A scenic view of a village with red-tiled roofs nestled at the base of a large, forested mountain. The village is built on a hillside, and the houses are densely packed. The mountain in the background is covered in lush green forest. The sky is clear and blue.

# *Faded Memories*

*Life and Times of  
a Macedonian Villager*

**The COVER PAGE is a photograph of Lerin, the main township near the villages in which many of my family ancestors lived and regularly visited.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is essentially an autobiography of the life and times of my father, John Christos Vellios, *Jovan Risto Numeff*. It records his recollections, the faded memories, passed down over the years, about his family ancestors and the times in which they lived.

My father personally knew many of the people whom he introduces to his readers and was aware of more distant ancestors from listening to the stories passed on about them over the succeeding generations. His story therefore reinforces the integrity of oral history which has been used since ancient times, by various cultures, to recall the past in the absence of written, documentary evidence.

This publication honours the memory of my father's family ancestors and more generally acknowledges the resilience of the Macedonian people, who destined to live, seemingly forever under foreign subjugation, refused to deny their heritage in the face of intense political oppression and on-going cultural discrimination.

This account of life and times of a Macedonian villager would not have been possible without the support and well-wishes of members of his family and friends whose own recollections have enriched my father's narrative.

I convey my deepest gratitude for the contributions my father's brothers, my uncles Sam, Norm and Steve and to his nephew Phillip (dec), who so enthusiastically supported the publication of my father's story and contributed on behalf of my father's eldest brother Tom (dec) and his family. I also extended my most sincere thanks to my father's relatives Jim Vellios (dec), Chris Vellios, John Kitin and Vick Velios for their assistance. Special mention also needs to be made of Victor Bivell, of Pollitecon Publications, for kindly reading and editing the final draft and making many invaluable observations.

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Jim Vellios  
2014

*“Everything  
beneath the sky will  
perish, even the tallest  
mountain.  
Nothing will survive  
but the written word.”*

***A quote attributed to  
Marcus Tullius Cicero,  
Ancient Roman lawyer,  
senator, consul and man  
of letters.***

*Bear in mind that  
the knowledge you have  
and your life’s experiences have been  
largely passed into your hands by  
past generations,  
receive it, honour it, add  
to it and then faithfully pass it onto your  
own children.”*

***Adapted from the  
wisdom of Albert Einstein***



***The Macedonian village of Krepeshina. It was the home of many of my family ancestors and the birthplace of my father and mother.***

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*My ancestors lived simple, introspective lives. They knew little of the world beyond their villages and townships. Their resilience and common sense approach to life was founded on the “wisdom of the ages” and grounded upon strong family values.*

**Chapter 9: He Who Must be Obeyed**

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*Traditional Macedonian society was highly patriarchal. My grandfather was our undisputed family decision-maker, to be obeyed at all times and in all things.*

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*During his first venture to Western Australia, in 1926, my father worked as a sleeper cutter in the towering forests of Western Australia’s South-West.*

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*In 1936 my father embarked upon a second sojourn to Western Australia. In his absence and with the onset of the Second World War we were exiled from our family home by my grandfather and forced to live on our own with my mother having to assume the role of family matriarch during the difficult time of German occupation.*

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*In early 1951 my mother and I boarded a Yugoslav-owned passenger liner destined for the port of Fremantle to be reunited with my father and brothers. On our arrival we travelled to Manjimup, a small, rural township where my father was working on several tobacco plantations.*

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## Introduction

*My father, Jovan Numeff, John Vellios, had just attended the burial of a life-long friend, who had been laid to rest according to the long-standing traditions of the Orthodox faith, in a section of Karrakatta Cemetery designated by the Cemetery Board as the final resting place for Australian Macedonians of the Orthodox faith living in Perth. After he had offered his condolences to grieving family members, with the customary solemn shaking of hands and uttering in a low voice, "Bog da go prosti", may God forgive him and accept him into heaven, he walked slowly, alone, among the resting places of the dead, tightly clutching a bunch of "trendafili", roses, which he had picked from his garden that morning. The warming rays of a "prolet sntse", spring-time sun, embraced him as he entered into a state of melancholy, oblivious to the world of the living and ambling inquisitively among rows of gravesites with their inscribed tombstones, stopping only occasionally to read the inscriptions and to look upon the photographs of the departed. He had known many of them, grown up with them in the country of his birth and later, he had shared their lives, hopes and aspirations in his adopted homeland. He felt such an affinity with them, so many fond, endearing but faded memories. They were his "selksi", his kinfolk, friends and neighbours and they, like him, had been born and raised in "stari kraji", distant Macedonian villages and townships.*

*He paused at one of the grey, slightly weather-worn graves and removed the shrivelled flowers that he had placed atop his wife's final resting place some weeks before. Bending over on increasingly unsteady legs, he replaced them with the "tufka", bunch, of fresh flowers he had been carrying. He stood awhile to look upon the photograph of his wife, at her half-smiling, kind and gentle face and then shuffled to the back of the headstone, where kneeling down, slowly lit a candle to his wife's memory and manoeuvred it gently into a specially designed metal box which was adorned with a small cross. This time, the candle did not fall over as it sometimes did, but flickered, and then shone brightly. Letta died on 12 September 1977. She was only forty-four years old.*

*Nostalgic thoughts streamed uninvited into my father's consciousness and it occurred to him that the generation of his parents were all but gone and that many of his own contemporaries had also passed on. He had adopted the habit of reading the daily newspaper, very early each morning, by beginning with the death notices, invariably finding a new entry of someone that he had known. He would often begin his conversations by talking about another friend or acquaintance who had recently passed. Sad, fatalistic thoughts overtook him and lingered. He still cherished life dearly and hoped for a number of healthy years ahead but he knew that soon there would be few of his generation left to tell their life "prikasna", story. The story that my father tells about his "famelija", family, is one of simple, hardworking people, battlers against the odds, who endured and ultimately prevailed in the face of*

*poverty, injustice and foreign occupation and oppression. It is a story of good and bad times, of triumph and tragedy.*

*His narrative is not based on surviving official documents such as birth, marriage, christening or death certificates, since these were rare in a society where few could read or write and where very little was recorded. This potted history of my father's family therefore relies heavily on oral evidence, his own personal experiences and on his faded memories of individuals and events that had been passed on by word of mouth through the generations.*

*While my father does not vouch for the accuracy of every detail contained within his narrative there is no deliberate attempt to misinform or deceive. However, he makes no apology that his account of individuals, groups and events is unashamedly presented from his own perspective.*

*My father's family tree has grown considerably over the passing years and today many more new branches and leaves hang from it. It was his sincere hope that members of his immediate and extended family might take the time to read his story and in doing so learn more about their family ancestry. He wanted to remind them that they are the sum of all of those who have gone before. He would want succeeding and future generations of his family to know that they have a cultural heritage of which they can be proud even though they might come across a host of strange customs, archaic views and fail to discover any prominent historical figures or widely acclaimed identities on the branches and leaves of their family tree. Despite this, he was convinced that family members, young and old, would encounter ancestors who were good, honest, hard-working, optimistic people who went about their daily lives, generation after generation, in hopeful anticipation that each new day might be better than the one that had preceded it. That they will be acquainted with forebears who, through enormous adversity, got on with their daily lives and who did the best they could with what little they had.*

*My father's story is a celebration of the resolve of ordinary people, who were too frequently immersed, unknowingly and unwillingly, into the midst of significant world events and generally treated with indifference but who survived with their spirits undaunted and their dignity undiminished.*

## Prologue

*Friday afternoons, almost without exception, my father would arrive at my home, just before three o'clock, sit himself in the corner of the family room sofa, adjust his cap, one of many that he possessed, invariably a birthday or fathers' day present, and "po nashi", in his native Macedonian tongue, ask whether we would be doing any writing that day.*

*After I had collected a note book and pen, he would sit upright and rigid as if composing himself for a serious interrogation and ask what it was that I wanted to know. During our initial conversations, he would talk in generalities, glossing over within a few moments, interesting details of the lives of family members and important events in his family's story. I would have to stop him, often with a slightly raised voice, tinged by frustration, exasperation rather than anger and insist that he elaborate. He would have to be constantly reminded that it was the little things, that appeared so trivial to him, that would be of most interest and offered the most important glimpses into the past. I frequently had to convince him that his readers would want to gain insights into everyday events, lifestyles and the way those from the past thought, felt and acted. After a time he was more forthcoming despite frequent periods of prolonged silence when he would have to be prompted. On such occasions, my father would use his standard retort, that he was getting older and more forgetful and that we had better hurry up and complete the task of writing the story of his family before he lost his memory or he was dead.*

*Later, when I had moved to a home a mere kilometre or so from his own and which was situated along the path which he walked daily, early in the morning and during the late afternoon, he would drop by to re-enact the same, well-established, routine. I would often arrive from work to find him seated on the wooden bench under the shaded front veranda or on his hands and knees removing weeds from the front lawn and garden beds or cutting down a branch of one of the Cocos palms that he disliked so much. The fact that my wife and I thought that the towering, impressive-looking palms gave our garden something of a tropical feel did not seem to matter to him.*

*These were priceless moments spent between a father and son and I will cherish them forever. I came to admire my father, his generation and other generations past, even more. Unlike myself and many of my contemporaries they had known poverty, lived with illiteracy, experienced the absence of even basic medical facilities and had endured long separations from their families while working in far-off lands. My father's family ancestors lived in a land where for centuries they did not cross any borders but many borders crossed through their lives and subjected them to foreign occupation, oppression and the horrors of war. Many "selski", the people of Macedonian villagers, such as my father, had been compelled to dig deep into their souls and find within them the courage and resolve to leave behind their beloved homeland, to uproot their families and to venture thousands of kilometres to rebuild*

*their lives abroad. That they prospered in communities with cultures, languages and values so foreign to them is testament to their strength of character. This is a story about family and I am reminded of Mark Twain's observation that he thought his forefathers were amazing and that as he grew older the even more amazing he realised that they really were.*

#### **Footnotes:**

*In this account of my father's family history there are a large number of Macedonian and Turkish words and phrases. Not surprisingly, after over five hundred years of Ottoman rule, some four to five thousand Turkish words crept into the Macedonian language as spoken by my father's ancestors. The language of Macedonia's Ottoman occupiers had Arabic and Persian roots but was somewhat removed from that spoken in the Sultan's court, they were said to speak "kaba turkce", common Turkish, which forms the basis of the modern Turkish language.*

*The jazik, language, of our Macedonian ancestors, po nashi, has been passed on through the generations and is largely unadulterated by modernity. It is an ancient and beautiful language where words and phrases convey a myriad of ideas and human emotions. For example, the word, "selski", which is frequently used in the story of my father's family refers superficially to fellow villagers but it means so much more. The word conveys strong bonds of kinship, long-established family ties and friendships and caring and respect for one another. One word but so rich in meaning and steeped in a long history of shared experiences and emotions. It is truly said that when a language dies that there is only silence and that a whole library of knowledge and experiences is lost.*

*A major issue in including Macedonian words and phrases is how to spell these in English. In my father's narrative words and phrases, are spelt phonetically, as they sound, but in many cases different spellings can be used.*

## Chapter 1: ... so the story goes...

*The earliest known members of my family tree were called Petrevski. They lived in a small rural village near the town of Prelip, which is located within the borders of what is now the Republic of Macedonia. Since no documented evidence exists we only know of them through the oral accounts that were passed on by successive generations of my family ancestors.*

*In traditional Macedonian society rarely were births, christenings, marriages or deaths recorded. Macedonian villagers and townsfolk were generally illiterate since there were few opportunities for them to attend school. They lived under foreign occupation and through numerous wars and upheavals in which any written documents, that might have existed, were lost. Many of their cemeteries, where tombstone inscriptions might have provided clues as to family relationships, have been destroyed.*

*Their concept of time was aligned to the changing of the seasons which dictated when to plough, plant and harvest their crops and pasture and tend to the livestock. Few knew in which month or even year they were born, christened, married or family members had passed. Nevertheless, everyone was expected to know how they were related to others in a society where everyone knew their place and where one's identity was intrinsically linked to one's family.*

*The story goes ... that the earliest known member of my family tree, Petre Petrevski, then a young teenager, left his overcrowded home, in which a large extended family of several generations lived, to become an apprentice to a maternal uncle who operated a popular blacksmith shop in Prelip. Falsely accused of murdering a distinguished Ottoman official, Petre Petrevski became a fugitive and fled to seek sanctuary in the mountainous, largely inaccessible, village of Bapchor inhabited by villagers who were proudly Macedonian and possessed an independent spirit.*

*Petre Petrevski fashioned a new life in his adopted village, married a local girl and through hard work and employing his skills as a blacksmith, prospered. His only son Vello would become a villager of some standing within the community where he married and had four sons. My family ancestors would subsequently adopt the name Velliovi, the descendants of Dedo Vello.*

## Chapter 1: ... So the Story Goes ...

The earliest known ancestor *sho e spomenat*, who is remembered and spoken about, on my family tree was a *kovach*, blacksmith, from *Prelip*, a *grad*, township, of some six thousand inhabitants now located within the borders of the Republic of Macedonia. He would subsequently make his home in the mountainous, independently-minded and highly patriotic Macedonian village of *Bapchor*. It was said that *Petre Petsevski*, liked to reminisce about his childhood and to tell the story of how he had come to leave behind the small rural village of his birth and journey to *Prelip* where he became an apprentice *smitter* of metals, a blacksmith. Apparently, *Petre* had been a restless youth to whom the mundane routine of peasant life, growing crops on scattered strips of arable land and raising and pasturing small herds sheep and goats, an everyday existence dictated by the comings and goings of the seasons, held little attraction. He was a head-strong youngster who wanted to see something of the *sfeto*, world, beyond his village. He would recount how he constantly badgered his father to allow him to *ostaj*, depart, the family home. "*Tatko*, father, he would say," there is no need for me to stay in the village, our family home is overcrowded, there is no room for all of us," and then add "our family finds it *teshko*, difficult, to produce enough *jadenje*, food, to feed ourselves even during the good seasons when the crops are bountiful and our sheep and goats multiply." His father did not want his youngest son to leave home since it was the duty of every Macedonian family patriarch to ensure that all members of the extended family were adequately sheltered, clothed and fed. It was a matter of obligation and personal honour. However, his father's reservations did not deter *Petre*, who knew that there would come a time when he would receive his father's *blosoj*, blessing, to pursue a life beyond the village.

*Petre* would recall one particular spring when the thick layers of winter snow had begun to melt from the fields and the rooftops of the village homes and the sun once more peeked through less dark and murky skies. His older brother *Kole's* wife, *Menka*, was showing the first signs of pregnancy. The *bebe*, baby, would be the couple's second child and yet another mouth for the family to feed. During one *vecher*, evening, on his way home from pasturing the family's small herd of sheep and goats, along the rolling hillocks located to the east of the village, *Petre* noticed a *chuden choek*, stranger, talking with his father at the front door of the family home. Peering into the gathering gloomy darkness, *Petre* saw his father beckoning to him to come and meet the family's visitor. As he came closer, he saw a muscular, middle-age man sporting a well-groomed, luxuriant, upward-curving moustache. His father introduced the stranger as his mother's first cousin, a blacksmith, from the nearby township of *Prelip*. His father then explained that *Vuicho Ylo* had come to ask whether *Petre* would like to be his apprentice.

### Footnotes:

The term "*Vuicho*" or "*Vujko*" traditionally refers to the brother of one's mother. However, it was often used by young family members to show respect when addressing older male members from the maternal side of their family.

He subsequently learned, that his uncle was a widower whose wife had died during an outbreak of the plague in *Prelip* and that he had no sons and that his only daughter had recently married and was living with her husband's family in a neighbouring village. *Petre's* time had finally arrived and he could now embark on a new life so different to the one he had experienced during his first thirteen years. *Vuicho Ylo's* home and workshop was located in one of several, narrow alleyways that stretched out from *Prelip's* town square and *charshiya*, marketplace. This would be *Petre's* new home. *Petre* had seen *Turcii*, Turks, going about their daily lives in his small rural *selo*, village, and *pametfaj*, remembered, how small groups of Macedonia's Muslim overlords would arrive several times a year, invariably on horseback and with a number of open carts pulled by horses or donkeys. They came to collect the taxes imposed by the Ottoman Empire on the *raya* or *giaur*, the Sultan's non-Muslim subjects. Christians who agreed to convert to Islam were exempt from such taxes but voluntary religious conversions were rare. On these occasions, villagers would carry sacks of grain, fruit, and vegetables and herd a number of sheep and goats into the village square. This was their tribute which was to be collected and taken to the storehouses of the local *bey*, a Turkish community official, responsible for administering the surrounding district, one of several within a *pashaluk*, an area ruled over by a *pasha*, a high ranking Ottoman official, typically a distinguished former military commander whose rank and status had been bestowed upon him by the Sultan in far off Constantinople.

There were many Turkish families living in *Prelip* and *Petre* soon learned that most of them had come to reside in the township from Turkish nomadic communities living in Asia Minor. They had been relocated to conquered territories as a means of increasing the number of local inhabitants who could be called upon to defend the authority of the Sultan in the event of any local insurrection or disturbance. This was a popular strategy, used over the centuries, as a way of consolidating control over conquered territories. The Romans, for example, adopted the policy of granting land to veteran legionaries who had completed the traditional twenty five years of military service, in regions which had been absorbed within the Empire, primarily to safeguard against local uprisings. The presence of Turkish settlers was also a useful way of repopulating and stimulating the economy of largely deserted regions where large numbers of the indigenous inhabitants had fled in the face of the Sultan's advancing forces. The Turkish inhabitants of *Prelip* were *Vuicho* ventured to the township since they were too occupied working their fields and because they had little or no money to spend or surplus produce to sell. The Turkish authorities also discouraged their conquered subjects from trading in the marketplaces of townships by imposing a substantial *trosarina*, fee, that had to be paid by non-Muslims wanting to sell or barter goods there.

#### Footnotes:

*The Turkish word "giaur" referred to non-believers, infidels, in Ottoman times it was often used to describe the Sultan's Christian subjects.*

*Petre's* new home was a two-storey building with white-rendered stone walls. It consisted of a well-equipped blacksmith shop on the ground floor which had a narrow internal, wooden staircase leading to sparsely furnished living and sleeping quarters on the upper floor. Nearby, in the town square, there were several *dukjani*, shops. A busy *furna*, bakery, selling *l'ep*, bread, and assorted pastries, attracted a constant stream of customers, drawn by the alluring smell of freshly-baked bread and *mantı* and *burek*, triangles of baked, brown, flaky pastries filled with meat, onion, leek and a variety of vegetables: *patlicani*, eggplant, *tıkva*, pumpkin and *espanak*, spinach. *Petre* recalled how each day he would buy freshly baked, round, *simit* loaves which he and his uncle preferred to the more traditional *pide*, flat bread, daily. Next door was a *misir carsisi*, spice bazaar, selling dried parsley, thyme, cumin, oregano, mint, paprika, pepper, salt and a variety of other spices, displayed in large, open bags scattered upon the shop floor. Alongside was a butcher's shop selling cuts of *teleshko meso*, baby beef, veal, lamb and chicken but not *bisko meso*, pork, which the Ottoman Turks, as Sunni Muslims, regarded its consumption as sinful.

"Keep the air flowing steadily", *Petre*, his uncle would shout, "more air...less air now," he would urge as he worked the ever-more malleable, red-orange metal in the charcoal fuelled forge of his smithy. At regular intervals, he would extract the ash-encrusted metal and hold it securely with large metal tongs as he hammered it into shape upon a large anvil before reuniting it once again with the flames. And so it would continue. It was thirsty work and beads of *pot*, sweat, would run down the faces of both men as they worked expertly as one. *Petre* soon found that he had a talent for making metal tools and equipment: axes, stirrups, plough points, hoes and shovels. He often mused that he could not have hoped for a better mentor. His uncle, too, was proud of his apprentice whom he came to regard as the son that he never had.

*Vuicho Ylo* was widely respected for his common sense and being *sposoven*, capable and trustworthy. His friends and customers regarded him as a highly skilful craftsman, who was honest and hospitable. Among his regular customers, besides the Turks, whose language he had learned to speak, were Jewish merchants and artisans who had settled in Macedonia after fleeing from the uncompromising Catholic Inquisition in Spain and Portugal during the fifteenth century and later from Jewish communities who had been displaced by rampart, fanatical anti semitism and religious pogroms conducted in a number of European nations.

#### Footnotes:

*The majority of Jewish families who immigrated to Macedonia settled in Solun and there was also a large Jewish community in Skopje. It was not uncommon to find Jewish quarters, distinguished by walled settlements, impressive looking synagogues and Hebrew schools, in other more populous Macedonian townships such as Bitola, Kostur and Strumica. By the sixteenth century it has been estimated that some three thousand Jewish families resided in Solun.*

*Among other popular traditional Macedonian pastries were, zelnik, filled with vegetables and onions or leeks, vialnik, spiral pastries coated with sugar or honey and ml'chnik, pastries made with egg and milk.*

Among *Vuicho Ylo's* customers were *Tsintsars*, a group claiming an ancient Thracian heritage and who spoke a distinct language of their own but who over time came to converse in Macedonian. They were widely disliked. Even the Turkish authorities often accused them of undermining them behind their backs while being respectful and subservient to their faces as a way of obtaining commercial privileges which they used to accumulate wealth and influence. They were regarded as excessively materialistic, shrewd business people, who too often displayed an air of cultural superiority in their dealings with others. In sharp contrast to the overwhelming majority of Macedonians, *Tsintsar* families would frequently *otkazi*, denounce, their religious beliefs, and convert to Islam as a way of promoting their business prospects and more importantly avoiding paying the Sultan's taxes. It was not uncommon for *Tsintsar* families to cynically *naredi*, arrange, that one or more family members convert to Islam to *odbega*, avoid, the entire family paying the tribute imposed on non-Muslims throughout the Ottoman Empire. Subjugated people occasionally converted to Islam out of fear, threat and intimidation and to most Macedonians this was somewhat understandable but there was general distain for those who adopted the Islamic faith primarily out of greed or as a way of securing financial benefit or positions of authority. However, despite such brewing ethnic tensions, all nationalities and religious faiths were equally welcome and offered hospitality at *Vuicho Ylo's* busy blacksmith shop.

*Petre*, with tears welling in his eyes, would recall the day that *novini*, news, spread throughout *Prelip* that *Halil Pasha* would be visiting the township. *Halil Pasha* had been a prominent Ottoman military commander, who was decorated, in Constantinople's *Topkapi Palace*, by the Sultan himself. In recognition of his elite standing and seniority, his military standard proudly displayed not one, not two but three yak hairs, indicating that he was a member of the elite order of Ottoman *pashas*. The visit generated great excitement and anticipation among *Prelip's* Turkish community which was determined to stage a rousing reception for the visiting war hero and newly-appointed governor of the surrounding *pashalik or vilayet*, provincial district, that included Bitola, Drama, Voden, Veles, Kostur and Kichevo. It was to be a day of feasting, drinking and celebration.

*Halil Pasha* rode into *Prelip* astride a magnificent white stallion. The new provincial governor, a man of about fifty years of age, sat tall and regal upon an ornate saddle. He was accompanied by three officers on horseback and a company of some thirty *askeri*, infantry soldiers. No prominent Ottoman official ever travelled through the occupied territories without a military escort since it was not uncommon for groups of disgruntled subjects, protesting the rape of a daughter, the kidnapping of a young child, forced conversions to the Islamic faith or seeking vengeance for beatings, murders and hangings or the burning down and looting of Christian churches and homes, to turn violently upon the Sultan's provincial representatives. The Turkish authorities were therefore acutely wary of *zulum*, public disorder, or *vastanje*, open rebellion.

Particularly concerning to Ottoman officials was the growing number of unruly gangs, often referred to as *haidjuks*. These were armed guerrilla bands, predominantly consisting of young men, who had fled their native villages and townships and established well-concealed, remote mountain and forest hideouts, *vo pustiniti*, in the wilderness. Such rebel gangs would regularly venture from their largely inaccessible hide-outs to harass Turkish merchants, rob trading caravans, raid Turkish communities and even attack small Ottoman military outposts. They regarded themselves as the defenders of the subjugated, *Risiani*, Christian population, against Turkish repression. Each *haidjuk* band had its collaborators, generally devoted family members and friends in the villages and townships, who would offer sanctuary, supply food and other provisions, delivered under the cover of darkness and provide information about the comings and goings of local Turkish troops and patrols.

At the rear of *Halil Pasha's* retinue, stumbling upon unsteady legs, was a badly beaten prisoner, a Macedonian, as indicated by his clothing. His hands were *stegnato*, tightly bound, and an *ortoma*, rope, was tied round his mid-drift. He was being forcibly tugged forward by one of the *Pasha's* soldiers into *Prelip's* town square. Despite his obvious pain, his eyes full of defiance, looked straight ahead and displayed no hint of fear. The *haidjuk* code demanded that he show no discomfort even when subjected to unspeakable acts of physical abuse. He had taken an oath to accept that his ultimate fate was God's will and that on his death that he would be just one more martyr to the cause of liberty and justice. Like his comrades, he was a devout Christian, who prayed regularly throughout the day and strictly fasted during the religious times of the year. There were no cries of pain, no tears, no begging for mercy but only a constant stream of shouted verbal insults directed against the Sultan and his appointed officials. There would be no trial in front of a *qadi*, Turkish judge, he would be publicly decapitated, impaled onto a wooden stake or burnt to death, as a warning to others who dared to rise up against Ottoman rule.

*Halil Pasha* dressed in flowing robes rode erect in the saddle, while acknowledging the acclamation of a predominantly Turkish crowd, with a slight nod of his head upon which rested a golden turban and with a slow opening and closing of the palms of his hands. On reaching the town square he and his officers dismounted. The newly appointed governor then stood before the crowd, an impressive and authoritative figure and declared to all in a clear, resonant voice that his prisoner was a murderer who had shown disrespect for the rule of law, insulted the Sultan and Almighty Allah and would be executed. Almost immediately, the *haidjuk* was pushed face down upon the worn cobble stones of the town square, his head was firmly held down and a rope was tied round each of his legs which had been stretched apart. Two of the soldiers knelt on his back to keep him from moving as one of the *Pasha's* men began impaling the victim with a long, sharpened *kol*, stake, which he hammered through his anus with a wooden mallet until it had penetrated his body and protruded between his head and shoulders. At that moment, a shot was heard coming from the direction of *Vuicho Ylo's* shop. *Halil Pasha* swayed, put his hands to his head and fell with a thud to the ground, blood streaming from a wound caused by a

single *kurshum*, bullet, that had entered through his right temple. Pandemonium spread quickly among the assembled crowd and people fled in all directions away from the exposed town square to seek shelter in the adjoining buildings. The military escort that had accompanied the provincial governor surrounded his blood-stained body to shield him from inquisitive onlookers and wrapped cloth, torn from one of his officer's tunic, round his head in the hope of stopping the blood which was flowing steadily from the fatal wound. Their efforts were to no avail, *Halil Pasha* was dead.

Concern for their commanding officer soon gave way to the task of finding the assassin as a deep-seated blood-lust surged within every member of the *Pasha's* retinue. The *haiduk* laying nearby, was heard to mutter, "death to tyranny, long live freedom" before he slipped once more into unconsciousness. On hearing this defiant outcry, two of the *Pasha's* men hammered the foot of the stake, on which they had impaled their prisoner's body, firmly upright into the ground and left their captive to die a slow, agonising death. Then, accompanied by a number of *Prelip's* leading Turkish citizens, the *Pasha's* men started to track down the murderer by systematically combing the alleyways, homes and shops that surrounded the town square.

*Vuicho Ylo* and *Petre* had not joined the crowd that had gathered to greet and pay homage to *Halil Pasha*. *Petre's* uncle had decided that this would be a good opportunity to *zatfoli*, shut, the blacksmith shop and visit to young *Petre's* family and spend the day in their company. *Petre's* parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters-in-law and nephews and nieces had greeted them warmly and were eager to ask *Petre* about his new life. Other villagers also came to the family home to see the return of the prodigal son, to join in the conversation and to enjoy the hospitality. *Petre* and his uncle departed *pos'le*, after, prolonged and tearful goodbyes and the promise that they would visit again in the near future. Little did *Petre* know that this would be the last time that he would see his *rodno mesto*, his birthplace, and the members of his immediate family.

As they *sevrni*, walked back, to *Prelip* along a network of rough dirt tracks, there was little said between them but both men felt a gathering unease. The *temnitsa*, darkness, was closing in and there was a *losha bura*, violent storm, brewing, initially announced by the distant rumbling of thunder and the occasional flash of *rofia*, lightning, that illuminated the night sky. The wind gusts became stronger and were followed by a torrential downpour. The two men wrapped their overcoats tightly round their bodies and began to trudge more quickly through the gathering puddles of water and slush. As they approached the smithy they felt that things were *ne tokmu*, not as they should have been. A number of the logs that *Petre* had *posechi*, cut, and *sobra*, collected, to fuel the forge and which he had stacked so neatly, layer upon layer, were now lying scattered at foot of the woodpile. *Petre* also noticed that the door of the smithy, which he clearly remembered shutting securely on their departure, was now slightly ajar.

## Footnotes:

*Haidjuks were armed rebels or freedom fighters depending on one's viewpoint. They belonged to a movement referred to as "ajdutstvo" and typically operated in groups of twenty to thirty members but bands could consist of as many as three hundred fighters. Each group had a vojvoda, leader, and they regularly raided the estates of leading Turkish identities and local tax collectors, robbed trade caravans and murdered those who they believed exploited Christians, even corrupt Orthodox priests. They were fearless and known to attack large townships, well-garrisoned Ottoman administrative and commercial centres and the major trade routes of the Ottoman Empire. Their motto was, slaboda ili smirt, freedom or death.*

*Many haidjuk recruits had been forced to flee their villages when their landholdings, generally the more fertile fields of lowlands, were seized by Turkish settlers who claimed them as their own chifliks, inherited fields. Such requisitioning of land, sanctioned by the Sultan, meant that the previous Macedonians owners were either left to till only the most marginal, infertile fields, relocate to the remote villages of the mountains where it was far more difficult for the Ottoman authorities to oppress them or to take up arms, join rebel bands and fight back.*

*Haidjuks, also spelt, ajduts or khaiduts, would occasionally enlist into the armies of countries that were often at war with the Ottomans, most notably Russia and Austro-Hungary. Some even immigrated to these countries to continue to fight against the Ottomans from a foreign base.*

Exhausted, *vodeni*, soaking wet, bemused by the disturbed woodpile and slightly open front door, *Petre* and his uncle, entered the smithy and slowly climbed the narrow, wooden staircase by feeling their way through the darkness, before taking off their mud-splatted shoes and soaked overcoats and flopping onto their straw-filled mattresses, which lay side by side, on the bare floor. They quickly succumbed to a deep sleep while outside the *dosh*, rain, and *veter*, wind, continued. This was clearly no normal storm but the harbinger of great tragedy and *zhalost*, sorrow.

Loud banging on the front door of the blacksmith shop had originally failed to wake the two men sleeping inside. However, as the pounding grew louder and more frequent, *Petre*, stirred, lit a *svekja*, candle, and gingerly walked down the stairs to see who had come calling so late during the *noshja*, night, and in such foul weather. *Petre*, reached the front door and began to open it but before he could fully do so, he found himself stumbling backward onto the floor as a result of being shoved in the chest with some force by several men who had come rushing inside. The uninvited visitors glared at *Petre*, clearly they had not come as guests seeking sanctuary from the rain and wind but as passionate avengers of a heinous wrong-doing. Among the Turkish officers and soldiers there were some Turks and Tsinstars whom *Petre* did not know personally but recognised as citizens of *Prelip*.

Rising from the floor, *Petre* addressed one of men, who appeared, from his fine clothing and authoritative demeanour, to be the leader of the intruders. "What is the matter *affendi, friend?*" *Petre* had asked. "Why are you here at this late hour and in such a rage?" The Turk, *ne odgovori*, did not answer, immediately but looked around slowly. "Is that your musket there near the forge *raya?*" he asked, in fluent Macedonian. *Petre* replied that he did not possess a firearm of any sort and that he had not seen the *puska*, rifle, before. "Is there anyone else in the house?" the officer asked. Just at the moment, *Vuicho Ylo* appeared at the top of the stairway surprised to see so many unfamiliar faces in his smithy. Before he could utter any comment or voice a protest, the officer gestured to two of his soldiers to go and search upstairs. They rushed past *Petre's* stunned uncle and shortly after reported that they had found traces of black powder on the upstairs window sill and a number *kurshumi*, bullets, round metal balls wrapped in cloth, on the floor nearby. They also located the ramrod of a musket, one which fitted perfectly into the underside of the barrel of the weapon found downstairs.

Within a moments, *Vuicho Ylo* and *Petre* were firmly restrained. "*Kerata*, villains, shame on you", the officer screamed at them. "You are both under arrest for the murder of *Halil Pasha* and may Allah be your judge." He then continued, "you will be taken to the local *aps*, jail house, and then stand trial for your murderous crime". Stunned, neither of the two men protested or struggled as they were bundled into the darkness and into the teeth of the menacing storm. No one spoke as they were marched in the direction of *Prelip's* jail, a small building with several cells, where criminals and political prisoners were held before trial or execution. That is when *Petre* had tripped, stumbled and fell over something that was laying in his path.

Unbeknown to him it was the body of the *haidjuk* who had been so cruelly impaled during the day. The stake upon which he had been hoisted upright had been blown over by the violent wind gusts. *Petre* who heard incomprehensible murmurings, moans, laboured breathing next to him, panicked, got to his feet and begun running. There was no looking back. Fortunately the darkness served to disorientate his pursuers who had little chance of preventing his escape. This was the story that *Dedo Petre* told his wife, son and fellow villagers about how he had *sezaseli*, came to settle in *Bapchor*, a mountainous, fiercely independent village, where few Turks dared to venture and where *Petre* knew that he would be safely out of the reach of the Turkish authorities. This is where my father's family history, as recounted over the generations, began. There are no recollections, faded memories, of family ancestors before *Dedo Petre*.

