating some of the dress and fads of her friends and schoolmates.

Kosta too had grown up, but remember, there was a double standard where Greek males were concerned, and his "emancipation" was not as difficult as his sisters. "Patera's" autocratic style was indeed stifling, but Kosta was nimble of foot as a youngster and could stay a step or two ahead of "Patera" as he was chased around the house while "Patera" was brandishing his belt and shouting Greek obscenities. I can recall no instance when Kosta responded in kind, though, God knows, there were many times when it could have been justified. He was good at "yessing" his father a lot and then going ahead and doing things his own way anyhow, just as any emerging young man with his own personality should do.

While Kosta had dutifully consented to work in the mill alongside "Patera" at the expense of furthering his own education to help the family financially, he at the same time had already set in motion the plan that would lead to his eventual independence. As mentioned, he was good with his hands and he was not afraid to work, and apparently he was convincing, too. Thus began a period of double shifts, one at Granite City Steel and a second learning the shoe repair trade. He proved to be a quick learner, and it was not long before he broke the news to "Patera" that he was quitting his job at the mill to strike out on his own.



Though he favored a "bird-in-hand," "Patera" was also a practical and worldly man, and with his experience in the family coal business back in Turkey, he fully understood the potential in this bountiful land of America for Kosta as a young man with a good work ethic and an entrepreneurial spirit. So, with his fathers' blessings Kosta was on his way, making his first stop in Columbia, Missouri where he had an invitation from George and Eugenia.



Eugenia and Kosta [Circa 1935]

Chapter 10  
EUGENIA AND GEORGE BRAKE

"Patera" felt well-informed about the "morality gap" between America and what he was accustomed to in the old country, and he was determined to save Eugenia from this. He felt that he knew best regarding the role of women. He censured her dress; jeans, shorts, and slacks were not allowed; and he did his best to censure her behavior in public as well. As Eugenia developed into a lovely young lady in her early twenties "Patera" began a search for a "Gambro". America, the melting pot, did not lend itself to meeting a good, Greek boy, "Patera" felt, so he set about to take care of the matter himself. After all, his daughter was almost 23 now and not getting any younger, which in the old country was unheard of if daughters were ever to get married.

The Boudoures family was quite prominent in those days in East St. Louis, Illinois, a neighboring community. Mr. Boudoures, was President of St. Constantine and Helen Greek Church there and knew a lot of people in the area. His two sons, my good friends to this day, Speros and George, were more my own age and not real prospects for "Proxenia" with my sister, so Mr. Boudoures volunteered that he knew an unmarried Greek boy in Columbia, Missouri that he would like my sister to meet, to which my father agreed, of course. Poor Eugenia! She was not even consulted on the matter until George Brake had been invited to Granite City. Such were the times!

It was early in 1936; I was only 9 years old, but I remember their meeting like it was yesterday. This man from Columbia had been invited to our house to meet my sister. On the fateful day everyone was ill-at-ease not knowing what and whom to expect.

How about my sister Eugenia? How did she feel? Was she nervous, afraid, apprehensive? What was going through her mind as she was asked to meet, sight unseen, the man she was being asked to marry?

Well, Mr. Boudoures arrived as planned with George Brake at his side. The introductions were made and everyone made a sincere effort to get acquainted. After drinks and sweets were served, and most of the "ice" had been broken, "Patera" suggested that Eugenia and George repair to another room for more privacy so that they might get better acquainted. They agreed, and, after about an hour in seclusion, they emerged with smiles on their faces! They became engaged and were married 3 months later on May 5, 1936.

Eugenia and George were not blessed with children. I have always felt that, in a way, my sister thought of Elias and I as the children that she and George could never have. After all, Eugenia herself was 15 years older and George was 27 years older than I, and they invited us to Columbia all the time. They grew accustomed to having us hanging around and Louie and I have fond memories of our visits there as youngsters. George was a gregarious, personable guy and he fit into the low-key lifestyle of "Little Dixie" [Columbia had a Southern tradition in the Civil War] very well, adapting readily to the outdoor sports of hunting and fishing which were so popular. I think that George genuinely enjoyed taking his wide-eyed young brother-in-laws out hunting and fishing, and teaching us all his old tricks. Eugenia loved having us around I think because she finally could have someone to order around. Doesn't everyone want to boss someone?

I personally felt that Eugenia tolerated the hunting and fishing as the other love in George's life. I think she would have preferred the local Holiday Inn to the camper that George hooked up to the back of their car when they went trout fishing. But, generally, she was a good sport about it, and went along for George's sake and the sake of her marriage.

My sister Eugenia was a very unselfish person. She spent nearly 50 years taking care of her husband, and, since our mother was widowed for 27 years, during much of that time Eugenia was taking care of her as well. Until my sister's premature and unexpected death due to complications following hip surgery in 1990, she was a daily fixture at the nursing home where mother is presently interned. This was then, and is now, no easy task. My brother, Louie, has picked up the baton since Eugenia's death. As those of you who have been through this type of thing can appreciate, this can be extremely draining emotionally, particularly if any extended period of time is involved. For my part, both Eugenia and Louie have my eternal gratitude.

Eugenia was the most selfless person that I have ever known, and I will never forget her. "AONIA TIS E MNIMI" [May her memory be eternal]!



Eugenia and George's Wedding-1936



Eugenia; Happy times with  
her brothers- 1988



Eugenia and George  
[Circa 1944]



A family get-together- 1981

Chapter 11  
KOSTA AND SOPHIA

When Kosta left home in 1937 to seek his fortune, he went to Columbia, Missouri where Eugenia and George Brake lived. There he struck a deal with George to put shoe repairing into Georges' Tiger Hat Shop, which was Georges' hat cleaning and shoe shining parlor. Kosta purchased his own machinery and equipment and developed a pretty nice business, while at the same time honing his skills. He worked hard and it was not long before he was ready for his own place, so he inquired of one of his suppliers regarding a shoe repair shop anywhere in his territory that might be for sale. When he was told that there might be just what he was looking for in Lincoln, Nebraska, he bid farewell to George and Eugenia and again headed West to the Nebraska State Capital in Lincoln. There he found and purchased a shoe repair shop which was in downtown Lincoln. This was the beginning of a series of business successes for Kosta, but not without hard work and sacrifice, which was always his trademark.

Kosta was 27 years old and doing very well financially, but man does not live by bread alone. He signed up for night classes at the University of Nebraska to continue his education. Always a religious person, Kosta attended the Greek Orthodox Church there in Lincoln which exposed him to local social life and girls. There he met Sophia Kosmos, the daughter of a prominent Greek businessman. A brief courtship started with a New Years Eve date in 1941; followed by an engagement in February; and Kosta and Sophia were married on June 15, 1941. In 1991 they celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

Kosta and Sophia settled there in Lincoln and prospered. The shop went from one location to two and then they branched out into real estate investments there locally and have been very successful. They had two children, Jimmy Dean born in 1947, and Margaret, born in 1954. Both children were excellent students, and both went on to very successful business careers; Jim as a Dentist, and Margaret as a Dermatologist. Jim married Pam, and they have a boy, Jimmy, age 18, and a girl, Christine, age 14. Margaret is married to another Doctor, Greg Sutton, an Ophthalmologist, and they have three girls; Leigh, age 7, Stephanie, age 5, and Elizabeth, age 3. Obviously, everyone is kept quite busy with their careers and their children, so "Papou" Kosta and "Yia Yia" Sophia do their part by pitching in with the baby sitting, which, needless to say, they love.

Kosta was always active in his church, and was also very active in A.H.E.P.A., rising in 1980 to the office of District Governor. He was also recently recognized by the local Masonic Lodge for serving as Lodge Chaplain for the past 9 years.

My brother always had a special way with things mechanical, unlike his youngest brother who is hopeless in this regard, and has absolutely no fear of taking on things around the house that intimidate lesser men. He loved cars when he was young and even knew how to repair his own until the manufacturers started putting things like transistors and computers into them. I still think he got my share of the family mechanical genes.

I regret not knowing my brother Kosta better. Just because our lives took slightly different paths and because there is a bit of an age difference; Kosta is 14 years older; doesn't necessarily mean that we have nothing in common. We have a great deal in common, and perhaps now, in these autumn years of our lives as we "mellow," we will come to know each other better and philosophize about what might have been and what might be.



