

Third Generation Greek Genocide Survivor Recounts Family Struggles



The following guest piece comes from Norwalk, Connecticut native Mirofora Kalogeridis. She is a first-generation American and third-generation survivor of the Greek Genocide which left hundreds of thousands of Pontians and other Greeks of Turkey dead or displaced between 1913 and 1922. Mirofora currently serves as the president of the Pontian Youth Association of the USA and Canada. Below she shares stories of her relatives who were forced from their homes in the Pontos region along the Black Sea and fled Ottoman oppression to find safety in Greece. The photograph above includes her paternal grandfather Andonis Kalogerides (left) and maternal great-great grandfather Stathis Tsipouridis, a Greek Orthodox monk (right).

The Greek Genocide to me means devastation. I feel pain. I can't imagine the pain and struggle my ancestors endured. From a young age we were taught the struggle the people of Pontos endured. My family history is difficult. Not many people still can find the words to describe the atrocities of their lives and even piece together

how they managed to leave Pontos.

A story I was lucky enough to be told was one from my Yiayia (grandmother), Sophia Koukidis. My grandmother's father, Panagiotis, had a "pandoxion," or an inn/rest stop for animals in Pontos. When troubles arose, he left with his grandfather by boat while his father was drafted by the Turkish army and was forced to become an "andarti," or "guerilla." Unfortunately, we were never able to find out what happened to him.

During the same time, my Great Grandfather Pangiotis' own Papou (grandfather) had passed away while on the boat and was supposed to be thrown overboard. In order to prevent them from throwing his body overboard, they had put my Theia (aunt) Eleni, who was a baby at the time, in his hands to make it seem as if he were still alive. When they finally reached land, they were able to lay his body to rest the proper way before carrying on the journey to Thessaloniki and Ouchena, which is presently known as Kozani.

Another story is one from my mother's side involving my Yiayia Mirofora's grandfather, Stathis. My Yiayia's grandmother had already passed away before troubles arose. But her grandfather Stathi was a priest and while many were running away to the mountains to become "andartes," or "guerillas," he went to the monastery to become a monk.

Papou Stathi left his two daughters to family members to watch them while he was away, but the Turks thought he left to become an "andarti" and so they threatened and beat the family that was left behind. Upon his return he tried to explain that he didn't flee and instead left to become a monk, but it was to no avail as the Turks still beat him.

Eventually the Bishop of the area took Papou Stathi in and protected him as he was very intelligent. My Papou spoke French, was highly knowledgeable in theology and finished school. As time grew rough he hired three boats for his family and others in the village in order to flee and take refuge in Thessaloniki and from there to Aridaia, Nomou Pella, in northern Greece.

I don't quite have the words to express the way I feel when I think about these stories. Are there words to describe an atrocity such as putting a baby in the arms of a deceased family member in order to ensure they get a proper burial? It's heartbreaking to think about especially in times like today. It really starts to put things into perspective. I get chills thinking about it.

Many times when I am out with friends I will get a call from Damian, who is our

Pontian Youth Advisor, or an email that I have to address as president of the youth association. I drop whatever it is I am doing in order to make myself available to calls or emails almost immediately. I feel an obligation to be involved and think it is so important to continue the conversation about what happened to the Greeks in Pontos.

Tripat performance: Panagia Soumela Bermio, Greece

Geplaatst door [Pontian Society "Pontos" of Norwalk](#) op Woensdag 28 augustus 2013

If I can help educate even one person on some of the injustices that our ancestors endured, it would all still be worth it. Keep in mind that this genocide took place just before Hitler did an “ethnic cleansing” of the Jews in Germany/Austria. I think what is most alarming is that this is still happening today. It is quite literally a life or death situation still in 2020! Isn’t that so crazy to think about?

We need to get people talking. We need to start educating others on what is happening outside of our privileged bubbles. Furthermore, people need to be held accountable for their actions. These are the reasons why year after year we commemorate the genocide and lobby to our politicians in D.C. We raise our flag at the Bowling Green and teach the younger generations our history. This is how we ensure that our flame will never burn out!

We will continue to lobby to the politicians in D.C. and continue to raise our flag. Memorials have been placed in our towns and cities and despite COVID-19 making it difficult for us to get together, we have still been active through social media.

Sometimes the people I am with don’t quite understand why I feel so compelled to get involved but it’s my history. It is very much a part of who I am and has shaped me in many ways.

I have been dancing pontiaka from a very young age. My best friends are most of the people I’ve danced with my whole life. They are my second family. We continue

to travel all over, performing and bringing awareness, from school cultural events, to the annual youth festival, church festivals, even as far as going to Greece and performing at Panagia Soumela in Veria, Macedonia!

When we dance it helps bring us closer to culture and our ancestors. I am honored to wear the “stoli,” or “traditional attire.” Most importantly it is a way I feel I can connect with my father who passed away when I was 8. He was very much involved with the “Pontiako” and I like to think he would be proud of the way I continued his legacy and share our history with the people in my life today.

My father had such a passion for the “Pontiako.” He helped in finding the location for our “syllogo” (society) which is still the same after so many years today. He was there step by step from the beginning with my godfather and many others in our Norwalk community.

On his tombstone, there is a saying that says “I Rumania ki an perasen, anthei kai ferei ki allo,” which in English means “Even though Rumania has passed away, it will flower and bear again.” In this case, “Rumania” doesn’t refer to the country, but rather to the fallen Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire, of which Pontos was a part.

That is what keeps me fighting.

pappaspost.com