Several months after he had settled in *Bapchor* news reached the village of *Vuicho Ylo's* fate. *Petre* wept when told that his much-loved uncle and mentor had been cruelly tortured in jail and then decapitated. He had been a peace-loving man unjustly forced to endure a violent death *so ches*, with dignity, and so became yet another Macedonian martyr under *pusto tursko*, the years of demoralising Turkish occupation. *Petre* bemoaned the fact that his own *pobegani*, escape, had only strengthened the case *protif*, against, his uncle. *Dedo Petre* was now a fugitive with little hope of proving his innocence or returning home to resume his former way of life.

It was not long before the twenty year old *Petre*, who had wanted so much to leave behind the life of a villager was working as an *argut*, agricultural labourer, toiling daily in the fields of his new neighbours and helping to pasture and milk their herds of sheep and goats. The young man, with no money and few prospects, was able to acquire sleeping quarters within the *auro*, stable, of one of the villagers and as time passed *Petre* became a *Bapchorets*, a respected member of his adopted village. He was hard-working and friendly and his skills as a blacksmith helped to enhance his standing in the community in which he would subsequently no longer be regarded as an outsider.

It was in *Bapchor* that *Dedo Petre* had fallen in love with the eldest of the three daughters of the family that had invited him to lodge in their stables. This turn of events did not please the family patriarch. The older man had admired *Petre* for his honesty and willingness to work hard but he was an orphan with no family home, land or livestock. There would be no *prirodna darba*, dowry, if his daughter married him and he worried that the newcomer would not be able to adequately support his much-adored daughter and that she would be destined to a life of poverty and misery. "*Petre*, I want to *govori*, talk to you, about my *kjerka*, daughter", he said one day, while the two of them were milking the ewes and nanny goats. *Petre* had braced himself anticipating that he would not like what he was about to hear. "Do not ask me for my daughter's hand in marriage. I admire you greatly but I love my daughter very much and you are without a home, have no land and will not be able to support her."

*"Dedo, grandfather"*, Petre replied, addressing the family patriarch in this manner as a sign of his respect. "I love you daughter and she feels the same way about me." "It is true that I am *siroma*, poor, and have no family in these parts but I am a tireless worker and I have a *zanaat*, craft. I will work day and night to carve out arable grain-yielding fields from the shrub lands and I will trade for materials to build a home and buy livestock by continuing to work as a labourer and by mending the metal tools of our fellow villagers." "That is all well and good *Petre*," the older man had replied, "but that will take time and my *kjerka*, daughter, is already sixteen years of age and many of the *chupe*, girls, of the village her age are already married and have given birth to children." Undaunted, *Petre* was true to his word. All his spare moments were spent cleaning what he hoped would be productive fields from virgin land located on the outskirts of the village. He toiled endlessly, cutting down the natural vegetation, pulling out the stubborn stumps and roots and fertilising the soil with ash and *gnoj*, animal manure. Using the money and materials he had secured by working as a labourer, shepherd and blacksmith, he built a small, but comfortable home, which included a rudimentary blacksmith shop. His future father-in-law could only be impressed by the young man's initiative and finally agreed to the marriage.

*Dedo Petre* was said to be a great conversationalist, popular with his fellow villagers, a man *sekogash*, always, happy to share his views on all aspects of *zhivot*, life. He was an amicable host to his many visitors, who during, *zima*, cold winter months, in particular, when the pace of village life slowed considerably, came to talk and drink his *rakia*, home-made brandy. *Petre's* small smithy regularly emitted a myriad of unusual noises and sounds, the hissing of the bellows and the thunderous clashing of metal upon metal. It was also a place of animated discussion, raucous laughter and of village gossip, exchanged in low whispers and knowing nods and glances. There his visitors discussed the *vremeto*, weather, crops and livestock and lamented the sad misfortune of the Macedonian people whose destiny it would seem was to live perpetually under the Turkish yoke.

*Dedo Petre* and his wife had a son *Vello* and it was during *Dedo Vello's* time that the village of *Bapchor*, like many other Macedonian villages of the mountains, experienced unprecedented increases in their population. This meant an ever-more desperate need to secure well-watered, life-sustaining land to help feed their *golemi fameliji*, large extended families. Small strips of land, scattered throughout the villages, farmed using outdated, feudal agricultural technology and methods barely produced sufficient yields for most families to subsist. Not surprisingly, village leaders, like *Dedo Vello*, looked with envy upon the lush, green river valleys below, so inviting, a God-sent answer to the vexing problem of an acute shortage of arable land. The solution appeared so simple, it was right there in front of the frustrated, land-hungry villagers every time that they gazed upon the seemingly beckoning fertile plains below. However, settling in the *pollye*, lowlands, was not a realistic option because of the presence of Macedonia's Turkish overlords who had occupied the most productive parcels of land on their arrival hundreds of years before.

## Footnotes:

*In Ancient Roman times, the Province of Macedonia was regarded as a much-desired posting for outgoing consuls who traditionally assumed the role of proconsuls or governors of the Empire's occupied territories. It was a province, clearly distinguished from southern Greece, the province of Achaia, and renowned for its mineral wealth and agriculturally productive river valleys. It was therefore an appointment that would enable Roman governors to generate enormous personal wealth through the collection of considerable tax revenue. This was important since Roman politicians frequently borrowed heavily to enhance their prospects of obtaining the major political offices of aedile, praetor and consul. These large personal fortunes were often to repay the debts incurred to fund their election campaigns which generally consisted of paying bribes, staging expensive public games and festivals and distributing free grain to the populous, the so called "bread and circuses" pathway to electoral popularity and political office commonly associated with the Roman Republic.*

## Chapter 2: Subjects of the Sultan

*The year AD 1453 was highly significant in the history of European Christendom. In that year Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, fell to Ottoman forces led by Sultan Mehmed II, who proclaimed it as the triumph of Islam over Christianity. The Christian nations of Europe were unable to halt the irresistible advance of the Ottomans and by the 16th and 17th centuries the Ottoman Empire stretched from the fringes of Vienna to Slovakia to the north, Yemen and Eritrea in the south, west to Algeria and east to Azerbaijan. In the face of such developments, the subjugation of our Macedonian homeland by the Ottomans, was inevitable.*

*The arrival of Turkish administrators, soldiers and settlers, who occupied Macedonia's fertile river valleys, resulted in significant political, social and economic upheaval and led to over five centuries of an uneasy existence between Macedonian villagers and townsfolk and their Turkish overlords and neighbours. As newly-arrived Turkish settlers requisitioned large stretches of the more productive agricultural lands many Macedonian villagers of the lowlands were forced to take refuge in the more isolated, largely inaccessible, mountainous villages, such as Bapchor, which inevitably contributed to serious overcrowding and land shortages.*

## Chapter 2: Subjects of the Sultan

Macedonia's earliest ancestors lived in farming communities which were frequently in dispute and often at war with each other. This lack of political unity would have dire consequences, one of which was their inevitable subjugation by foreign tribes, notably the more ethnically cohesive and militarily advanced, Goths and Huns. A succession of military defeats and subsequent repression led to massive migrations of Slavonic tribes drifting in continuous waves out of the Danube River valley. They shared a common heritage and language, *old Slavic*, which was spoken in various regional dialects. The Slav tribes who ventured to the west were the ancestors of the modern Poles, Czechs and Slovaks while those who traveled east, were the forefathers of the Ukrainians, Russians and Byelorussians. The southern Slavs, the forebears of the Macedonian people, among others, penetrated into the Balkans into regions that were traditionally within the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Roman Empire, centred on the fabled city of Constantinople.

As more Slavonic tribes migrated into the Balkans the increasing overwhelmed indigenous inhabitants of the region were either displaced or assimilated. The ancient Macedonians and tribes of Illyrians and Thracians therefore tended, over time, to be absorbed into the Slavic culture. Our early Macedonian ancestors were therefore a complex ethnic patchwork of southern Slavs, ancient Macedonians, Illyrians, Thracians and Bulgars. The latter were not ethnically Slav but related to the Tartars and possibly the Huns. The Bulgars were feared as ruthless raiders and looters and widely condemned for their indulgence in making human sacrifices. Unruly bands of Bulgars settled in the Balkans and by the sixth century A.D. they had raided as far south as Athens. The Byzantine Greeks never forgot their loutish behaviour and commonly referred to them as *Varvaroes*, the uncouth and uncivilized ones. It is said that one of their kings, Krum, had a drinking vessel made from the skull of the defeated Byzantine emperor, Nicephorus. Bulgar leaders, *boyars*, would occasionally assume the role of feudal lords and rule over regions occupied by our Macedonian ancestors and treated them as their serfs and vassals.

Our Bulgar *komshi*, neighbours, fought many battles with their Byzantine foes and almost succeeded in capturing Constantinople on several occasions. However, eventually, Byzantine military might prevailed. Western Bulgaria, sometimes known as *Sclavinia*, continued to assert its independence for a time until it too fell to the forces of the Emperor Basil II known as *Bulgaroktonus*, Bulgarian slayer. It is said that on the Emperor's instruction, many thousands of captured Bulgarian troops were blinded by their captors who inserted red hot poker into the their eye sockets. The story goes that one in every hundred Bulgar warriors were only blinded in one eye so that they could guide their less fortunate comrades home to *Ohrid*, meaning hill, the capital of the Bulgar king, Samuel, who was said to have died from the shock of witnessing the procession of his blinded troops arriving home. Over time, the Bulgars, too, would be gradually assimilated into the Slav culture and modern Bulgaria, a Slavonic nation, still bears their name.

As a child, attending a Greek school, if only irregularly, I was taught to despise Bulgarians who were portrayed as evil, hideous one-eyed monsters, like the mythological Cyclops. My grandfather, who on one occasion overheard my naïve description of them, was quick to admonish me and then proceeded to tell the story of the day that Bulgarian prisoners had been paraded through Athens. Apparently, large crowds had gathered along the streets of the Greek capital as the city's inhabitants came out of their homes and stores to leer upon the grossly deformed creatures that they had been told so much about. They were amazed, he said, when they saw that the Bulgarian captives looked very much like themselves. They certainly had two eyes and laughingly commented that some Athenian women were even heard to whisper, among themselves, how handsome many of prisoners were.

In 1241, a short-lived Bulgarian kingdom, which incorporated large parts of our traditional Macedonian homeland, emerged under the sovereignty of the brothers Jovan and Petre Asen. However, this kingdom would soon fall to a new conqueror, the Ottoman Turks. The Ottomans had initially been called upon by a number of Byzantium emperors to assist them in settling a series of destabilising imperial squabbles occurring in the royal court and to help them curb the power of the Serbian leader, Stephan Dusan, who had asserted control over parts of the Macedonian homeland that had previously been under Byzantine rule. The Ottomans promptly took advantage of their position as trusted allies to betray their Byzantine hosts and Macedonia became a major target for annexation and the Ottomans did not fail to seize their opportunity.

The Ottoman Empire, *Dawlet-il Aliyyat-il Osmaniyye*, was founded in 1299 by nomadic Muslim tribes originating in Mongol-controlled central Asia. Like the irresistible hordes of Genghis Khan and his successors, the Ottomans, were constantly on the march, marauding and pillaging before eventually settling in central *Rum*, Anatolia, at the invitation of their fellow Muslim cousins, the then powerful, *Seljuqs*, Seljuk Turks. Ottoman society was dominated by military and religious leaders who were motivated by a strong sense of patriotic militarism that was reflected in their lust for territorial expansion. The Ottoman *beyliks*, lords, eventually united under the leadership of the powerful *Osmani* family and it was not overly surprising that over time the Ottomans betrayed their Seljuk hosts and replaced their hegemony with their own. In the late fourteenth century, the Ottomans defeated Bulgarian and Serbian armies and then in 1453 captured the fortress city of Constantinople, the capital of the once mighty Byzantine Empire. The fall of Constantinople, a feat achieved by Ottoman forces commanded by Sultan Mehmed 11, *the Conqueror*, was a momentous historical achievement comparable to the capture of Jerusalem, by knights from Western Europe, during the first crusade centuries before. In the sixteenth century, guided by the legendary, Sultan Suleiman, the Magnificent, the Ottomans marched into Belgrade and besieged Vienna and firmly established themselves as masters of the Mediterranean. At its zenith the Ottoman Empire's twenty nine provinces or vassal states stretched across large sections of Asia and Europe from the Euphrates River to the Carpathian Mountains and a substantial distance along the Danube River.

The Sultans were at the apex of Ottoman society and exercised enormous power and political influence. They were ordained by a council of military and religious leaders and elders who proclaimed them as the descendants of the prophet Mohamet, as the shadows of God on earth and after the capture of Constantinople, as the heirs to the Byzantine emperors. The Sultan's *tughra*, personal monogram, consisted of beautifully interwoven letters of the Arabic alphabet written in white, upon a pink-red background. All *tughras* glorified Allah and contained the word *gazi*, meaning fighter or warrior, in the upper right corner. The heartbeat and administrative centre of the Empire was the *Topkapi Palace* in Constantinople from where flowed an endless number of royal edicts, missives and reports, back and forth to a bureaucratic network of empowered provincial officials, some of whom were highly efficient but others corrupt, incompetent and repressive. The Empire's leading public servants, both in peace and war, were not typically members of the Sultan's family or from the nobility. Many of the most prominent administrators of the Empire were foreigners, appointees and vassals of the Sultan, owing everything to his person and to whom they were expected to be totally devoted and loyal.

In the main, as long as their Christian subjects *priznji*, acknowledged, even with the most vehement and innate feelings of disdain and hatred, the right of the Sultan to rule over them and to pay the tribute demanded of them, they were generally left to live in peace, free to openly practice their religious beliefs and pursue their lives within the context of their cultural heritage. Far more feared were the *bashi bazooks*, armed bands of unruly Turkish outlaws, who regularly engaged in plundering the homes and property of the subjugated peoples of the Empire and even those of their fellow Turks. Military conquest had sustained the Ottoman Empire and was pivotal to forging its unity and sense of purpose. The Sultan's army consisted of some sixty thousand trained and well-equipped infantry soldiers, contingents of sharp-eyed archers, later musketeers, who were resplendent in their distinctive yellow and green uniforms and a highly mobile cavalry. Although many of the Ottoman soldiers were from conquered nations, the great majority were exceptionally loyal to the Sultan and extremely disciplined. Their emblems were a wooden spoon and cauldron as an outward declaration of their camaraderie, that they ate and fought together. The loss of a cauldron by a Ottoman military battalion was perceived as the ultimate disgrace, much akin to the loss of the eagle emblem by a Roman legion and the tipping over of cauldrons by Turkish regular soldiers was generally regarded the signal of seething unrest and impending mutiny.

#### Footnotes:

*The Byzantine Empire or Eastern Roman Empire, was centred on the city of Constantinople, named in honour of the Roman emperor, Constantine, the first of Rome's Christian emperors who established the capital of the eastern Roman Empire at Byzantium (Constantinople) in 324 A.D. The Byzantine Empire survived for over one thousand years as a predominantly Christian entity. An proclaimed "golden age", a renaissance, in Byzantine society, occurred under a ruling dynasty originating with the Emperor Basil 1, known as "the Macedonian" who reigned from 867–886 A.D. The Macedonian dynasty, as it is often called, ruled the Byzantine Empire until 1056 A.D. While historians debate the ethnicity of Basil 1 there is evidence that he had an Armenian and Macedonian heritage and that he was born into a peasant family in the "theme", region, of Macedonia.*

*The Ottoman Sultans ruled a vast transcontinental empire from 1299-1922. The first capital of the Empire was the city of Bursa in Anatolia, then Edirne and from 1453 the legendary Constantinople (Istanbul). The first of the Empire's thirty-six Sultans was Osman from the Oghuz tribe. The Sultans were absolute monarchs accountable only to Allah and the sharia, God's law, and claimed a heavenly mandate to rule on earth. They often referred to themselves as Caesar, the self-proclaimed successors of the Roman emperors. The Empire was governed through the Sultan's firman, royal decrees or mandates which were to be obeyed without question or hesitation.*

*The soldiers of the Empire were originally nomadic tribesmen who were difficult to mobilise and this forced the Sultans to hire foreign mercenaries, many of whom were Christians, who received a salary and were entitled to a portion of the booty seized during conquest. Later, Turkish regular soldiers were typically referred to as mehmetciks, little Mehemets, a contraction of Muhammed, which was an affectionate nickname since Mehemet was the most common first name among them. Most of the regular soldiers were from peasant families, illiterate and ignorant of the world beyond their own, so much so that many Turkish soldiers at Gallipoli believed that they were fighting the perennial enemy, the Greeks. They endured hardship stoically and were often commanded by Prussian trained officers, mushir, field marshals and feriks, generals, who were unrelenting in the demands they imposed on their troops.*

*Behind the ten feet thick walls the Sultan's Topkapi Palace was a spectacular array of domes, turrets, minarets and belvederes. It was an opulent, mystical complex that occupied over seventy hectares and contained numerous courtyards, offices, workshops, ornate hallways and various lavish residences. At the height of the Ottoman Empire it was the home of the Sultan, his harem, major officials, soldiers, craftsmen and a host of servants. The Palace looked out across the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara. It was abandoned in 1853 when the construction of new Dolmabahce Palace was completed.*

*The High Porte was that section within the Topkapi Palace where the Sultan and his major court officials, the Vizier-i-Azm, prime minister, the kizlar agha, chief eunuch, and shaikh ul Islam, the leading Muslim cleric, deliberated and where foreign ambassadors were greeted.*

The Sultan's ability to wage war was complemented by a naval armada of over one hundred and fifty warships. This almost irresistible military machine was financed from the tribute extracted from subjugated vassals and the taxes collected from merchants and traders venturing over Ottoman-controlled lands. For much of its existence, the Empire was prosperous, largely self-sufficient and capable of producing a surplus of food.

Our Macedonian homeland was blessed with timber-clad mountains, perennially flowing rivers and bountiful fields, nestled in fertile river valleys, which were ideal for growing cereal crops and producing lush, green grasses on which sheep, goats and cattle could graze. It lay directly in the path of Ottoman expansion and did not fail to attract their interest. Inevitably, the Sultan's troops marched into the Macedonian villages and towns of the lowlands, where they rapidly overwhelmed hastily organised and poorly armed, local resistance. In the wake of the Ottoman soldiers there followed a steady stream of Turkish settlers who requisitioned the *plodna zema*, most productive farm land, and there they would stay for over five centuries, foreign overlords, living nervously, largely keeping to themselves, behind the high stone protective, *stisoj*, walls, of their heavily fortified, timber and stone homes with reinforced, bolted doors and iron-framed *pendzheri*, windows.

Turkish officials governed in the manner of medieval lords confident that their power and authority would be maintained by units of *askeri*, Turkish regular army soldiers, and a host of personally appointed local administrative officials. They were also *osigori*, confident, about the unquestioned loyalty of local Turkish populations to take up arms in the event of any insurrection, primarily as a means of safeguarding their newly-acquired *chifleeks*, land holdings, and to demonstrate their undying loyalty to the Sultan. Local *beys* demanded homage and respect from their Macedonian subjects and the right to collect tribute in the form of indentured labour and a portion of the grain harvested and a number of the animals raised. Macedonia's Turkish occupiers showed far less interest in the uplands, the village communities of the *planini*, mountains, where life was more Spartan and the soils less fertile and productive. These villages were virtually inaccessible, especially during the cold winter months when outdoor activities came to a virtual standstill and the only visible sign of life was the *kadesh*, smoke, that rose, sky ward, from the stone *okhaksi*, chimneys, of the homes of the hibernating villagers. It was so cold during *zima*, winter that the extreme temperatures would cause some of the canopy of trees, which inhabited the rugged mountain sides, to succumb to the extremes of Mother Nature. They would groan during their death throes as once sturdy trunks came crashing down upon the hard earth and threw up snow-encrusted branches and leaves in all directions. During this time, the homes of the mountain villages would be entombed by persistent, heavy *snek*, snow, that inhabited the roof tops and eerily crept up along the outside walls and eventually obscured the *pendzheri*, windows. The weight of the snow meant that some roofs had to be supported with sturdy timber struts that reached from inside the homes to the *chati*, roof tops.

While the villages and townships of the plains were shackled by foreign occupation, those of the mountains were less directly affected and were therefore more independent and rebellious since their geographical location had given them some degree of immunity. In these villages, Macedonia's Ottoman occupiers could not easily harass them. The village of *Bapchor*, carved out of the mountain sides and forests, was one such village. It was reputedly founded in 1660 as the result of the amalgamation of three smaller settlements, *Kosiak*, *Selishcha* and *Sveti Tanas*. It is said that it had originally been established on the site of a *bachillo*, a place where sheep and goats were herded to be milked at certain times of the year, and where butter and a variety of cheeses were produced. Hence the derivation, some say, of the village name. The village was surrounded by four mountains, *Onomlatskje*, *Rit*, *Derveno* and the imposing *Vicho*. Its inhabitants were hardy, resilient, resourceful and patriotically Macedonian. The population of *Bapchor* had grown over time and was further boosted by the arrival of many free-spirited individuals and families who sought a safe sanctuary there, just as *Dedo Petre* had done. Many of these new arrivals had invariably *ostaji*, abandoned, their homes in the lowlands in the face of the arrival of Turkish soldiers, settlers and officials. Sitting defiantly in the shadow of *Vicho*, some twenty nine kilometres away, *Bapchor* had become severely overcrowded.

During *prolet*, spring, when the winter snows were less frequent and the canopy of snow that covered the village was finally yielding to earthly colours, the red and black of the soil and the different shades of green of the new grasses, shrubs and leaves, the village would begin to stir. Small *trape*, streams, began to flow again and there was mud and slush everywhere and the local *rekji*, rivers, bloated by the melting snow, soon tested the resolve of their banks. It was during one such spring day that the village elders, *Dedo Vello*, *Dedo Petre's* son, prominent among them, held council at the home of their *chorbadjia*, village mayor. They stood warming themselves, huddled around the *ognischeto*, fireplace, which fed greedily upon logs from the family wood pile and sipped from small glasses filled with murky, throat-clearing, home-made *rakia*, a potent alcoholic drink, which good Macedonian hosts traditionally offered to their male guests. Their leader, despite his age and aching *koski*, bones, stood erect and dignified as he meticulously stuffed finely-cut strands of silky yellow tobacco, into his *luli*, roughly whittled wooden pipe.

#### Footnotes:

*The overwhelming number of Macedonians during the time of Ottoman occupation were peasant farmers. Even the townsfolk often possessed land holdings in the villages on which they grew life-sustaining crops and raised animals. The shortage of arable land had always been a major concern and it has been estimated that some 70% of villagers merely had sufficient farmland to subsist. Much of the productive land had been confiscated by Ottoman settlers who established their chifleeks, hereditary landholdings, which they claimed to be gifts from the Sultan. Consequently, many Macedonians were forced to till marginal, infertile, rock-infested soils or relocate to the villages of the mountains. Such relocations contributed to overcrowding and severe land shortages in these villages. Some villagers had tried leasing portions of land from Turkish land owners but overly harsh tenancy terms severely compromised this practice and the movement of people from the lowlands to the mountainous villages continued unabated.*

There were solemn matters to discuss but the old man was unhurried. Time had never been his enemy. In his world, things changed very little, if at all, and he fully appreciated the value of patience. He collected a long, thin *vetche*, twig, from atop the mantle piece of the family fireplace and poked it into the open fire until the end was licked by *plamen*, flames, and was alight. He lifted it slowly, lit his pipe, took a deep puff before he *pl'una*, spit, gently on the end of the twig and then rubbed together two *prsti*, fingers, over it to extinguish the flame. Many of his companions followed his example and sweet-smelling tobacco smoke soon filled the room.

One of the *sobranje*, assembled, a young man of thirty with a wife and three young children, addressed *Bapchor's* elder statesman respectfully. "*Tatko*, father" he said, "*ni se macheni narod*, we are an oppressed people, and face *zor*, severe challenges. The time has come for us to take our concealed firearms and storm the lowlands to seize the homes and *chifleeks*, land holdings, from our accursed Turkish oppressors." He continued, "they have well and truly outstayed their welcome." He spoke in a nervous, trembling voice, clearly tinged with pent up anger and exasperation. "Why should our children go *bes l'ep*, without bread?" "Let us take what is rightfully ours or at least die trying," he implored his fellow villagers. Having completed his remarks, the young villager bent his head and stared intently at the hard, bare earth floor. The assembled fully understood the frustrations he had voiced. They knew that the Ottoman Empire was showing signs of decay and that it might indeed be on its death bed. They had heard the story that Tsar Nicholas 1 of Russia, in far off St Petersburg, had referred to the Empire as "the sick man of Europe." The villagers were becoming increasingly aware of the jibes that the once mighty Ottoman Empire was terminally ill as a result of too much wine, tobacco, coffee and opium.

Undeniably, the power of the Sultan was in decline and subjugated peoples were increasingly looking for opportunities to secure self-rule and freedom. In 1822, Greek nationalists, buoyed by the support of Britain, France and Russia agitated for their independence and when Russian troops marched toward Constantinople in 1829, the Sultan, very much under siege, begrudgingly agreed to the proclamation of an autonomous Greek nation which would be ruled by a Bavarian prince as its absolute monarch. However, the Ottomans strongly rejected the idea of a self-governing Macedonian nation and were resolutely determined to cling tenaciously to their precious Macedonian territories. Such developments had greatly aggrieved Macedonian townsfolk and villagers. The young man who had spoken about taking up arms and forcibly seizing what rightly belonged to his people was expressing the frustration and disenchantment held by countless generations of Macedonians who had been forced to live with the everyday realities of foreign occupation.

Occasionally, there would be those who fanned aglow the *jaglene*, embers, of freedom, take up arms, flee into the mountains and harass their Turkish occupiers as members of organised armed bands of guerilla fighters. Inevitably, they would be overwhelmed by superior numbers

and more sophisticated weapons of war. They died in battle, were executed as prisoners of war, endured long terms of imprisonment or lived as outlaws constantly on the run from pursuing Turkish soldiers or the police. Too often they found themselves powerless to prevent the inevitable retaliatory murders and the burning down of the homes of innocent villagers.

not like what they were *Bapchor's* mayor who had remained dispassionate, his outward demeanor revealing few of his innermost thoughts, merely turned and looked directly at the son of his sister and frowned. Then in an assertive voice said, "*Dete*, son, *mlchenje*, be silent, hold your *jazick*, tongue, I do not want any more *Bapchortsi* martyrs, parents grieving over dead sons and a village full of destitute wives raising their young *sirachi*, orphans, without their *mashi*, husbands." He drew a long, deep breath, looked up and craned his neck toward the heavens, "One day, God willing", the Turks will leave our *zemia*, land, but until then we will have to find other ways to deal with our *prechkeski*, problems." He took another puff of his pipe and continued, "families who have outgrown their homes and do not have sufficient land to raise crops will have to send younger members of their households into the outskirts of our communally-owned shrub lands where they will have clear fields to crop and build new homes." His reasoning was clear and reflected the wisdom of the years. At these words most of the assembled gazed at the dirt floor and shuffled nervously, transferring their weight from one leg to the other, hesitant to *kreni*, lift, their heads and look directly at one another. They did hearing it but they knew in their hearts that he was right.

The old man continued, "those who will be forced to leave the village will have to *odbega*, avoid, not to *posechi*, cut down, too many beech and oak trees. We will always need virgin forest to gather firewood and timber and to hunt." He looked grimly at his fellow villagers who stood around him. He knew them all, they were his friends and kinfolk and he fully understood that so many of them would have to send their sons, daughters-in-law and much loved *mnuchi*, grandchildren, away from their patriarchal homes. His own home, too, was overcrowded, uncomfortably so, and he would also have to *opitaj*, ask, his youngest son, his wife and three adored grandchildren, to depart the family home. He tugged at his tattered overcoat, puffed deeply on his pipe once again and said, "We will not abandon them, we will give them all the *pomosh*, help, that we can, but make no mistake things will be hard for them." Defiant and resolute, he concluded, "*Sega*, Now, go home and talk these things over with your families. The sooner we act the better it will be for all concerned." With that said, he ushered his guests to the front door and watched, sadly, his eyes reddening, welling with tears, as they walked homeward in various directions, each man steeling himself to deliver the bad news. His *srtse*, heart, was heavy but he could think of no other way.

Over the following days, *nazhalene*, distressed, villagers, with mules loaded with their personal possessions and all the food that their family could spare, wrapped in *velentsa*, blankets, or carefully placed within home-made, *koshnitsi*, baskets, began departing *Bapchor* amid scenes of

enormous sadness and despair. There can be few feelings of greater despondency and sense of failure than, *roditeli*, parents, having to send their loved ones from their family home. Grandmothers sobbed uncontrollably as their young grandchildren, who had grown up in their care, held on tightly to their *pregatchi*, aprons, and refused to be parted. Hardened family patriarchs, self-assured, who had overcome many of life's most formidable challenges and reputedly dispassionate villagers turned and wandered off, *sami*, alone, mumbling they had to attend to some pressing matter. They could not be seen to weep. *Dedo Vello*, now the family patriarch left the meeting grateful that he did not have to face such a decision, at least for the time being, but his extended family was growing and he knew that in the near future members of his own family would have to leave the family home. However, at that, *vereme*, time, the family, was, at least village standards, *bogati*, well off, a legacy from *Dedo Petre* who reportedly, *naplodie*, bred, a large flock of *ofchi*, sheep and *shareni*, multi-coloured, goats which it was said he herded with the ringing sounds of a large hand-held bell.

*Bapchor's* exiles, like those from other overpopulated mountain villages, were forced to settle beyond the established confines of their villages where they lived in *kalivi*, makeshift huts. There they laboured tirelessly to bring down the towering beech, elm, wild maple and oak trees, to slash away shrub land and dense undergrowth, to remove large, stubborn, deeply-embedded boulders and to carve out fields which they knew would initially yield little in return for their hard work. Virgin land beyond the parameters of the villages was communally owned and the village elders, in council, had the authority to allocate it in any way that they believed would best benefit their fellow villagers. In such trying times, they encouraged the settlement of marginal areas of land by the members of their communities who had been forced by trying circumstances to depart their family homes. These desperate and impoverished villagers were said to have gone *na kopachina*, clearing new fields, with axes, spades and mattocks. The stumps and the roots that clung so tenaciously to the soil were often left to decay and rot away over the ensuing years while branches, shrubs, grasses and weeds were burnt in large bonfires and the ashes, along with animal manures, were used to fertilise the newly-created *nevi*, fields. Soon after, the first crops were sown around defiant stumps and rocky outcrops. There they built their homes with timber from the *orman*, forest, and stones removed from the surrounding area. They were extremely resourceful and even though poverty was their constant companion their innate survival instincts inevitably prevailed.

#### Footnotes:

*Little is known of Dedo Vello Petsevski except that he had seven children - four sons and three daughters. His four sons were Yane, Dimo, Risto and Jovan. He was said to have established a bachillo near Vicho, where the Vellioff family produced a variety of cheeses and butter.*

Even though the Ottomans had refused to divest themselves of their Macedonian territory a growing number of Macedonia's Turkish occupiers began to feel increasingly uneasy as the passage of time began to conspire against them. Some had resigned themselves to returning to their traditional homeland amid fears of imminent violent upheavals and the likely loss of their material possessions and possibly physical harm. Such changing circumstances would offer unique opportunities for some villagers to purchase keenly sought-after fields and pasture lands from their Turkish neighbours to add to their own existing land holdings. In the period 1820 to 1825, a group of relatively more well-to-do *Bapchortsi*, including *Dedo Vello's* son, *Yane Vellioff* and his brothers, pooled together their financial resources and *reshie dakupe kupi*, decided to purchase, a parcel of land in a nearby region known as *Pavlin*. *Yane Vellioff*, the oldest son of *Dedo Vello* and grandson of *prededo*, great grandfather, *Petre*, took the opportunity to buy life-sustaining land, from a Turkish *bey*, lord, named *Karaselli*. In the process, he would lay the foundations for the establishment of the village of *Krepeshina*, meaning sewn together, like a quilt, implying that it as a community founded by a number of *Bapchortsi* families. Later, under Greek domination, the village would be renamed, *Atropos*, perhaps in recognition of its original Macedonian name since *Atropos* in ancient Greek mythology was one of the three goddesses of fate. She and her sisters, *Clotho* and *Lachesis*, were fabled spinners and weavers of cloth, the makers of quilts.

*Bey Karaselli's* family home was an impressive fortified, two-storey structure, surrounded by a solid, high stone wall. It was located in Bitola, a township which is today located within the Republic of Macedonia, just beyond the *granitsa*, border, with Greece. Under Ottoman rule, Bitola was a busy Turkish administrative and military centre in the Balkans. This ancient city, at the foot of *Mount Pelister*, had grown into a major trading centre during Roman times, when it was regularly frequented by merchants and settlers from townships located along the Adriatic and Aegean coastlines. In Ottoman times, Bitola would become the residence of numerous foreign embassies and was where many of the official documents, from the surrounding subjugated territories, such as property deeds, were housed.