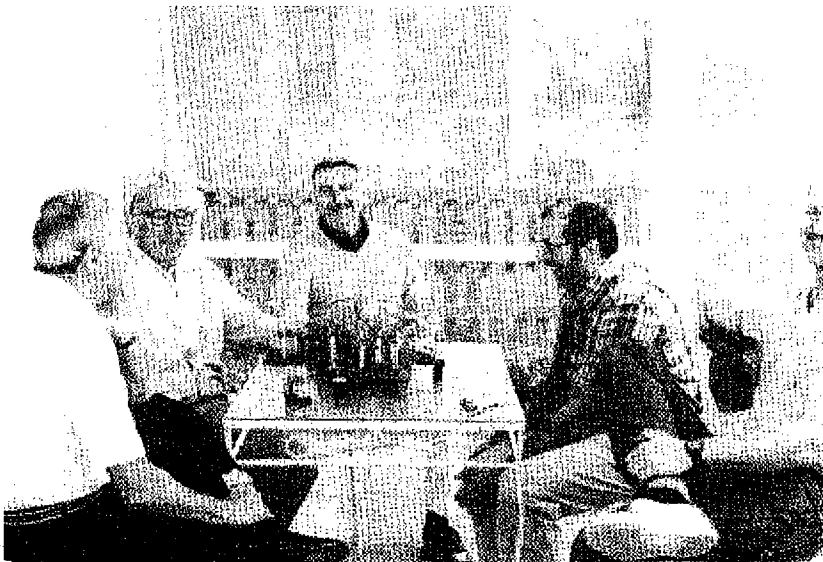
Kosta and Sophia's Wedding-1941



District Governor of  
A.H.E.P.A. -1980



Margaret and Jim Kontras with their  
St.Louis Cousins- 1983



Louie, Gus, Nick, Jimmy Dean  
and Donn - 1983



Greg & Margaret Sutton  
and the girls - 1991





*Herbert T. Tiemann*  
GOVERNOR

# THE GREAT NAVY OF THE STATE OF NEBRASKA

*Theodore W. Metz*  
CHIEF ADMIRAL

*To All Who Shall See These Presents*

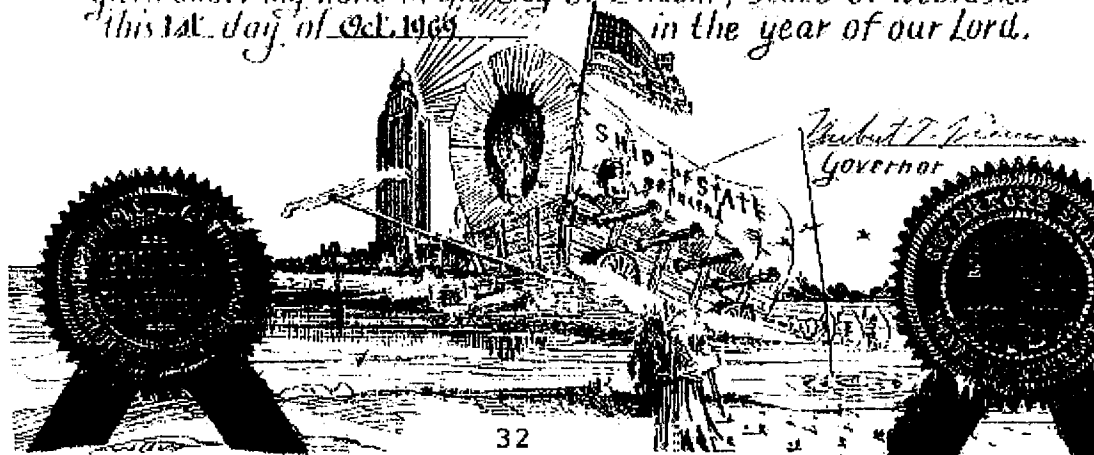
**GREETINGS**

**K**NOW YE, that reposing special trust and confidence in the Patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities of

**Gus James Kontras**

and knowing him to be a good fellow and a loyal friend and counselor I have nominated and do appoint him an Admiral in the Great Navy of the State of Nebraska. He is therefore called to diligently discharge the duties of Admiral by doing and performing, all manner of things thereto belonging. And I do strictly charge and require all officers, seamen, tulpoles and goldfish under his command to be obedient to his orders as Admiral - and he is to observe and follow, from time to time, such directions as he shall receive, according to the rules and discipline of the Great Navy, of the State of Nebraska. This commission to continue in force during the period of his good behavior, and the pleasure of the Chief Admiral of the Great Navy of the State of Nebraska.

Given under my hand in the City of Lincoln, State of Nebraska this 1st day of Oct. 1969 in the year of our Lord.



Chapter 12  
ELIAS AND NICOLAKI COME OF AGE

The Americanization of Elias and Nicolaki took place both at school and in the neighborhood as we grew up with the "Americanakia" in Granite City, and in no time at all we were Louie and Nick to our buddies. We dressed and behaved as much like them as we possibly could since we were keenly sensitive to the fact that, at that particular time in this country's history, Xenophobia prevailed and certainly Greeks were not treated any better than any other minority. Ethnic just were not as accepted then as they are today, and, far be it from us to stand out any more than we had to with our coveted new friends and neighbors.

Emerson Grade School was only a seven block walk from home but it was a trip that accelerated our development, both good and bad. Good because with every passing day you would feel more like you belonged; bad because we picked up undesirable stuff too. But boys will be boys, and we quickly learned how to fit in with the other kids. In time we no longer felt like outsiders.

As we imported the language into our home, we helped to "Americanize" mother and dad. We influenced them to speak more English and less Greek, though I honestly think it was all lost on our mother!

Dad was a good and fair man who would give us the shirt off his back if need be. He was very protective. As children, he wanted us to eat right, sleep right, and to lead a good and honest life. At the same time he was also a stern and serious-minded patriarch. He dominated all of our lives, particularly mothers'. Her life was pretty much limited to caring for her children and her husband with little opportunity for her to improve herself or her English. In those days women did not work outside the home, even in America. In spite of all that, mother maintained a good attitude and had a good, up-beat sense of humor.

After Emerson Grade School came Central Junior High for our 7th and 8th grades. Wow!. This was the big time! Team sports, home rooms, girls -----things were beginning to look up! This is where Louie and I got into basketball. We had played the game for years, but now we were exposed to competitive sports. We got to go on out-of-town trips to East St. Louis and play junior high school teams like Lansdowne and Clark. Great stuff!

Louie entered Granite City High School in January of 1940 and I followed in September 1941. An unprecedented interest in basketball existed at that time in Granite City because their basketball team had won the Illinois State Championship that year.

This increased visibility of the sport made it imperative that we make the team! And we did! Both Louie and I played Varsity basketball for two years, and we even played on the same team in '43-44. That was fun! Louie was more of an all-around athlete because of his speed, and he also excelled in football and track. While I lettered in both those sports, my efforts were certainly not much to brag about. I specialized in basketball, and was named Captain of the team in '44-45. In any event, the Kontras family was well represented in Granite City sports from 1943 through 1945. It was a fun period in our lives.

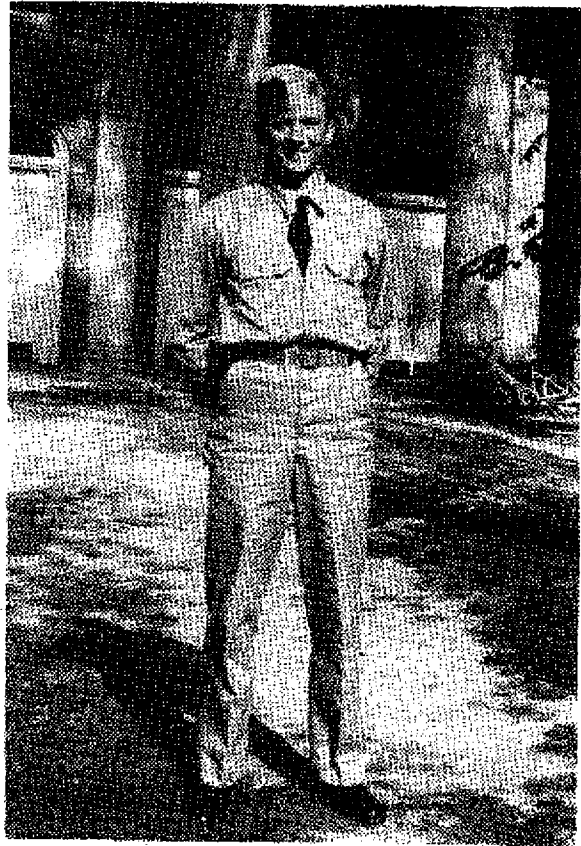
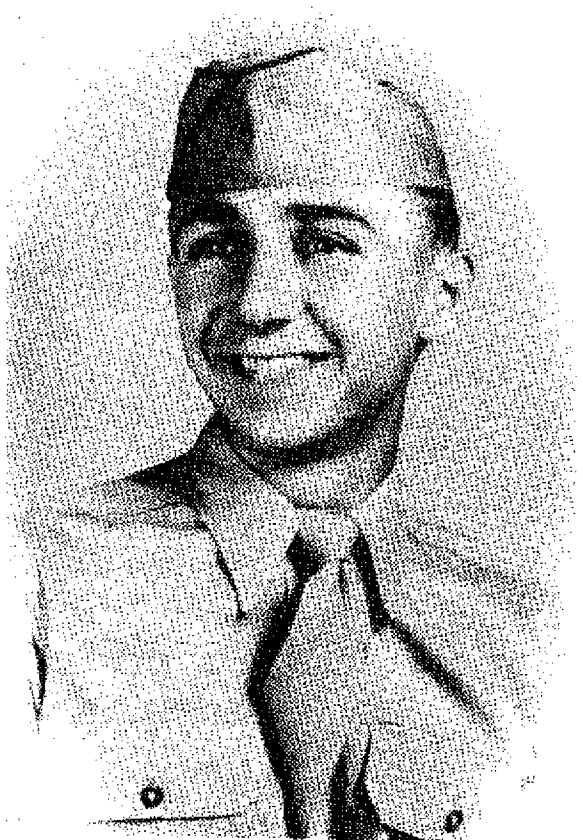
Obviously, there were other things besides sports. Two that come to mind were girls -----and World War II. Though the former quite naturally got a lot of our attention; the latter weighed heavily on our minds at that time. Many of our neighbor pals and classmates had been called into service, and we knew our time was coming.