Over the centuries, *Karaselli's* family had accumulated considerable Macedonian land holdings on which they grew high-yielding grain crops, fine quality tobacco and pastured large flocks of sheep and goats and healthy herds of, *goveda*, cattle. The aging Turk, like other Turkish family patriarchs, was wary of the likelihood of violent local uprisings as the power of the Ottomans declined. He had been born in Macedonia, it was his home, but he was increasingly visited by persistent, nostalgic thoughts of returning to his ancestral homeland and spending the *pos'ledni godnini*, last years, of his life there in safety and comfort. He was therefore in the mood to sell and *Yane Vellioff* was desperate to buy. *Dedo Yane* had apparently encountered *Karaselli* having his breakfast. The Turk, dressed in his ornate, flowing robes was seated upon a large cushion, at a low table, eating a dish of *menemen*, a mixture of *domati*, tomatoes, peppers and scrambled eggs, cooked in olive oil. He scooped up his meal with *komati*, pieces, of bread which he roughly tore from a circular bread loaf topped with sesame seeds.

As *Dedo Yane* approached, his host gestured him to, *sedni*, sit, opposite him. With a wave of a wrinkled right hand, the Turk *pokana*, invited, his guest to take an aromatic *sucuk*, spicy Turkish sausage, and *kofti*, meat ball, which had been cooked in sheep fat and flavoured by an exotic mix of spices and garlic, from one of the plates resting upon his breakfast table. *Bey Karaselli* was in no hurry and ate, *pol'eka*, slowly. After he had finished he asked *Dedo Yane* whether he would like a drink of *kahve*, sweet, strong Turkish coffee, which he poured into small cups from an elaborately decorated tea pot.

While the two men drank together *Dedo Yane* asked his gracious host whether they could  *pazarime*, conclude the sale, of a portion of *Karaselli's* landholdings. Shortly after the *selo*, village, of *Krepeshina*, was established on this site, nestled within a rugged river valley hemmed in by the *Pirko* mountains. Soon, from a small elevated hillock, referred by the villagers as the *gavran*, crow, one could see new fields being carved out upon the level land and along the rolling, elevated slopes by the industrious villagers and flocks of sheep and goats grazing in ever-increasing numbers in the meadow lands.

*Dedo Yane Vellioff* was said to often recall that on that day he had walked home a contented man and had set his mind to buying further tracts of land being offered for sale by the same *Karaselli*. Shortly after, *Yane Vellioff* once again journeyed to Bitola. However, on this occasion, he had been trumped by villagers from the neighbouring village of *Neret* who were also desperate to buy arable land. A group of *Neretsi* consequently became the owners of an area known as *Loposhites*, where they built temporary huts in which to shelter as they tended their crops and pastured their flocks at different times of the year. On this occasion, the old Turk had pulled slowly at his luxuriant moustache, calmly adjusted his *fez* and shrugged his shoulders. He offered *Dedo Yane* a cup of Turkish coffee and commiserated with him. My paternal ancestor had left to go home with his *ramo*, shoulders, drooping, despondent, bitterly disappointed and cursing the villagers of *Neret* under his breath. Another of *Dedo Vello's* sons, *Jovan Vellioff*, relocated his immediate family to the small village of *Elovo*, on the outskirts of *Pavlin*, where they came to be known as *Jovanovi*, after *Dedo Jovan*. Some time between 1880 and 1885, members of *Dedo Jovan's* branch of our family tree would also reside in *Krepeshina*, where the villagers referred to them as *Elovarovi*, a reference to their former village. *Dedo Yane's* brother, *Dimo Vellioff*, would in time also move his family from *Bapchor* to *Krepeshina*.

For over five hundred years of Ottoman rule, relations between Macedonia's villagers and townsfolk and their Turkish neighbours, was strained. The two groups lived side-by-side but segregated in clearly delineated communities. It was an uneasy co-existence even though most Turkish families desired to live in *mir*, peace, and were mindful not to incite ill-feeling among their more populous Macedonian neighbours. They were acutely aware that the undoubted unease between them was typically not of their making but inflamed by decisions made in distant Constantinople and various European capital cities.

While there were regrettable incidents: forced conversions, beatings, murder and rape, these were not everyday occurrences. Generally, Macedonia's Turkish occupiers adhered to the principle of showing tolerance toward the religious beliefs of their non-Muslim subjects, *rayas*. Macedonians and their Turkish neighbours rarely interacted socially since religious differences and the realities of a conquered majority living among a politically and economically empowered minority drove them apart. Turkish women would never speak with Macedonian men and only rarely to the womenfolk. Marriages between Turks and Macedonians were strongly denounced by both sides. The depth of feeling in this matter was clearly illustrated by the tragic events that followed one such wedding. A young Macedonian consumed with outrage and loss of face, as a result of his sister's impending marriage to a Turk and a Muslim, had shadowed the couple and during their marriage celebrations, held behind the high-walled courtyard of the home of the groom's parents, shot dead the bride and groom. Two well-aimed bullets from an illegally concealed rifle and the bloody deed was done.

While the women crowded round the dead couple and wept the groom's male relatives and friends, having regained their composure, began to pursue the murderer on horseback. They soon caught up with their exhausted quarry who had stopped running and stood motionless, in the centre of the roadway, ready to accept his fate. He had tears in his eyes, crying not for himself but for his dearly loved young sister. He was gunned down by the pursuing vigilantes who had then urged on their horses to trample his lifeless body over and over again. After a time, a calm descended and silently the Turkish avengers turned for home where they were greeted by shrill, mournful cries of despair and prepared for the burial of the young couple, far too young to die, who only minutes before were filled with joyous anticipation of a long and fulfilling life together.

There in the in the middle of the roadway, among the rolling hillsides, covered in the tall, lush grass typical of the region, a grief-stricken father and mother, who had lost not only a daughter but also their only son, assisted by family members, lifted their son's bullet-ridden and *posinat*, badly bruised, body onto the back of the family's *kola*, cart. Villagers attempted to shield the dead man's weeping widow away from her husband's badly mutilated body. She was hysterical and trying with all her remaining strength to break free from the arms of the womenfolk who were restraining her. Her two young children, confused, overcome by the scene they were witnessing, clung tightly to their mother's apron and wept with her.

*Dedo Yane Vellioff*, it was said, often told the story of a Turkish family patriarch, a resident of the village of *Maala*, named *Vella*. The Turk was regarded as bad-tempered, disagreeable and generally treated his Macedonian *komshi*, neighbours, with contempt. He had the ear of the local Turkish officials and had purchased, through his personal connections, the right to collect the Sultan's taxes. The Ottomans, like the Romans, traditionally auctioned to the highest bidder

the right to collect tribute from the subjugated population, to act as private tax collectors. It was rumoured that *Vella* had been successful in tendering for the lucrative appointment by *otkupnanje*, bribing, no less than the *Pasha* himself, whose authority extended over many of the villages of the *Lerinsko* region. *Vella's* method of securing this lucrative position not unusual since bribery and corruption among local officials were rife under the Ottomans.

The villagers of the region came to despise their newly-appointed *spahili*, tax collector, who enjoyed nothing more than to act the role of a strutting conqueror, walking tall and arrogant among the Sultan's conquered subjects. He was their *dushman*, avowed enemy. The day-to-day struggle confronting Macedonian villagers and townsfolk to grow sufficient food to merely subsist, was made so much more difficult by the need to pay a significant part of their produce in tax. Not only did the villagers and townspeople resent the amount of tax they were obliged to pay but they were equally infuriated by the way that *Vella* collected their tribute. *Vella* was gruff, overbearing and rarely used a *cntar*, scale, to weigh the grain that he collected as tax, always making sure that he took more than was his due. He reasoned that no one would dare to voice any objection about his corrupt practices, that the villagers would continue to suffer in silence and that they were unlikely to risk open violence against his person. He saw himself as the anointed representative of the *Pasha* and therefore of the Sultan himself, the king of kings, the master of all conquered territories and of all the valleys, forests, roads, rivers and mountains of a vast Empire.

With rifle in hand, *sednat*, seated, upon a well-groomed, thoroughbred stallion, he insisted that villagers toil long hours working on his personal fields as indentured labourers and demanded *chess*, respect, in the form of gifts of food and home-made alcohol. *Vella* had developed the intimidating habit of arriving uninvited at weddings where he fully expected to be treated as a honoured *gostin*, guest. Wary *zertoj*, grooms, would reluctantly bow their heads to acknowledge his presence and trembling young *nevesti*, brides, would hesitantly *batsi*, kiss, his hand in welcome. Over time, *Vella's* antics generated considerable resentment, so much so that a group of more daring villagers, who had had enough, hatched a plan to murder him.

At the celebration of a village marriage *Vella* predictively arrived at the wedding feast dressed in an ornate robe with a side arm tucked into his colourful, baggy, trousers and a rifle nestling within a leather side saddle. His weapons were clearly visible and menacing. He was anticipating a warm reception from the villagers whom he expected to humble themselves before him. Dismounting in his typically intimidating manner, with a *kamsik*, whip, in his right hand, *Vella* was greeted with nervous reverence by the newly-weds, their parents and the village mayor. He then proceeded to take a seat at the head table which was covered with a white tablecloth with intricate, colourful patterns, embroidered by the groom's mother and on which rested plates of freshly-baked bread, roast meat, salads and bottles of home-made wine and brandy. Shortly after *Vella* had taken his seat, a group of conspirators acted by repeatedly stabbing the much-despised interloper from behind.

The big man lurched forward and fell face first onto the table top, sending food, drink and plates in all directions and there he lay, *krf*, blood, flowing freely from mortal stab wounds that had been inflicted deep into his broad *pl'eshchi*, back. Wedding guests screamed in horror while others, overcome by shock, sat motionless. In those confused moments the assassins quickly dispersed, melting away into the crowd and made good their retreat. Once the villagers had regained their composure, a number of them lifted *Vella's* blooded *mrsha*, body, and carried it into the stables of the home of the villager mayor where it was placed upon bundles of dry, newly-harvested hay.

The news of *Vella's* death spread rapidly through the neighbouring villages and within hours members of his family arrived to retrieve his body. He was buried in *Maala's* Turkish cemetery, situated nearby a *dzamija*, mosque, with several small minarets and a colourfully decorated interior. Macedonian and Turkish villagers were not buried in the same *grobishcha*, cemeteries, after all, one group was Christian and the other Muslim. I recall, as a young boy, that the Muslim cemetery at *Maala*, where *Vella* had been laid to rest, was being excavated to make way for the construction of a new road that travelled past the looted and later demolished, village mosque. The skulls and bones of long-dead Turks had been unearthed by road workers and rather callously left exposed to the elements. I have to shamefully admit that I and other village youngsters, in an act of ignorance and disrespect, kicked around some of those skulls in our games. It did occur to me at that time that one of those skulls might even have been that of the much-feared and disliked *Vella* himself.

The murder of *Vella* was not the end of the matter. Members of the Turkish community of the region subsequently conducted a thorough, but fruitless, investigation, to try to find the perpetrators. A strict code of silence was imposed in all nearby villages which no amount of Turkish intimidation could penetrate. Although they had failed to track down the culprits, the local Turkish community felt that they were duty-bound to retaliate in the belief that it was a matter of honour and that a dramatic response would act as a deterrent to any villagers or townsfolk who might, in future, contemplate threatening the life of one of their countrymen. Consequently, they erected a road block along the roadway between *Neret* and *Lerin* on which villagers regularly journeyed to sell small quantities of surplus produce to the townsfolk and to buy provisions, especially during designated *pazari*, market days. There, they took turns to perform sentry duty and villagers who refused to use the longer, alternate route in defiance of the blockade, were usually subjected to savage beatings.

One day, a number of villagers from *Neret* were shocked to find three badly mutilated bodies at the site of the blockade, a young father who had been wrongfully linked to *Vella's* death, his wife and their young child. Once honour had been so cruelly and unjustly satisfied an uneasy peace resumed between the two communities. However, not long after, an old Turk, a *sakat*, crippled, and senile bachelor from *Lerin*, had taken upon himself to indiscriminately slaughter the *bishina*, pigs, belonging to his Christian neighbours declaring that swine were unclean and

that pork should not be eaten by god-fearing people. He unwisely ignored the protests and subsequent threats to his personal well-being. An exasperated and angry group of towns people, spurred on by utter frustration, ambushed the recalcitrant old man, battered him to death and placed his body under a pile of dried leaves and twigs and set it ablaze.

**Footnotes:**

*Vella's brother, Ruschan, was also an intimidating bully. His malevolent attitude toward his Macedonian neighbours was illustrated on the occasion he insisted that he exchange one of his least productive fields for a lush levada, pasture land, belonging to a Macedonian villager from Maala. When his neighbour declined, Ruschan had rcommented that he had killed hundreds of people during his life and had sworn to Almighty Allah that he would not kill again but added that he was prepared to forsake his oath just one more time.*

*The Ottoman authorities maintained detailed census and taxation registers known as defters, in order to enforce an efficient tax collection system which was vital in financing Ottoman military garrisons and repairing the roads, bridges and government buildings within the Empire. There was a general ten percent tax or tithe, known as the osur, which Christian subjects paid annually based on their crop yields and growth in livestock numbers. Muslims and Christian converts to Islam were exempt from paying taxes.*

*The percentage of produce collected as tax, by often unscrupulous tax collectors, was often much higher than that officially sanctioned. They frequently took every opportunity to personally benefit by increasing the tax collected. Ottoman tax collectors would often overestimate the taxes levied on villagers and townsfolk especially when the Empire required additional revenue during times of unrest. Inevitably, this led to a vicious cycle of higher taxes and increased discontent. Such a crippling tax burden also contributed to large numbers of villagers seeking new homes in the villages of the mountains where the efficient collection of taxes was far more difficult.*

## Chapter 3: Village Life

*My ancestors were peasant farmers living their lives in technologically backward, agricultural communities which exhibited many of the physical and social features commonly associated with medieval Europe. Their everyday existence was absorbed by the need to raise life-sustaining grain crops, fruit and vegetables on strips of land scattered among the village fields and to pasture small herds of sheep and goats in the meadow lands. They were poor, illiterate and unworldly but they were industrious and knew how best to use their meagre resources to subsist.*

*Traditional Macedonian society was male oriented and family patriarchs were to be obeyed without question. Everyone knew their place and had a shared responsibility to promote the general welfare of their large extended families. Age and not education, was the measure of wisdom and elders were to be respected and cared for in their declining years. Therefore the birth of male children was considered to be a greater blessing than girl babies as they would carry on the family name, look after aging family members and some would become family patriarchs. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to enter into often prearranged marriages, while still in their early teens, and fully devote themselves to the families of their husbands.*

*As my family tree sprouted new branches and leaves my direct ancestors would become known as Numevi, the descendants of Dedo Noume, one of Dedo Yane Vellioff's sons.*

### Chapter 3: Village Life

The most important annual activity in the well-established routine of village life was *soberva*, harvest time, particularly the reaping of the *zhito*, grain crops, notably rye, corn and wheat. This was the time when the adults, accompanied by the older children, equipped with saw-like *srpi*, sickles, with wooden handles and curved metal blades, laboured together to cut and gather the grain-bearing stalks ready for threshing in the fields or within the *goomni*, courtyards, of the village homes. There the grain-bearing stalks were trampled by foot or by the family's horse or donkey. Once the grain had been separated it was scooped up into the *veter*, air, with broad, flat wooden shovels, to separate it from the husks. Corn kernels had to be removed by hand from the cobs. The precious grain and corn kernels were then bagged and taken to the village mill to be ground into *brashno*, flour, while the stalks and husks were stored in the stables as fodder to be fed to the livestock, especially during the bleak winter months. Little was left unused since villagers could not afford to be wasteful. Stalks destined to be used as roofing material were cut into longer lengths than normal and the grain growing on them was removed gently by hand to avoid damaging them. Even the fine remnants of the pounded stalks, known as *pleva*, were not discarded but mixed with mud by stone masons to make their mortar. Hay, so vital to the survival of the livestock was also cut and bundled from the pasture lands at harvest time.

*Dedo Yane Vellioff's* lasting legacy to the *selo*, village, of *Krepeshina* was a *vodenitsa*, water-powered flour mill, which he subsequently donated to the village church. *Krepeshina* is a traditional Macedonian village that has survived the passage of time although, today, it is an obscure community inhabited almost exclusively by the elderly. Once thriving villages, vibrant and bustling with life are now merely the haunts, after sundown, of shadowy, ghost-like figures from the past. Visitors reminiscing about old times while strolling among the decaying buildings and empty fields claim that as *noshja*, night, approaches they can hear the chatter of long-departed villagers, ghosts from the past, going about their daily lives. Shepherds herding their flocks and sleeping beneath the *dzevzdi*, stars, often comment that all seems to grow silent once the eerie crowing of phantom *peteli*, roosters, welcomed in the new day.

Water-powered flour mills, situated alongside rivers and streams, were common features of the cultural landscape of Macedonia's villages. In a society where a variety of grain crops were grown and bread was the staple food, water mills were essential to grind the grain into flour. The village of *Krepeshina* had one water-powered flour mill, *Maala* two while the more populous, nearby village of *Neret*, had five such mills. *Yane Vellioff's* family had constructed the water-powered flour mill as a sound family business enterprise and the *Vellioff* family mill was a popular meeting place for the villagers, especially at harvest time, when bags of *chentitsa*, wheat, *rzh*, rye, and *chenka*, corn, were carried by donkey or on broad backs of the villagers to the mill site.

This was a time of the year for the villagers to briefly *pochini*, relax, to stand around idly and talk awhile alongside the river bank and listen to the cascading sounds of running water and the gentle slapping of the mill's wooden paddles as they continuously rotated to power two large circular, furrowed, grinding stones. *Dedo Yane Vellioff*, a founding father of the village and the village miller, was typically the centre of activity : supervising and shouting out instructions that were often met with indifference by his sons, busily feeding grain into the centre of the mill's grinding stones. *Yane Vellioff* would proudly proclaim that the flour produced at his family mill was the finest in the *Lerinsko* region. The *Vellioff* family patriarch reveled in such surroundings and would often declare that this was his favourite time of the year. The flour mill operated smoothly under the auspices of the *Vellioff* family for many years until *Dedo Yane's* sons, despite his angry protests, refused to continue to *meli*, grind, the grain of their fellow villagers.

The *Vellioff* brothers had enjoyed a bountiful harvest. Especially satisfying were the high-yielding rye crop raised in the family fields in *Pavlin*. The brothers had fertilised their fields there by plowing in large quantities of animal *gnoj*, manure, into the soil and their painstaking preparations had been rewarded. Having harvested the rye they piled the grain-laden stalks into pyramid-shaped stacks to allow any rain that might fall to flow off them and keep them relatively dry. They had decided that they would thresh their crop on bare patches of earth which they had cleared in the fields and caked with a mixture of water and *kal*, mud, and occasionally cow pats which were left to dry and formed a hard surface. The sons of *Yane Vellioff* duly informed their father that they did not have the time or inclination to mill the grain of their fellow villagers and *se faliye*, boasted, that they had plentiful grain of their own which required milling. Consumed with anger, the family patriarch warned that unless his sons changed their minds he would *podari*, gift, the family's water mill to the village church, which he did, and from that time the flour mill continued to grind the grain of the villagers but now under the supervision of the village priest and an appointed village miller and not members of the *Vellioff* family. It was an arrangement that would continue long after *Dedo Yane's* death. Donations of flour received from the villagers in return for the milling of their grain helped to financially sustain the village church and its priest.

Subsequently, one of *Krepeshina's* millers was *Vasil Tolleff* who adopted the habit of sleeping, during harvest time when there were large quantities of grain to grind, in a makeshift shack located at the mill site. Apparently, a large *smok*, python, lived there with him among a clutter of old bags and equipment where it would hide whenever anyone beside the miller approached. It is said that the *zmia*, snake, was killed by a group of youngsters as it was sunning itself on a nearby rocky outcrop. The young boys proudly told the villager miller that they had saved his life by ensuring that he would not be squeezed to death by the large reptile while he was asleep. They were expecting to receive the miller's gratitude but were surprised when he had turned angrily upon them and shouted at them that they had not saved his life but had murdered one of his *duzhini*, faithful companions.

*Yane Vellioff* was further estranged from his four sons after the *umirachka*, death, of their mother when the family patriarch married a much younger woman. His *nova nevesta*, new wife, was invariably seen at his side while he worked in the fields and as he pastured the family sheep and goats. His fellow villagers often sniggered behind his back that the crusty old man feared that his young wife would run away should he leave her alone at home. The marriage produced a daughter who, when she married, was gifted the most bountiful of *Yane Vellioff's* fields. Their half-sister's large dowry further irked *Dedo Yane's* sons and drove another wedge in their already less than cordial relationship. *Yane Vellioff* died of old age in the home of his daughter in *Krepeshina* without ever reconciling with his sons.

**Footnotes:**

*In Australia, members of my branch of my family tree are referred to as Vellios or Velios, a Greek derivation of Vellioff, which we inherited from Dedo Vello. However, most of our compatriots know us as Numevi, a surname derived from Yane Vellioff's son, Nuome Vellioff. Another branch of our family tree refer to themselves as Naoum which signifies that they are also descendants of Dedo Nuome.*

*Giorgi Numeff*, the eldest of *Dedo Noume Vellioff's* sons, now an aging patriarch, walked noticeably hunched over and with the assistance of a crudely whittled, but sturdy, walking stick. He moved with difficulty, joints aching, his once muscular, *nodzi*, legs, barely supporting him, his limbs reluctant to obey the clear messages being sent down to them by a still alert brain. He was visibly failing, his *mrsha*, body, succumbing to the natural ravages of old age, years of hard work and the onerous responsibilities of being the family's chief decision-maker. He no longer thought about his, *mlados*, youth, when he was full of energy and optimism, instead eerie, vivid images of his long-departed father and mother would appear to him with increased regularity during nights of restless, broken sleep. They seemed to be beckoning him, *ratsi*, hands, outstretched toward him, smiling gently, imploring him to join them in the after-life. The old man now talked regularly of the rapid passage of the years and of his impending *umirachka*, death. As he strolled, somewhat unsteadily, in the courtyard of the family home, he lingered awhile to look at his wife of over fifty years who was bent over weeding in the family's *mala gradina*, vegetable garden. The smooth, olive complexion of her youth, her boundless verve and ready smile had left her and while she neither relinquished her dignity nor lost her innate charm, she too, was tired and ailing. However, life was still precious and one of *Giorgi Numeff's* favourite sayings was "*staros ni rados ama schmit ni shaga*", old age is not a joy but death is nothing to laugh at.

The family patriarch reflected that it seemed an eternity since they had married in circumstances, that had at the time, had been a rich source of gossip throughout nearby villages. His father, *Noume Vellioff*, the eldest son of *Dedo Yane Vellioff* and his good friend, *Jovan Kochoff* from *Bapchor*, had talked over the years about the time the two of them would further cement their close bonds of friendship through the marriage of their eldest children, *Giorgi* and *Lozana*. With the inevitable passage of the years *Lozana Kochova* had bloomed into womanhood. She was a sensible and *prepna*, attractive, young girl from a respected, relatively well-to-do family, and as such was a most desirable bride. The *Kochoff* family, however, were having serious doubts about their daughter marrying outside of *Bapchor*, a village full of willing suitors, and moving to *Krepeshina* to marry *Giorgi Numeff*. *Baba Lozana's* family, therefore, began spreading the, *mamel'edzhia*, deception, that their daughter was soon to marry a hard-working young man from *Bapchor*, the oldest son, who would inherit a number of highly productive fields and a substantial herd of sheep and goats. It was a well-conceived ploy but the *Kochoff* family had not reckoned with *Dedo Noume's* determination to get his own way. He was a short, stout man with a reputation, some would say a family trait, of being pig-headed, he was not easily distracted once he had made up his mind. He would see that his son *Giorgi* married *Lozana Kocheva* and nothing or nobody would deter him. The dramatic events associated with *Dedo Giorgi* and *Baba Lozana's* marriage were played out in the fields of *Pavlin* which had been purchased by villagers from *Bapchor* during *Dedo Vello's* days and over time were shared with their kinfolk who had settled in *Krepeshina*. Village families would annually send a male family member to *Pavlin* to milk the family herds of ewes and nanny goats. The area was well-known for its fertile fields and cold, pristine waters and was the

place where milk from family flocks was stored, on site, in large wooden barrels. After a night of sleeping under the *dzevzdi*, stars, a male member of each village family would herd their flocks back home and then within days return to *Pavlin* to make, *mus*, butter, and a variety of cheeses. This was a man's job and referred to as going *na bachillo*. Widows and wives with husbands working abroad would have to ask male relatives to undertake the task on their behalf. At *Pavlin*, the assembled family representatives would begin agitating the stored *ml'eko*, milk, with *domaski*, home-made, wooden paddles to which were attached round wooden plates with holes drilled into them. As they agitated the milk the butter fat rose slowly to the surface and was promptly scooped up by eager hands in soft, pliable clumps and plunged into the cold, crisp *vodj*, waters of *Pavlin's* streams, seeping from underground springs, to solidify. The butter was then placed within tin containers to be taken home and used for cooking or to be sold in the townships.

The family home of *Noume Vellioff* in *Krepeshina* had become severely over crowded. A large *zadruga*, extended family, was forced to live there in increasingly cramped and uncomfortable conditions. Nevertheless, it was home and everyone was expected to contribute to the family's well-being. *Noume Numeff*, was primarily responsible for ploughing the family fields, planting grain crops and helping with the harvest. *Risto* and *Marko* also worked in the fields and were the family's chief shepherds. In addition to his other family responsibilities, their brother *Gile Numeff*, undertook the important role of going to *Pavlin*, *na bachillo*, to milk the family's ewes and nanny goats and to produce the family's butter and cheese. *Gile Numeff* was reputedly good at what he did and the family was well-supplied with butter and *staro chirene*, fetta cheese and *ourda*, cottage cheese, which he made by draining the residue fluid left over from the making of the fetta cheese, boiling it and then allowing it to set. He would process the milk from the family's sheep and goats until only a murky white, watery mixture remained. This too was not wasted but taken home as feed for the family pigs. *Gile's* skills as a maker of butter and cheese were widely acknowledged throughout the surrounding villages, so much so, that he would travel each year to the village of *Belkammen*, located in the shadows of *Vicho*, to assist the villagers living there to produce their butter and cheeses. The village was named after the white rocks found in the vicinity and was home to a number of Albanian families who had settled there and generally earned their living by working as skilled stone masons and carpenters.

It would be in *Pavlin* that *Noume Vellioff*, deviously deployed his marriage plan for his eldest son. He began by circulating word, throughout the village communities located in the *Lerinsko* and *Kostursko* regions, that his son, *Giorgi*, was to be engaged to a girl from the village of *Lagen*. As he had suspected this *novini*, news, quickly filtered into the homes of nearby villagers and into the *Kochoff* household in lofty *Bapchor*. Convinced that *Noume Vellioff's* family had no further matrimonial designs involving their daughter and that their own misinformation had been believed, *Jovan Kochoff* agreed to my future great grandmother travelling to his family fields in *Pavlin* with her younger brother acting as chaperone. It was there among the *visoki*, tall, green grasses of *Pavlin*, that the venerable *Odysseus*, the crafty strategist of the *Numeff*

family, accompanied by his sons and a number of relatives and friends, sprung his trap. It was during daylight, indeed, it was noon and the *sontse*, sun, was directly overhead, brightly nestled in a clear, blue sky, when the family of *Noume Vellioff*, the *Numevi*, brazenly *agrabne*, kidnapped, *Dedo Giorgi's* bride-to-be. The volley of *kamenje*, stones, accurately hurled at them by *Baba Lozana's* indignant, but outnumbered and powerless young brother, failed to deter the members of the *Numeff* press-gang. *Baba Lozana*, hanging from a wooden pole which had been passed through her dress sleeves and along her back, feet dangling, heart thumping and terrified, was unceremoniously carried to *Krepeshina*. When her brother returned to *Bapchor* crying, distraught and without his sister, *Baba Lozana's* indignant father went directly to *Lerin* to inform the local police and to engage a lawyer to help bring his daughter back home. However, *Baba Lozana* would stay.

The once close *priateli*, friends, their families now bound together by the marriage of their children, sat facing each other. Each drank slowly from a glass of *Noume Vellioff's* home-made wine. There was a long silence since both men were unsure of what to say or the way they should act toward the other. Then *Jovan Kochoff* spoke, " *Brat*, brother," he said, "you took my daughter against her will into your family home." *Dedo Noume* did not respond immediately but drank deeply from his glass and smiled at his guest, "*bati Jovan*", he replied, "you promised many years ago that our children would wed." He paused and looked directly into the eyes of his old friend and asked, "is not the eldest son of *Noume Vellioff* a worthy husband for your *kjerka*, daughter?" The two men stood and embraced, before sitting down to talk of old times and to reflect on the fact that soon, *so Gospo*, by the grace of God, they would be celebrating the much anticipated birth of a *mnuk*, grandson. During the ensuing years, *Giorgi Numeff* had often wondered whether his life-long partner had married him out of embarrassment or whether she was at least a little attracted to him. He never *opita*, asked, and she never told him, but they had raised a family and had grown old together.

My great grandmother *Lozana* was said to have a gift for weaving, knitting and embroidery and was noted for her commonsense and quick thinking. My grandmother, *Yana*, who knew her well, would tell of the day that she had vigorously slapped the back of one of her sisters-in-law who almost *oplit*, choked, from a piece of chicken wing that had lodged in her *grlo*, throat. The family's young *nevesta*, bride, had just removed it from the family *tengere*, cooking pot, when she had been interrupted by the unexpected arrival of her father-in-law. She had *gltna*, swallowed, it whole, being too embarrassed to be seen taking more than her rightful share of the family's evening meal.

#### Footnotes:

*Giorgi Numeff*, the oldest of *Noume Vellioff's* four sons, would become the patriarch of an extended family of thirty eight *dushi*, people. The four *Numeff* brothers worked *bratsvo*, as one, but so overcrowded had the family's household in *Krepeshina* become that the brothers, *se podelie*, moved into separate households, and equally divided the family's *imanje*, livestock, and *nivi*, fields. *Dedo Risto Numeff*, another of *Noume Vellioff's* sons had three sons, *Stoian*, *Tome* and *Kuzo* and a daughter *Stasa*. His son, *Stoian Numeff*, worked in the United States of America for

three years and on his return sought a permit to immigrate to Australia. However, this request was rejected by the Greek authorities. He consequently fled across the Bulgarian border where he became a citizen. As such he was required to undertake compulsory military service and to avoid this requirement he returned to Krepeshina where he was jailed as a Bulgarian sympathiser. Ironically, on his release, he was forced into national military service by the Greek authorities. Dedo Stoian's favourite saying was pravina nemashe nicade, there was no justice anywhere.

On completing military service he was permitted to depart for Western Australia where he worked as a farm labourer and sleeper cutter. In 1937, he was joined by his son Noume, who was born in 1913 and was married to Ristana Ylova, the twin sister of my future mother-in-law. Dedo Stoian worked as a cook in various Perth restaurants before returning home. Six years later Baba Stoianitsa died and Dedo Stoian Numeff and Noume's wife Ristana, son Kole and daughter Stasa, left for Australia. Noume's eldest son, Mitre (Jim Vellios), who was born in July 1931, had previously ventured to Australia in 1948, as a seventeen year old, to join his father.

In 1950 Dedo Stoian family's left Western Australia and purchased a dairy farm in the Wauchope, New South Wales, located some 400 kilometres north of Sydney. There they would marzie kravi, milk a herd of dairy cows, atshisti, cleared, the farm of excess trees and scrubs and orayi, ploughed, the soil with horses in the days before they could afford to buy a tractor. They grew vegetables: fasul, beans, and bizeli, peas, kept chickens, made cheese, baked their own bread and butchered their own meat. Only rarely did they travel to the Wauchope township to buy clothes and various provisions and would occasionally visited Port Macquarie, some twenty kilometres away, to go swimming. The ladies would enter the water fully dressed while the men waded into the surf wearing their long trousers. Stoian Numeff (Vellios) died in Wauchope in 1960.

In 1952, Stoian's eldest son, Mitre Numeff (Jim Vellios), who had returned to live in Perth, married Vesa Kaindova, the daughter of Kuzo and Sofka Kiandoff, formerly from Bapchor and then Maala. They were wed a few months after my own wedding and Vesa wore my wife's wedding dress. Mitre Numeff originally found employment as a mechanic but had difficulty with pismoto and eziko, writing and speaking, in English. On his return to Western Australia he became a crane driver with Portland Cement, then worked as a cleaner at the Majestic Hotel in Applecross, before becoming a cleaning foreman at West Australian Newspapers, the Vesnikara. Later, he was employed as a gardener with Co-operative Bulk Handling, a company handling the grain produced by Western Australian farmers. The other members of his family, father, mother, brother and sister, settled in Melbourne.

Mitre and Vesa had three children, Jovan (John), who was born in 1953 but tragically died when only three months old, Fania (Faye) was born in 1954 and Giorgi (George) in 1956. Mitre Numeff was a life member of the Macedonian Community of Western Australia, where he served in a variety of important roles over many years. Mitre and his family are descendants of Noume Vellioff. Mitre's mother was the twin sister of my wife's mother, Mara Peova nee Ylova and Vesa's mother, Sofka Kiandova, was the sister of my father-in-law, Vasil Peoff.

Tanas and Tome Yloff from Krepeshina, my mother-in-law's brothers arrived in the Wauchope district in 1927 where they were employed as timber and clearance workers. Subsequently, Tanas purchased a truck with which he carted sleepers out of the forest to local railway sidings and Tome rented a dairy farm where he milked a herd of dairy cows. In 1933, the two brothers were joined by their families. Tome Yloff later purchased his own dairy farm and Tanas would also buy a farming property in the area and use his truck to pick up milk from surrounding dairy producers and deliver it to the local butter producing factory. Tanas and Yana Yloff had nine children, Mitra, who married Kole Paikoff, (Nick Paikos), Sotir, Ristana, Fanija, John, Shirley, George, Betty-Jana and Keith. Tome Yloff's family consisted of three boys, Riste, Jim, Tanas and three girls, Rita, Kata and Mara.

The kidnapping of brides, although not unknown, was certainly not the norm or socially condoned in a society where matrimonial bonds were formally arranged through strictly adhered to, time-honoured customs. Courting was virtually unknown. When a young man indicated that he was attracted to a girl this was strictly interpreted as the prelude to a proposal of marriage and a *stronick*, matchmaker, was engaged usually a relative or friend of the young man's family, someone who was known to the family of the intended bride and could be diplomatic. They were generally older women reputed to be gifted in the art of match-making and their services were keenly sought after. Their role was to discuss the prospects of matrimonial ties being agreed and very importantly the size of the *darba*, dowry. The *stronick*, bearing gifts, usually woollen *chorapi*, socks or aprons made by the suitor's mother, would pay a visit to the family home of the intended, *nevesta*, bride, and there *zboreva*, talk over, the proposal of marriage with the young girl's family patriarch and not necessarily her father. As a show of appreciation for helping to organize a successful match, *stronicks* customarily received a *podarok*, gift, of a new pair of *che'li*, shoes. Such occasions could elicit *rados*, joy and happiness, if the match was to the *merak*, liking, of the two young people involved. However, such arranged marriages could also lead to heartache when a girl was not keen on her chosen husband-to-be. It was difficult for young girls, often in their early teens, to defy their *roditeli*, parents, on any matter, including whom they were to wed. As a result more timid and obedient young girls would enter into loveless marriages out of a sense of duty. In time some would learn to *lubi*, love, their husbands and take comfort in their children but others knew their lot was to endure in silence.

*Zetoi*, grooms, were expected to pay a dowry to the family of their brides. Custom dictated that this was in exchange for a *sanduk*, wooden chest, filled with *charchafi*, blankets, rugs, shirts, socks and aprons, which every girl dutifully collected over time and brought into her husband's household. The size of dowries were generally determined by the ability of family to pay but only rarely was a dowry not paid. However, the erstwhile *Dedo Kole*, my grandfather, who had insisted on a dowry of six *napoleonie*, French gold coins, when his daughter *Kata* was married, refused to pay a dowry to my maternal grandfather *Kuzo Ilioff* when my father and mother wed. The two men were not on speaking terms at the time and *Kuzo Ilioff* had expressed strong reservations about his daughter, my mother, marrying into the family of *Kole Numeff*. This was a sufficient reason to *Dedo Kole's* way of thinking for not paying a dowry.

My mother, *Jordanna Iliova*, clearly recalled the day when the matchmaker, a family friend, arrived at her home and how she had been told by her father *Dedo Kuzo* to leave the house while her parents and their visitor talked over a few things. The visit was not a surprise, my father had told my mother to expect a visit from the *Numeff* family match-maker. She and my father had grown up together in *Krepeshina* and were almost the same age, in fact my mother was a nearly a year older. However, their marriage plans had to overcome a rather crucial hurdle, gaining the consent of my maternal grandfather *Kuzo Ilioff*, who was concerned that his headstrong, oldest daughter with smooth olive skin and long dark *kosa*, hair, which she wore in long plaits

was determined to marry *Risto Numeff*. *Dedo Kuzo* had witnessed my paternal grandfather's outbursts while they had worked together in the United States and during the normal course of village life and reasoned that any son of *Kole Numeff* might, in his view, have the same personality flaws as his father. He frequently lectured his eldest daughter, in very direct terms, that if she married into *Kole Numeff's* household she should not ever contemplate coming to *plachi*, cry, to him when things inevitably turned *kisello*, sour.

I had heard of an incident that occurred between the two men while they were working together in the United States. Apparently, it had been *Dedo Kuzo's* turn to *gotvi*, cook, the evening meal for his fellow workers, *selani*. Soon, an enticing aroma wafted from within the communal cooking pot. One of their number, *Mitre Ilioff*, a relation of *Dedo Kuzo*, had commented on the mouth-watering *mirismo*, smell, of the *chorba*, stew, that his cousin was cooking and he asked if he could taste small portion by scooping it into his plate. Just as he did so, my grandfather entered the room and grabbed the plate from his *liffin*, a person who liked to have a taste of food before it was served, work-mate and hurled it against the wall declaring loudly that they should all eat together and share equally. Stew splattered on the floor as the plate smashed and the *lajtsa*, spoon, cluttered against the wall. As his relative cowed *Dedo Kuzo* said, "*Kole* why are you so *loute*, bad tempered? No one can live with you." *Dedo Kole* had glared at his fellow villager and with a wry smile said, "Do not be so sure, your own daughter *Jordanna*, will one day come to live in my home". Although *Dedo Kuzo* was resolutely opposed to the marriage he had not reckoned on the determination of my mother. She had made up her mind and *Dedo Kuzo* eventually relented. Soon after, the official announcement of the, *aramus*, engagement, of *Risto Numeff* and *Jordanna Iliova* was made and *Dedo Kole* was said to have taken his flintlock rifle from its well-concealed hiding place, stand legs spread apart in the family courtyard and fire the weapon several times into the air. This was a customary, if overly dramatic way, most likely borrowed from our Turkish neighbours, of announcing good news.

*Kuzo Ilioff* was far less anxious about the marriage of his younger daughter, my mother's sister, *Dosta*, to her husband *Mitre Kitin*. It was said that *Dedo Kuzo* had crossed paths with his future son-in-law while herding the family flocks of *ofchi* and *kozi*, sheep and goats. Following a typical exchange of greetings, the tall, angular, young man had informed him that he was on his way to collect, *drva*, firewood, for his family's woodpile which he intended to load onto a cart harnessed to a *magare*, donkey. During the course of that day, the two men met again and *Dedo Kuzo* was surprised to see the young man was already on his way home to *Krepeshina* with his cart fully loaded. He had reasoned that the young man had previously harvested the wood and had merely spent the day collecting it. However, he noticed that the timber was freshly-cut with red resin still visibly flowing from many of the logs. This left a lasting impression on *Dedo Kuzo* and the thought passed his mind that this young villager would be a good provider and an ideal husband for *Dosta*, his youngest daughter. The marriage was readily agreed to by both family patriarchs and the couple wed in 1936.

The *Kitini*, Kitin family, were originally residents of *Bapchor* who like many other families from village had relocated to *Krepeshina*. The family was originally known as *Nikolovi* but their new name appears to have originated, unusually, not from a male member of the family but rather from a certain *Baba Kita*, who was said to have been a feisty, young widow, whose children were identified by their fellow villagers as *Kitini*, the sons and daughters of *Kita*. *Dedo Mitre Kitin*, was the son of *Giorgi Kitin*, a close friend of my father and he and *Dedo Giorgi* shared many life experiences working together as sleeper cutters in Western Australia during the 1920s.

The news of the engagement of my parents spread quickly throughout *Krepeshina* and nearby village communities and a constant stream of well-wishers began to flow into the rejoicing *Numeff*, and less enthusiastic, *Ilioff* households. Village engagements were not lavish affairs, my father and mother had simply made a verbal commitment to marry and my mother was gifted an inexpensive engagement *prsten*, ring, made from twisted wire, which my father had purchased in *Lerin*. Villagers could not afford extravagances even in the celebration of the most joyous occasions. A wedding date was set in consultation with the village *pop*, priest, and this was followed by a number of traditional wedding preparations. Among the most critical of these, rather ironically, was securing musicians to play during the celebrations. Since there were no professional bands, villagers who had taught themselves to play a musical instrument: flute, clarinet, drum, trumpet, piano accordion, violin or the *gayda*, Macedonian bagpipe, were in great demand during such festive occasions.

My paternal grandfather was frequently asked to play at village, *svadbi*, weddings. Rarely would such an invitation be declined since *Kole Numeff* enjoyed being the centre of attention. On such occasions he would *brichi*, shave, trim his moustache and open an old, tattered case from which he took out a dark, pin-stripped suit, the one he had worn on his voyage home from America, those many years ago. Dressed in his finest, if now slightly ill-fitting clothes and placing his home-made *gayda*, a flute inserted into a parchment of stitched goat skin taken from the stomach of the animal, under his armpit, he would leave home early in eager anticipation of a day of music, drinking, eating and dancing. Village weddings were a time to *praznuva*, celebrate, to *od begaj*, leave behind, if only momentarily, the stress and grinding monotony of daily life and to enjoy the company of one's friends and loved ones.

#### Footnotes:

*Yane Kitin, Dedo Mitre Kitin's grandfather, had been one of Bapchor's leading citizens and a deeply patriotic Macedonian who like others with such strong convictions would become a political prisoner and subjected to repeated beatings. Such mistreatment would contribute to his early death at 49 years of age. Giorgi Kitin, Dedo Mitre's father, was married to Velika Tolleva, the daughter of one of Krepeshina's millers. Elisabeta Kitina, Dedo Mitre's sister, is the mother of Nick (dec), Peter and Mary Zaikos (Petrou).*

An impending marriage was an opportune time for the bride, accompanied by the women of the household, to consult a *Romany*, gypsy, fortune teller. *Romany* families regularly drifted in and out of Macedonian villages and townships, speaking a language of their own among themselves but often in fluent Macedonian to the villagers and townsfolk. They would typically set up their exotic campsites on the outskirts of settled communities. They were regarded as outsiders, non-citizens, by the authorities and were not permitted to own land and were therefore, destined to roam the countryside, constantly on the move with their possessions carried within intricately-constructed, brightly-decorated, horse-drawn wagons. The *Romany* were said to have originated in North-West India but by the fourteenth century some groups had drifted into the Balkans. Villagers generally keep their distance from *Romany* campsites but they did occasionally witness some of the strange ways of these mysterious and transient people. They noted that the *Roma* drank strong, highly-sweetened tea and rarely ate at noon but preferring to eat at sunset, typically stews consisting of variety of vegetables thickened with handfuls of rice or pasta. They would drink water scooped from as close to the head of a river or stream as they could and washed their clothes as far as possible downstream. The villagers and townsfolk observed that they would not *mie*, bathe, in stagnant water but only immerse themselves within the flowing river waters. Although they had a reputation as astute merchants and traders, they did not hesitate to resort to *mol'i*, beg, for food. It was not uncommon for *Roma* men, wearing large *shapki*, hats, since they regarded the head as the most important part of the body, dressed in colourful clothing and sporting luxuriant moustaches, knock from door to door seeking charity, invariably accompanied by their young, desperate-looking children.

The arrival of *Romany* families in the villages and towns provided a curious spectacle and the children, in particular, were fascinated by the antics of their mischievously playful *majmuni*, monkeys, and intrigued by their captive brown *mechki*, bears, powerful, fierce-looking *zhivotni*, creatures, firmly restrained with thick ropes attached to large metal nose rings. Their trained bears would dance and prance in response to the shouts of their masters and to the whacks with stout wooden sticks, administered with great gusto upon their broad, hairy backs and rumps. The *selski* would offer *Gtuptsi*, *Romany* visitors, arriving at their doorsteps, small quantities of beans, corn, vegetables, pieces of fruit and loaves of bread which they eagerly accepted and deposited into large, *torbi*, bags, dangling over ornately decorated *semeri*, saddles, placed atop a donkey or horse. There was little animosity between the *Romany* and the villagers or townsfolk who were by nature extremely hospitable. It was also the case that many of them were highly superstitious and unnerved by the prospect of becoming afflicted by some dire misfortune as a result of the casting of the evil eye or a malevolent *kl'efva*, curse, upon them should they have caused offence or displeasure. Gypsy fortune tellers were said to have the gift of reading tarot cards, coffee cups and tea leaves, interpreting mystical signs and peering into the future. They invariably predicted a happy marriage, blessed with many healthy children and much *kismet*, good fortune.

My mother's coffee cup reading, performed by an old gypsy woman, wearing a brightly -coloured

frock and adorned with gold plated bangles, bracelets and rings, foretold a long marriage full of trials and tribulations, a family of many sons and of ultimate fulfillment.

On *streda*, Wednesday, of the week my parents were to be married, the women of the *Numeff* household, directed by *Baba Yana*, began baking bread and pastries for the wedding guests. My grandmother took extra care when baking the *kolalsi*, circular, plaited loaves, which would be taken to the homes of the *numko*, best man, *pobraatimi*, groomsmen, and the family's closest relatives. The women spent days preparing a variety of dishes that would be served during the wedding feast. Both families began celebrations in earnest during *sabota*, Saturday, when the villagers ate, drank and danced as a prelude to the wedding of *Risto Numeff* and *Jordanna Iliova*. They danced the traditional *hora*, circular dances, in the village square. The old men, the village patriarchs, danced first and complaints of aching limbs and failing hearts were forgotten as their legs and arms responded to the beckoning, hypnotic music. Straightening their *iskriveni*, bent over bodies, *za raka*, linking hands, with life-long companions, they performed the slow *staro horo* the old man's dance, and felt young again. The women danced to songs such as *Makedonsko Devojce*, a song dedicated to young Macedonian maidens, while the younger men and those who still thought of themselves young, danced the up tempo, *poschenoto*.

On *nedela*, Sunday, the *Numeff soi*, kinfolk, and their relations, walked to my mother's family home carrying with them her bridal veil and a new pair of shoes. They strolled slowly, chatting excitedly and singing and dancing along with the accompanying music as they went to collect the family's new bride and escort her to the village church. In the villages of the *palini*, mountains, brides were often taken to church atop a horse but in the *pollye*, lowlands, where the land was relatively *ramno*, flat, brides generally arrived at church in carts drawn by a donkey or horse. Wedding parties were careful to avoid crossing paths as this was considered a bad omen. If such an occasion arose, it was customary for one of the bridal parties to divert off the road, and *krie*, hide, behind an outcrop of trees or a dry creek bed until the other party had well and truly passed from view.

Early on the morning of her wedding day, my mother, recalled going alone to the village *chesma*, water fountain, to fill one of the family's clay pitchers. It was a symbolic gesture, the last chore that she would perform in the household of her parents. She sometimes spoke of her feelings on that day and described a host of conflicting emotions: the sadness of her impending departure from her family home but also the joyous anticipation of beginning a new chapter in her life. She remembered how from the upstairs window of *Kuzo Ilioff's* home she heard the music, singing and chatter and watched the members of my father's family and fellow villagers milling below. She also remembered glimpsing her future father-in-law among the throng playing his *gayda*, singing, shouting and smiling broadly. Seated nearby, on the family's cart, which had been suitably decorated for the occasion, was his much more reserved wife. She saw my father walking nervously alongside, dressed in his my grandfather's American tight-fitting, *kostum*, suit, a family heirloom, to be worn only on such special occasions. A well-tailored American-

made suit was still much-prized even if it did not properly fit the person wearing it. Most of the clothes worn by the *selski* were home-made by self-taught *terzi*, village tailors, who would practice their craft generally during the bitterly cold winter months when the fields lay buried under thick blankets of snow. The visit of the village tailor, usually accompanied by a young apprentice, typically a teenage son or relative, was a significant event and it was customary for village tailors to temporarily live in the homes of the villagers while they measured, cut and stitched garments made from *volna*, wool, that had been spun and woven by the women on their rudimentary home looms or from *krpa*, cloth, that had been purchased in one of *Lerin's* drapery stores.

My mother had watched as my grandfather, on arriving at the front of the house, ceremonially sought out the patriarch of her family, her father, *Kuzo Ilioff*, whom he found seated stoically on a chair, erect and formal, so much out of character, but playing the role that was expected of him and performing it with dignity and with an appropriate element of theatrics. A large, round, baked bread loaf rested on Dedo Kuzo's lap and as my grandfather and the other wedding guests filed slowly past they shook his hand, offered words of congratulations and gently placed *pari*, coins and notes, upon the loaf. The money was for the newly-weds who were beginning a new life together. However, more often than not, such monetary gifts would be retained by family patriarchs with the comment that your money is our money, our *borch*, debt, is your debt and that the money gifted was needed to ease some of the family's more immediate financial commitments or to purchase livestock and fodder. My father and mother, *sezenie*, were married, in the Greek Orthodox Church of *Sveti Giorgi* in *Krephešina*. This was not the preference of either of the families but since the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of the village had been banned by the Greek authorities, they had no other option. My parents therefore made their marriage vows in a language which they understood but rarely spoke among themselves. Their best man was *Vasil Pandu*, who was also known as *Vasil Shestevsky*.

**Footnotes:**

*Macedonian men of the villages and townships having more than one surname was not uncommon for it was customary for families without sons to welcome a son-in-law into the family, as a domaski zet or zet na kurkia, a husband who lived with the family of his wife, adopted his wife's family name and agreed that his children carry the surname of their maternal forebears.*

*It was also customary for families without male offspring to adopt sons from families with a number of sons so that their family name would live on. These young boys were raised by their new families who often married one of the daughters. Another way of perpetuating the family name, used by families without male heirs, was to employ a momok, a helping hand, who would live with and then marry into the family. It was said, generally in jest, that some less scrupulous young men would agree to become a momok to a wealthy family even if the daughters were not particularly attractive.*

After the wedding ceremony, the guests returned to the home of *Kole Numeff* to continue feasting, drinking, dancing and singing. The family had slaughtered a number of sheep which had been roasted slowly on a home-made spit. Inviting morsels of meat, flavoured with herbs and garlic, were placed alongside ample servings of *fasul*, bean soup, *kioftini*, spiced meatballs, *pulni piperki*, stuffed capsicums, *espechini patati*, baked potatoes, *salata*, green salads, *sirene*, cheese, *zelnik*, pastry filled with fetta cheese, *sarmi*, vine and cabbage leaves, filled with meat and rice, kebabs cooked in *salo*, fat, and roasted eggplant. Poverty was no excuse for a lack of generous hospitality on special occasions.

Celebrations continued well into the late afternoon of *punedelnik*, Monday, when even the most resilient of the guests finally departed for home. There was no honeymoon my mother simply entered a new household, dominated by the *Numeff* family patriarch where she was expected to spend her, *denja*, days, being subservient to her mother-in-law. Before entering the *Numeff* household my mother was handed a few pieces of firewood and a small quantity of *met*, honey, by *Baba Yana* which she symbolically dabbed at three spots of the front door of her new home to ensure a sweet marriage and then placed the firewood in the family hearth to announce that this was now her home and that she would do her part to help foster the general well-being of her husband's family. It was not uncommon for new *nevesti*, brides, to *mej*, wash, the feet of their new mothers-in-law as a gesture of respect and obedience or for the groom to gently *chuka*, knock, his new bride's *glava*, head, on the mantle piece to indicate that she would obey him in every way. Living within in an extended family with their husbands and children had its compensations but for many new wives it could be an emotionally lonely and sometimes humiliating existence.

Within the first year of marriage my mother fell *trudna*, pregnant, with my brother *Tanas*. At a time where there were few hospitals, doctors or nurses, village children were traditionally delivered in the family *auru*, stable, re-enacting the biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ. The villagers reasoned that if it was good enough for the son of God to be born in a manger then that was where their own sons and daughters should also be born. During the last days of a complicated pregnancy my mother lay on a, *kreve*, bed, of fresh *slama*, straw, attended to by the women of the household. The pain of childbirth was clearly etched upon my mother's face, she was grimacing and bravely trying to hold back a deep desire to *vreskra*, scream. There were no trained midwives and no pain killers to assist in childbirth. When my older brother was born his umbilical cord was cut by my grandmother using a pair of old household *nozhitsi*, scissors. The lack of professional medical care and medicines meant that miscarriages were commonplace and the infant mortality rate was high. The loss of a new-born babies was typically accepted as the will of God. The villagers grieved but were philosophical since what mattered most was that the mother had survived and other children, especially male offspring, could be conceived in the future to ensure the continuation of the family name. Not surprisingly, family burial plots often contained tiny wooden caskets within which lay the bodies of dead babies and young infants.

*Baba Lozana* had experienced the heart-break of several miscarriages and a number of her children had died in infancy. So when *Dedo Kole* was born she was naturally overjoyed at the birth of a, *zdrav*, healthy, baby boy. Superstition, mingled with tradition, the two were often indistinguishable, dictated that the good health of the young child would be assured by its parents leaving the youngster by the roadside and then concealing themselves nearby to await the arrival of the first person to come across the newborn. That person would then be asked to christen the child and in doing ensure that the good Lord recognized the youngster as one of his own. *Ylo Shestevsky* had been the first person to come across my grandfather and therefore christened him and as such would be best man at his wedding to *Baba Yana*. The best man at the wedding of my parents had therefore been predetermined long before they were married. When *Vasil Pandu* married *Stasa*, one of *Ylo Shestevsky's* two daughters and moved from his native *Neret* to become a *domaski zet*, he became the natural choice to take over the role as the anointed best man of *Kole Numeff's* sons.

Years later, after our family had moved to *Maala*, among our close friends and neighbours was a young Greek family. The seeds of friendship had been sown when my mother had found a baby girl, wrapped in a warm blanket, crying by the roadside, while returning home after collecting water from a local spring. Placing the clay pitcher that she carried hoisted on one shoulder on the ground she knelt down and gently lifted the baby into her arms. The distressed youngster, had been left there by her parents, who were lurking in the nearby shrubs and who quickly revealed themselves when my mother stopped to pick up their baby daughter. Since my father was away working in Australia, his brother *Striko Mitre*, on behalf of the *Numeff* family, christened the baby girl, and named her Christina. The couple were subsequently blessed with the birth of a second child but much to their distress their young baby boy fell ill and was soon clinging desperately to life. His condition deteriorated so dramatically that his frantic parents feared that their *bebe*, baby, would die. During the late hours of night, the couple knocked loudly on front door of our family home and begged my mother to accompany them and their sick baby to the village, *tsrkva*, church. They had come looking for *Striko Mitre*, who had christened their young daughter but he had been recalled to the Albanian front to rejoin a Greek army battalion engaged in fighting against invading Italian forces. He had left only days before having spent a short time recuperating at home from a leg wound. With my mother in tow, off they went to *razbudi*, wake, the village priest and beg him to immediately christen the youngster and be comforted in the knowledge that if their child should die he would be granted entry into heaven. Good fortune smiled upon the boy whom my mother christened *Andonie*. My mother's choice of names had intrigued the baby's parents since it was the name of a villager regarded as being a little dim-witted. When quizzed about this, my mother replied that she had no time to think of a name beforehand and that it was the first name that had entered her head. The young boy survived and later immigrated to Melbourne where by a strange twist of fate, he and my brother *Sotir*, who was living there, became the best of friends. My brother was best man at *Andonie's* wedding.

After giving birth, my mother remained *vnatre*, indoors, for the traditional six weeks of recuperation. However, two to three weeks after his birth, my older brother *Tanas* was carried in the arms of *Baba Yana*, accompanied by his godfather, to the village church to be christened, to be officially introduced to the All Mighty. Thus he would be recognised as one of the flock and his eternal salvation would be assured should he die in infancy. During this time, streams of well-wishers regularly arrived at the *Numeff* house in *Krepeshina* invariably bringing with them plates of *pitoolki*, sugar-coated, golden-brown pastries, made from a heavy flour and egg batter which had been fried in *maslo*, oil or *salo*, lard. Following her six weeks of confinement my mother eagerly looked forward to stepping outside into the sunlight and again entering into the normal routine of village life but, *prf*, first, she would visit the village church to receive *molitva*, a blessing, from the village priest.

Boys were usually named to honour of family members who themselves had the name of one of the many, *svetisi*, saints, of the Orthodox faith. Birthdays were rarely recorded or celebrated instead one's special day was the saint's day after whom one had been named. On that day, Macedonian villagers and townsfolk could anticipate a visit from their relations and friends expecting to receive generous hospitality. Few villagers knew their true birthdays and subsequently birth dates, recorded on immigration papers and passports, were generally estimates or simply fabricated. It was of little use asking one's parents since the standard reply was that they had been born during a cold or hot spell or when it was harvest time or when a certain family member had died. One rather ironic consequence has been that some Macedonian immigrants benefited by gaining the Australian old age pension a little sooner than they should have. However, this was not necessarily always the case. My brother *Sotir* was noted as being younger than he really was on his passport documents and therefore had to work a little longer before he could officially retire.

In such close-knit communities it was paramount that young children show *odnos*, respect, to all elders and more especially to those of their immediate and extended family and be able to distinguish between their paternal and maternal branches of their family tree. They were expected to address their relatives in the correct manner, *striko and strina*, when in the company of a paternal uncle and aunt and *vuicho and vuhna*, when addressing a maternal uncle and aunt. A popular game was for parents to ask their children to name not just their uncles and aunts but also their many cousins. Failure to do so could result in a severe reprimand since in such a strongly family-oriented society everyone was expected to know their place.

#### Footnotes:

*In traditional Macedonian society it was critical to know one's relatives - both paternal and maternal. A teta or tetin referred to a female and male blood relation whether they be on the father's or mother's side. A shoora referred to the brother of one's wife, sveska to a wife's sister, bajanak to one's wife's sister's husband, dever to a husband's brother, yatrva to a husband's brother's wife, zolva to a husband's sister, snaa, to a brother's wife, zet for a son-in-law, nevesta, to a daughter-in-law, svekor for a father-in-law and svekrva for a mother-in-law.*

*Younger generations of Macedonians have been bemused by the way that their parents would reprimand them for their disappointing behaviour. On these occasions they might have been referred to as pusti govedi, straying livestock, and cursed in a variety of ways: reka da te krni, may rapid river currents carry you away, rofa da te udre, may you be hit by a lightening bolt, smok da te kasni, may you be bitten by a poisonous snake, krasta da te fati, may you contract a painful skin allergy and glavata da te frkni, may you suffer a blinding headache. The word siktar, get out of my sight, would often follow.*

## Chapter 4: Working on the Railways

*America's railway network was largely instrumental in fuelling the country's significant economic growth during the second half of the nineteenth century. The period following the calamity of Civil War was America's golden age of railroad construction. My great grandfather, Kole Numeff, and his brother Sotir, were but two of many millions of immigrants who ventured to American shores to earn much sought-after American dollars. The two brothers had embarked on an adventure undertaken by a growing number of Macedonian villagers and townsfolk in the hope of boosting the financial well-being of their impoverished, large extended families.*

*On America's wide, desolate and dusty plains they toiled from early morning to sunset, clearing scrubland, compacting earth and laying metal tracks and wooden sleepers during the unrelenting heat of summer and the cold, wet winter months. It was back-breaking work but Numeff brothers were young, healthy and accustomed to working hard. However, the physical demands of their American adventure were outweighed by the emotional heartache of being so far from their loved ones, in a vast continent, where they did not speak the language, were socially shunned and were expected to embrace customs and values that were foreign to them. Their new reality was far removed from the lives they had known in their village communities and townships where they lived among their extended families and life-long friends.*

*Like many of their Macedonian compatriots the Numeff brothers never contemplated building a new life in America. On the contrary, they were sustained by the thought that they would return to their ancestral homeland as soon as they had saved sufficient American dollars to make their overseas trials and tribulations financially worthwhile.*

## Chapter 4: Working on the Railways

There came a time when *Kole Numeff* and his brother *Sotir* left the village to find work abroad. Their American odyssey was directly linked to the intrigues of European politics in the second half of the nineteenth century. A decade or so before their journey across the Atlantic Ocean the political fate of their native Macedonia had been at the crossroads and there was *nadeshda*, hope, that over five centuries of Ottoman rule would come to an end and that an independent Macedonian nation would emerge. Tsarist Russia inflicted a series of severe military defeats upon Ottoman forces and in March 1878 the Tsar's government insisted that the Sultan sign the Treaty of San Stefano, which included, among its many clauses and conditions, autonomy for Macedonia. It appeared that Macedonia's Orthodox Russian brothers had finally succeeded in helping to liberate them from their seemingly eternal bondage. However, such dreams, tragically for the Macedonian people, would remain unfulfilled. Britain, France and other leading Western European powers, wary of Russia extending its influence in the Balkans and thereby gaining access to warm-water Mediterranean sea ports, reconvened peace talks in Berlin where it was agreed that Macedonia should remain within the Ottoman Empire. Tsarist Russia racked by internal woes was in no position to object. Serbia, Montenegro and Romania subsequently gained independence as did a region of present-day Bulgaria but the long-suffering Macedonian people had again been sacrificed on the altar of European diplomacy.

The *braakiata Numevi*, *Numeff* brothers, were among the bitterly disappointed when it soon dawned on the generally politically naive villagers that rumours that the Turks were about to depart Macedonian soil were unfounded. Their father, *Giorgi Numeff*, along with other village elders, who had spent their entire *zhivot*, lives, as subjects of the Sultan, were deeply saddened and there was rekindled talk about the evil curse that had surely been cast upon the Macedonian people. They could not fathom why they had been so callously abandoned by the Christian nations of Europe and destined to linger under Muslim rule. Clearly, the political intrigues of the leading European nations cared little about the injustices that had been inflicted upon generations of Macedonians whom they deemed as insignificant and their sufferings as inconsequential. Disappointment and despair manifested itself in increased revolutionary zeal which led to open rebellion, the Ilinden Uprising, that erupted on 2 August 1903, on *Sveti Elias's* day. This was not a spontaneous event since villagers and townsfolk had been preparing for an open show of defiance for decades by covertly organizing an underground resistance movement which widely disseminated revolutionary ideas and established a network of safe houses where caches of illegal arms and munitions were stored. The eleven day uprising which followed, began with high hopes, the cutting down of telegraph wires and the taking of Turkish hostages, but it would prove to be merely a fleeting, elusive expression of freedom and independence. The successes were short-lived and there followed the usual reprisals. Many innocents, along with those actively involved, were imprisoned, tortured, lynched or burned to death and so joined a host of past martyrs who had died bravely for the Macedonian cause.

However, their gallantry and heroic deeds lived on in the stories passed down through the generations, *patriotski prekasky*, patriotic stories, and in the nationalistic *pesni*, songs, of their people.

It was difficult for the Macedonian people to understand their betrayal. *Dedo Giorgi* would often lament, “Is it that we are not Christian enough, have we not suffered long enough or is it that we are not deserving enough?”. “*Pusto Tursko*”, the misery of living under the Ottomans, he would say, a short, simple statement conveying deep-seated frustration, a sense of injustice and a feeling of utter despair. He would generally conclude with “*Kaj ima sila nema pravina*, where there is unbridled power there is no justice.” *Dedo Giorgi Numeff* knew full well the miseries that had been inflicted on his people since he had endured them from the day he had been born. However, he struggled to *razberi*, understand, that this reality had little to do with basic human rights and freedoms but was largely a matter of geography and economics based on Macedonia’s strategic location within the Balkans, its mineral wealth, fertile soils and lush river valleys. To make matters worse, Macedonia’s Turkish occupiers became increasingly nervous and insecure as Ottoman power waned and this only heightened their oppression as the most tangible way of maintaining order within the remnants of what once was an extensive empire and as a means of raising sufficient taxation revenue to service and repay loans negotiated, notably from British and French bankers, which were being used to fund the administration of an increasingly economically crippled Ottoman Empire. One wonders how significant the intense political lobbying, by leading bank executives in London and Paris, was responsible for British and French support for the continuation of Ottoman rule over Macedonia.

*Kole Numeff*, hot-headed, proud, full of indignation, was a constant concern to his father who knew that the local Turkish authorities were aware that his first born was more likely than most to openly challenge Turkish injustice. No doubt many had heard his open and defiant criticisms of Turkish occupation and *Dedo Giorgi* reasoned that sooner or later, in a small religiously and socially divided community, there would be an incident involving his oldest son. He feared that if this occurred it would prompt a vindictive, retaliatory response and the family could ill-afford to have any of its *stoka*, property, or livestock requisitioned. The *Numeff* family patriarch was also concerned, that under such circumstances, his more demure son, *Sotir*, would also become a target for harassment. His unease increased immeasurably when *Dedo Kole* acquired an ancient flintlock rifle which he concealed within the family home. *Giorgi Numeff* therefore *reshi*, made a decision, which as the family patriarch he had every right to do. “*Kole*, you and *Sotir* will be going to America”, he said, one evening after the family had finished eating their meal. The brothers listened in disbelief at what they were hearing. “What do mean *tatko*, father”? *Kole* had asked. “Exactly what I have said,” his father repeated in an unwavering tone. “You and *Sotir* will be going *na tuchuzina*, to work overseas, and I will sell some of our sheep and goats to pay for your passport papers and sea passages. I have already contacted an immigration agent in *Lerin* and you should be leaving within a few months. He went on, “the travel agent has found jobs for both of you with an American railroad construction company”. “Who will help with

pasturing and milking the livestock and with the crops?" *Sotir* asked and then continued, "we are peasant farmers, we know nothing about building railways and have never seen railway tracks or a steam-powered locomotive." *Giorgi Numeff* listened patiently and calmly but would not be moved. "Those things we will have to deal with *so Gospo*, with God's *pomosh*, help, but it is important for the future well-being of our family and for your safety that you both go to America as *pechalbari*, to find work and earn American dollars, that you will send home and help boost our family's finances." He continued, "we will use the money to build homes for your families and to buy more livestock and land". So it was that my grandfather *Kole Numeff* and his brother *Sotir*, the sons of *Giorgi Numeff* of *Krepeshina*, would become but two of an increasing number of young men from Macedonia's villages and townships to depart their ancestral homeland to work in America, a country which during the second half of the nineteenth century, extended a welcoming hand to millions of European immigrant workers.

The brothers arrived on American shores apprehensive, emotionally overwhelmed and alienated from their families, in a land with an unfamiliar *jazic*, language, strange customs and big, bustling cities on a scale which they could never have imagined. Fortunately, for them the booming American economy embraced them by offering gainful employment, a paying job, the very thing that they desired most. So my great grandfather and his brother became railway workers in the quest of earning American dollars which they would save and send home to *pomoshi*, assist, their family overcome the demoralising realities of poverty that so typically gripped most Macedonia's villagers and townsfolk.