Louie graduated from high school in 1944, qualifying for and enlisting in the Naval Air Corps. He was selected for flight training and went to Glenview Naval Air Base in Chicago for that and to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill for pre-flight training. From there he went to flight training at Corpus Christi Naval Air Base in Texas. This is where he learned to fly those little planes that landed on what seemed to him to be even smaller aircraft carrier flight decks. This from a kid that used to get motion sickness from riding on electric street cars!

My own military career was a little less dramatic. I was fortunate enough to pass an Army Specialized Training Program examination given to high school seniors which qualified me to enter the service in the highly desirable A.S.T.R.P. program; I was sent to the University Of Illinois campus and completed one semester of college before the war with Japan ended in 1945. The program was discontinued and I ended up in the Army Air Force and eventually became a weather observer. I was stationed at Sherman Air Force Base in Leavenworth, Kansas and while there I was fortunate enough to play on the undefeated Sherman Air Force Base basketball team that went 23-0 in 1946. Some military service record, huh?

Growing up with my brother Louie was fun. We shared a lot of good memories. The best part for me was when I grew 5 inches in one year and he couldn't beat me up anymore. That was great!

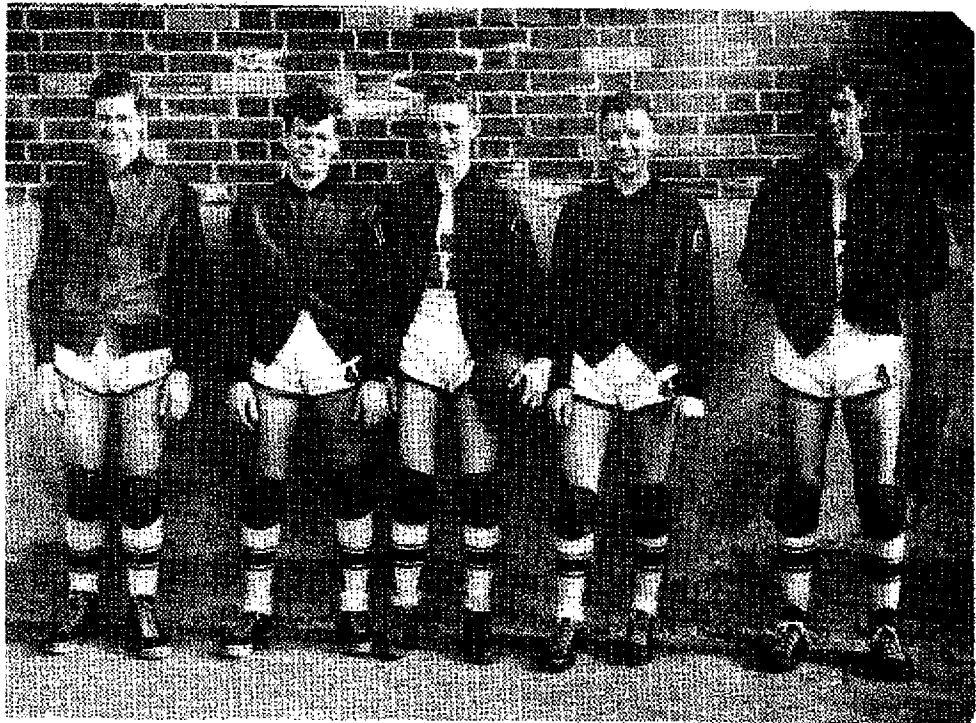
In spite of the 120 miles that separate us, over the years Louie and I and our families have shared more things in common than not, and have stayed together through thick and thin, sharing many of our joys, and yes, some of our sorrows. Hopefully, with the Good Lords' help, this can continue through these Autumn years of our lives.



Nick and Louie - 1945



Nick Kontas



Chapter 13  
LOU AND BETTY

When George Brake heard about Lou's assignment to Glen view Naval Air Base in Chicago, he told Lou to look up his brother, Jim Bratsakis [George's Greek name], who lived on West Harrison Street. Lou called, and as was customary where servicemen were concerned in those days, he was graciously invited to the Bratsakis home for Sunday dinner.

There he met the rest of the family, which included a bubbly, brunette, youngest-daughter, Betty. Apparently, Lou behaved himself and was invited back. Before long he found that he enjoyed going over there, and it became a regular thing, or at least as regular as it can get when you are in the military. Perhaps he liked the home cooking?

However, fate intervened. Lou was transferred to North Carolina for preflight training. Absence does make the heart grow fonder, as Lou found out, and thus began a long-distance romance that continued through his subsequent transfer to Texas, and his final discharge and return to Columbia, Missouri in 1946.

Lou and Betty stayed in touch during Lou's first years in college at the University of Missouri. It wasn't easy driving 420 miles on a weekend to see Betty and then try to stay awake in classes on the following Monday. The romance flourished, but Lou just couldn't keep up the "bedraggled Monday" experience much longer, so they finally were married and moved to Columbia in 1948.

Lou continued at the University after his marriage, but it was no picnic; being married, working full-time and going to school. I was also at the University at the time and Louie and I had put a small cleaning and pressing business in the back of George Brakes' hat shop, whereby we could both make a living by each taking a half day of the work load and have our classes arranged in the other half of the day. This arrangement, and the G.I. Bill, sustained us through our college years at Mizzou.

In September of 1950, Lou and Betty were blessed with their only child, a boy named Jimmy, after both "Papou's". By now, Lou and I were finished with College and into life's mainstream. Lou had stayed there in Columbia and expanded the cleaning and pressing business to include tuxedo rentals which, obviously, was a good business for a college town.

As Jim grew up, Lou introduced him to the joys of the outdoors which he himself loved so much over the years, particularly fishing and hunting.

Lou and Betty bought their first home on Paris road in Columbia and as their business grew and prospered, they built a home on High Ridge Circle, where they live today. Both Lou and Betty were hard workers. Betty working right alongside of Lou over the years, and as their business improved, they were able to invest in income property there in Columbia.

Jimmy Kontras grew up in Columbia, and like his dad and his Uncle before him, he attended the University of Missouri. Jim graduated in 1972 with a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine. Like father, like son, Jim loves the outdoors and animals, and he now owns and operates the Plaza Animal Clinic in the fashionable Country Club Plaza area of Kansas City, Missouri. Jim is a bright, hardworking, guy who loves his boys, Lexi, age 10, and Evan, age 6, very much. I don't mind saying that he is one of my all-time favorites!

As mentioned, Lou's favorite pastimes are hunting and fishing, although he claims now that the rigors of the cold and early morning hours have somewhat diminished his ardor for duck and goose hunting. For a guy in his "olden years" who survived a bout with colon cancer 12 years ago, Lou still remains amazingly active, and enjoys the less physical aspects of outdoor life, like fishing and dove and quail hunting. Not surprisingly, he plans to initiate the new generation; his pride-and-joy grandsons, Lexi and Evan, just like he did with his son Jim.

The family owes Lou and Betty a debt of gratitude for their years of anguish during mothers last few years. The two of them carried the entire load of going to the nursing home daily and caring for mother, and for this we shall be eternally grateful. Only one who has gone through this with an elderly parent can truly relate to it.



Betty, Lou, Jim & the boys '92



Lexi, Jim & Evan Kontras-1992



Betty and Louie's Wedding - 1948

## Chapter 14 NICK AND MARIE

I graduated from the University of Missouri in January of 1950 and headed to St. Louis to seek my fortune. St. Louis offered the largest job market in the state. I already had some friends there in the area from the Granite City days. How was I to know that Marie Glitsos also lived here?

With no preconceived notions of what I wanted to do with my life, I began canvassing St. Louis for job opportunities. I took the very first job offered, particularly when they told me that it paid \$200 per month! In those days jobs were hard to come by and I was flat broke.

Those were lean days but fun days. I took a room in a rooming house because that is about all I could afford, and that is where I met my old friend, Karl Johnson, who, along with his wife Peggy remain best friends to this day. Karl and I had a lot of fun commiserating about our poverty-level status of that time. We still do.

Because I still loved sports, I went to the local Y.M.C.A. to work out. That is where I met Tyke Dennis and Soc Dendrinellis, who were local Greek boys that also liked basketball and played down there regularly. Our friendship grew, as we enjoyed the basketball as well as each others company. They invited me to attend church with them at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox church on Forest Park Avenue and wanted me to play on the church basketball team. I agreed, and that was my indoctrination into the St. Louis Greek Community. Though I am not the best church-goer, from this exposure I made some life-time friendships.

Going to church included going to Bible Class, and that is where I met a considerate, sensitive, beauty by the name of Marie Glitsos. I was no kid anymore; I was 27 years old, and had dated some of the communities' prettier girls, but I had never met anyone as beautiful and genuine as Marie. It didn't take me long to realize that she was something special. We had difficulty at times getting together for a date because she was also dating another fellow at the time. We were hardly two or three months into our dating when I took Marie up to Columbia to meet my family. Six months after we first met, I asked her to marry me. We were married on May 15, 1955 at St. Nicholas Church and it was probably the smartest thing I ever did!



Our early married life included some of the best of times and some of the worst of times. The two of us had lots of fun establishing a home together and learning more about one another. Marie was working as an executive secretary for the President of an oil company, a job that she enjoyed. I was getting up a full head of steam on my own career in the insurance business, but our primary focus at that time in our life was Marie's father, who had a serious heart condition and was gravely ill. He had been in and out of hospitals for years and had barely made it through our wedding.

This period was very stressful for Marie and her sisters, Joanna and Dessie, and was particularly so for their mother. We prayed that he could hold out so that he could see his first grandchild; but he just couldn't make it, and passed away just a few months before our first child was born in 1957. We named her Demitra in honor of both her grandfathers. Our intentions at the time were honorable, however, we have since found a photocopy of the ships' manifest that shows that when Marie's father came over he was listed as Demosthenes, not Dimitri as she was led to believe all her life. Well, so much for our efforts to be even-handed in honoring both of Demi's "Papou's"!

Demitra Ann, her middle name after her "Yia Yia" Glitsos, was born on June 6, 1957. This brings to mind a story that Marie will never let me hear the end of. In those days I had embarked upon a course of study called C.P.C.U. which required the successful completion of a series of 5 year-long, graduate-level courses in order to obtain the Insurance Industries' most coveted professional designation, "C.P.C.U." I had studied particularly hard for the first year because naturally, I wanted to get off to a flying start. Well, you guessed it, Marie's contractions started the morning of the examination! I took her to the hospital at 6 a.m. and my "C.P.C.U." examination hours were from 9:00 to 1:00. What to do? Do I let a years' work go down the drain? Do I leave my wife to birth our very first child without her husband?

Well, I think that the good lord interceded and helped me to get back before the baby arrived and I was there for the delivery, but I have never heard the end of it from Marie.

Nicolette joined us on January 23, 1959 and, obviously, was named after her father. I did better at Nikki's birth, hopefully making better marks from her mother than I did with Demi. Nikki's arrival provided Demi with a playmate and somewhat eased Marie's job since the girls could occupy each other more and their mother less. Nikki came along at just the right time because it was about this time that Marie got into tennis and she could let the girls entertain each other a bit while she played her tennis.

Maria was named after my wife and my mother, and was born on April 26, 1961. Here too I got in trouble with Marie because she had chosen the name of her best friend, Kathryn Condaxis, for our new baby, when, unbeknownst to me, my mother and my sister descended upon us from Columbia adamantly insisting that the baby should be named Maria, after my mother. We already had Kathryn on the birth certificate!

It was an awkward time for me because I was in the middle, but I must confess I secretly hoped that we went with the name Maria because it would honor the two most important women in my life, my wife, Marie, and my mother, Maria.

No discussion of our family could be complete without mentioning "Kukla". She was our family dog; a black cock-a-poo; that grew up with the girls, and was as much a part of the family for those seventeen years as any of us. I'm sure that each of us has his own special memories of "Kukla" and how much happiness she brought us.

When the girls grew up we of course became somewhat emancipated, and we were free to travel and play golf and tennis, which are, right after our family and friends, the real loves of our lives. But in retrospect, I personally feel that even with the financial and emotional hardships of those times, this period, when the girls were young and growing up, were some of the happiest times of my life.



The Glitsos Family;  
Dessie, Marie, Joanna,  
Anna, and Demos (Circa 1936)



Nikki, Nick, Demi, Marie, Don,  
and Maria - 1989



Marie and Nick - 1988

## Chapter 15 THE KONTRAS COUSINS

Dad's brother, my "Thio" Nicola, was three years younger than dad. He was the first to come over and settled in Martins Ferry, Ohio. Martins Ferry is located on the Ohio River very near Wheeling West Virginia. The prevailing industries there were steel mills and coal mining, both needing immigrant labor. Thus, like Granite City, the predominant makeup of the citizenry in Martins Ferry was ethnics. "Thio" Nicola had married Despina Petikas, another "Kardamilitis", and they went into the grocery business in Martins Ferry.

I have some good memories of "Thio" Nicola from our summer vacations when we visited our cousins for a week or two at a time. He had an outgoing personality and a knack for the small talk so necessary to a successful retail business. I enjoyed rummaging around his store taking in the sounds and smells and, occasionally, when "Thio" was not looking of course, sneaking a cookie.

"Thio" Nicola and "Thia" Despina had 5 children. Kosta [Gus], the oldest, was born in 1922. He was followed by Bill in 1923, Jim in 1925, and Viola, the youngest, in 1929. The fifth a girl, named Eugenia [Jennie] only lived to age 22. The cause of her death is not known, but she would be approximately my age if she had lived.

Trips and vacations in those days were rare, so our infrequent trips to Ohio were something we really looked forward to and relished. "Thia" Despina and the kids shared their home and their friends with us while we were there. I particularly remember how enterprising the boys were and how hard they worked. They took turns helping their dad in the store after school and Bill, the junior entrepreneur, had newspaper routes that he would put us to work on, making a profit on each of our sales. Viola, younger and the lone girl among 5 older boy, just tagged along and was fun to have around. Every other year the Ohio cousins came to Granite City and stayed with us and we, in turn, took them to our hangouts and introduced them to our friends. I have some great memories of those growing-up years!

As we grew older and interests began revolving around school and school-related activities the visits naturally diminished and finally World War II took us all into the service, except Viola, of course. Gus, being the oldest, went first and was the first to return home.

He immediately enrolled, with the help of the "G.I. Bill-of-Rights", at Ohio State University in Columbus. Soon after, in 1946, "Thio" Nicola tragically passed away from a routine tonsillectomy. He began hemorrhaging and they could not stop the bleeding. His sudden death stunned the whole family. I, personally, felt bad that I could not get a "Pass" from the Air Force Base and attend the funeral to pay my last respects to "Thio". He was my favorite Uncle.

After "Thio" passed, the rest of the family moved to Columbus from Martins Ferry. As each boy finished his education he started up a business there; each became very successful in his own right. Gus was a gregarious guy like his father, and he ended up doing very well in insurance and real estate. Bill received his Doctorate of Dentistry in the military service and started a thriving dental practice when he returned. He continued his early entrepreneurial bent with real estate investments and has been very successful at it over the years. Jim got both a law degree and an accounting degree, and specialized in taxes and tax law there in Columbus also becoming quite successful, and even bringing in his son, Nick, into the business. Viola went into partnership with her brother Gus in the restaurant business along with her husband Bill Petikas, and the two of them were the operating heads of a successful restaurant there until just recently when they sold it and retired.

The first to marry was Bill; he and Sophia had 3 children; Valerie, Nick, and Billy. Valerie is married to Rob Holloway and they have 5 children. Nick is married to Aggie and they have 2 children. Billy and Denise are the youngest and have 3 children. All live in Columbus except Nick and Aggie who are in Cincinnati.

Jim and Theo were next to be married and they had a girl, Denise, and a boy, Nicholas James. Both are married and have families; Denise is married to David Marino, and Nick married Karen, and both have children; Denise has two girls and Karen has a boy and a girl. Nick and Karen were nice enough to come to St. Louis and visit us one time and we enjoyed their company very much. He reminds me so much of his dad.

Gus married Stella and they had three children; two girls, Connie and Kathy, and a boy, Gregory Nicholas. All three are married and live in Columbus except Kathy who lives in Tucson, Arizona.

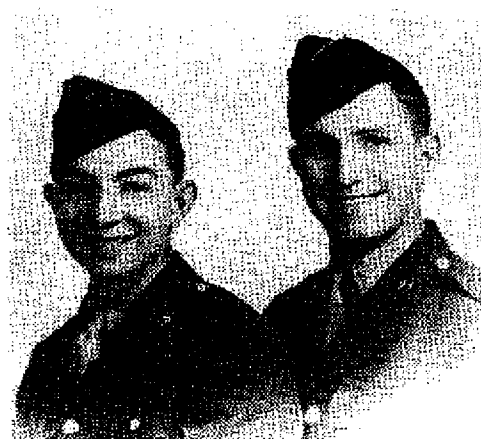
Viola married Bill Petikas and they have three boys and a girl; Mike, Nick, David, and Rene', all of whom are married.

Both Gus and Bill set good examples and were very good at staying in touch with us over the years, with periodic visits and extemporaneous drop-byes', and I have tried, within our own limitations, to do the same.

The family suffered a tragic double blow in the period 1988-89 when both Gus and Jim died of cancer. We will miss them both. "Aonia Tous E Mnimi" ----[May their memory be eternal!]



Bill Kontras  
- 1944



Jim & Gus Kontras-1944



"Thia" Despina, Gus,  
"Thio" Nicola & Bill  
Kontras (Circa 1925)



Nikki Kontras & the other Nick Kontras's  
1981



The Kontras Family Reunion - 1981  
[Eugenia, Viola, Gus, Jennie Melissas, Stella, and Bill]

Chapter 16  
THE MELISSAS COUSINS

Dad's second-oldest sibling was "Thia" Erini [Aunt Irene]. "Thia" Erini married a fellow Chiotan named Steve Melissas in 1911, the same year that mother and dad were married. Like dad and mother, they were apart for ten years until "Thia" came to join her husband in America. She came with their first-born, 11 year old Mary, who, like my sister and brother, had been born in Kardamilla.