#### Footnotes:

*The Ilindensoto Vostanse, Illinden Uprising, was organized by VMRO (Vnatesna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija) which was founded in 1893. Many of the Organisation's leaders were educated under the auspices of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and were therefore often referred to by their opponents as Bulgari, Bulgarians, but in reality a large number of them were native-born Macedonians. VMRO began establishing clandestine regional committees which were initially predominantly composed of teachers and priests but later joined by townsfolk and peasants.*

*In some regions these committees exercised considerable power, including the ability to collect taxes, operate postal services and administer justice. However, the Organisation lacked sufficient finances to adequately arm its freedom fighters. It was further hampered by the absence of political or diplomatic allies among the *golemiti sili*, European powers, and the open hostility of its Balkan neighbours. Support from the perennial enemies of the Ottomans, Austro-Hungary and tsarist Russia, was not forthcoming as both countries faced their own domestic challenges and therefore adopted the attitude of "keeping the Balkans on ice", preserving the status quo. The Ottoman authorities reacted to simmering discontent and revolutionary zeal by increasing the level of repression. VMRO therefore came to the conclusion that it needed to act quickly despite the reservations voiced by the Organisation's inspirational leader, *Goce Delchev*, that talk of a full-scale revolt was premature.*

*Goce Delchev was born in the patriotic Macedonian village of Kukush on 4 February 1872 and studied in the village school during lessons conducted by the Bulgarian Exarchate Church before attending a high school in Solun and then a military college in Sofia. He was tragically killed in a skirmish between his *ceta*, band, and Turkish police near the village of Banista in May, 1903.*

*Subsequently, VMRO launched several attacks in Solun and succeeded in sinking a French-owned ship anchored in the port and bombing the Constantinople Express while it pulled into the city's railway station. Attacks on cafes, Solun's gas supply, an Ottoman bank and a German school were also conducted. At a meeting held in the village of Smilevo, the Bitola revolutionary regional council, under Dame Gruev, voted to stage a full scale uprising and on 2 August, St Elias's day. Subsequently, VRMO forces attacked Turkish units in the Bitola vilayet and destroyed local telegraph and telephone networks and bridges and stormed the estates of local beys. On 3 August, Krushevo, a mountain village of some 10 000 inhabitants was captured and a provisional revolutionary government was declared. Simultaneously, revolutionary activity spread to Kostur, Lerin, Prelip and Ohrid.*

*Desperate to consolidate these initial gains, VMRO appealed for assistance from the major European powers by arguing that the Macedonian cause could not withstand the overwhelming military advantages of the Muslim Ottomans. Inevitably, abandoned by the western powers, the rebels were soon overcome and the Ottomans ruthlessly re-established their authority. It is estimated that some 9 000 Macedonian fighters died, 200 villages were razed to the ground, 12 000 homes were destroyed and over 170 000 people had been left homeless. The failure of the Ilindskoto Vostanie was particularly demoralising and the years 1903-1913 are often regarded as a tragic period in the Istoriya na Makedonsiot narod, history of the Macedonian people. VMRO became virtually irrelevant and within the political vacuum created Macedonia's Balkan neighbours looked to feasting on Macedonian territory once the Ottomans were eventually removed from the region.*

*In 1903, a British consular official, accompanying the Ottoman Inspector-General, along with representatives of Austro-Hungary, touring through the Kostursko kaza, region near Kostur, observed that the local people did not see themselves as Bulgarians, Serbians or Greeks but as Macedonians and that they expressed a deep desire to pursue their own national identity rather than having one imposed upon them.*

*The lust for Macedonian territory, by Macedonia's Balkan neighbours, was further illustrated during the Prvata Svetska Vojna, First World War, when Bulgaria displeased with its territorial gains resulting from the 1913 partition of Macedonia gravitated toward the Central powers, in part, hoping to acquire more Macedonian territory, particularly that which had been ceded to Serbia, should Germany and its allies win the war. At the end of the First World War a Macedonian organisation agitating for an independent Macedonia was formed in Switzerland but had little hope of success as it encountered strong opposition from Serbia and Greece whose main focus was to acquire the Macedonian territories that had been allocated to Bulgaria in the 1913 partition.*

*At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 it was agreed, under President Wilson's so called Thirteen Points, that nations with minorities living within their borders should have their basic rights and freedoms protected. However, this obligation was not enforced by the newly-created League of Nations as evident by the treatment of Macedonian minorities residing in Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.*

*Sotir*, felt a rough, calloused hand cup loosely round his neck. It shook him gently. "It's time to get up *braate, brother*", whispered a gruff, croaky voice. Unlike himself, who could *spie*, sleep, through any disturbance, *Kole*, was a restless, haunted soul, who tossed and turned during the night before sleep would eventually overcome him. It was *temnitsa*, dark, and the cold penetrated through the home-made *tsrveni vel'enste*, red, woollen blankets, in which they wrapped themselves. *Kole* and *Sotir Numeff*, my paternal grandfather and his brother, peasant farmers from the tiny village of *Krepeshina*, located in the rolling lowlands of their ancient Macedonian homeland, were to spend the next four years, *na tuchuzina*, working abroad, as railroad workers in the United States of America. Both men had begrudgingly arrived there carrying Turkish passports and recorded as Turkish immigrant workers by American immigration officials.

Each morning they would *razbudi*, awake, among the increasingly familiar sounds: loud snoring, the clearing of phlegm-filled throats and the squeaking of the opening and closing of the door to their sleeping quarters, as their fellow workers walked gingerly, in the semi-darkness, half awake, to a makeshift outside toilet located behind a nearby shrub or to splash their faces with icy cold water scooped from old, rusting metal buckets that rested precariously upon recycled wooden boxes. Not for them the thick carpets, comfortable leather couches, finely-carved furniture pieces, well-stocked liquor cabinets and expensive silverware that adorned the railway carriages of the cigar-smoking railway company executives, in their expensive tailored suits, who occasionally visited the work site, cold and aloof, there to ensure that construction was on schedule and that the profits promised to their shareholders would be honoured. They slept in a disused railway carriage upon a hard wooden floor, in overcrowded, primitive and stark conditions. There was no privacy, instead each man merely seconded a space for himself where he could roughly bundle a few possessions upon the bare floor, within a disused, eagerly requisitioned, wooden crate or cardboard box.

My grandfather and his brother were playing their small part in the building of the extensive railway network that would crisscross a vast continent like an octopus in the middle of a feeding frenzy, eagerly spreading its long tentacles in every direction. America's railway networks linked the most isolated, ramshackle rural communities with the nation's newly-emerging, populous cities, vibrant centres of industry and commerce, edifices of the country's growing prosperity. America's booming, sprawling cities were teeming with humanity: immaculately dressed businessmen, pampered ladies proudly parading in the fashions of the day, smartly attired shop assistants and workers from all trades and descriptions hustling and bustling in and out of modern buildings soaring ever skyward, office blocks, large department stores and a host of smaller retail shops, restaurants and factories. Immigrants had come from many parts of the world, some fleeing political and religious persecution, others to escape poverty, crop failures and famine. Most of them entered the country through a number of major entry points, with those arriving from Europe tending to disembark on the east coast while those from Asia passed through immigration centres located along the west coast of the United States.

Some seventy percent of America's immigrants entered through New York City which was commonly referred to as the "golden door" and were processed at an immigration centre on Ellis Island, located in New York harbour. This facility, which commenced operations in 1892, was constructed to replace the aging Castle Garden Immigration Centre which was situated at the tip of Manhattan Island.

The work colleagues of the *Numeff* brothers were a mix of Irishmen, Germans, Poles, Russians, Slovaks, Hungarians and Lithuanians as well as native American Indians and a large number of Chinamen. The two brothers sensed a particular *pizma*, loathing, for the Chinese labourers among the company supervisors and many of their fellow workers. They observed that the Orientals rarely responded to personal jibes or even the occasional physical abuse but remained reserved and tended to keep to themselves often on the outskirts of the railway company campsites where they lived in tents since they were not permitted to sleep in the same quarters as the white workers. In the early *rano*, morning, when previously raging, warming campfires were no more but a few glowing embers and the horses and mules were finishing off their breakfast of hay and barley, it was the Chinese labourers, in their light blue, cotton long-sleeve tops and trousers and distinctive straw hats, who were first to respond to the shouts to commence work yelled out by work-gang foremen riding on horseback through the campsite. No one could question their capacity to shift *zemya*, soil, and *kamen*, rock, they were tireless and uncomplaining. The brothers were somewhat bemused at the insinuations by some of their fellow workers that the Chinese were unclean and disease-ridden since they had observed that they bathed far more regularly than their European colleagues and were typically healthy and energetic. Unlike most of their fellow workers, the Chinese would change their work clothes daily and wash themselves before sitting down to eat their meals. One worksite foreman reacting to abusive and derisive comments directed toward his Chinese work-gang members commented "they built the Great Wall didn't they"? They were certainly assigned the more dangerous tasks of setting explosives and working in the more treacherous terrains.

Most immigrant workers experienced some level of prejudice and discrimination. Even the more assertive Irish were often excluded from applying for some jobs and barred from living in particular suburbs of America's towns and cities. They were ostracised to such an extent that some resorted to Anglicising their names and attempted to tone down their distinctive accent. Irish immigrants were typically Catholics and therefore regarded as Papists in what was a predominantly Protestant nation. *Nekolku*, Some, of them did not speak English and this led to the popularly held opinion that they could not or would choose not to assimilate into the new American society being moulded, one which was highly patriotic and firmly committed to commonly-shared nation-building values. Often the only work that was available to Irish immigrants was in railway construction because it was hard, dirty, *opasno*, dangerous, and poorly paid. They, like other immigrants did the work that those with the opportunity to choose refused to do.

This was a new reality for the *Numevi, Numeff* brothers, surrounded by an array of diverse races, cultures and life experiences that living in their confined world of the village they never knew existed. Macedonian villages had schools but young children were often too busy shepherding the flocks and helping in the fields, to attend regularly. Most of the things that the brothers knew of the world therefore came from stories they had heard from villagers who had travelled abroad to other, *drzhavi*, countries. Even then, they generally did not believe the accounts of populous cities, strange machines located in large workhouses, complex road and railway networks, luxurious homes with owners so wealthy that their every need was attended to by a host of servants or of many strange customs and past-times. To most villagers these were the equivalent to fairy tales, regarded as gross exaggerations, surely they told themselves, that their village communities and small townships were similar to those in which most people in the world lived. If such things were indeed true then these were *davolski raboti*, the devil's work, which they would need to *odbega*, shun.

Working on the railways was physically demanding and monotonous. Day after day, as the sun would begin to assert its majesty over the night skies, the workers would be taken, by the new-born light, to the rail head where the previous day's frenetic activity had ended and where the new day's work would begin. There, *Kole* and *Sotir Numeff*, would begin the back-breaking work of unloading metal rails and wooden sleepers, which arrived seemingly without end, upon flat, low railway cars hauled by horses and mules. Days were spent compressing *peshok*, sand, and rubble upon which rested the sturdy wooden sleepers and heavy metal railway tracts that scarred the land and stretched endlessly toward an ever-distant horizon and distributing the metal spikes, bolts and nuts used to securely position the tracks upon railway sleepers. Occasionally, they would have to take some of the company horses to one of the mobile railway workshops to be reshod or have their saddles, collars or leather straps repaired or replaced. This was of particular interest to the inquisitive *Kole* who was a naturally gifted craftsman and would, on his return home, become known throughout the surrounding villages of the *Lerinsko* and *Kostursko* regions as a maker of *samari*, saddles, and someone who could work equally skilfully with leather, timber and metal.

The metal railway tracks upon which thundered mighty steam-powered railway locomotives, billowing puffs of smoke and pulling in their wake, snake-like, rattling carriages carrying their human cargo and laden with minerals and agricultural produce were a testimony to the ingenuity of railway engineers and railway company workers who had triumphed against the natural elements. They had cheated Mother Nature by laying steel tracks upon dry, dusty prairies, over swiftly-flowing white-water rapids, wide, meandering rivers and through seemingly impassable, lofty, defiant, mountain ranges. However, Mother Nature would not easily succumb without rebelling against such intrusions. She had fought back, had delayed them and prompted a constant change of plans but in the end begrudgingly relented. However, she did not forget or forgive the indignities committed against her by her human tormentors. Mother Nature was determined to find ways to exact her revenge.

Work gangs were roused and marshalled quickly, in the crisp morning air, by gang foremen to begin each toil-filled day. The work-site was soon a hive of activity, organised chaos, movement in all directions, horses pulling carts full of sand and rubble and the constant unloading of trailers stacked high with wooden sleepers and metal tracks. There was a cacophony of unmelodic sounds: the chatter of workers, the shouted instructions of the gang supervisors, the winnowing of the horses and the persistent dull, resonating thuds of heavy metal sledge hammers. In contrast to the urgency of the early mornings there was far less enthusiasm in declaring an end to the day's work. Often the increasingly familiar comment, "Mr Boss, Mr Boss, the day go", uttered as the sun set in the evening sky, marked the completion of the working day. It is suggested that this was the reason for immigrant workers sometimes being collectively referred to as *dagoes*.

In the incessant quest of improving productivity work-gang supervisors even forbade members of their work teams rolling their own cigarettes during work hours claiming that this was a form time-wasting. Admonished in this way, some immigrant workers turned to chewing tobacco, a habit that some Macedonians took home with them often to the disgust of their fellow villagers. *Teuteun*, tobacco, was not unknown to the villagers since it was grown extensively by Turkish families living in Macedonia and they had frequently witnessed their Turkish neighbours smoking the silky, dry, *zhltó l'ista*, yellow leaves. Indeed, many Macedonian villagers subsequently took up smoking. Typically, they would meticulously finely cut the dry tobacco leaves with small *noshoi*, knives and then place them within a recycled small bag or tin. Villagers generally smoked their tobacco by tightly stuffing it into *luli*, home-made wooden pipes.

In the summer months, a blazing sun would beat down relentlessly on the browning backs, arms and legs of the railway workers as they laboured in a foreign, often intimidating land. Beads of sweat would drip from their exhausted, aching bodies and soak their, *pl'achki* clothes, threadbare shirts and trousers, ripped and hastily-stitched with patches of assorted colours, which stuck to them like a second skin. *Oblaksi*, Clouds, of dry, red dust whipped up by warm breezes added to their discomfort. There was no relief, no place to hide from nature's fury. Trees and outcrops of shrubs, that might have provided shade and temporary relief from the intense glare of the sun's rays, had long been cut down to carve out millions of railway sleepers and to feed hungry worksite cooking fires. Short work breaks reluctantly agreed to by their work gang bosses were therefore taken in the feeble *senka*, shade, alongside a company trailer or a pile of stacked sleepers. The occasional drink from water bags hanging in the shade offered some respite, temporarily cleared dust-filled, parched *grla*, throats, but too often it was too hot and they were too *postanati*, tired, to eat or even to think as they went about their work routines as if in an hypnotic trance. In stark contrast, black, threatening, rain-filled clouds accompanied by rumbling *grmneva*, thunder, flashes of lightening, announcing the onset of heavy rain and bitter snow storms, were common occurrences during the winter months. There was little time to *topli*, warm oneself, by huddling close to their campfires which were forever being harassed by swirling breezes and downpours of rain or to brew a comforting, *goreshcho*, hot, pot of *chaji*, tea, or

coffee. There was simply too much work to be done. The employees of railway construction companies were expected to stick to the task at hand, *trpi*, be oblivious, to the rain, snow, slush and mud and to toil through bouts of influenza, fever and general ill-health. They begrudgingly endured since the money earned was an unique opportunity to *potkrepi*, support, their families to better themselves materially and to escape, at least temporarily, the soul-destroying and grinding poverty that was so much part of their lives. While not often openly mistreated, the *selski*, villagers, were almost universally viewed as foreigners with little or no contribution to make other than that which resulted from the fruits of their labour. Their inability to speak the language, at least fluently, and, therefore, their need to have to resort to a truncated, stunted vocabulary of a few rehearsed words and poorly pronounced phrases, did not help, but rarely was the hand of friendship ever extended to them. Not only were they geographically isolated from their families and their homes by the vast Atlantic Ocean but they were also social castaways, powerless, frustrated and constantly being tested both physically and emotionally.

Working away from home was not necessarily a novel experience for some of them who had previously ventured as immigrant workers, *so bitchkia*, with saw in hand, to seek employment as lumberjacks in French and Romanian forests or in neighbouring Bulgaria. Before his American sojourn, an impetuous *Kole Numeff*, then barely in his teens, had left *Krepeshina*, with a few possessions stuffed roughly into a home-made carry bag strapped around his chest and a red *vel'enste*, woollen blanket, hanging off one shoulder, to journey on foot into the wilderness of Turkish *Anadolu*, Anatolia, bound by the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean seas and the Caucasus Mountains. It was a region inhabited by imposing, claustrophobic forests, interspersed by deep, rugged river valleys and raging, quick-flowing rivers. There on the Anatolian plateau, bitterly cold in winter, stifling hot in summer, *Dedo Kole Numeff* had spent a year hidden away in the tall forests working as a bullock driver entrusted with hauling timber logs from the forest to isolated timber milling communities. The logging company which had employed him preferred to use teams of bullocks rather than horses for this task since they were easier to look after, less expensive to feed and a able to shift heavier loads. My grandfather toiled *zaedno*, together, with his fellow migrant workers, living in small, makeshift huts cobbled together with mill off-cuts and blemished, knotted or warped and therefore non-commercially valuable timber planks. It was an existence full of great privations and *Kole Numeff* laboured under such harsh conditions with barely enough food in his stomach to enable him to greet the new day and ward off any serious, debilitating, *boles*, illness. His body soon became immune to exhaustion and the inevitable daily aches and pains.

A constant flow of immigrant workers and settlers into Asia Minor had been occurring for centuries and there were significant Hellenic settlements established across the Aegean Sea as early as the classical Greek period when citizens from the land-starved Greek city-states sought

land to raise crops and pasture their livestock. Macedonia's Turkish overlords had warmly welcomed immigrant workers to their resource-rich, yet largely undeveloped, Anatolian territory. Attracting a host of young, robust men provided access to a productive labour force that could more fully exploit the region's abundant natural resources. It also served a more covert, but no less important purpose. The leaders of the now terminally ill Ottoman Empire were comforted to observe the exodus, from conquered villages and townships, of groups of young men, potential freedom fighters and political activists, who, under certain circumstances might rise up to overthrow Turkish rule through violent insurrection.

Now *Kole Numeff* was working abroad once more. During the winter months they toiled, their heads typically covered with crude raincoats, made from coarse hessian bags with top and side strings ripped open to form rudimentary hoods, to cover their heads and *ramni*, shoulders. However, these would soon become water-logged, heavy and cumbersome and had to be discarded. When the cold was at its most fierce they would resort to stuffing rags, old newspapers and pieces of cardboard within their work clothes in a desperate, too often futile attempt, to protect themselves against the unforgiving, intrusive chilly gusts and breezes. It was clearly Mother Nature's way of punishing them, reaping her vengeance, showing her displeasure at their presence and at their temerity to have disturbed her.

My grandfather and his brother possessed a scant understanding of local ways and of the language used by their work-gang supervisors to bark out simple instructions that was often accompanied by much figure pointing, gesturing and a host of derogatory remarks and observations. Not that they understood much or took offence. They were merely transients, there to work, earn money and then return home. They were not inquisitive sightseers seeking knowledge or personal enlightenment in the land of boundless opportunity but absorbed themselves in the routine of work, robotic, unthinking, having learned through necessity and experience to set aside their feelings of isolation, loneliness and despair. The stark reality was that they were there to shift sand, compact railway beds, lay sleepers and unload and position metal tracks. However, their inner-most feelings, so expertly pushed down into the deepest recesses of their very being, were forever bubbling within and would surface, leap up during quiet moments of reflection, and grip them tightly. They would rip at their heart strings, bring tears to their eyes and evoke deep yearnings for their loved ones and home. At such times, they sustained themselves by seeking the companionship of their fellow villagers, their *selski*, and by tenaciously adhering to the traditions of their homeland which dictated how to act and relate to one another. These things they understood, provided security and comfort, in an environment that they found difficult to comprehend and where they did not feel that they belonged.

Macedonian immigrant workers were not permitted to be *hovarda*, extravagant, hard-earned American dollars were not to be spent on personal comforts but saved to be sent home to their seemingly ever-more *dal'eku*, distant, villages and townships. Personal extravagances were simply unacceptable.

Sustained by strong bonds of kinship and life-long friendships they kept to themselves and accepted the guidance of the oldest or most respected among them, thus recreating, if somewhat superficially, the patriarchal extended family, structure with which they were so familiar. They did the best they could to do as they had done at home, they ate from *edno tengere*, from the same cooking pot. In the most desperate of times, they were fortified in the knowledge that their *paary*, money, earned in eagerly sought-after American dollars and company cheques or money orders would ease the burdens of their loved ones.

#### Footnotes:

*The word paary is said to be derived from the Turkish word para which referred to a small Turkish copper coin.*

*A steady stream of Chinese immigrants first began arriving in the United States of America during the 1820s and then in more significant numbers as a result of the lure of the Californian gold rush that commenced in the late 1840s. By the 1880s, some ten percent of California's population was of Chinese origin, predominantly young males from China's Guangdong province.*

*Ten thousand Chinese railway workers were employed in the building of America's first intercontinental railway and over one thousand died during its construction. Typically, their bodies were transported back to China to be laid to rest alongside their ancestors. In 1865, the average monthly wage earned by a Chinese railway worker was between \$US26 and \$US35 out of which they had to pay for their food which generally consisted of dried fish and other kinds of seafood, seaweed, mushrooms and fruit. In 1885, official Chinese Immigration to the USA was banned under the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was not repealed until 1943.*

*Many Irish immigrants also experienced discrimination. It was said that no group was considered to have a lower status than the Irish in the USA during the 1850s. Irish immigrants therefore frequently lived together in the most squalid accommodation, the so called "Irish quarters" of cities, often in makeshift shanties and dark, damp cellars. It has been estimated that some 80% of Irish children died in early infancy. During this time, even Irish Catholic churches were occasionally menaced. Small wonder that large numbers of Irish immigrants were forced to undertake the back-breaking work of being a railway worker since not many other forms of employment were available to them.*

By the late nineteenth century the United States possessed approximately fifty percent of the world's railways. The construction of such an extensive railway network was particularly significant in the development of the United States as an economic and industrial powerhouse. The majority of America's railways were built by private firms which had successfully tendered for government railway construction contracts. Railway company directors equated success in terms of profit and the size of the dividends paid to shareholders. Obsessed by maximising returns and the bottom line these business enterprises adopted tight construction schedules. It was not therefore surprising that the worth of a railway worker was directly related to their productive capacity and that workers were regarded not as individuals but as units of labour. The reputations of gang supervisors, their status in the eyes of the railway company bosses, was therefore not measured by their success in fostering workplace harmony but on the ability of their work crews to complete their work as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The *selski* would daily return to their sparse lodgings, rudimentary converted railway cars or *cardir*, canvas tents, their bodies covered in dust and dirty, exhausted and craving sleep. During the *noshja*, night, they slept, upon wooden floors or on the bare earth on bedding typically consisting of their home-spun *tsrveni velentsina*, red woollen blankets, which they had carried seemingly half-way round the world and from work-site to work-site slung across their shoulders and secured there with fraying pieces of string or rope. These were treasured possessions for they had been spun by a loved one, a mother or wife, they were a real and comforting connection with home. Their spartan living quarters and oppressive working conditions were a source of intense frustration but such negative emotions needed to be suppressed. They could not hope to clearly convey their grievances to those who mattered and it was unlikely that anyone would take the time to listen. When sleep did come they dreamed of the day that they would return to their villages and townships and once again *sedni*, sit, among their own upon cushions scattered around the low family table, telling stories of their time abroad, smiling, embracing, backslapping, talking excitedly and catching up with village gossip. Their thoughts were dominated by how joyous their homecoming would be when their personal odyssey abroad was at an end. Despite the obvious attractions of living and working in America, only a small minority of Macedonian immigrant workers contemplated building a new life there. Most viewed their American adventure as a temporary interlude, primarily as an opportunity to secure the financial well-being of families back home. Most yearned of nothing more but to return home as soon as they had earned sufficient American dollars to have justified their time abroad. Some would make this journey more than once, but few, were keen to settle permanently and apply for American citizenship that was so prized by millions of other immigrants who had journeyed there.

"*Braate, amun*, brother, may the good Lord have mercy on us, how much longer do we have to stay in this infernal place?" *Sotir* would routinely ask his older brother. *Dedo Kole* was invariably dismissive, would shrug his shoulders and brood in silence. He knew that the time

had not yet come to depart and that more money would have to be earned and saved to make their years away worthwhile

However, frustrations lingered and when rumours swept through the work-site that labourers were required for the construction of the Panama Canal, a water way that would link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, some of the *selski* suggested a move south. "We should go" one of their company suggested. "I hear that they are paying good wages and in American dollars. It will mean that we can return home earlier and with our money belts bulging." *Kuzo Ilioff*, my maternal grandfather, had listened silently as he sat cross-legged upon the bare ground around a warming campfire. Slowly, he unfolded his legs and raised himself off the ground, dusted off his worn, dirt-stained trousers and said, "*Selski*, we may not be entirely *radoseni*, happy, here but at least we know what to do and our families know where we are." He paused, composed his thoughts and continued, "starting again in a new land will not be easy." The assembled *selski* listened attentively to his words for their companion was known for his thoughtful and common sense approach to life. Some of the assembled fidgeted while others bowed their heads and gently disturbed the earth beneath them with their feet or with a *stap*, stick, destined for the nearby campfire. "Let's stay here *ushte edna godina*, another year, when we can *tseli*, all, return home together," *Kuzo Ilioff* concluded. There followed a general *soglas*, agreement, that they would stay.

Almost a year later, during one hot summer's day, it had been *Sotir's* turn to return a little earlier to the campsite and prepare the evening meal, a hearty vegetable stew with generous chunks of fresh buffalo meat. The powerful, bearded beasts which could often be seen in large rambling herds, grazing on the plentiful grasses of the plains, were periodically hunted by railway employers paid to deliver their carcasses to railway worksites. During the previous day large quantities of buffalo meat had arrived and the work-mates were very much looking forward to their evening meal.

My grandfather, who was unloading railway sleepers, was therefore surprised to see his younger brother running quickly toward him, shouting and waving his hands wildly clearly excited about something. On reaching my grandfather, *Sotir*, panting heavily, breathless, opened his mouth and tried to *zborni*, speak, but the words simply would not come. He tugged at his brother's sweat-stained shirt, he gasped, but still said nothing until he had eventually regained his breath. "*Kole, Kole*", he blurted out, "travel agents", travel agents", he repeated in a rasping voice. "There are travel agents at the campsite ready to sign up anyone wanting to purchase a sea passage back to Europe." His seemingly disinterested older brother replied, "Not now *Sotir*, we'll discuss this matter with the others *vecher*, this evening." Although outwardly calm and composed my grandfather thought of little else during the rest of the afternoon. Distracted, silent, he went about his work there on the dusty, wind-swept prairie constantly visited by visions of *Krepeshina* and the people whom he loved.

That night, the *selski* agreed that it was time to go home. Sea passages were subsequently negotiated and a travel itinerary, consisting of a number of train and bus journeys, that would take them to New York City, was arranged by the travel agents who had visited their railway company work site. On reaching New York they were taken to cheap lodgings near the harbour and within days boarded a British passenger liner that would bring them home. They went aboard with eyes fixed straight ahead. There would be no goodbyes, no regrets, there was no turning around for one last look. *Sotir* was exuberant, grinning broadly, while *Kole*, softly murmured “at last” under his breath.

Many European nationalities had immigrated to America. Italian immigrants tended to work in America’s coal mines and steel works in jobs typically organised for them by their *padrones*, patrons. Greek immigrants often worked in America’s textile industries while Russians, Poles and Jews tended to find seek employment in the produce markets of the larger American cities, especially those in New York and Chicago. Over time, many immigrant workers prospered and shifted from the overcrowded, multi-storey tenement buildings and slums into their own more comfortable suburban homes where they were invariably joined by other members of their families. Subsequently, they sought and were granted permanent residence and became American citizens. Most Macedonian immigrants on the other hand only yearned to return to their ancestral homeland. It had been four long years since the two brothers had arrived at Ellis Island to be processed for entry into a flourishing nation with a bludgeoning economy, to a country that had offered, with open arms, a warm welcome to the impoverished, politically disenfranchised and religiously persecuted. The U.S. federal government’s Ellis Island Immigration Reception Centre was a three-storey building made of steel, brick and stone and had the capacity to process some five thousand immigrants a day. At that time, the U.S.A. clearly viewed immigrants as productive future citizens of a great nation where cultural diversity would be welded into a common identity which in turn would give birth to strong feelings of nationalism and patriotism.

Their departure of the *Numeff* brothers was a far different experience to that of their arrival, when they had joined long queues of hopeful, bewildered newcomers from all parts of Europe, tightly clutching their belongings, wrapped in brown paper and secured by string under their arms and carrying old suitcases, shuffling and scurrying here and there. This time there were no meticulous recordings of personal details, searching interrogations or intrusive medical examinations that they had endured four years before. Nor was there the many hours of waiting to be picked up by the railway company’s recruitment officers during which they had to put up with insistent, annoying street peddlers and boarding house and tavern proprietors offering them things to buy or somewhere to eat and sleep. My grandfather would often comment in jest, using rather crude language, accompanied by loud guffaws, that in the final analysis America’s primary health requirement for incoming immigrants depended solely on whether they could successfully go to the toilet or not.

The anxious moments experienced as they had steamed into New York harbour on the occasion of their arrival now gave way to relief and fleeting visions of a warm homecoming. Within a few weeks they would be with their families and in familiar surroundings. They were going back to where they belonged.

Steaming out of New York harbour the *selski* huddled together at stern of the ship under grey, cloud-filled skies and light showers of rain. Only now, safely aboard, knowing that they were on their way home, did they turn their faces, only momentarily, to farewell the imposing, towering statue of a lady, a classical beauty, with her feet set solidly upon a large pedestal and holding aloft the torch of enlightenment in her right hand and a tablet in her left. She stood facing the broad expanse of the Atlantic Ocean and peered out toward Europe, the “old world”, the world from where the *selski* had come and to where they were returning. Like one of the alluring sirens of ancient Greek mythology she had been there to entice, to welcome, them to American shores, and now she was saying goodbye. The *selski* had learned that a major benefactor who helped finance the construction of the magnificent and symbolic figure was an immigrant himself, the famous publisher, Joseph Pulitzer, who was of Hungarian descent. The *selski* had been among those who had heard the lady’s call but unlike so many of the others they had never intended to stay. Their world was their beloved Macedonia, the land of their ancestors, ancient, staid, poverty-stricken and repressed, but nevertheless home.

My grandfather and his fellow *selani*, compatriots, had gone aboard as steerage or third class passengers. They were herded below deck like cattle and completed their voyage living in the primitive conditions, in semi-darkness, sleeping in rudimentary bunks covered with flea-infested, old, yellowing sheets and fraying blankets. Their food was often “on the turn” and water was so scarce that they were forced to use salt water to wash themselves and their clothes. The homeward journey was extremely unpleasant endured in stifling conditions on a ship that was constantly tossed up and down and from side to side by angry seas and violent storms. Their overcrowded living and sleeping quarters reeked of the gut-wrenching smells of sea sickness, inadequate sanitation and foul-smelling body odour. Adding to their discomfort, the *drugari*, friends, found themselves *overtini*, surrounded, by empty bunks stacked high with bags and crates full of *pumuk*, cotton, and coffee, a lucrative cargo, which passenger liners frequently carried during the less crowded homeward voyages, for a substantial fee, since both commodities were in high demand in Europe.

The conditions below deck were in stark contrast to the pampered luxury of the first-class passengers above, who resided in well-appointed, luxury cabins and enjoyed all the pleasures associated with *skapi*, expensive, ocean-going cruises of that time: eating the finest food, sampling the best wines and spirits and partying well into the night. .

## Chapter 5: Return of the Prodigal Sons

*Macedonian villagers and townsfolk lived together in close-knit extended families with up to four generations living under the same roof. They lived claustrophobic lives, without privacy, and were expected to fully commit to shared, rather than personal dreams and aspirations. Everyone knew their place within their family hierarchy and in the broader community and all were expected to behave accordingly.*

*The Numeff household in Krepeshina was overcrowded and family tensions surfaced regularly after my grandfather Kole and his brother Sotir returned from working overseas. The two brothers had seen something of the world beyond the village and had begun to question the absolute authority of their father. It was during this time of festering disharmony that the Numeff family purchased fields in Maala a small village nestled in the lowlands below Krespeshina. Maala had been the home of a significant number of Turkish families many of whom had begun returning to their ancestral home in the face of the declining fortunes of the Ottoman Empire.*

The birth of a healthy *dete*, male child, was generally more enthusiastically celebrated than that of *chupe*, girls. Boys would carry the family's *imeto*, name, contribute as productive members of the extended family and some were even destined to become family patriarchs. Girls on the other hand would marry, often in their mid-teens, and were expected to totally immerse themselves in the lives of the families of their, *marshi*, husbands. Before departing, the *Numeff* family guests, were offered strong, black, sweet *toortsko café*, Turkish coffee, served in small cups, which were ceremonially placed face down onto their saucers after they had finished drinking. The patterns made by the residue of the coffee inside the *prasni*, empty, cups were then interpreted, foretelling either good or bad omens, by villagers who were reputed to have a gift of glimpsing into the future. Hospitality was an important feature of village life and on this occasion the *Numeff* family had much to celebrate.