"Thio" Steve was in Butler, Pennsylvania "Batching it" when my father was there. Subsequently, "Thio" Steve moved to Monessen, Pennsylvania, a mill town just outside Pittsburgh. Their first son, Nick, was born there in 1925, and was followed by two sets of twins. First came Kosta [Augi] and Jim [Cab] in 1926, and then Eugenia [Jennie] and Mike were born in 1928. Only Jennie remains in Monessen and still resides in the family home. Mary is in Pennsylvania; Augi in Atlanta; Cab is in Las Angelas; Mike is in Wilmington, Delaware; and Nick is in Chicago.

I still remember our visits to Monessen back in the early thirties. No one had much in those days. We slept on the floor all over the house, but I remember them as happy times. I specifically remember "Thia" as the matriarch, and how much fun "Thio" Steve was. He was a little more light-hearted than "Thia," and I remember that he would playfully fix breakfast for all us kids, and I do think he was having just as much fun with it as we were. They are good memories.

Nick [Mel] has been the best at staying in touch with me over the years. He contacts me from time to time, as I do him. He and Augi owned a manufacturing business in Michigan which they recently sold. Both are retired now; Augi in Atlanta and Nick in Chicago. Mary's daughters, Irene and Kathryn have the distinction of being the first of the "Next Generation. Mel has a married daughter, Nancy. Augi has 4 children. Cab has a son. Mike has four children. Jennie never married and, as mentioned, has retained the family home in Monessen. We have Jennie Melissas to thank for spearheading the last Kontras Family Reunion held in Columbus in 1981.

As mentioned, Mel and I have gotten together several times. For example, Marie and I have been going to Arizona the past five winters, and, lo and behold, who shows up at our doorstep in Tucson but Mel, on his way to California to see his brother, Cab. Neither Mel nor I have any difficulty talking, so its fun for me to see him because we wax eloquently on most any subject, whether we know anything about it or not. He has been particularly helpful in gathering some of the facts presented in this book, and for this I am very grateful. Thanks Cuz!



Pete Pantelas, Gus Pantelas, Sophie, "Thia" Erini  
"Thia" Kiriaki, Mary Pagonis, Augi Melissas, Jennie  
Melissas, Paul Pantelas, Jennie Pantelas, Uncle Ted,  
Nick Melissas, George Pantelas, Jim Melissas, Mike  
Melissas, Nellie Pantelas

Melissas Family Reunion - 1963



back row: Augi and wife, Barbara; Jennie Melissas and Irene,  
(Mary's daughter)  
couch: Jim, Jackie (Nick's wife), Nick, Kathy (Mary's  
daughter, Mary, Mike, Helen, "Thia" Erini, and  
"Thio" Steve  
front: Debbie, Steve, Diane, Michael, Carl, Angel, David,  
and Nancy (in "Thia's" lap)



Nick Melissas and  
Nick Kontras - 1992



Chapter 17  
THE PANTELAS COUSINS

The youngest of dad's sisters was "Thia" Kiriaki [Carrie] Pantelas who celebrated her 90th birthday in February 1993. She enjoys good mental and physical health and still lives by herself in Toledo, Ohio near her daughter, Jennie Samonides.

"Thia" left Kardamilla in 1921 and married Kostas Pantelas in Warren, Ohio in 1922. Their first child, a boy named George, was born in 1924. Their daughter, Nellie, was born in 1926, followed by another daughter, Jennie, [another Eugenia] in 1931. Jimmy Pantelas, the baby of the family, and the youngest of my cousins, came along much later, in 1939.

Warren, Ohio was where dad started out--- his old stomping grounds. My brother Louie was born there, so our trips there were like homecoming to dad. "Thia" idolized her older brother who was more like a father to her because of the great age difference. He had practically raised her because of their fathers premature death.

As kids, Louie and I enjoyed visiting our cousins in Warren. George and Nellie were more our age, but Jennie would tag along too; and it was fun exploring a new community and seeing where dad and mother had lived and where Louie had been born. Jimmy came on the scene later when we were more into our own school-related activities and our trips to Warren were less frequent, so we did not get to know him quite as well. When Marie and I were newlyweds Jim did come through St. Louis for a visit and we got to spend some time together and get better acquainted.

George and his wife Evelyn still live in Warren, as do their two children; Melanie and Gus, who also live in Warren. When Marie and I took the girls to the 1964 Worlds Fair in New York, we stopped in Warren and visited George and Evelyn. Melanie was a brand new baby then.

Nellie was married to a man named Kosmides there in Warren and later divorced him and moved to California. She had a son, Steve, and a daughter, Carrie. Sadly, her son Steve died in a tragic auto accident at age 28. Carrie is in the San Francisco area where her mother has been for years. I haven't seen Nellie since 1964 though I hope to change that soon since our daughter, Maria, now works and lives in San Jose.

Jennie married Pete Samonides, and they reside in Toledo, Ohio. Though "Thia" Kiriaki lives alone in Toledo, Jennie and Pete look out for her well-being.

Jennie and Pete have a girl and a boy, Stacy and Bill. Both she and Pete are quite busy; Pete in the restaurant/deli business and Jennie as an insurance broker specializing in health insurance.

Jim Pantelas and his wife, Mary Ann, reside in Atlanta, Georgia, where he is doing well in the hotel business. They have a grown daughter, Shannon.



Young "Thia" Kiriaki with "Yia Yia" Eugenia in Greece



George Pantelas, "Thia", Jennie, and Nellie (Circa 1935)



"Thia" Kiriaki and Gus Pantelas - 1922

Chapter 18  
" THIA" MARIGO

Dad's third sister was named Maria but was affectionately called Marigo. She was three years younger than "Thia" Erini but considerably older than "Thia" Kiriaki. She was the only sibling who never came to America.

Marigo was tall and headstrong, like her older brother Dimitri. Though marriages in the village were arranged through proxenia, and her marriage was no exception, she stubbornly insisted upon going through with marriage to a man who was just not right for her. Both dad and "Thio" Nicola knew the "gambro" well enough to know that he had a reputation with the ladies; he would be bad news for Marigo, but they could not dissuade her, and the wedding took place. They were married in 1914, and, sure enough, soon thereafter he left with "Patera" and "Thio" Nicola to seek work in America. Worse still, when Dad sent him back to Greece with \$1000.00 to bring mother, Jennie, Gus, "YiaYia" and his sisters, Paradisis took off for Rumania, telling Marigo that she could come there if she wished. "Thia" Marigo anguished over this as her brothers and mother counseled her against following her "no account" husband. "Things would be no different there," they advised her. Against everyones advice [love is indeed blind], she followed him there. No one was surprised when, a year or so later, she returned to Kardamilla without him. On her return Marigo brought her infant son, George, and she was pregnant with her daughter, Kiriaki.

After re-grouping in Kardamilla, "Thia" Marigo was fixed up with and married another villager by the name of Katsikas. They had two boys, Kosta and Dimitri. George Paradisis did come to Granite City to visit us once, and attended my sisters wedding in 1936 [see photo]. He since passed away about ten years ago at age 70. Kiriaki married and lives in Pireaus. Kosta Katsikas is age 63 and lives in Pireaus as well, and Dimitri Katsikas lives in Australia.

Chapter 19  
NICK AND HIS SECOND LOVE

One cannot devote forty two years to something and not have it be an important part of one's life. And so it was with me and the insurance business. It became my second love.

I started working in 1936 when I was nine years old. I swept floors in the Granite City Press Record and then was promoted to selling newspapers. Since this was the height of the depression, the price of a newspaper was only three cents; my sales commission was one cent per copy. My "newsstand" was in front of the American Steel Foundry plant at quitting time. Obviously I did not make much money, but I was impressed with the mild rush I experienced whenever I made a sale. Thus another entrepreneur was born!

My mother did not raise any dummies! I learned quickly what I DIDN'T want to do in life. I DIDN'T want to be a section hand on the railroad. It was slave labor, and I had all I wanted during my fifteenth summer. I DIDN'T want to work in the open hearth ovens of the steel mill as a third helper. The first helper got the instructions from the metallurgical engineer regarding what chemicals, etc. were to be shoveled into the ovens; he would simply pass it down to the second helper. The second helper also had seniority over me, so, he would pass down the instructions to the third helper [that was me] who had to shovel it all into the open hearth oven with its oppressive 3500 degree heat. Seniority [the pecking order] came only after many years of apprenticing. Not what I had in mind for the rest of my life!

Lou and I had no reason to believe that college preparatory work was to be important for us in high school, mostly because of our financial limitations in those days. Military service changed all that however. The G.I. Bill-of-Rights provided each returning serviceman with a months' college expenses for each months' service. One semester at the University of Illinois had wet my appetite to continue, so I did just that by enrolling in the University of Missouri at Columbia. Dad and mother had moved to Columbia in 1946 to be closer to my sister Jennie; this provided me with a place to live while attending college. Since 18 months of service gave me only 18 months G.I. Bill money I had to graduate in three years which was a built-in motivator for me. But graduate I did, and in January of 1950 I left Columbia with my Bachelors Degree in Business.

I knew a few people in St. Louis but they, like me, were young and had limited contacts. Guys like Greg and Harold Pappas, Al Yiannakakis, and Harry Pliakos had been in College with me, so we transferred our regular Friday night poker game to St. Louis. My friendships with Spero and George Boudoures went all the way back to my Granite City days and I knew how much they loved to play cards. Later, Mike Fandos, Leo Catsavis, George Caporal, and Paul Condaxis joined the group and, believe it or not, we have been playing, on and off, ever since.