Upon disembarking at the Athenian port of Pireaus the first priority of the brothers had been to exchange their American dollars for ornately decorated small, round, gold coins, *napoleonie*, which they tucked within their concealed money belts. These twenty franc coins, minted during the third French Republic, were adorned with a Gallic rooster on one side and the head of a female, representative of the Republic, on the other. The coins had minted to celebrate the resurgence of the French nation following the humiliating defeat suffered during the Franco-Prussian War at the hands of a confederation of German-speaking states led by Prussia in 1870-1871. *Napoleonie* are rare today as many of them were melted down to help fund the heavy financial burdens incurred as a result of France's subsequent participation in two world wars. *Napoleonie* tended to be far more highly prized by Macedonian villagers and townspeople than paper money, notably the Turkish lira and Greek drachma. After all, gold was real, it glittered and was universally valued, whereas paper currencies had no such intrinsic qualities. The scarcity and the widespread mistrust of banks reinforced the popularity of *napoleonie* as a store of value and a means of exchange.

These coins could be hidden away in highly secretive places without fear that they would deteriorate and villagers and townsfolk were comforted in the knowledge of having their family's savings close by. However, this method of safeguarding the family's wealth was not always foolproof and there were accounts of rusting tin cans filled to the brim with gold coins being discovered by villagers ploughing their fields or digging the foundations for their new houses. It could also destroy friendships and instigate long-lasting family vendettas. My grandfather told the story of a villager from *Neret*, a more populous village near *Krepeshina*, who during Ottoman times, had worked abroad in America. On his return he was desperate to find a secure hiding place for the hard-earned, precious gold coins. He wanted his savings to be safe from the bands of *arami*, outlaws, who occasionally raided villages and townships to seize food, livestock and other items of value. Following a series of sleepless nights, the villager informed his wife that he would seek the advice of his life-long friend, his *numko*, best man, and the godfather to his children.

## Chapter 5: Return of the Prodigal Sons

The return of villagers who had worked abroad generated great excitement. These were special occasions and a welcome distraction to the monotony of village life and were therefore much celebrated. The majority of villagers who had left to work overseas were glad to be home and quickly readjusted to their old way of life but it was not always the case. Some who had witnessed a *svet*, world, beyond the village begun to question the existing order of things, the way that things were done in communities where little, if anything, changed with each passing generation. The return of my grandfather and his brother from America would be a time of contrasting emotions for their father *Giorgi Numeff*.

The ageing family patriarch walked slowly, shuffled to the porch of the family home where he stood still and stern-faced. Not so his wife, *Lozana*, a diminutive figure standing next to him, nervous and beaming with joy, clasping and unclasping her *pregatch*, apron, fidgeting, trying hard to contain her excitement. Involuntarily, she found herself walking ever more quickly toward the two men approaching the family home. On reaching them, she spread out her arms and hugged them with frail hands and as they gently bent their heads down toward her she kissed them over and over again on their cheeks and lowered foreheads. This was the day she had *se moli'l na Gospo*, prayed to God for, ever since the day that *Sotir's pismo*, letter, had arrived from distant America in which he had written that he and his brother were on their way home. After a time, *Kole Numeff* slowly eased himself from his mother's embrace, walked toward his father and extended his right hand. The old man did the same and they shook hands and exchanged brief, mundane, barely audible greetings. *Sotir's* handshake was more enthusiastic but still formal and stilted. Only then did *Kole Numeff* acknowledge his young wife, *Yana*, whom he had not seen for four years and asked how she was. Public displays of love and affection were not the way of the menfolk of Macedonia's villages or towns.

Villagers soon began visiting the *Numeff* family home eager to welcome back the brothers, listen to news of their own relatives working in America and to ask about their time there. *Baba Lozana* beamed with pride as she greeted a seemingly never-ending stream of guests and well-wishers. Meanwhile, *Dedo Giorgi*, sat with his male visitors, cross-legged at the family's low dining table while his wife and daughters-in-law poured small glasses of *vino*, wine and *rakia*, wine brandy, made from the *grozje*, grapes, picked from the family grape vines. On the table were small, carved wooden plates filled with *meze*, snacks of *bibli*, roasted chick peas, sultanas and *halva*, a sweet dessert, served only on very special occasions was purchased in *Lerin*. It was important on such occasions to show *odnos*, be hospitable. The women of the *Numeff* household and the female visitors sat together upon home-spun woollen blankets and talked in low whispers as they gossiped among themselves. This was in contrast to the exuberant, boisterous chatter of the men, who raised their voices, laughed loudly and earnestly debated the issues of the day. In traditional Macedonian society the women knew their place and that they were subservient to the menfolk.

He was graciously welcomed and offered a glass of *rakia*. As the two *Neretsi* drained their generously filled glass of warming home-made brandy the villager explained his dilemma to his host who listened attentively, refilled his glass, patted his guest on the shoulder and smiled. “*Ne se grizhi*, don’t worry, *braate*, brother, we will find a safe place to conceal your gold coins”, he had declared reassuringly. During that night the two men, constantly looking over their shoulders and careful not to be seen, buried a small container with a hundred gold *napoleonie* under one of a row of boulders that had been laid down to designate the border of one of the villager’s fields. His *numko* strongly urged him that he should tell everyone he met that his gold coins had been stolen by Turkish outlaws during a recent raid on *Neret*. “Tell everyone, loudly and often, be earnest and convincing, that your gold coins were taken from you.” Soon after the villager had decided to buy a number of new fields being sold by a village who was leaving to live abroad and had gone to retrieve his buried coins. To his dismay he found that they were missing. He had gone into a frenzy, lifting and casting aside boulder after boulder, but to no avail. Finally, in desperation he went to consult his *numko* and told him that his life’s savings had been stolen. His closest friend smiled at him and said “*braate*, that is very good, you even have me believing that you have suffered a grave misfortune”. The villager replied, in a voice now tinged with growing frustration, “listen”, he shouted, “my gold coins have really been stolen”. His *numko* merely smiled again and then burst out laughing, “that is really good, you are so, so convincing”. And so the conversation had gone until the villager turned away in disgust muttering obscenities about his supposed friend who within a few months purchased a number of new fields and added significantly to his flock of sheep and goats. My grandfather would typically conclude the telling of this story with a knowing grin and a wink. Such suspicions of banks continued even after many of my Macedonian compatriots had lived abroad for a considerable time. To his dying day, my father, who was a resident of Australia for over fifty years, hid thousands of Australian dollars saved from his and my mother’s old-age pension, in an envelope which he placed under one of the nesting cubicles within the hen house of their Manjimup home. This was truly a nest egg.

Under Greek jurisdiction a dilemma faced by those returning from working abroad was how to minimize the heavy taxes that were levied by the Greek government when they sought to exchange their foreign earnings for Greek drachmas. A good friend of the *Numeff* family and my wife’s uncle, *Kole Peoff*, begrudgingly paid a significant portion of the money he had saved from toiling long and hard in the United States to the Greek authorities in this way. It was during the time of the Greek - Turkish War of 1923, when the Greek government’s failure to negotiate sufficient foreign loans, was keen to find alternate sources of revenue to fund its war effort against the perennial enemy. To add to *Kole Peoff*’s angst, the value of the Greek drachma had depreciated significantly due to Greece suffering a series of military setbacks. In an ironic twist, *Kole Peoff*, who had contributed to boosting the tax revenue of the Greek government to help finance its war against the Turks, a campaign which he knew and cared little about, found himself conscripted into the Greek army to fight in this very conflict. A renowned wit he often

commented, whimsically, that he had personally, if involuntarily, paid for his own army training, uniform, food and accommodation. Fortunately, he saw little military action as the Greek army was soon in hasty retreat fleeing a mere one step ahead of advancing, jubilant, revenge-seeking Turkish troops. One would not want to be captured and *Kole Peoff* remarked, with a sly smirk, that he had turned around and had run away as fast as he could with the best of them.

He would *parmetfaj*, recall, in his typical jovial manner how he was able to requisition a horse that had ensured his escape from his Turkish pursuers. Apparently, the animal had been temporarily left unguarded while its owner had gone into nearby shrubs to relieve himself. It was at that moment that *Kole Peoff*, feeling at last blessed by good fortune that had previously eluded him, seized his opportunity. He walked slowly toward the horse and settled the animal down with soothing words and by stroking its broad back before gingerly easing himself into the saddle and galloping off. Having reached safety, he dismounted, let the horse loose and proceeded to walk home. *Kole Peoff* would add, with some satisfaction, that justice was ultimately done since the war had not gone well for the Greek government and that subsequently the leading proponents of the pro-war faction, a group of prominent Greek politicians of the time, those responsible for taxing him so heavily and then sending him to war, had been executed on the orders of their political successors.

The sons of *Giorgi Numeff* gradually acclimatised to the long-established cycle of village life, the daily routines adhered to by Macedonian village folk over the centuries but these would prove to be far from harmonious times. *Dedo Giorgi* and his sons were determined to make good use of the family's hard-earned savings and regularly discussed the matter during evenings while sitting round the dining table, after long, arduous *denya*, days, working in the fields and pasturing the animals. Their discussions would invariably degenerate into heated disagreement, punctuated by raised voices and the occasional exchange of harsh words and personal insults. There was an undercurrent of tension arising from a perceived challenge to the authority of the family's patriarch by his sons. On such occasions, my grandfather, frustrated and angry, would raise his voice, "*Tatko*, father, you treat me and *Sotir* like small children." He would continue, "we are grown men, we are the ones who spent four years of our lives labouring abroad and it is we who should *reshi*, have a say, on how the money earned through our sweat and toil should be spent." He would then stride to the front door, slam it shut behind him, and go out into the darkness muttering to himself. Sometimes he would not return to his bed but lay upon the straw stored within the family stables and fall into a restless sleep among the livestock. It was useless to try to console him or coax him back inside to warm himself in front of the fireplace. During the ensuing days no words would be exchanged between the family patriarch and his eldest son. However, as frayed tempers slowly subsided, the subject of how best to use the family's savings would be broached once again. *Sotir* had tried desperately to mediate between two indomitable wills while the womenfolk of the Numeff household particularly *Baba Lozana* and *Baba Yana*, fretted over the family's disharmony and comforted each other that all would be well ... eventually. Although firmly steeped in tradition, *Giorgi Numeff's* sons had seen something of the world beyond the village and they had observed distinctly contrasting lifestyles and attitudes to those of the established morays of patriarchal society. *Kole Numeff* as the oldest son was the old man's natural successor and as the years passed he had become increasingly confident, assertive and less reluctant to openly express his personal views.

One evening, during these troublesome times, *Dedo Giorgi* unexpectedly announced that he had heard that parcels of land, owned by Turkish families wanting to return to Turkey, were being offered for sale in the nearby village of *Maala*. The name of the village suggests a Turkish origin which referred to an area or location. When the inhabitants, particularly of the larger villages such as *Neret*, with some four thousand people, living in five hundred households, were asked where they lived they generally replied, *gorna maala*, *dolna maala* or *sedi maala*, in the upper reaches, lower section or in the centre of the village. During one crisp *esen utro*, autumn morning, *Giorgi Numeff* and his two sons left on foot to look over the land being offered for sale. Barely a word was spoken as the three men trudged silently along ancient, well-worn pathways, littered with fallen, reddish-orange autumn leaves which crunched under their feet. When they reached their destination all three men were impressed by what they saw. The land was *ramono*, flat, the soil *plodno*, fertile, and there was ready access to water *bl'izu*, nearby. The silence was finally broken when *Dedo Giorgi* commented, "the *nevi*, fields, here will be

easier to plough, irrigate and harvest than our fields in *Krepeshina*.” His sons nodded in unreserved agreement which was very much a rarity during this time of dispiriting family harmony.

As the inevitable passage of time continued to turn against Macedonia’s Turkish overlords, many of whom were born and raised in Macedonia and had for centuries regarded it as their homeland, more Turkish families began contemplating a return to their ancestral homeland and began selling their Macedonian assets. It was in such circumstances that *Giorgi Numeff*, like his ancestor, *Yane Vellioff*, before him took the opportunity to purchase highly sought-after, life-sustaining land. The Turkish owner of the land to be sold came to meet them mounted on an impressive white stallion. He was dressed in loose black robes and wore a fez on his balding head. On reaching them he dismounted and sat himself down on an exquisitely crocheted silk cushion which he carefully laid upon the ground while my great grandfather sat down cross-legged on the bare ground opposite. Their negotiations were conducted in Macedonian which the Turk spoke fluently and all went well since it was in the interest of both parties that a successful sale was concluded. Helped to his feet by his sons, *Dedo Giorgi* reached beneath his tunic and inside his *dzeb*, pocket, from where he took out a wallet which he opened by unfastening several thin leather straps, secured by small brown buckles. He slowly reached inside the wallet from which he began to take out, one by one, some of the gold coins and place these into the outstretched right hand of the Turk. When satisfied that the number of *napoleonie* was the agreed sum, the Turk nodded and then raised his right *raka*, hand, and said, “*Tamum*, that is enough, that is the correct amount.” He then placed the coins into a special compartment within his saddle from where he extracted a neatly-folded parchment, the title deeds to the property, which he handed to *Dedo Giorgi*.

Those long, lonely days spent working on the American railways appeared to have yielded dividends. One suspected that the ageing patriarch also secretly appreciated the relative peace and quiet that he hoped would now descend upon the *Numeff* household. He would not miss the heated discussions or the seemingly endless brooding of his quick-tempered eldest son.

## Chapter 6: The Vultures Hover

*There was a time when the tents of the Sultan's army were pitched within numerous cities and towns throughout a large sprawling and vibrant Empire. However, by the early twentieth century the influence of the once powerful Ottomans was in dramatic decline and the Empire's borders had contracted significantly.*

*Other countries, notably Tsarist Russia and Austro-Hungary the perennial enemies of the Ottomans, hovered like vultures over the "rotting carcass" while in the Balkans the newly-independent nations of Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia also circled like vultures in anticipation of seizing former Ottoman occupied territories, most notably our Macedonian homeland. Once again the vision of a free Macedonia would be dashed as our ancestral home was partitioned by our neighbours who claimed it as their own just as the Ottoman Turks had done before them.*

## Chapter 6: The Vultures Hover

The recently-created nations in the Balkans had visions of territorial expansion which they hoped to achieve by annexing Turkish occupied villages and townships in Macedonia. However, in order to fulfill such expansionist policies they would reluctantly accept the reality of having to act collectively by forming unlikely alliances and displaying a level of co-operation and unity that would be difficult. Greece had long regarded their Bulgarian neighbours with intense suspicion and contempt and were furious over the Sultan's decision to permit the Bulgarian Exarchate Church to build churches, conduct religious services and establish Bulgarian language schools within the Ottoman-controlled Macedonian territories despite the vehement opposition of the leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church. The two countries were wedged apart by ethnicity, language, religious squabbles and territorial ambitions and would find it difficult to put aside such animosities. Relations were little better between Serbia and Bulgaria, both Slavonic and Orthodox nations, but torn apart by a rivalry fuelled by commonly-shared expansionist goals. In addition, the state of Montenegro was wary of land-locked Serbia which it feared had designs on its own territory as a way of securing access to the Adriatic coast. Macedonia's Balkan neighbours were clearly motivated by nationalistic ambitions of territorial expansion and supporting the Macedonian people to achieve nationhood and independence was never a consideration. The uncertain fate of the Macedonian nation was therefore further compromised by the intrigues of Macedonia's Balkan neighbours who were feverishly positioning themselves, like hovering vultures, to absorb Macedonia within their national boundaries as soon as the crescent flag of the Ottomans had been taken down from the mastheads.

To preserve a tenuous peace a regional peace-keeping force, composed of Italian, Austrian, French, British and Russian troops, an assorted array of uniforms and languages, was stationed in Macedonia. Of particular fascination for the villagers and townsfolk was the presence of black-skinned, African-born, French soldiers from colonial Senegal who they incorrectly referred to as *Arapji*, Arabs. In the *Lerinsko kaj*, the villages near *Lerin*, villagers were required to accommodate often rowdy foreign soldiers as guests into their already overcrowded homes. These were anxious and dangerous times especially for families with young girls who lived in constant fear that their young daughters would be molested. Indeed, there were incidents of harassment and even rape and it was not unusual for villagers and townsfolk to retaliate. As youngsters we had heard stories of villagers coming across the decomposing bodies of murdered foreign soldiers. Foreign troops further infuriated the locals by requisitioning portions of their crops and some of their livestock. It was said that French soldiers nearly eradicated all of the turtles in areas where they patrolled. They were already unpopular among the villagers and townspeople for their boisterous behaviour and further angered locals by indiscriminately cutting down significant numbers of trees which grew along the mountain sides and intimidating able-bodied villagers to undertake indentured labour. Unpaid village work-gangs were obliged to undertake the back-breaking work of hauling the newly-felled lumber to the lowlands from where it would be *prenosi*, transported, to France.

My father, then barely a teenager, had on several occasions been seconded to be one of those reluctant labourers and he described the day, while working without pay or gratitude to enhance French interests, that he nearly froze to death after being caught in a torrential down-pour which soon gave way to a fierce snow storm. He recalled that he would have died had it not been for the quick thinking of his fellow villagers who carried his limp, lifeless body to a nearby campfire where French soldiers were warming themselves and drinking freshly-brewed coffee. The warmth of the, *ogan*, fire, and a drink of hot coffee had helped my father to survive this ordeal but he would remain unwell for many *mesetsi*, months, to come.

There was one exception to the way foreign *vojniksi*, soldiers, were regarded. The appalling conditions confronting Russian peace-keeping troops elicited considerable compassion even among the most hardened villagers who knew what it was like to live with poverty and hardship. Teenage, Russian peasant conscripts from poverty-stricken rural villages of Tsarist Russia, much like their own communities, were forced to shelter within crudely dug trenches in the hills above *Lagen*. Most of these young men were raw recruits and inadequately supplied by the despotic, soon to be deposed, government of Tsar Nicholas II. They died in the hundreds from exposure, starvation and disease within their makeshift campsites. Driven to the verge of mutiny they then had to endure the indignity of being held prisoners, at gun point, by their French allies on the orders of their incompetent, tsarist appointed officers.

In 1912 continuing political instability within the Sultan's court further weakened the ability of the Ottomans to cling onto their remaining foreign territories and this encouraged Macedonia's Balkan *komshi*, neighbours, to agree, rather hesitantly, to form a fragile Balkan League designed to finally drive the Turks from Macedonian soil. At this time, the Sultan's court had been distracted by demands by its Albanian subjects for independence, a revolt in Yemen and an Italian invasion of Libya. The Balkan League seizing on this opportunity declared war on Turkey in October 1912 and initially inflicted several significant defeats on Ottoman forces. A Greek naval blockade halted the flow of food, munitions and military equipment from Asia Minor to Turkish battalions in the field while at the same time Bulgarian troops, despite battling a severe outbreak of disease and having their progress hampered by continuous rain, trudged slowly, ever onward, through the mud and slush toward Constantinople. This conflict between the Ottomans and members of the Balkan League ended on 30 May 1913 with the defeat of the Sultan's army.

The removal of the Turkish yoke, so long awaited, had evoked great feelings of joy which reverberated throughout Macedonia's townships and villages, including the *Numeff* household, and gave rise to genuine hopes of independence. Such developments seemed beyond belief, they were the fulfillment of centuries of unanswered, *molbi*, prayers, said for over five hundred years, by generations of Macedonians who had died believing that either the good Lord had turned his back on their plight or that he did not as yet have the time to listen to their miserable tale of woe.

There now emerged real hopes of self-determination, of living free from harassment, of being able to raise one's children within one's cultural traditions and the notion of living as a free people in a free land. For a few fleeting moments my Macedonian ancestors felt that God had listened and had intervened on their behalf.

However, the disunity and distrust, rampant within the Balkan League, were soon exposed. Military conflict between the uneasy allies was inevitable and commenced shortly after, when Greece, Serbia and Romania, the largest and most populous of the newly allied states, turned upon Bulgaria. Traditional animosities between Greece and Bulgaria had been reignited following Greece's occupation of the thriving Macedonian port city of *Solun*, Thessalonica, during the first Balkan War. When contingents of the Bulgarian army reached the outskirts of the city they observed, to its great chagrin, the Greek flag flying over the city's buildings. About this time, Serbia also refused an ultimatum to retreat from Macedonian territory that had been previously claimed by Bulgaria. With overwhelming odds so strongly stacked against them, the Bulgarians were forced to come to the peace table. Consequently, in 1913, under the conditions set out in the Treaty of Bucharest, which officially concluded the second, *Balkanskite Vojna*, Balkan War, Macedonia was partitioned and various portions of its traditional territories were incorporated within Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, while a small region, known as *Mala Prespa* or *Gol Brdo*, was ceded to Albania. The initial exuberance that had accompanied the end of Ottoman rule, which had flickered brightly, soon grew dim and then was extinguished. Once again foreign troops marched through the Macedonian homeland which had been so clinically and arbitrarily apportioned. In the case of our family we were now officially, if reluctantly, citizens of Greece.

Greek claims to Macedonian territory were founded on the notion that in antiquity Macedonia had been one of a large number of Greek city-states and an outpost of ancient Greek culture. However, in ancient times, Macedonia was regarded as being on the periphery of the classical Hellenic world and generally considered as a nation of uncultured barbarians by the Hellenes. For centuries, the ancient Macedonians had been excluded from competing in the Olympic Games as they were regarded as outsiders and therefore by logic not Greek. Nevertheless, Greece asserted that ancient Macedonia was indeed Greek. They argued that the ancient Macedonian kings and their subjects spoke Greek and that most prominent of all Macedonian historical figures, Phillip of Macedon and his more famous son, Alexander the Great, were Greek-speaking and leading disseminators of Greek culture.

The Serbian state also failed to acknowledge the cultural uniqueness of the Macedonian people whom it regarded as having a Serbian ancestry and insisted that they should be inspired by a vision of a united southern Slav nation naturally under the leadership of Serbia. Bulgaria asserted that those who referred to themselves as Macedonian were in reality ethnic Bulgarians. They pointed to similarities in language and the decision taken by an overwhelming majority of Macedonians to worship in Bulgarian churches during the final years of Ottoman rule. The

Bulgarian Exarchate Church had been founded in 1870, with the approval of the Sultan, despite intense lobbying by the leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church who traditionally wielded considerable influence within the corridors of the Sultan's court in Constantinople. Before the proclamation of an independent Greek state the Ottomans had long accepted the authority of Greek Orthodox Church to preside over Orthodox faith, culture and education throughout the Empire. The enormous influence of Greek religious leaders in the *Topkapi Palace*, played a significant role in the abolition of Serbian bishoprics by the Ottomans and when in 1711, Romania supported the Russian invasion of a number of Turkish territories, Romanian *boyars* or lords were replaced as governors, *hosopodars*, in Wallachia and Moldavia, by *phanaroits*, well-connected Greeks domiciled in Constantinople. Influential Greeks assumed leading positions within the administration of the Sultan's interpreter service and often acted as de facto ambassadors for the Sultan in negotiations with foreign delegations. In addition, Greek *phanaroits* often took on the role as the Sultan's tax collectors and secured lucrative contracts to supply various goods and services to the Ottoman court. It is estimated that there were some two million Greeks resided within the Turkish homeland in communities scattered along the coasts of Anatolia and the Black and Mediterranean seas. Indeed, many of the Greeks living in the very heartland of the Ottoman Empire spoke little or no Greek. It was evident that Macedonia's neighbours were content to claim the Macedonian people as their own but none were willing to support their desire to be free and independent.

#### Footnotes:

*The term "millet" originates from the Ottoman word millah, meaning nation. During Ottoman times the two major millets were the Muslim and the Greek Orthodox since Ottoman officials generally classified subjected peoples not by ethnicity but as groups with shared religious beliefs. The Greek Orthodox Church patriarchate, domiciled in Constantinople exercised with the approval of successive Sultans jurisdiction over all Orthodox Christians residing within the Empire. Orthodox Greek Church leaders possessed considerable influence within the Sultan's court and reasoned that in order to maintain the autonomy and authority of the Greek Orthodox Church they would have to bow, however reluctantly, to Ottoman rule and openly declared that the Sultan's turban was much preferable to the Pope's red cap.*

*Greek Phanariotes were members of prominent Greek families, often wealthy merchants, who resided in the, Phanar, lighthouse, quarter of Constantinople, where the Greek Patriarchate, the spiritual leaders of all the Ottoman Empire's Orthodox subjects also typically had their homes. Phanariote Greeks exercised considerable power especially in matters to do with the administration of the Balkans where the Ottomans relied on these well-educated and cosmopolitan subjects to act as diplomats and administrators.*

*Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans advanced south and captured Athens in 1458 and by 1500 the lowlands and most of the islands of Greece were under Ottoman rule. Cyprus fell in 1571 and Crete, then under Venetian rule, in 1670. Greek nationalistic feelings had been fuelled by Turkish repression, the seizure of land and the imposition of heavy tax burdens. In addition, some Greek phanariots having witnessed the emergence of nationalistic movements in Western Europe began to contemplate the idea of an independent Greek nation. Such sentiments were further advanced by a growing philhellene movement among influential members of the European aristocracy and groups of wealthy Americans, often collectors of antiquities, and by writers and artists who had been inspired by a revival of interest in the achievements of ancient Greek civilisation. The struggle for Greek independence was predominantly waged between 1821-1832 and when the Ottomans reacted with widespread repression, the great powers, notably Britain, France and Tsarist Russia, intervened on behalf of the Greek people. In 1832, an independent*

*Greek nation was proclaimed with Otto of Bavaria, the second son of the philhellene, King Ludwig 1, installed as the country's monarch. King Otto would rule as regent and absolute monarch and from 1843 as a constitutional monarch before he was deposed in 1862 and succeeded by King George 1 who a member of Denmark's Glucksburg dynasty.*

*In the 1913 partition of the Macedonian homeland Greece acquired the largest territorial gains consisting of some 34 000 square kilometres, a region which is sometimes referred to as Egejska Makedonija. Some 25 284 square kilometres were awarded to Serbia, commonly known as Vardarska Makedonija, now the Republic of Macedonia, while Bulgaria was granted 6 778 square kilometres, Pirinska Makedonija or Pirinsko del. A small portion was transferred to Albania which is referred to as Malla Prespa and Golo Brdo.*

*Tragically the existence of a Macedonian identity would be denied by each of Macedonia's neighbours. The Greek example of denying the existence of a distinct Macedonian identity was repeated in Vardarska Makedonija, where Serbianisation took place with a large number of Serbian troops stationed in Macedonian territory and Serbian colonists encouraged to purchase the more fertile tracts of land. Serbian cultural and social organisations actively promoted the assimilation of Macedonians into Serbian culture. In the Pirinsko del, similar policies were also pursued by successive Bulgarian governments.*

As the authority of the Ottomans continued to decline the Sultan's court began to explore ways to drive a wedge between the potential enemies of the Empire. The Sultan's decree in favour of the creation of a Bulgarian Church was essentially a means of igniting Greek-Bulgarian tensions in the hope that this would preclude an alliance between the two countries. The Sultan declared that an independent Bulgarian Exarchate Church could establish churches and schools in Macedonian villages where at least two-thirds of the inhabitants indicated, by plebiscite, their desire to worship in Bulgarian, a Slavic language very much akin to Macedonian. Consequently, the close relationships between the Sultan's major officials and influential Greek courtesans began to cool. The Sultan also declared that Bulgarian bishoprics would be permitted to be established in *Skopje, Ohrid* and *Monastir*. Therefore in the twilight years of Ottoman rule many Macedonian villagers attended Bulgarian churches and send their children to Bulgarian schools. In recognition of this trend the leaders of the Bulgarian Exarchate Orthodox Church wisely began recruiting young men from Macedonian village and township families to be ordained as priests.

With the partition of Macedonia, the Greek authorities were determined to cast out the Bulgarian Church and totally eradicate its influence within that region that had been absorbed into Greece. The newly-appointed Greek governor of *Kostour* soon arranged a meeting with the head of the Bulgarian Exarchate Church in the area and informed him, in the sternest terms, that he expected all representatives of the Bulgarian Church to leave Greek territory within days. He added that the continued presence of Bulgarian church officials or their sympathisers would not be tolerated. Subsequently, priests of the Bulgarian Church, who ignored this ultimatum, were arrested and imprisoned in *Solun* before being sent into exile to various Greek islands. The buildings and property belonging to the Bulgarian Exarchate Church were seized and religious icons and relics were either destroyed or cynically recycled. Invariably, the Slavonic text in icons, holy paintings and artifacts was removed and replaced with inscriptions written in the letters of the Greek alphabet. More fanatical Greeks, would refer to Macedonians, who chose to cling faithfully to their true ethnicity, as *Varvaros*, ignorant, uncultured barbarians.

To his final days, my father, *Risto Numeff*, who lived to the good old age of eighty six would claim that he was a Bulgarian. For years he subscribed to Bulgarian communist government-funded and published magazines and newspapers which regularly arrived at his Manjimup home glorifying the achievements of the Bulgarian nation, the wisdom of Bulgaria's Marxist-Leninist political leaders, such as *Giorgi Dimitroff*, and touted the benefits of socialism. In the small, Western Australian rural community far away on the other side of the world these publications were read over and over again by my father and enthusiastically shared with the regular stream of visitors who came to pay their respects to the last patriarch of the *Numeff* family. One of my father's most pressing priorities, certainly never to be overlooked, was the payment of the annual subscription fee for these publications which he always insisted on doing well before the renewal date. His vehement insistence of having a Bulgarian ethnicity caused some degree of tension within the family who steadfastly and proudly proclaimed ourselves to be Macedonians.

In the end we accepted what we regarded as one of *Risto Numeff's* eccentricities. My mother, far more diplomatic could be swayed either way. However, while members of the family occasionally expressed some frustration over my father's views on this matter it was not to say that we did not understand our family's patriarch determined stance. After all, as a young boy living under Ottoman rule, he had briefly attended a Bulgarian school and had worshipped in *Krepeshina's* Bulgarian Church where lessons and religious services were conducted in the Bulgarian language.

During the first Balkan War Turkish forces had been severely demoralised and driven back to a defensive position only thirty kilometres from Constantinople. All territories west of Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, Epirus, Albania and Kosovo, representing some eighty percent of the Empire's European regions, were ceded by the Ottomans. In this conflict, people fled in various directions, some removing themselves from the battle zones while others departed fearing recriminations by opposing armed forces. In the wake of invading forces, Turkish families tended to gravitate to legendary Constantinople where they lived in makeshift, illegally constructed shanty towns while others fled to find sanctuary in Anatolia. At the same time, through threats and intimidation the Turkish authorities compelled increasing numbers of Greek families to flee their homes in Turkey and return to Greece. Turkish militia units would often arrive at night and enter village squares shouting and beating drums and harassing the Greek inhabitants. Local authorities turned a blind eye to such injustices and merely informed Greek families that they could not guarantee their safety. As a result in May 1914 the governments of Turkey and Greece agreed to a voluntary scheme of exchanging populations, based on the model that had been previously thrashed out by Turkish and Bulgarian officials. However, before this exchange could take place Europe plunged headlong into a catastrophic conflict, the First World War, in which Greece and Turkey were once again, rather predictably, on opposing sides.

By 1914, Europe was a powder keg with two armed camps, both committed to *vojna*, war, resulting from the signing of a series of binding military alliances and agreements between leading European powers. All that was needed was a spark to ignite the fuse and begin a domino effect that would lead to a world war. This occurred on 28 June with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne and his wife Sophia, while they were on an official visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia - Herzegovina. The assassin was a Bosnian student with alleged links to a Serbian terrorist group. Austro-Hungary, clinging tenuously to its grandly named, but terminally ill, Holy Roman Empire, still had designs of expanding into the Balkans and in 1908 had annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina much to the chagrin of Serbia. This politically motivated assassination led the aging Hapsburg emperor, Franz Joseph, to request the military support of Austro-Hungary's chief ally Kaiser Wilhelm 11 of Germany should he declare war. He deemed Serbia responsible for the death of the royal couple by accusing the Balkan nation of having permitted anti-Austro-Hungarian terrorist groups to operate freely within Serbia's borders. Imperial Germany's agreement to stand by its ally fortified the resolve of the Austro-Hungarian throne which subsequently presented Serbia with an ultimatum, a series of demands, some of which the Serbs refused to accept. Consequently, Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia which turned to its Slav and Orthodox ally, tsarist Russia, for military support. When Russia mobilised its troops for war the Tsar's Triple Entente partners, Britain and France, were obligated to honour their military commitment to their Russian ally. Simultaneously, the Central powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary supported by Turkey and Bulgaria, also prepared for war.

Bulgaria's participation in the ensuing conflict was largely motivated by the hope that victory would lead to the acquisition of Macedonian territories which had been incorporated within Serbia and Greece. Such intrigues, alliances and particularly the declaration of war were concerning to Greece which at that time was gripped by internal disunity and unrelenting vindictiveness between by two irreconcilable factions at loggerheads with each other. King Constantine favoured neutrality and was accused by his opponents of having German connections and sympathies. Meanwhile, the prime minister, Venizelos, advocated that the Greek nation should declare its unequivocal support for the Triple Entente powers in the expectation that the defeat of the Central Powers would lead to Greek territorial gains especially at the expense of Turkey which had aligned itself to Imperial Germany and Austro-Hungary. Unable to sway the Greek monarch to his viewpoint, Venizelos resigned in frustration in 1915 despite winning a landslide electoral victory and moved to *Solun* where he established an alternate Greek government. Shortly after, the increasingly unpopular King Constantine was deposed and British and French troops began arriving in *Solun*.