The minute I got to St. Louis I put a resume' together and started pounding the pavement. Jobs were hard to come by in 1950. When the American Automobile Insurance Company told me that I tested well to become an "underwriter trainee," I asked them what an underwriter does, and how much does the job pay? When they told me it was \$200 per month, I stuck out my hand as a gesture of acceptance and I was on my way.

The American Auto training program was for one year in the Home Office going from department to department. Apparently, I did well; I was invited to become a Home Office Underwriter of Workers Compensation and General Liability. It was great experience but it didn't take me long to figure out that the big money was in sales, so after two years in the Home Office I left the insurance company ranks and went with F.D. Hirschberg & Co., one of the oldest agencies in St. Louis. It was one of the best decisions that I ever made!

By 1961 I was restless to start my own agency. I rented some office space in Clayton, one of the cities' high-profile communities, and started Clayton Insurance. It was a success by any standard, though we certainly had to overcome some memorable problems getting there. In a few years it became readily apparent however that the future was limited for the one-man agency, particularly in its ability to compete for markets and for the larger commercial accounts. Consequently, in 1970 I joined one of St. Louis' finest and largest insurance brokerages, The Daniel and Henry Company. This was a good move for me. We grew from 8 to 65 brokers and into the largest, independently-owned agency in St. Louis. My own book of business grew as well, and, as a partner and long-time member of the Daniel & Henry Company's Executive Committee, I feel good about the role that I played in this growth.

In 1979 I hired Ken Preis, a solid professional and also a "C.P.C.U." to help me with this growth in our book, and two years later I hired my daughter, Demitra, away from the Insurance Company of North America where she was a marketing representative for two years. Demitra came in as the first lady broker at the Daniel and Henry Company and as one of the first lady brokers in St. Louis. Both Ken and Demitra played a large role in our growth over the next ten years. Subsequently,

I hired my son-in-law, Donn Muenks, also a " C.P.C.U.", to join us from a competitor agency, and, when "burn-out" set in for me in 1989, I was ready to plan an orderly transition of the business, from me to them, effective on 1/1/92. The baton had been passed to the next generation!

The insurance business provided us with a good living over the years and Marie and I with a reasonably secure retirement, if one can be secure in retirement, and we have met many wonderful people along the way. We have some world-class memories from some of the business trips we took and people that we have met in exotic places like Hawaii, London, Madrid, Munich, Switzerland, Washington D.C., Vancouver, etc. While I still go in to the office to help out when and if needed, my role now is a passive one, and so, for all intents and purposes, my romance with my second love has ended and I intend to devote all of my attention henceforth to my first love, Marie, with, of course, an occasional game of golf.



Nick's Graduation from  
College - 1950



A Business Meeting  
- 1987



At St. Andrews Scotland - 1989

The Friday Night Poker Group - 1980  
(A. Sevastianos, S. Boudoures,  
N. Kontras, G. Boudoures,  
L. Mastorakos, and G. Caporal)



Nick and Demitra,  
Business Partners  
1992 B.C. (Before  
Cassandra)



60th Birthday Surprise Party - 1987

Chapter 20  
DEMI, NIKKI, and MARIA-THE NEXT GENERATION

Demitra Ann Kontras was born June 6, 1957 and as mentioned previously, when we named her we thought that we were honoring my father, my father-in-law, and my mother-in-law, all at one time. Oh well, two out of three isn't bad.

Being our first, Demi was naturally subjected to all the parenting excesses and insecurities common to the situation. Fortunately, she overcame all of this and grew up to be a normal and lovely child. She was bright, outgoing, and played well with the neighborhood kids, participating in most of the obligatory things that kids are subjected to like Girl Scouts and Greek School. Demi was quite popular at Ladue High School, eventually being named Captain of the Varsity Cheerleading team during her Senior year. After graduation she followed in her fathers' footsteps and went to the University of Missouri in Columbia. This made her "Yia Yia" Kontras and "Thia" Jennie very happy because she would be under their "watchful" eyes in this, her first time away from home and living alone. It also comforted Marie and I. She did us proud, and graduated in 1979 with a Bachelors Degree and with her reputation still intact.

Demi returned to St. Louis after her graduation to look for a job and, eventually, went to work for Insurance Company of North America, a large property/casualty insurance company. Okay, she got a little help in landing the job, but with her people-skills she was a natural as a Marketing Rep trainee, and I.N.A. knew it. After two years, Demi left I.N.A. and came to work for me at the Daniel and Henry Company as a licensed insurance broker. She was in charge of our Personal Lines [homeowners, automobile, etc.] and did a "bang-up" job cross-selling and consolidating this book of business for us. After receiving her "C.P.C.U." designation she branched out into all lines, and today she writes the largest commercial account on our books. Because of this personal growth in Demi, and the addition of her husband, Donn, also a "C.P.C.U.", I felt confident in turning over the business to the two of them and my long-time employee and friend, Ken Preis. The three of them incorporated and contracted to purchase my business assuming command on 1/1/92 and becoming part-owners and Vice Presidents of the Daniel & Henry Company.

Demi and Donn are also partners in parenting a brand new baby daughter, Cassandra Marie, our first grandchild! What a blessing! She was born on March 10, 1993 and is, obviously, a beautiful little girl, and the apple of "Yia Yia" Marie's and "Papou" Nick's eyes.



Our daughter, Nicolette, was born on January 23, 1959 and follows a long line of Kontras's who honor the name of "Thio" Nicola. I happen to be the senior member of this group and I am proud of it. A photo of all the Nicks, including our Nikki, is included at the end of Chapter # 15.

Nikki was a quick study from early on. Some of the stories that come to mind regarding her antics are legend. One of her mothers' favorites involves her early childhood and she was barely able to talk. Observing that neighbor children appeared to have so many more nice clothes and fun toys to play with than she did, she remarked, "Mommy, why can't we?" Born of the depression era, Marie quickly responded, "You know, Nikki, money doesn't just grow on trees. Daddy has to work hard for it!" To which Nikki immediately retorted, "Well, if Daddy would just work, work, work, instead of golf, golf, golf, maybe we could have some of those things too!" From the mouths of babes.

All of God's children are, of course, different as was our daughter, Nikki. Thank God for that, right? She spent most of her youth hanging upside down from the jungle-gym in the back yard. How she didn't break her neck on that thing I will never know. She played with the neighbor kids, was in Girl Scouts, later becoming an Explorer Scout and almost drowning her poor father [or vica versa] in a crazy canoe trip on a swollen, swift, Courtoise River. To this day Nikki continues her love for the outdoors, having backpacked and hiked through the Rockies and Europe and enjoying the outdoors every chance she gets.

Nikki also went to Mizzou where she spent two years before arriving at the sophomoric conclusion that college is not for everyone, and announcing to her parents that she was not going to go back in the fall. This upset her mother and I and we told Nikki of our disappointment, and reminded her that we could no longer help her financially in the event that she decided to knock around and waste her life. Instead of going back to College she got a job with an insurance company here in St. Louis, on her own mind you, and became a policy typist. It did not take her long to see what she DIDN'T want to do, and that all the good-paying jobs were held by college graduates. In just two years time Nikki decided, again on her own, to return to the University of Missouri, St. Louis and get her degree, only this time she had to work as a waitress nights and go to school in daytime to do it. But do it she did, making good grades while doing so and proving the value of perseverance. After that, again on her own, Nikki got a job with the old Ozark Airlines, then headquartered here in St. Louis. She worked her way up from cargo, to ramp, to ticket agent, and finally, to sales rep. When Trans World Airlines [T.W.A.] bought Ozark Airlines, they asked Nikki to come along as a sales rep in their Dallas office.

Soon, Nikki was sales manager for T.W.A. in Indianapolis. When T.W.A. joined with Delta and Northwest Airlines to form a joint-venture called Worldspan to provide computer hardware and software networking for an Airline Reservations System, she went on to become District Sales Manager for Worldspan in Boston. But as loving parents, we are still hopeful that, notwithstanding her business success, we can get Nikki to come back to St. Louis some day. We do miss having her around!

Maria Kathryn Kontras was born on April 26, 1961. Like her sisters, she was a fat baby, and a sweet and lovable child. Naming Maria proved to be another near-fiasco for me, however. She was originally named after Marie's best friend, Katherine Condaxis, until the infamous unannounced visit by my mother and sister Jennie. They descended upon us from Columbia demanding that she be named "Maria". Through it all Katherine Condaxis remains Marie's best friend, and, eventually she baptized Maria and has been a wonderful "Nouna" to her, but Marie still gets a bit hot under the collar when she talks about it.

In addition to Girl Scouts, Maria was physically active in sports, cheerleading, and as equipment manager of her high school football team. She has since stayed with her training regimen and still runs tri-athlons and is, by far, the best athlete in this family. She even went so far as to journey out to California a few years ago to participate in a tri-athlon event on Catalina Island and competed with the "Big Boys" in the icy waters of the Pacific Ocean and it almost proved to be more than she could handle. For the most part it is running and biking for Maria nowadays.

Consistent with the family tradition, Maria also attended the University of Missouri at Columbia and laughingly recalls the occasional surprise visits from "Yia Yia" Kontras and "Thia" Jennie to her apartment on campus. They were just worried about the girls living on their own. But "Yia Yia" and "Thia" meant well, and our girls knew it.