Once more Macedonia would be a battleground to be crossed by soldiers wearing an array of different uniforms and hoisting high a variety of national flags. Villagers and townsfolk would scurry home from their fields and pasture lands to take refuge in their homes and once inside bolt their, *vratī*, doors, securely behind them and peer through barred windows at foreign soldiers parading through their neighbourhoods in a series of patriotic advances. Neatly uniformed, smiling, singing, they marched into battle but would invariably be seen retreating to their encampments shell-shocked and mourning their lost comrades who had been so full of life only hours before and whose bodies were left unburied on the battlefield.

## Chapter 7: Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts

*Macedonia's neighbours, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania cynically partitioned our Macedonian homeland and claimed portions of it as their own. They argued that a distinct Macedonian identity was a myth and that historically and culturally Macedonians were either Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians or indeed Albanians.*

*The region where my ancestors had lived for generations was incorporated within the borders of Greece. Through an intense and extensive program of hellenisation, consisting of a rigorous program of re-education, assimilation and repression, the Greek authorities sought to destroy every vestige of Macedonian culture. They would go so far as to deny the very existence of Macedonians living in Greece. They changed our family names, those of our villages and townships, of rivers and mountains and even passed legislation making it illegal to speak the Macedonian language.*

*Like the ancient Mycenaean Greek warriors who clandestinely emerged from inside the Trojan horse to sack, burn and destroy Troy, despite the warnings about Greeks bearing gifts, more radical Greek elements sought to eradicate all things Macedonian.*

As a result of the Balkan Wars and First World War the Greek army occupied over half of the traditional Macedonian homeland. However, there would be no liberation only occupation. One liberates one's own territory but occupies the land that belongs to others. The Greek authorities soon proceeded to impose an vigorous policy of assimilation calculated to destroy all vestiges of Macedonian culture among those Macedonians unwittingly now trapped within Greece's, *gradnitsa*, border. They established a free-wheeling intelligence service to closely monitor any suspected anti-Greek activities with the ultimate aim of erasing any reference to the existence of Macedonians. Accordingly, Greek government officials were instructed to attend compulsory workshops where they were lectured on methods and strategies regarding how best to achieve this. Those public servants born in the more patriotic and populous Macedonian regions or with suspected sympathy for their Macedonian neighbours were transferred to other parts of the country. Substantial government subsidies were provided for the publication of papers, journals and books that denied the existence, both in the past and present, of Macedonian-speaking people.

This program of ethnic cleansing sought to acquire cultural converts who would sign a declaration professing a personal awakening to their true cultural heritage by embracing hellenism. Bulgarian churches and schools were closed and pillaged and individuals who resisted were arrested and subjected to imprisonment, beatings and general intimidation. Letters sent home by some Greek soldiers stationed in Macedonia openly and proudly described acts of atrocities, including the use of physical violence and the senseless destruction of property. A principal agent for the dissemination of Greek propaganda and the hellenisation program being waged was the Greek Orthodox Church which helped to fund the establishment of pro-Greek associations and invested significantly in the building of Greek schools.

The names of Macedonian towns, villages, rivers and other geographical features, were changed as were the surnames of Macedonian villagers and towns people which now typically ended in, *is, ios or populous*, and not the Slavonic forms, *eff ov or ev*. There was an unrelenting campaign staged against the speaking of the Macedonian language even at home and during funerals, weddings and christenings. The use of our mother tongue was officially outlawed in 1927. Successive Greek governments, who internationally vigorously denied its campaign of ethnic cleansing, enacted a language tax where Macedonian speakers could be fined for each word that they uttered *po nashi*, in our ancestral language. They argued that Greek was a superior language, after all they said, it was the language of the Bible. *Grkomani*, Macedonian villagers and townsfolk, who had been swayed by Greek propaganda and expressed open support for the Greek government's policies, were rewarded with important positions in the villages and townships and were awarded government jobs. Even the names of traditional Macedonian songs and dances were changed and the Macedonian people, living within the borders of Greece, were insultingly referred to as *Slavophile Greeks*.

Our *Vlasi*, Vlach, neighbours were also subjected to a similar campaign of ethnic cleansing. Under Ottoman rule they had been permitted to freely speak their Latin-based language, akin to Romanian, and to establish their own schools and churches. However, with the arrival of Greek authorities these schools and churches were shut down and the *Vlachs* were discouraged from speaking in their own language or in Macedonian, which a large number of them spoke fluently. *Vlachs*, living under Greek rule, like Macedonians, were expected to assimilate into the now dominant Greek culture and to regard themselves as Greek. Such dictates served to divide *Vlach* communities living in Macedonia into those who accepted the process of hellenisation and those who did not. At the commencement of the Second World War, a strong nationalistic movement emerged among dissenting *Vlachs* who unsuccessfully proclaimed their independence an action which they misguidedly thought would be sanctioned by the invading Italians.

The language spoken by a people is generally irrefutable evidence as to their cultural heritage since it is the manifestation of shared historical roots and experiences. The language spoken by Macedonian villagers and townsfolk, *po nashi*, our mother tongue, was a Slavic dialect, called *Makedonski* and it is certainly not Greek. Outpouring of Greek nationalism and countless acts of selfless patriotism had achieved Greek independence. It was therefore surprising that, more fanatical members of the Greek nation, could not comprehend why the overwhelming majority of Macedonian villagers and towns people also desired their independence and freedom and had little enthusiasm for speaking Greek, a language foreign to them or why they failed to comprehend their reluctance to embrace and share the supposed intrinsic riches of Greek culture. The answer should not have eluded them, it was simple, our Macedonian forefathers had instilled deep within the hearts and minds of succeeding generations a pride in being Macedonian. That is what they called themselves because that was the name of the region in which they lived and more importantly because their cultural heritage and language was not Greek but Macedonian.

With the defeat of the Central powers in late 1918, Greece was among the victorious nations and accordingly a Greek delegation attended the Paris Peace Conference, which commenced in January 1919, held at the palace of the former French kings at Versailles. Greece was determined to exploit the defeat of Germany, Austro-Hungary and more particularly Turkey and subsequently it was granted permission to send troops into Smyrna and its hinterland, Turkish territory in Asia Minor, where there were a significant number of long-standing Greek settlements. During the First World War, people of Greek origin living in this region had been harassed by the Turks, some had been interned while others were forced to serve in the Turkish army as non-combatants, in the medical corps or as porters. However, they were not subjected to the severe mistreatment said to be inflicted on other ethnic groups, such as Armenians and Syrian Christians. By March 1919, Greek forces had occupied Smyrna and long stretches of the eastern Aegean coastline and formerly displaced Greek families began returning to reclaim their homes and

property. However, with the demobilisation of Britain and France at the end of the First World War, Greece was forced to stand alone and was not able to maintain its political and military ascendancy in this former Turkish territory. Greece's vision of creating a new Byzantine Empire by taking advantage of Turkey's military defeat and domestic upheavals that were occurring in Turkey soon evaporated. The Turks had responded to their ill-fortune and diminished status by regrouping quickly under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, known as *Ataturk*, the acknowledged "father of the modern Turkish nation", who was the leader of the "*Young Turk*" movement which removed Sultan Abdul Hamed 11 from power and embarked on the modernisation of Turkish state.

The founder of the new Turkish Republic had been born in *Solun*, Macedonia, in 1881, the son of a timber merchant. On the death of his father, young Mustafa Kemal attended the Turkish military academy at *Bitola* and was then deployed as a junior officer to Syria and Libya where he was engaged in fighting against Italian forces in 1912. He was later appointed a military attaché to Bulgaria and resided in *Sofia*. *Ataturk* became a national hero as the commander Turkish forces at Gallipoli where his men halted a major British and French offensive which included troops from Australia and New Zealand, the Anzacs. Under *Ataturk* the Ottoman Sultanate was officially abolished in November 1922 and he became President of a new, invigorated, secular Turkish nation with an elected, democratic government. Under the new constitution Turkish citizens were no longer permitted to wear the fez and the Latin alphabet was adopted. Greek territorial gains, confirmed under sections of the Treaty of Versailles which had been negotiated at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, were therefore soon lost as Smyrna was retaken by Turkish forces.

The atrocities that had been inflicted against the Turks, by the Greeks, were reciprocated and as a result many people of Greek ancestry living within Turkish territory became homeless. The Turkish nation, traumatised by the loss of past glory had responded by attempting to establish a resilient Muslim majority in Asia Minor which would necessitate the exodus of non-Muslims from its territories, particularly Greeks, many whom had lived there for centuries. Many of them were compelled to hastily board vessels of all sizes and flying the flags of many nations and head for Greece.

**Footnotes:**

*Mustafa Kemal made a moving speech in memory of the Turkish and foreign soldiers who had perished during the Gallipoli campaign. His words are inscribed on a monument at Anzac Cove and read: "Those heroes who shed their blood and lost their lives. You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country, rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehments to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours. You mothers, who sent your sons from far away countries, wipe away your tears, your sons are lying in our bosom and after losing their lives on this land become our sons as well."*

The idea of an orderly and peaceful exchange of populations was again revisited by the newly-formed League of Nations and agreed to by both parties. Hapless King Constantine, who had been restored to the Greek throne, was once more forced to abdicate and was replaced by a military junta. Five royalist politicians and the commander of the Greek troops during Greece's disastrous war with Turkey were placed on trial, convicted of treason and executed. This was the comeuppance that *Kole Peoff*, who had been conscripted to reluctantly participate in this war, had recalled with some satisfaction. The new Turkish Republic was determined to expel non-Muslims from its territory and hundreds of thousands of displaced refugees flooded into Greece. Significant numbers were settled in the Macedonian villages of the lowlands and the surrounding townships where their arrival dramatically altered the social and ethnic fabric of the region. The influx of these new settlers, *prosfigi*, refugees, people with a Greek ancestry whose families had lived for generations in the Turkish homeland, imposed enormous logistical challenges for the Greek government which was in part alleviated by the movement of Turks, living within Greece's borders, moving in the opposite direction. The irony was that such relocations were in fact the compulsory deportation of hundreds of thousands of people, over one million Greeks and three hundred thousand Turks, on purely religious grounds but nevertheless fully sanctioned by international law. Macedonia's newly-arrived Greek settlers were initially granted land that had been formerly owned by departing Turkish families. In the land redistribution scheme that accompanied this massive dislocation of people these former Turkish citizens often acquired the most fertile fields and as their numbers swelled they assumed many of the influential positions in the villages and townships. Macedonians, once again, became second-class citizens required to bend to the collective will of new arrivals who had little or no affinity with their traditional homeland.

My mother recalled seeing a Turkish family departing the village of *Maala* on the way back to their ancestral home. The family shuffled slowly, despondently, carrying with them bags and suitcases full of clothes and other personal possessions. Larger items: furniture, cooking utensils and pottery had been loaded neatly onto a horse-drawn cart. My mother was witnessing an increasingly familiar sight in the villages and towns of the Macedonian lowlands. At the head of this family group was an old man dressed in his finest, loose-fitting robes, which billowed in a light breeze. The old Turk's family were Macedonian-born and were now bound for a land that was dear in their hearts but largely foreign to them. As they passed by, several villagers, tolerance and compassion eroded by centuries of pent up frustration, taunted them. After a time, the Turkish patriarch stopped, turned and stared directly at his tormentors, then straightening himself, drew a deep breathe and said "*Braati i sestri*, brothers and sisters", I hear your jibes but it would be unwise to rejoice too loudly or too long over our departure." His *glas*, voice, began to fail him but he composed himself and took in another gulp of the very air he had breathed since the day he was born, "We have an affinity with this land. We were born here and even though you might despise us we have learned to speak

your language and we have allowed you to worship your God.” He paused again. “*Ama*, but, the *Grsti*, Greeks, who will replace us will be far less tolerant. *Alal da vie*, best wishes to you, because you might soon regret our leaving”. These last words were delivered slowly, they appeared to emanate from the wisdom that comes with old age and were uttered with a half smile or perhaps it was a grimace that indicated genuine concern and sadness for the challenges that were ahead of us. With that, he had turned and waddled, upon aging, unsteady *nodzi*, legs, as quickly as he could to catch up with the other members of his family. My mother commented that the sniggering and sarcastic laughter soon gave way to thoughtful reflection as some of the villagers began to wonder whether the old Turk might have been speaking the truth. His ominous prediction of a bleak future was soon to become a reality as the old man’s words would indeed ring true. Not long after many Macedonian families would themselves be leaving their homeland for distant lands in not entirely dissimilar circumstances. The Greeks who came in the wake of the Ottomans adopted the credo “*O melite tin Elenki*”, speak only in Greek and immerse yourself only in Greek culture. Greek police with their extensive network of informers feverishly proceeded to identifying those who, in their eyes, were too ignorant or rebellious, to embrace hellenism. They espoused the concept of *Megale Idea*, grand idea, of unify all Greeks within a new vibrant Greek nation. This vision, however, was dismissive of the simple fact that the Macedonian people were not Greek.

While it is true that most Macedonians had little to do with their Turkish neighbours and there was an on-going underlying unease between Turks and Macedonians, the overwhelming majority of Turks, living in Macedonia, were *chesen*, honest, and hardworking and tried to live their lives by the *zakoni*, laws, of the *Qur’an*, the Muslim holy book, as the way of achieving eternal salvation. They, like their Macedonian counterparts, lived within a strictly regimented patriarchal society where respect of elders and responsibility for the collective well-being of one’s family was paramount. Boastfulness and self-promotion among them was discouraged since only *Allah* was to be glorified. Many of our Turkish neighbours had been born in Macedonia and they regarded it as their home. Most had learned to speak *po nashi* and fully appreciated the benefits of co-existing in harmony in a land where they had initially been viewed as intruders and subsequently lived in communities among a conquered, culturally distinctive majority. Typically, some of the Greeks who followed in their footsteps were not Macedonian-born and too often exhibited a superiority complex which caused them to look down their noses at the Macedonian people, their culture and language. Strong nationalistic and patriotic feelings have their place but they can often give rise to fanaticism and this in turn is a solid foundation upon which intolerance and oppression can be justified and practiced.

While it was true that the land-holdings of villagers and townsfolk, who could demonstrate proof of ownership, by producing official title papers to the Greek authorities, generally did not have their assets confiscated during this time, some villagers and people of the townships did forfeit some of their life-sustaining fields. Tax avoidance is as old as civilisation itself and

and many villagers and townspeople had understated the extent of their land holdings to avoid paying tax. In retrospect, this proved to be an unfortunate ploy since the land not legally declared was taken from them to be included as part of the government's land distribution program.

**Footnotes:**

*Even though relations between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia have improved somewhat, Greece still insists that its northern neighbour should be officially referred as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and not the Republic of Macedonia, in order to distinguish it from the region of Macedonia which Greece had incorporated within its national borders.*

## Chapter 8: As if Time Stopped Still

*Macedonian villagers lived highly predictable lives largely governed by the passing of the seasons and long-standing customs and traditions. The majority were peasant farmers who knew adversity and poverty and fully understood the daily challenges of life. They possessed a keen survival instinct, nurtured over succeeding generations, based on observing and interacting with their immediate surroundings.*

*Despite their on-going trials and tribulations they found comfort in their families, fellow villagers and a undying faith that their crops would grow, their livestock would multiply and the forests would nurture animals to hunt, timber with which to build their homes and logs to fuel their fireplaces.*

*Continuity, not change, best describes their daily existence and they did as generations before them had done - they accepted rather than questioned their fate. Largely ignorant of the world beyond their villages and towns, they had the wisdom to realise what was important in life was not the accumulation of personal wealth but leading lives where close family bonds and respect for others was paramount. For them, it was as if time had stopped still.*

In our traditional homeland, the Macedonian people lived in small agricultural communities which struggled daily to subsist just as their earliest *Slaviany*, Slav predecessors, had done. A major resource in sustaining them was access to water with which to irrigate their all important grain crops and vegetables. The river flowing through the village of my birth, *Maala*, was the *Neretskata Reka*, so named since it flowed from the direction of the village of *Neret*. Fortunately, the soils around *Maala* had good water retention qualities and there was minimal leaching of essential soil nutrients but without regular watering the crops would not have survived. In the warmer months, the villagers built small, temporary dams constructed with stones and tree branches to restrict the flow of river water and diverted some of it into their fields through water-bearing channels that had been dug with their mattocks. I particularly enjoyed irrigating our family fields and feeling the soothing sensation of the cool water running over my feet and in between my toes. This water was rarely used domestically since villagers much preferred to fetch their drinking water from *studeni*, cool, pristine local, *izvori*, springs.

Arguments, even long-standing feuds, over the way the river water was being used, were common. It was not unusual for villagers, who were closely related or shared life-long friendships, to disagree over who was using the water, how often they did so, the quantity of water they accessed or the times when they chose to irrigate. Not surprisingly, my paternal grandfather, the feisty, *Kole Numeff*, was often embroiled in such disputes with his fellow villagers. Little wonder, that over time, villages determined to financially compensate one of their own who was charged with the responsibility for overseeing an equitable watering roster in the hope of promoting, *mir*, harmony, within communities where people lived in such close proximity with each other and where every word or action could be overheard or observed and quickly became the subject of conversation, gossip and accusation. A village, *vordaahr*, was appointed *sekoj godina*, annually, with the authority to impose fines on villagers who transgressed any of the communally agreed conditions associated with the use of the river water. However, despite the best of efforts of the *vordaahri*, disagreements occurred and dented egos and brooding discontent often lingered. The work of the *vordaahr* was a thankless task and the heated arguments, mutterings of foul play, verbal abuse and even the occasional threat of physical violence, was barely worth the small retainer. Hardly surprising, the position was not popular and few villagers were willing to undertake the role for more than a year.

Villagers would also nominate one or two rangers or *pollatsi*, who like the reeves of medieval villages, were charged with ensuring that livestock did not stray into fields and trample the crops and settling disputes over the positioning of boundary markers. As in feudal times, villagers typically owned strips of land scattered among the village fields and these were distinguished by stone boulders or wooden stakes, makeshift markers, which could be moved by the unscrupulous or simply disturbed by strong winds, heavy rains or rummaging *zhivotini*, wild animals.

The *lozinki*, vineyards, of villages were located on sites that had been chosen by the founding fathers or elders as places most likely to produce the best grapes. Each family traditionally planted grape vines in the village vineyard which was patrolled by a villager appointed as a *pardaahr*, whose task was to vigilantly look after the vineyard, often from a crudely built hut perched on a strategically positioned vantage point. A *strajaahr*, forest ranger, was responsible for monitoring the sustainable use of the surrounding forested areas. Since the villagers were acutely aware of the importance of conserving their local natural environment on which they were so dependent. Firewood, so important for feeding family fireplaces especially in the long, bitter winter months, could only be cut down during strictly regulated times although villagers were permitted to collect trees and *vetki*, branches, that had naturally fallen to the ground at all times of the year.

Village life essentially revolved around two seasons, the warm and the cold months. During late *prol'et*, spring, and *l'eto*, summer, the family worked tirelessly to prepare for late autumn, *essen*, and more particularly for the harsh winter months. The working day of the adult members of the *Numeff* household would begin at daybreak, invariably announced by the crowing of the village *petli*, roosters. Time pieces, such as the round, silver, highly-prized pocket watch that *Dedo Kole* had purchased in America and wore proudly, dangling from a chain to be admired and commented upon only on special occasions, were rare. Villagers, however, were experts at telling the time by observing the changing position of the *sntse*, sun, in the *neboto*, sky, during the day and by listening to the crowing of the roosters at night fall and day break.

Sometimes, during moments of interrupted sleep, half-dreaming, I still have visions of my grandmother or mother, putting logs into the family fireplace and of *Dedo Kole* or my father opening the front *vrata*, door, to venture outside to tend to the livestock or go to the *noozhnic*, toilet. At such times I see fleeting shadows, as by the new-born light the *Numeff* household stirred and without eating, trekked upon familiar paths to our fields, carrying with them woolen, home-made bags containing rye bread, onions, small clumps of feta cheese and water stored within *stomni* or *bookli*, small wooden or clay pitchers and canisters. I recall the villagers exchanging greetings and chatting among themselves as they went about their daily routines and think about the harsh life we endured and how there was always work to be done. The fields had to be ploughed with *drveni*, wooden, ploughs, our grain crops had to be planted, watered, weeded and fertilised. Our flocks of sheep and goats needed to be milked and pastured and there were *louski*, excess growth, to collect as feed for our animals and our household vegetable garden required nurturing. Wood needed to be collected for our fireplace. There were grape vines and fruit trees to prune, for while it was too cold for citrus fruit to flourish, *kajsiji*, apricots, *praski*, peaches, *krushi*, pears, *jabolka*, apples and *chereshi*, cherries, all thrived.

I would think back to harvest time when life became even more frenetic, when our crops had to be gathered and the precious grain bagged, milled and stored, when rough skinned pumpkins

had to be removed from their thick stems. There was a large variety of vegetables to plant and nurture in our home garden, some of which would be pickled in a brine of salt, vinegar and water. There were peppers, both mild and hot, to string together, hang out to dry and later grind into paprika.

On the death of *Dedo Giorgi Numeff*, his sons *Kole* and *Sotir Numeff*, inherited the family's properties in *Krepeshina* and *Maala*. My grandfather, *Kole Numeff*, was now a relatively large land owner and by village standards, a man of some standing and authority. His fields produced *chenitsa*, wheat, *yechmin*, rye and *chenka*, corn, and the family's vegetable garden nurtured thriving crops of peppers, beans, watermelons, rock melons, onions and an assortment of greens. He owned some eighty sheep and forty goats and the milk produced was used for the family's personal needs, to nurture the new-born lambs and kids and to make a variety of cheeses and butter. The fluffy yarn shorn from the family animals was fed into the household looms to make *pl'ahki*, garments, and during the bitter winters the family's cooking pot contained stews with ample quantities of mutton and goat meat. My grandfather and his brother also inherited several fields in *Bapchor* and *Pavlin*, a legacy dating back to *Dedo Petre* and *Dedo Vello*.

Our home was where the members of our family sought respite from the labours of the day. However, villagers were not house proud and the prosperity or standing of the family was not associated with building a bigger or better house than their neighbours as it is in more affluent societies. The houses of the villagers, therefore, tended to be uniform in size and design. Besides, it was unwise to openly display any outward signs of prosperity to a succession of foreign occupiers who found themselves on Macedonian soil with some regularity. Accordingly, the *Numeff* home was a modest structure built with timber frames, stone walls and wooden rafters which supported a roof of thatched straw. Although far from being an imposing structure the house kept out the wind, rain and snow. Its *odzahak*, stone chimney, carried out the *kadesh*, smoke, from an open fireplace which kept the family warm and heated the family's cooking pot hanging from a four-legged metal frame that was placed within.

The family slept on a bare floor in a single bedroom upon mattresses plaited from strands of *slama*, straw, and rested their heads on straw-filled pillows while covering themselves with *charchafi*, sheets, made by the women of the household on their rudimentary looms. There was little privacy and this frequently tested the patience of everyone. Home was the place where the *stari*, older members, of the family looked forward to resting their aching bodies after many hours of *jaka*, hard, work during the daylight hours. In contrast, the children bursting with energy, playful, loud, trying hard to entertain themselves within a confined space, chased each other, pushed and shoved and milled annoyingly round the feet of the adults.

One way for the adults to snatch an hour or two of peace and quiet was to tell the children stories. Typically my brothers, cousins and I would take advantage of *Baba Yana's* kind and loving nature and prevail upon her to be our story teller. Typical of youngsters everywhere we were keen to hear tales of mythical creatures: larger-than-life heroes, villains, pious saints, selfless martyrs and legendary kings and queens. We were fascinated by tales of *vampiri*, ghosts, and *samovilli*, witches, who in the guise of ugly, old hags or beautiful, young women, we were told, lived in the forests and mountains and liked to sing and dance but were evil

and would, not hesitate to *umori*, murder, their innocent victims or turn them into *kamen*, stone. I still recall sitting upon the floor with the other younger members of *Kole Numeff's* extended household, legs crossed upon straw-filled blankets, warming ourselves near the open fireplace, eager and silent. The light of a dim *lumba*, lamp, or *kandilo*, candle, cast eerie shadows on white, lime-coated walls as we waited with growing anticipation for my grandmother to ready herself. She was typically unhurried and would pull up a low stool, sit, wipe her hands upon her *pregatch*, apron, before in a rather dramatic, animated voice and sweeping hand gestures and exaggerated facial expressions recount stories of the exploits and conquests of Alexander the Great, the renowned Macedonian king and master of the then known world. Our storyteller, face half in shadow, would *kazhi*, tell us, that when wind gusts swirled leaves and debris about that the spirit of the great ancient Macedonian king and that at such times we should declare loudly that Alexander the Great lives and that he still rules the world. Our grandmother would warn, in stern and deliberate tones, that failure to do so would surely lead to insanity or *bol'es*, a terrible affliction.

Another of *Baba Yana's* favourite stories involved the heroic exploits of the Macedonian king, *Marko Krali*, Marko the king, who was reputed to have been a powerful monarch with his royal court located at *Prelip*, the very town where *Dedo Petre* had worked as a blacksmith before he had moved to *Bapchor*. She would tell us that although *Marko Krali* was not able to hold back the Ottoman hordes he did succeed in reaching an understanding with them and that as a respected vassal of the Sultan did much to protect his people from acts of cruelty and oppression. *Baba Yana's* painted vivid scenes and images of King Marko, mounted upon his magical black and white stallion and we would conjure images of the king dashing round the countryside, wearing a hat sewn from the skin of a wolf and with shoulders wrapped in a cape made from the fur of a large black bear he had slain. *Baba Yana* would tell us how the burly, regal hero, sporting a long impressive moustache, championed the cause of the vulnerable. She claimed that he was fearless, fair, honest and strong, a true hero, who invariably at the very last moment outsmart Turkish despots and wrong doers. His demise, my grandmother would say announced the end of the "*good old days*". The exploits of *Marko Krali* lived on in popular Macedonian stories and sayings and in the local geography. A person with large feet would be described as having feet like the legendary monarch and as children we would often play near a large boulder with a distinctive indentation vaguely resembling a horse's hoof, which we were told had been made by *Marko Krali's* legendary steed. Many of these *Makedonski narodni prikazni*, traditional Macedonian stories, conveyed strong patriotic and nationalistic messages that were to inspire cultural pride. However, *tseli*, all, of them were not so serious. There were many stories and fables that were light-hearted and *smeshno*, humorous. *Baba Yana* told us of the adventures of *Kelchje*, a pocket-size Hercules, whose antics poked fun at Macedonia's Turkish overlords. These stories were recounted with a cheeky smile and occasional low chuckles since *Kelchje* was clearly one of her favourites. We would early listen to the amusing misadventures of *Itter Petre*, Clever Peter, who was credited with

having the ability to extricate himself from any sticky situation. Another popular character, borrowed from our Turkish neighbours, was *Nasreddin Hodza*, reputedly a fourteenth century Turkish *mullah*, religious leader, living in Anatolia. He was often portrayed as riding on his donkey facing backwards while holding on tightly to the animal's tail. One story about him relates how he and a group of fellow *mullahs* were journeying to the local mosque and when asked about his strange riding habit he replied that it would be impolite for him to turn his back to his friends who were walking behind him. Apparently, when a group of children, complained to *Nasreddin Hodza* that he had only given them a small quantity of grapes from a basket overflowing with bunches of the fruit he had told them that it did not matter whether they had received too little or too much since all the grapes tasted the same. *Baba Yana* was telling us the very stories that had been told to her when she was a *mala chupa*, young girl.

My own children, as youngsters, would continually harangue my brother, their uncle, *Noume*, to tell them these very same stories. My brother, exhausted from working in the paddocks, would nevertheless sit down with them upon a patch of buffalo grass, that thrived in a shaded area next to the farm house, and tell them traditional Macedonian stories that had been passed on through the generations. Storytelling would remain an important past time in most Macedonian immigrant families even among the adults. The folktales and fables of their ancestors offered profound messages about life and provided insights into the past. Regrettably, it has become a dying art in our now technologically-obsessed world.

Another important feature of Macedonian village homes was their outdoor stone and mortar bread ovens. Bread was typically made from rye, corn and occasionally wheat flour. The women of the household would divide the bread dough into loaf-sized portions and place these, covered with moist cloth, into a pantry or cupboard. Then each week they would *pechi*, bake, a number of bread loaves, depending on the size of the family, using the dough that had been previously prepared. When it was time to *pechi lep*, bake bread, small, dry twigs that would nurture the new flames, were first placed into the oven and then larger logs were added. Once sufficiently heated the residue of ash and charcoal, that lay on the oven bed, was removed with a damp *metla*, broom, and the women sprinkled water and flour over the dough which was then inserted into the bread oven with long handled, wooden ladles. The oven was then sealed to prevent intrusive drafts of air entering and compromising the baking process. My grandfather, *Kole Numeff* took great pride in the quality of the bread ladles which he had meticulously made and the womenfolk of his household were particularly careful not to set one of these alight or burn the edges since this would inevitably elicit a sharp rebuke from the Numeff family patriarch.

Many Macedonian immigrants were bemused by the trend away from white bread, made with wheat flour, in favour of brown, multigrain varieties of bread. In their ancestral home bread made with wheat flour was regarded as a delicacy while that baked other grains or corn flour was regarded as inferior and as an indication of hard times. Rye tended to be the most

popular grain crop since wheat would not grow successfully unless the climatic conditions and soils were favourable. Wheat flour was therefore generally scarce and more eagerly-sought, after. Villagers were particularly fond of *pogachi*, round bread loaves made with wheat flour, and *khori*, savoury pies, which were baked with wheat flour and water mixed with lard, to make thick pastry bases and thin toppings within which were placed an assortment of fillings: cottage cheese, *jajtsa*, eggs, *kromit*, onions, *pras*, leek, *tikvi*, pumpkin and *meso*, meat and then baked in *tepsi*, large, circular pans.

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While there were few incidences of criminal activity among the villagers, life was lived in a subjugated land, a battle ground where the political ambitions and quarrels of Macedonia's Balkan neighbours and a host of European nations were too often settled. As the authority of Macedonia's Ottoman overlords declined, *bashi bazouks*, unruly gangs of Turkish marauders, *andarte*, Greek outlaws and the chief protagonists of both, the *comittee*, fighters who had sworn unreserved loyalty to Mother Bulgaria, operated largely unrestrained. Such a chaotic situation naturally affected the design of village homes which were traditionally built with small window frames protected with iron bars and reinforced doors which were securely bolted at night when the family dogs were unleashed to patrol the surrounds.

My grandfather recalled the time when villagers celebrating the marriage of two brothers were surprised when a band of *andarte* entered the village square and began firing their rifles and hand guns indiscriminately. Within a few moments two villagers were dead and a number of others lay on the ground bleeding. The intruders had come, armed and menacing, determined to teach the Bulgarian sympathisers, a lesson and to murder the Macedonian-born priest who conducted religious services in the village's Bulgarian Church. The bandits found their intended victim praying before the altar. He did not resist as they dragged him away nor did he react to the verbal and physical abuse to which he was being subjected but remained composed and was fully accepting of his inevitable fate.

The two grooms were also taken hostage by the murderous band who retreated toward the safety of their mountain hideaway. Along the way they came across a shallow creek where the outlaw leader pushed the priest to the ground, shot him and abandoned his lifeless body in the shallow waters. The two grooms, although blindfolded, were acutely aware of what had occurred and expected that they too would be murdered. Fortunately, their blood-lust satisfied, the terrorists decided it was time to have some fun at the expense of their remaining captives. Loosening the ropes that had secured the hands of one of them the bandit leader, smiling knowingly at his companions, shoved him to the ground and shouted at him to stand up and run for his life. The young man *skokna*, jumped up, and fled as fast as his feet could carry him. Almost immediately the outlaws did the same to his brother and soon both young men were running, stumbling, falling down, scrambling up, fully expecting at any moment to be shot dead by their pursuing tormentors. Only after several minutes did the first brother to be released summon sufficient courage to remove his blindfold and realised that the footsteps that he had heard behind him had been those of his brother and that the *andarte* were nowhere to be seen.

The two men collapsed to the ground, hugged, nervously grinned at each other and were enormously relieved to be alive. By the time a Turkish garrison arrived at the village, the culprits had well and truly fled into the densely forested uplands, unpunished and free to inflict further atrocities upon innocent, unsuspecting villagers and townspeople. One of the company of Turkish soldiers spied the blood-stained, crumpled body of a young child hidden under a patch

black berry bushes. The youngster, some six years old, had been wounded in the initial attack and in a state of shock had hidden within the prickly vines where he had slowly bled to death.

It was not uncommon for such lawless gangs of renegades to steal the property of villagers and townsfolk. Horses were their most popular target but donkeys, mules, oxen and other livestock were also taken. Over time, *zakoni*, laws, were enacted to make the selling of animals without officially stamped ownership papers illegal. However, the intermittent nature of police patrols and a general indifference to enforcing the law meant that few arrests were made and stolen livestock was regularly herded across the Albanian border never to be seen again.

In the ninth century, groups of Christian holy men embarked on a crusade to convert the pagan Slav populations of the Balkans to the Christian faith. Among the better well-known were the Christian Orthodox monks, the brothers, *Sveti Kiril* and *Sveti Metodi*, from *Solun*. They undertook the daunting task of beginning to translate the *vagel'je*, Bible, and the letters of St Paul from the Greek texts into *old Slavic* which was the predominant language in the region. However, since there was no Slavic alphabet the brothers began working on developing what would become the *kirilitsa*, the Slavic alphabet, which is still used by a number of modern-day Slavonic nations. Their work in developing this alphabet and spreading Christianity in the region was carried on by *Sveti Clement* and *Sveti Naum*.