After she graduated from Mizzou, Maria also came back to St. Louis and got a job with National Casualty Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Nationwide Insurance Company of Columbus, Ohio. The "greening" of Maria Kontras followed. After 4 years in Human Resources, she wanted more and, on her own, she enrolled in a masters program at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. She had to commute for two years for two weeks at a time while still working full time at National Casualty. That is what is called perseverance! She received her Masters Degree in 1990 in "Organizational Development" and, to her credit, as of this writing, she has paid off all her student loans in full. Since that time, the Pepperdine Graduate School Placement people referred her to Intel, the Silicone Valley semi-conductor giant. She joined them in Santa Clara, in February of 1993 and, regrettable to her parents, she is now a California girl, at least for the time being.



Demi and Donn's Wedding - 1982

Demi was married to Donn Muenks on May 16, 1982 thereby giving us the son that we never had. He will be thirty eight this November and is a pleasant and even-tempered guy that fits in with family and friends alike. In addition to being a good insurance man [he too acquired his "C.P.C.U." designation], he is also a good athlete, and a scuba diver. Donn is a computer "whiz", helping me deal with the infinite intricacies of the con-founded machine. Now that Donn and Demi have started a family, Donn is a key person in the Triad Insurance Agency's plans for the future, and a great addition to our family!

Obviously, Marie and I are proud of our children. And why shouldn't we be? They are productive, interesting, people that we like to hang around. I only hope that they feel the same.



Nicollette Kontras - 1982



Maria Kontras and her Parents - 1982

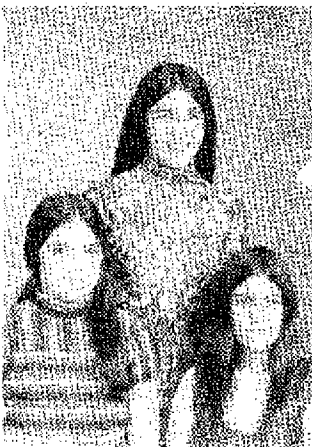


Demi,

Nikki,

and Maria

Growing Up . . .



Donn, Demi, and Cassandra - 1993

## Chapter 21 THE "KOUMBARI"

In Greek tradition, "Koumbari", also known as God Parents, are practically family. The "Koumbaro" is responsible for the spiritual guidance of the child that he baptizes, and is like next-of-kin. No discussion of our family history would be complete without our "Koumbari"

Quite naturally, coming to St. Louis after my graduation from college in 1950 I had few friends besides my old roommate and pal, Karl Johnson, and my poker playing buddy's from college days. Most of my time was spent in basketball workouts at the local Y.M.C.A. where I heard these two guys shouting to each other in Greek so that their opponents could not understand them. I was one of their opponents! They were Tyke and Soc, and, as you might suspect, I intercepted their communications and some of their passes too until they caught on to the fact that I had "broken their code". Later, as we got to know each other, we had a lot of fun telling that story, and, eventually they convinced me to play on the St. Nicholas Church basketball team.

At St. Nicholas, I met many of the friends that I still have forty years later. One of these friends, Mike Fandos, became my "Koumbaro". I met Mike on the church basketball team. He had just come home from Michigan State and went into the family restaurant business. He liked sports too and was a regular in our Friday night poker game, so we got to know each other pretty well during our single days, double-dating on many occasions. Mike was privy to the fact that I had spent my entire savings, all of \$300, to buy Marie Glitsos an engagement ring for Christmas, 1954 . He graciously offered to be my best man, provided, of course, that Marie bought onto the deal. She did, and I have had a loyal "Koumbaro" and a wonderful wife ever since.

I feel that Mike has been a positive influence in my life, and Marie and I have had a long and rich relationship with him and his wife, our "Koumbara" Alice, ever since, including their baptism of our first-born, Demi. Their children; Stacy, George, and Charles grew up with our girls, and we have many good memories of family vacations together. Marie and I take golf and tennis trips with them because we are so compatible physically and mentally and, health permitting, we plan to continue doing more of the same for years to come.

Our second daughter, Nikki, was baptized by one of Marie's long-time girlfriends, Kathryn Cowlen, who for many years was a good "Nouna" to Nikki, coming to see her on her birthdays and bringing her presents at Xmas time. Since Nikki has been away for the most part ever since she left for college, the relationship has suffered somewhat, but hopefully the relationship can be resurrected at an adult level if and when Nikki returns to St. Louis.

Though Katherine Condaxis, Marie's best friend, may have been disappointed when we renamed Maria, she never showed it, and she asked if she could baptize Maria when she was born. She and her husband, Paul, have been loyal and steadfast "Koumbari" and we have many fond memories together, including a 1964 trip to Cape Cod with the kids. "Koumbaro" Paul had a near-fatal setback when a tumor was discovered on his brain about ten years ago but he survived and is still with us. Kay and Marie still remain best-friends and play tennis together at least three times a week.

Marie and I did some baptizing too! The first child that Marie and I baptized was Ted Pliakos, son of Harry and Georgia Pliakos. Harry and I went to "Mizzou" together and remained friends after graduation. Harry is a bright guy with a quick wit, and we had a lot of fun over the years. Ted, their third child, was born in 1959, after Suzie and George, and before Cathy. In spite of my mediocre God-parenting, Ted grew up to be a handsome young man, graduated from "Mizzou", and went into computer software sales here in St. Louis. We are proud to be his "Nouna" and "Nouno."

In 1966 we baptized Anna Marie Dunlap. She is the daughter of Joanna and Bill Dunlap, Marie's oldest sister and her husband. Anna, as she prefers being called, is married to Jim Brown, and they reside in Chesterfield, Mo. Anna has an older brother, Jim, Marie's nephew, who is married to Karen, and they reside in Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1973, our daughter, Demi, baptized Maria Patrice Nakis, the daughter of Sam and Virginia Nakis. Sam is an old golfing buddy, and a very active A.H.E.P.A.N., who served the organization as Supreme President a number of years ago. Maria is their second child after Manolaki, born in 1969. They are both great kids. Maria has blossomed into a well-adjusted, lovely, young lady. A scholar/athlete in high school, she has gone on to attend Northwestern University in Chicago. Virginia has been an outstanding parent to these kids and "Koumbara" to us. She is one of Marie's daily walking group and a good friend.

We almost lost Sam last year when an aneurysm burst in his aorta, but we told him that he was just too ornary to die and hadjust used up one of his nine lives. Sam is a great guy and would do anything for you if you are a friend of his, and he has zillions of friends. Just one good example of Sam's generosity occurred when Nikki and Maria were 16, he arranged for each of them to go on the A.H.E.P.A. trip to Greece, and, later, when our Maria graduated from college, he got her on the Greece trip as a counselor for the younger girls. Even though we do not always agree on politics, Sam and I seem to be getting along better with age and I look forward to many more years of golf and fellowship with my "Koumbaro" Sam.

Cleo Poulos Mulholland, another of Marie's long-time girlfriends, married a pleasant Irishman named John Mulholland. They had one child, a beautiful daughter named Dorie. John was a hale fellow, well-met, with a gregarious demeanor. He was stricken with pancreatic cancer, and, though he had shown no previous proclivity towards religion of any kind, John asked our parish priest to be baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church. And he asked the Priest to call me about being "Koumbaro". The priest called me and suggested that we buy a cross and get there right away because John did not have long to live. We did, and John Mulholland was baptized a Greek Orthodox at age 49.

Both Cleo and John, at different times, told Marie and I that they were convinced that John's embracing of religion at that particular time and his new-found spiritualism produced a miracle remission of his cancer. His life was extended for eight more years!

We are happy that our daughters, Maria and Dorie, decided to extend the "Koumbario" in 1992 when Dorie asked Maria to baptize her baby, Amelia. That makes us "Double Koumbari". It is certainly gratifying to see that the next generation has seen fit to pick up where we have left off with their new "Koumbario"!



Old St. Nick, Marie, Len and Marilou, and our "Koumbari", Alice and Mike Fandos



Sam Nakis, Maria Patrice, Manolaki, and Virginia Nakis (Circa 1975)





Ted Pliakos and his "Nouno"  
Nick - (Circa 1964)



Maria Kontras and her  
"Nouno", Paul Condaxis  
- 1982



"Koumbara"  
Cleo Mulholland, with  
Margo Anastas and Maria  
Kontras - 1992



"Koumbara" Kay Condaxis,  
Dottie Fulton, Tennis  
Pro Evonne Goolagong,  
and Marie Kontras - 1977



Anna Marie Dunlap  
with the Kontras  
Girls - 1980

## Chapter 22 RETURN TO GREECE

Our first trip to Greece was in 1978 with Mike and Alice Fandos. We spent time together in Athens sightseeing as well as on a three day cruise of the Greek Islands. But went seperately to see our relatives and the old homesteads in Crete and Chios. Unfortunately, our first visit was just too short, but it is safe to say that we were impressed with the natural beauty of Greece and the warmth and "philoxenia"[hospitality] of it's people. The lemons certainly were bigger, just as our parents told us!

Our second trip was special, because we went for a month, in September, 1983 and, most importantly, because Demi and Donn accompanied us. We visited an old school-mate of mine, Manoli Yiannakakis, who attended Mizzou with me years earlier. "Al" as we affectionately called him, had made a lot of money in Saudi Arabia. He retired and built a home on the Island of Siros, in the Cyclades. "Al" and Billie, his wife, were our gracious hosts for a week, which included sailing in their 40 foot sloop, island-hopping, and seeing one nude beach after another.

Demi and Donn also went with us to Chios to see the Kontras home in Kardamilla; this time we also had time to go to "Yosona", the Kontras summer home by the sea. Yosona has a beautiful view on the mountainside overlooking the azure Aegean Sea but the property has been neglected over the years, and, sadly, looks quite seedy since the old house collapsed into ruin. We could readily see, however, how pleasant it must have been for our ancestors to take refuge in this idyllic spot. Demi fell in love with Kardamilla and wanted to build a home there someday. Finally, we had to leave. Demi and Donn took off on their own for a week and we did the same. It was one of the best vacations that Marie and I ever had.

Our third trip to Greece was with our good friends, Bess and George Pappas who are loads of fun to travel with. We rented a car and went first to Delphi where George has relatives, and then to Peleponisos where we visited Nauplion, Olympia, and Patras. Occasionally we got lost and confused the natives along the way with our Greek.

By this time we were learning our way around and we knew where to go and where not to go. My sister Jennie was born in Greece, but we were never able to get her and her husband, George Brake, to go while George was still living. After George passed away, Marie, Nikki, and I were finally able to talk Jennie into coming to Greece with us in 1989. It was her first visit back to the land of her birth!

A young Greek attorney who visited us in the States helped make our Athens visit quite special with typical Greek "philoxenia". He and his mother could not do enough for us. They invited us to their summer home on Lagonissi, a beautiful seashore spot just East of Vouliagmeni. Elias was motivated to be nice to us because he liked our daughter, Nikki. I like Elias too; he is athletic and personable, and a man's kind of man. But then again, nobody asked me, right?

The four of us flew to Chios and rented a car for the drive to the "horio" where we stayed in "Kirio" Frank's xenothohio [hotel] on the sea at Marmaron. This is called "Kato" Kardamilla, while "Ano" Kardamilla is a bit further up the mountainside. Both are ancient but beautiful. Jennie was genuinely touched. I think Nikki enjoyed her Aunts' added perspective of years ago when she was growing up there.

Upon our return to the mainland we visited with mothers' cousins; George Giadzikis and George Tsarouchas. We invited the Giadzikis family to dinner at Triantapfilous' restaurant in the Plaka as our guests, and it was nice seeing everyone at one time like that. George Tsarouchas on the other hand, is a nice but stubborn man, and he would have no part of eating out, insisting that we go to his home or nothing at all [philoxenia]. So we went to his home. He had invited his entire clan so that we could see everyone at one time, which was very nice. Jennie particularly enjoyed visiting with Georges' sisters because they had grown up together and reminisced the "olden days".

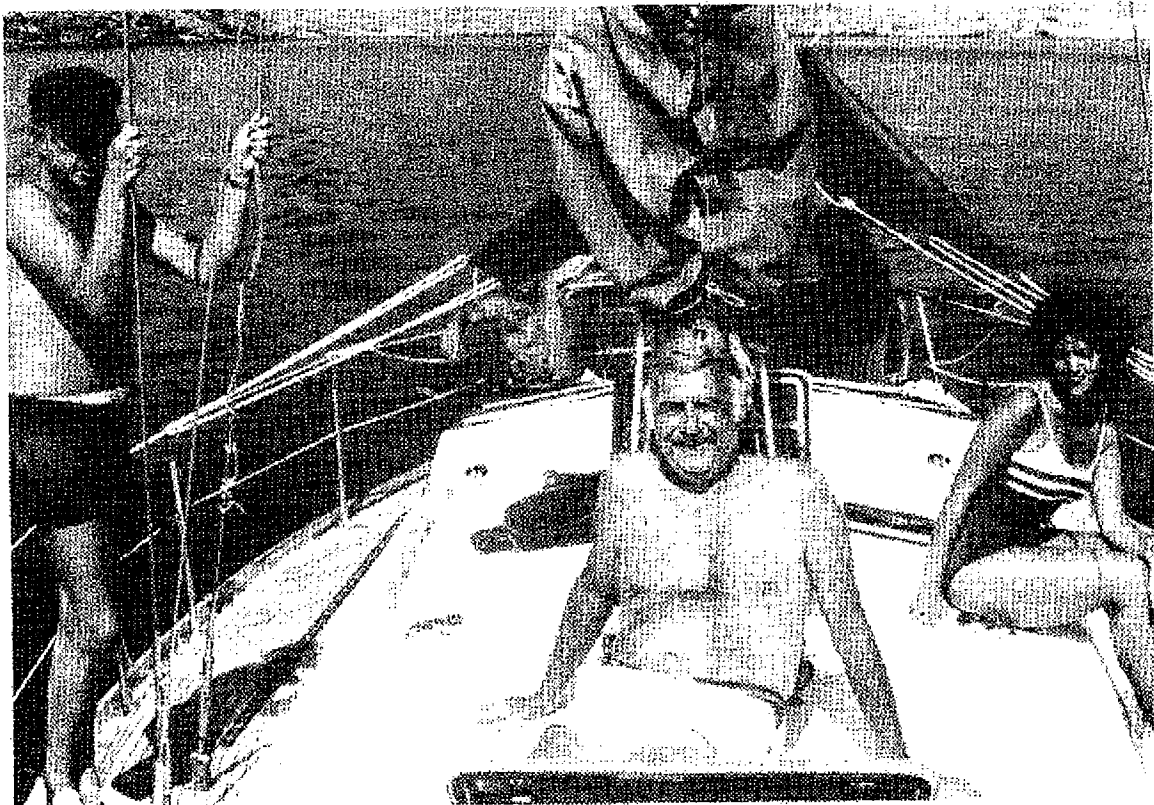
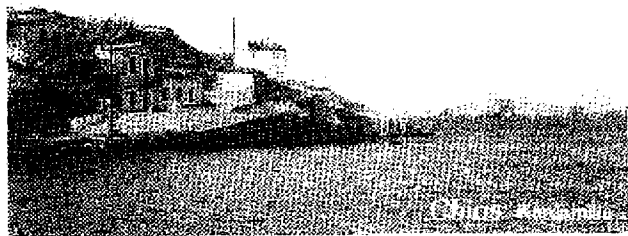
I do think we wore my sister Jennie out but I believe that she really enjoyed the trip. I enjoyed it too because it was quality time spent with my sister that I didn't take the time for previously, and it's too late to take the time for it now.

Marie and I have a special affinity for this beautiful land of our ancestors and we plan to make a return trip in September of 1993. This time we are planning to rent Elias' summer home in Lagonissi in which to headquarter, and plan to invite the girls over and travel to those parts of Greece that we have missed or neglected in our prior trips. Naturally, we plan to return to Chios again and resume our search for more knowledge of our "root's".



Marie Kontras  
at the  
Parthenon  
1977

Chios - 1988



Sailing off the Island of Siros - 1984  
[Panayiotis, Nick, and Demi]



Talking With Some Kardamiletes  
Jennie, Nick, and Marie - 1988



Nikki, Nick, and The Acropolis - 1988

Chapter 23  
PROUD OF OUR HERITAGE/PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN

A big part of this book was written on the patio of our Arizona playhouse during the monsoon season of January and February, 1993. This has become a pleasant interlude each winter for us to rent the home of our good friends, Bob and Reggie Travers, but we couldn't play golf or tennis in the rain, and it rained almost every day. I could think, however, and I could ponder over old memories and old recollections. These are my ponderings.

Another ancient Greek, Heraclitus, once said, "The only thing that is certain is change". Since our parents came to these shores the speed of change has increased ten-fold, and it will certainly increase ten times ten-fold in the lifetime of our young ones. The only thing that will not change is "TO EMA". "TO EMA NERO THEN GEENETE" [Blood is thicker than water]!

You can be sure that Dimitri and Maria Kontras are proud. Proud of their Family Heritage, their children, their grandchildren, and their great grandchildren; and proud as well of the role that they played in bringing their family and their heritage to this great land.

GOD BLESS THEM, AND GOD BLESS AMERICA!

THE END.

FAMILY RECORD

Name: Dimitri and Maria Kontras  
Born: Kardamilla, Greece, 1820  
Children: Stephanis  
          Born 1850, Kardamilla, Greece  
          Died 1915,           "           "  
          Kostas  
          Born 1855,           "           "  
          Died 1902,           "           "

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Name: Kostas and Eugenia Kontras  
Born: Kardamilla, Greece, 1855  
Children: Dimitri  
          Born 1884, Kardamilla, Greece  
          Died 1968, Columbia, Missouri  
          Nicola  
          Born 1887, Kardamilla, Greece  
          Died 1946, Martins Ferry, Ohio  
          Erini  
          Born 1896, Kardamilla, Greece  
          Died 1979, Monessen, Pa.  
          Maria  
          Born 1899, Kardamilla, Greece  
          Died ?  
          Kiriaki  
          Born 1903,           "           "  
          Died 2003

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Name: Dimitri and Maria Kontras  
Born: Kardamilla, Greece, 1884  
Children: Eugenia  
          Born 1912, Kardamilla, Greece  
          Died 1990, Columbia, Missouri  
          Kosta  
          Born 1913, Kardamilla, Greece  
  
          Elias  
          Born 1926, Warren, Ohio  
  
          Nicola  
          Born 1927, Granite City, Ill.