Christian religious ritual played a significant role in the lives of most Macedonian villagers and townsfolk. Christianity offered comfort and *nadeva*, hope, in face of worldly adversity. Even those with a healthy cynicism about the existence of God and religious rituals attended church on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, christenings and particularly during the major observances on the Christian calendar, *Vel'igden*, Easter and *Bozhik*, Christmas. Churches, local shrines and sanctuaries were places of worship and pray where villagers and townsfolk could ask for divine intervention in their lives. They visited these holy places bearing a small *podarok*, gift, and would light candles in *spomen*, memory, of family members who had passed and for those who were *boleni*, sick. Some would spend the night sleeping within churches, among the icons depicting the life of Jesus and the saints or alongside a holy relic, before returning home anxiously hoping that their prayers had been heard. The occasional revelation of a miraculous recovery or the reported vision of a saint appearing to worshippers served to provide considerable comfort to those seeking divine help and inspiration.

Village churches and those of the townships were generally financially supported by the local inhabitants who gifted produce and volunteered their time to help grow crops and raise livestock on church owned lands. Donations to the church were typically auctioned on St George's day to raise additional funds. Orthodox churches were typically named in honour of the saints. *Sveti Giorgi*, St George, the dragon slayer and the saint of healing tended to be the most popular among them. Worship and prayer were often all that could be done for those in poor health living in communities where there were no qualified nurses, doctors or hospitals. Although limited medical services and facilities could be accessed in the larger towns, like *Lerin* and *Kostur*, the expense of consulting a *l'ekarach*, doctor, and receiving hospital care was well beyond the financial means of most families.

Macedonian villagers and townsfolk looked forward with great anticipation to Easter when the *vremeto*, weather, was mild and on most days the sun was warming and invigorating. The celebrations at Easter time were characterised by several timeless rituals which traditionally lasted six weeks. During this time, believers would *postj*, fast, by excluding meat, butter and oily foods from their diet. Not surprisingly that during this period fishmongers did a lucrative trade by travelling through the villages and townships with large wicker baskets, expertly slung across

the broad backs of their horses or donkeys, overflowing with sweet-tasting, *rebi*, fish, netted in *Lake Kostur* and *Lake Prespa*

On Good Friday, *Veli Petok*, worshippers attended an evening service to mourn the death of Jesus and express their eternal gratitude for his ultimate sacrifice in order to absolve them of their sins. Following a sombre church service the congregation would walk around their local church three times, illuminating the night sky with candles light while carrying holy crosses and some of the ornately-painted religious icons that adorned their church. During the Easter period, the women from many of the village households would walk to *Lerin* or *Kostur* to buy candles and red *boya*, dye, with which they coloured the shells of hard boiled, fertilized *jajtsa*, eggs. The more traditional among them still opted to colour their Easter eggs using dyes made from the juice of vegetable skins. The egg symbolized rebirth, the resurrection of Jesus and was also said to represent the tomb from which Christ miraculously arose from the dead following his crucifixion.

On Easter Saturday, villagers would butcher one of their sheep or goats in readiness for the much-awaited Easter Sunday lunch before gathering once more in the village church to eagerly await midnight when coloured, hard-boiled Easter eggs were exchanged with relatives and friends and the congregation whispered *Christos Voskrese*, "Christ has risen". It was customary for the villagers to tap the eggs, which they had been gifted, gently against those of their fellow villagers - pointy end and then round side up. As a youngster I recall how the children would try to select Easter eggs which they judged to have the hardest shells and would therefore be more likely to crack the eggs shells of their friends and relations. It was a time-honoured custom and often animated and competitive. The midday Easter Sunday meal was one of the highlights of the year and a prelude to further religious celebrations which would continue into Monday and Tuesday. Under Greek rule the authorities insisted that villagers and townsfolk display the Greek national flag during Easter time as was the case on other Greek national public holidays. Failure to do so was frowned upon and might incur a fine or initiate some form of harassment. While this was a bitter pill to swallow for many Macedonians, outwardly at least, they showed only mild resentment at having to attend Easter celebrations in a Greek Orthodox Church on such an important religious occasion.

Similar rituals were associated with the *paznuva*, celebration, of Christmas, during cold, snow-infested December. At this time, villagers would traditionally slaughter a *bishe*, pig, that had been raised specifically to be eaten during the celebration of the birth of Christ. A few days after Christmas was *Sveti Jovan's*, St John's Day, which honoured the memory of John the Baptist, the zealous preacher who had christened Jesus in the waters of the Jordan River, was celebrated. On this day I recall that the village priest, draped in black robes, beard reaching almost down to his midriff, would conduct a traditional Orthodox church service before leading worshippers in solemn procession to the river's edge where he would dramatically cast out a holy, gold-encrusted *krst*, cross, into the freezing waters, swollen by heavy winter rains.

According to tradition, the person who recovered the holy relic would be blessed with good fortune and feted by community during the year. It often turned into a rough and tumble affair, a hectic scramble, with young men diving into the icy river waters hoping to be the one to retrieve the holy cross. The ritual generally culminated with the successful villager, grinning from ear to ear, raising the holy relic triumphantly over their head and on reaching the river bank being heartily congratulated by the assembled villagers. However, failure to recover the holy cross was considered to be a portent of impending misfortune. I distinctly recall the year that the holy cross, despite a frenzy of activity, could not be found and remember the resulting gloom that descended upon *Maala*. The older women, who were said to know most about the ways of the Lord, whispered of difficult times ahead. Even some of the men, grizzled agnostics, non-believers, talked among themselves of an impending calamity.

Several days later, while playing along the river bank, with my school friends, one of our company began to shout excitedly. Trousers hitched above his knees, hand stretched skyward, he held aloft the holy cross. He was smiling broadly and overcome by his *kismet*, good fortune, much to my disappointment, knowing that my brothers and I had searched the same area, without success, the day before. Our school friend became an instant hero and wallowed in the warm greetings and universal praise that he received from his fellow villagers who breathed a collective sigh of relief that the holy artefact had been recovered and returned to its rightful place.

#### Footnotes:

*The difficulties faced by the Macedonian people in asserting their national identity is further evidenced by the momentous challenges that have confronted the Makedonska Pravoslavna Crkva, Macedonian Orthodox Church, which today has jurisdiction over all Macedonian churches in the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonian diaspora. The Macedonian Orthodox Church only achieved autonomy from the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1959 and despite being autocephalous, independent, still struggles to find acceptance among other national Orthodox churches.*

*In 1993, an Archbishop of the Macedonian Orthodox Church declared that Macedonia was an ancient nation and that the Macedonian Orthodox Church was an ancient church. He reminded his audience that the Macedonian Orthodox Church was merely attempting to revive the Ohrid Archbishopric which had served as a conduit for the spread of Christianity in the Balkans before it was stripped of its independence, in the early eleventh century, by a decree of the Byzantine emperor Basil 11 who placed the Archbishopric under the control of the Greek Orthodox patriarchate based in Constantinople.*

## Chapter 9: He Who Must Be Obeyed

*My paternal grandfather, Kole Numeff, was born in the tiny Macedonian village of Krepeshina in 1881. He was a complex individual who in many ways typified his generation and Macedonian family patriarchs throughout the ages. He could be domineering, stubborn and temperamental but he took his role as our family's patriarch seriously and was a talented, self-taught craftsman and musician.*

*His life was full of personal challenges, the frustration of living under the Ottoman yoke, the emotional strains associated with working in foreign lands, far from familiar surroundings and loved ones, surviving two world wars and dealing with family tragedies including the death of his wife, Yana at a relatively young age and the loss of a son and a number of close relatives during Greece's tragic Civil War.*

*During his declining years, my paternal grandfather would complain that he had been cruelly deserted by his surviving sons and daughters who had departed the village determined to build new lives for their families in far-off lands. This then was Kole Numeff - he who must be obeyed.*

My brothers and I greatly respected our paternal grandfather since he was, after all, the undisputed head of our family. However, he could be distant and aloof. His often intimidating personality was in distinct contrast to our grandmother, a warm-hearted and gentle woman, who constantly fussed over members of her extended family and especially her grandchildren. According to my mother, when I was only a few years old, *Baba Yana* had been balancing me on her lap while making the evening meal, a *manjaa*, stew. Her grip had slipped and as I fell forward my *lako*, elbow, dipped into the hot stew and soon turned red and began throbbing. My mother recalled how anxious and apologetic my grandmother was and how she tried to ease my discomfort by applying some of her home-made lotions which she kept for just such occasions. Following the celebration of a village wedding I had found a number of Greek *drachmi*, a substantial sum of money for that time underneath a row of low bushes growing alongside the dusty roadside. I had taken the paper notes to *Baba Yana* and after no one had claimed the money in the designated time my brothers and I proudly showed off a new pair of shoes that our grandmother had purchased for us. That was her way, her family always came first, especially the young ones. My grandmother *umri*, died from stomach cancer a *boles sho ne se lekva*, a disease for which there was no cure. She was in her early forties and her passing only served to further harden my grandfather's outlook on life.

Villagers suffering from ill-health and even terminal diseases rarely consulted a doctor or had access to pain-killing drugs and many died agonising deaths at home when home-made remedies and vigilant prayers would, too often, be in vain. Although my grandfather was known to be somewhat tight-fisted he did seek medical advice for his ailing wife who rarely complained and tried hard to remain cheerful. When asked about her health she would stoically reply, "*Ne mie kefo*", I'm not feeling well, and then add reassuringly, "but I am sure that will get better soon." However, she was visibly declining and *Dedo Kole* decided to consult a doctor in *Lerin* with a reputation as a gifted medical practitioner who it was said had cured seriously ill patients in the past. However, upon examining my grandmother, the doctor, noted as a straight talker, duly informed my grandfather that his wife was dying. The walk home was silent and sombre. *Dedo Kole* said nothing about the doctor's prognosis but my grandmother did not have to be told. All she wanted was to go home and spend her remaining days in the company of her loved ones.

Within a few weeks our much-adored grandmother passed away. Her family and friends were grief-stricken but at the same time relieved that she was at last free from pain. Since there was no village mortuary and she had died during the height of summer *Baba Yana* was buried the following day in *Maala's* cemetery where the gravesites were typically overgrown with long grass, weeds and prickly blackberry bushes. In those times, monuments or headstones were rare and over time, sadly, few were able to recall where their fellow villagers, even close family members, had been laid to rest. My paternal grandmother was lowered into a *pliko*, shallow, grave laying within a wooden coffin, which had been made by my grandfather from planks of wood. My grandmother was buried, as it was customary, in a *grob*, grave, containing the

remains of other departed members of our family.

Families traditionally honoured the memory of their departed loved ones by performing a number of rituals conducted at the gravesite usually with the village priest in attendance. These were held nine days, six weeks, six months, twelve months and three years after death. After a time the *koski*, bones, of the deceased were exhumed and ceremonially washed. It was considered to be a favourable sign when the bones had *mirosi*, gathered moss or fungal growth, since this was thought to signify that the deceased had been a good person and by implication had been accepted into heaven. The Macedonian word *mirin*, refers to a gentle, peace-loving person. I recall that my mother and her sister, *Dosta Kitina*, who were both living in Western Australia when their father passed away, had been comforted when their relatives in Macedonia informed them that the bones of *Dedo Kuzo Illioff*, when exhumed, were *mirosani*, well-covered with fungal growth. It was said, that at one time, the *mir*, holy oil, used by Orthodox priests in various religious ceremonies was produced by church officials, using fungal growth from the bones and occasionally the body fats of deceased church dignitaries and mixing these with a concoction of oils. The saying *da mi mirosa da leze*, may your bones gather fungal growth when you have been laid to rest, is therefore *chudno*, strange, but nevertheless, a blessing. The absence of doctors and nurses in the villages, the lack of officially conducted post-mortem examinations as a prelude to issuing death certificates and the custom of burying the deceased shortly after death occasionally meant that some poor unfortunates were buried alive, presumed dead but merely unconscious or in a temporary coma. This would become evident, when villagers, adhering to tradition exhumed the bodies of their dear departed to *mie*, wash, their bones, discovered corpses turned to the side or laying face down. One could only imagine the horror of regaining consciousness and finding oneself buried alive with only a minimal amount of oxygen remaining and with no means of escape.

The scarcity of professional medical personnel and facilities and the lack of *l'ekvi*, medicines, meant that home remedies were used to comfort the sick and dying. Traditionally, *rani*, cuts and wounds, were treated with an ointment made from balsams, various pleasantly scented, oily *stsvekjina*, flowers, picked during spring and stored in jars containing, *maslo*, olive oil, or by applying a powder made of wood shavings taken from timbers which had been infested by wood worm. Damp blackberry leaves or a paste of fresh cream, flour and olive oil were placed on the skin to ease irritations and infections. Swellings were typically doctored with compresses made from a poultice of boiled rice coated with olive oil, while patients with stomach aches would have their abdomens smeared with a dough made from flour and water and sprinkled with oil and sugar. Alternatively, they would be given a drink made from the seed pods of wild *trendafil*, roses and hot tea.

Footnotes:

*During medieval times a string, attached to a bell, was sometimes placed in coffins. The ringing of the bell announced that someone who had been recently buried was still alive. This is possibly the origin of the saying to be "saved by the bell".*

A brew made from boiled blackberry leaves and stems was recommended for chest pains. Concoctions of various combinations, onion juice and *met*, honey, and boiled milk with lemon juice, butter and honey were commonly used to treat coughs and colds. A mixture containing onion juice and vinegar was reputed to cure a *treska*, fever. Another popular remedy for relieving the symptoms of fever was to set alight small balls of wool that had been dipped in *rakia*, home-made brandy, and then inserted into glass cups to create a vacuum. These cups would be arranged onto the patient's back where the suction created within held them in place. They were then slowly dragged back and forward to draw out the cold and fever. The *l'ek*, cure, for ear aches was even more theatrical and involved dipping cone-shaped pieces of cloth into bees wax and once the *krpa*, cloth, had hardened putting it into the infected *ushe*, ear, before setting the outside edge of the cone alight in order to melt and remove the offending ear wax. Another remedy for ear aches was to mix the juice of a leek with olive oil and pour it into the infected ear.

Women, experiencing problems conceiving might have had a bread bun, embedded with burning candles, placed onto their stomachs and then an earthenware pot was put upside down over the bun and candles. The candles would draw out the air and create a vacuum which was said would help position the womb in such a way that would improve the chances of conception. I distinctly recall the day when my brother *Sotir* and I were weeding in one of our family fields and disturbed a large hive of wild bees with our flaying mattocks. Almost immediately an angry swarm of bees, bent on revenge, attacked and both of us were stung repeatedly on our arms, legs and faces. On reaching home, we rushed inside and called out loudly to our mother who hastily proceeded to doctor us with compresses of boiled rice mixed with olive oil.

It was not uncommon for villagers to keep bees and harvest *blak*, sweet tasting, honey, for the family to eat or to barter for other goods in the townships. Villagers generally kept their bee hives in boxes stacked one atop the other. They would extract the honey by setting alight dry cow dung that had been placed in a bucket and direct the smoke into the hives in the hope that it would confuse their bees, make them docile or even encourage them to temporarily leave the hive so that the precious honey could be removed safely. On another occasion I had foolishly tied our family donkey to one of a number of our *komshia*, neighbour's, bee hives. The animal was not surprisingly spooked by the thousands of bees buzzing incessantly around it and had consequently tugged hard upon the rope and in doing so tipped over a number of the stacked hives. As I came out of our neighbour's house I was confronted by the sight of a crazed donkey, severely harassed by hordes of highly indignant bees, heading toward me. I was now in the firing line. My mother's home-made remedy for bee strings needed to be called upon yet again.

My mother would tell how fellow villagers would comment that in the event anyone needed sound advice or incisive guidance regarding almost any issue or problem confronting them that they would be wise to listen to what *Dedo Kole* had to say and do as he had suggested but they would be *budala*, foolish, to do as he did. It was a classic case of do as I say rather than do as I do. *Kole Numeff* was known as a generous host and visitors were always welcomed in his home. However, we sometimes felt that our grandfather too often exhibited more understanding and compassion in his dealings with others than with some members of his immediate family. My grandfather was a gifted craftsman. My brothers often joked that despite some reservations about our grandfather, that the old man had magic in his hands and we deeply lamented that it was a gift that had not been passed on to his grandsons. The rest of us too frequently found it rather difficult to hammer, at least straight, even a single *shayka*, nail. Our grandfather's workshop was *pulno*, filled with an array of arduously maintained tools and he could often be found working there.

There came a time when my grandfather and his brother *Sotir* embarked on a special project, the building of a new family home using some of the funds that they earned while working abroad. The brothers subsequently contracted a team of Albanian builders and stone masons from *Belkammen* the village to which *Dedo Gile* had travelled regularly years before to assist the villagers there to make their cheeses and butter. These Albanian builders were well-known throughout the region and had constructed many homes in a number of the surrounding villages. The two *Numeff* brothers met with the leader and spokesman of the group, a rotund, cheerful man, with a reputation for being a wag who was fond of playing a joke at the expense of others and over a drink of *rakia* thrashed out a mutually agreed price. During negotiations, at times amiable, at times heated, my grandfather made it clear that he would personally quarry the *kamenje*, stones, that were to be used to construct the *stisoj*, walls, of the new *Numeff* house.

My grandfather possessed a driven personality and having set himself a challenge *nishcho*, nothing, could get in his way. He went about the task with skill and gusto. He was strong, energetic and worked tirelessly to remove copious amounts of soil from, a site he had selected until he had exposed a cluster of large boulders under the surface of the earth. He proceeded to crack and chip the now exposed stones into the desired sizes and shapes with a large metal *charkan*, hammer, the very one *Dedo Petre* had arranged to be brought to him from his uncle's smithy at *Prelip* and which had become a family heirloom. Everything appeared to be going smoothly and the new *Numeff* house begun to take shape. However, things would rapidly deteriorate. The source of growing tension was that the Albanian builders had resorted to taking stones from *Dedo Kole's* quarry to use in the construction of other homes throughout the *Lerinsko* region. When my grandfather discovered their scam he was furious and insisted that they stop. The builders nodded in agreement, smiled, but ignored his protests to his rising annoyance and soon a previously dormant volcano was ready to erupt and reek havoc.

*Kole Numeff* was eighty four years old when he died. He was buried in the village cemetery in *Maala*. Short of stature, he was only five feet five inches tall, broad shouldered, he had a reputation for being argumentative and headstrong and he was known for his physical strength and tenacity, and some might say, for being *inadzha*, stubborn. As children, we had heard the stories told by his contemporaries, who had accompanied him while working on building America's railways, where apparently he was well-known among his fellow immigrant railway workers for his ability to *kreni*, lift, and carry the heaviest objects and for his capacity for hard *rabota*, work. He was reputedly inexhaustible. My grandfather would proudly recall, between long puffs of his home-made pipe, the loud bellowed instructions of work gang supervisors, that echoed throughout the railway company camp, to find "Nick", the English version of his name, when there was something *teshko*, heavy, to *preмести*, move.

He had left to work in the United States before he had completed the customary two years of compulsory military service and so soon after he *sevrna*, returned, from abroad he was drafted into the Greek Army. Even there, in a highly regimented environment typified by constantly bellowed orders that required responses based on blind obedience, the new recruit openly demonstrated an indomitable independent spirit and defiance. His fellow villagers would relate the story of my grandfather's first day, in what would prove to be a most unremarkable military career, spent at a training camp in *Solun* where conscripts, young boys and older men, like himself, were sent to complete their basic military training. They would tell how one of the duties traditionally assigned to the newest recruits was the unpleasant task of digging latrine pits.

Lined up in the company with his fellow conscripts, fidgeting uncomfortably in an ill-fitting uniform of a Greek soldier, my grandfather had overheard a fellow conscript, a villager from a neighbouring village, a known *grkomun*, Macedonian who had embraced hellenism, tell the officer - in - charge that conscripts like my grandfather, patriotic Macedonian, should only be given shovels and not rifles and be ordered to *kopa*, dig, toilet pits since this was all they were intelligent enough to do. My grandfather's face reddening, eyes narrowing, muscles twitching, well and truly stirred, bristling with anger, rushed at his bigoted fellow conscript with arms flaying wildly in the hope of landing a number of hammer-like blows on his now startled nemesis. It was said that he had to be taken to the ground, kicking frantically to break free from the restraining arms of the dozen men who had held him down, all the while shouting out obscenities in both Macedonian and Greek. He yelled that all recruits had to relieve themselves and should be involved in digging latrines and that his tormentor should be thrown into one of the latrine pits since he was not a real man but a lump of human excrement. This had been a potentially dangerous outburst for a new Macedonian conscript. Fortunately, on this occasion his belligerence and outspoken behaviour attracted little admonishment but it was not always so and subsequently he would spend considerable time confined in a military prison cell for being insubordinate and speaking his mind.

Things went from bad to worse and harsh words and were exchanged. The Albanian builders dug in their heels determined to have the last laugh on the grumpy, bad tempered villager. Their leader informed *Dedo Kole*, with a barrage of offensive words and gestures that they would not hang the *vratati*, doors, or install *dzham*, glass, into the empty window frames, until they were good and ready to do so. They knew all too well that these were technically difficult tasks that required the expertise of a skilled tradesman. However, they had seriously underestimated *Kole Numeff*, who was not a man to rile. Following this heated altercation, my grandfather awoke early the next morning, said nothing and with determination etched on his *litse*, face, headed along the road to *Neret*. There adopting the cloak and dagger tactics, a trait he had inherited from *Dedo Nuome*, he spied upon the unsuspecting builders as they went about their work, joking, skylarking, blissfully unaware they were being watched by a pair of dark, brown eyes from behind a low, crumbling stone wall, opposite the building site. Oblivious to his presence, the Albanian builders continued the job of hanging doors and installing glass into the empty window frames. Crouching and motionless, my grandfather watched and observed every move they made and now armed with this newly-acquired knowledge strolled home smiling to himself.

The next day he awoke early and without eating breakfast entered the family stables and approached the sturdy wooden work bench he had built there. He was a man on a mission and feverishly set to work with his well-maintained wood scrapers, hand-powered drills and ancient saws with their sharp, jagged teeth. There he stayed hour after hour surrounded by an ever-growing pile of wood shavings and fine red sawdust as he constructed a number of wooden doors. Stacked neatly nearby were pieces of *dzham*, glass, cut into various sizes. Within a few days the new *Numeff* house had doors hanging from every door frame and the window frames had been fitted with glass. Some weeks later the Albanian builders arrived to complete the construction of the *Numeff* house. They had made their point, the house would be built in their own time and only after they had taught the sharp-tongued *Kole Numeff* a lesson. My grandfather peered outside from a slightly ajar front door as the builders approached and as they came closer he slowly swung open the front door. The Albanians were momentarily taken aback, their *ochi*, eyes, darting quickly to the doors and to the glass-filled window frames. A few of them began shaking their heads in disbelief. *Dedo Kole* did *plati*, pay, them but only after having deducted from the agreed sum a penalty for their tardiness, work not done and the stones that had been removed from his quarry. The building gang foreman, hand outstretched, received a quantity of gold coins from my grandfather and proceeded to count them. He was about to open his *usta*, mouth, to complain over the amount of the payment but he stopped himself. Finally, with a resigned smile, he said, "you crafty old devil", "I thought I had seen you spying on us." Nothing more needed to be said and the bemused builders turned on their heels and walked away.

My grandfather was skilled in making ploughs and wooden handles for *lopati*, spades, and mattocks which he bartered for timber for the family wood pile or grain. My father would often,

*gorvori*, tell, of watching his father working busily at his work bench, oblivious to the comings and goings of the world *nadvor*, outside, surrounded by an assortment of tools and gadgets, cutting and joining planks of timber or working with metal and animal hides. At these times *Kole Numeff* appeared content with life. However, this was in sharp contrast to the time he would spend sitting on the front porch, on an old, rickety wooden stool, back straight, statuesque, slowly puffing on his pipe and engaging in an exchange of pleasantries and gossip with fellow villagers passing by.

*Dedo Kole Numeff* was a gifted saddle maker. Villagers throughout the *Lerinsko* region, and beyond, would journey to *Krepeshina* and later *Maala* to ask to see the village saddler. Everyone knew to whom they were referring and they would be directed to the *Numeff* family home. Having tracked down my grandfather and exchanged greetings they would ask whether he would make them a *samar*, saddle, and invariably a deal was done. In addition, my grandfather was a cooper with a talent for making small *bochki*, barrels, with wooden lids, that were used to store wine and brandy and a variety of pickled vegetables : capsicum, cauliflower, *zel'ka*, cabbage and olives. He had learned much of the intricate craft of barrel-making by observing a cousin who had trained as a barrel maker while working abroad in Bulgaria. However, despite his considerable skill, my grandfather experienced difficulty in mastering the complex art of constructing larger barrels and it soon became obvious that his cousin was reluctant to pass on this closely guarded knowledge. "*Brachet*, Cousin, he would implore, "I want you to teach me how to make large wooden barrels. Just let me *puli*, watch, you." The typical response was evasive and non-committal. "I will *Kole*, but not today I have to go to *Lerin* " or "not today I am busy plowing my fields". There was a never-ending array of seemingly plausible excuses.

Not easily discouraged, my grandfather seemed to grow even more fond of his relative and visited him more regularly. However, his visits were typically accompanied by the hasty downing of tools and calls, by his cousin to his wife to, *da se odnisi*, graciously welcome, their visitor by brewing him some *tootskoe café*, Turkish coffee, and to bring a few glasses of spring water and *rakia*. Then he would add. "I am so *radosen*, happy, you have come to visit me again my dear cousin ." Then he would invite my grandfather to sit next to him on a *stol'itsa*, bench, on the front porch of his home. "Sit down and let us have a drink and a chat", he would say with a broad smile. Frustration gnawed at *Dedo Kole's* deepest inner being but he never let it show as the two men sat talking, laughing and joking together. As a last resort my grandfather reverted to the proven strategy of sneaking behind walls or within nearby sheds and stables to peer through the cracks or twisting his head awkwardly around corners, to observe his cousin when he was engaged in crafting large wooden barrels. It was a painstaking process but eventually *Dedo Kole* had accomplished his mission, he had seen what he needed to see. Shortly after, my grandfather invited his cousin and his wife to an evening meal insisting that they had to come and accept his hospitality in return for all the generosity he had received during his

many visits. On that day, he had cornered one of the family's plumpest *kokoshki*, hens, against the barrier of the *kokosharnik*, chicken coop, wrung its *til*, neck, and passed the dead bird over to my grandmother who immersed it into a bowl of scolding *goreschna*, hot, water and plucked off its *tsrni perduva*, black feathers. She would prepare a special meal, *chorba so kokoshka*, a hearty chicken stew, with *krtuli*, potatoes. His guests duly arrived and were warmly greeted. "*Dobro veche*, good evening, it is so good that you could come", said my grandfather as he placed his arm tightly around his cousin's *ramo*, shoulder and walked him toward a well-stoked, crackling fireplace. "Come cousin, warm yourself before we *jadi*, eat, and *napisi*, drink, a glass of *rakia*" he said. His relative glowed in the warmth of his reception and the jovial mood of his host and looked forward to an evening of good food, strong drink and animated conversation. Then all was silent. My grandfather's visitor had abruptly stopped talking and was transfixed by a very large, perfectly crafted, wooden barrel that rested in the *kjusho*, corner, of the room. No words were exchanged, the night went well and the two cousins would continue to be close friends and to visit each other for many years to come.

Personal animosities and life-long family feuds were not uncommon in Macedonian village society. The family provided a sense of belonging, continuity and security but it also demanded that all family members suppress their individuality and personal aspirations and desires for the collective well-being of the entire family. However, in the claustrophobic world of the village, living with little or no privacy, there were bound to be tensions. Having spent their lives working together at home and abroad and being so reliant on one another the brothers *Kole* and *Sotir Numeff* had a severe falling out.

The family's financial woes once again dictated that one of them would need to leave the family home and work abroad. It was subsequently agreed that *Kole Numeff* would remain home and look after the family's fields and flocks while his younger brother *Sotir* would venture a second time to the United States of America in order to boost the family's finances. *Dedo Sotir Numeff* had previously experienced life in America and he had disliked it intensely. However, his sense of family duty had overridden his personal feelings and he had reluctantly departed. He would be away for two years and was much missed by the family and more particularly by his wife and two young daughters. Prior to his leaving the brothers had agreed that the money *Sotir* earned from working overseas was to be divided equally among them. The two *Numevi* owned their material possessions, *bratsvo*, equally as brothers. The problems that were to beset the *Numeff* family began when *Dedo Kole's* portion of the money, in the form of notes, gold coins and company money orders, which he had placed within a wooden canister concealed in the family stables, had mysteriously disappeared.

My grandfather was aware that there was almost no chance of recovering the notes and coins that had been stolen but asked his younger brother to cancel the railway company money orders and to request that his former American employers issue new ones. This would be a complicated and slow process but it could be done with *Sotir's* agreement and the co-operation

of a travel agent in *Lerin* who had close contacts with American railway construction companies employing immigrant workers from the surrounding towns and villages. Soon after, *Dedo Kole* was arrested and jailed as a result of information forwarded local police that he possessed several illegal firearms which were hidden within the family home. Two police officers had forced open the front door and had gone directly to a secret compartment, under a window ledge, where they found two old rifles and an antiquated pistol. The police officers appeared to know exactly what to look for and where to find it. My grandfather was convinced that he had been betrayed by his brother's strong-willed wife with whom he had a frosty relationship. He believed that his sister-in-law had acted to instigate his arrest as a way of preventing him from harassing her husband to cancel the stolen money orders and replace them with new ones.

This event would mark a significant reversal in the family's financial well-being. *Dedo Kole* would subsequently spend three months in the jail house at *Kojenie*, a small village located between *Lerin* and *Solun*, which was regarded as a more secure detention facility than *Lerin's* jail. The village of *Kojenie* was home to a large number of Albanian and Vlach families but few Macedonians. My grandfather's imprisonment meant that our family had lost its patriarch and although he could be moody and even pig-headed, *Dedo Kole* was the glue that held our family together and now that he was no longer with us we felt disoriented. He was eventually released but only after the family *plati*, paid, a rather substantial fine.

To further compound the family's misfortunes *Dedo Sotir Numeff* was ordered to complete his compulsory military service which he had previously failed to do as a result leaving to work abroad. Sadly, *Dedo Sotir* contracted pneumonia within weeks of being conscripted and was so ill that he was sent home to *Krepeshina* to recuperate. Fears soon surfaced that his illness was life-threatening and so with a *tesko srtse*, heavy heart, his increasingly anxious wife insisted that her husband consult a doctor in *Lerin*. *Dedo Sotir*, wrapped in warm blankets to *brani*, protect, him from the biting winter cold, rode upon the family horse while his wife, reins in hand, head bowed, walked beside him. They had expected bad news but were shocked by the prognosis of the doctor who declared that *Dedo Sotir Numeff* had only had a few weeks to live. *Baba Yana*, had heard the village gossip regarding her brother-in-law's poor health and that *Sotir* and her sister-in-law had gone to seek medical advice. She implored her head-strong *msh*, husband, to visit his sick brother. "Don't be so stubborn *Kole*", she would say, "he is your only brother. Go and see how he is and ask how we might be able to help." Although, he failed to respond, his wife's words remained with my grandfather. He paced the courtyard, brooding, brushing the snowflakes from his overcoat, his mind filled with conflicting emotions. After some time, it was *chisto*, clear, what he had to do, he would go to see his brother. Subsequently, the two estranged brothers met in a torrential downpour on the road between *Lerin* and *Krepeshina*. My grandfather stood in the middle of the road, dripping wet, as he waved down the driver of the horse and cart that his sister-in-law had hired in *Lerin* to carry her sick husband home.

The driver pulled firmly on the reins despite the animated objections of *Sotir's* wife, who had recognised the bedraggled figure standing in front of her. She had no liking for him at the best of times and she shouted hysterically at the driver to keep moving on. Frustrated, emotionally exhausted, she finally turned her attention to my grandfather and demanded to know what he was doing there. "Leave us alone, *Sotir* does not want to talk to you, *bolen lezi*, he is sick and unable to stand up," she yelled out. The bemused driver, who knew nothing of the animosities that had led to the scene he was witnessing, but no longer able to listen to the shrill cries of his female passenger, pulled once again on the reins and the horse and cart now came to a standstill. "Stop shouting or I'll leave you and your husband right here by the roadside" he warned. The poor woman sobbed uncontrollably, her husband was dying and she would soon be a widow and have to care for two young daughters on her own. *Dedo Kole* was the last person she expected or wanted to see. Seemingly oblivious to it all, my grandfather went slowly to the back of the cart and peered at his listless brother. Their eyes met but not a word was spoken before *Dedo Kole* turned and walked away. However, shortly after he had disappeared, into the gathering *temnitsa*, darkness, *Dedo Kole* returned with a number of his fellow villagers to help guide the horse-drawn cart through the mud and slush.

Within days my grandfather paid a visit to his brother's home. Awakening from a restless sleep *Sotir* had looked up from his *kreve*, bed, to see his older brother standing before him. His eyes grew misty as he recalled how much his older brother had meant to him. "Why have you taken so long to come to see me *braate?*", he had asked in a soft voice. "Sorry brother these are hard times. There are things to do," my grandfather replied with head bent and eyes firmly affixed upon the bedroom floor. The two brothers were embarking the first hesitant steps toward a long overdue reconciliation when *Sotir's* wife, who was not home when *Dedo Kole* arrived, burst in, screaming and sobbing. It was clearly time for my grandfather to leave. These would be the last words exchanged between the brothers. *Sotir Numeff* died within days of my grandfather's visit.

Troubled by mixed emotions, personal pride and deep *zhal*, sadness, my grandfather did not attend his younger brother's funeral. This was *Kole Numeff's* way. He had loved his brother, he had been his mentor and best friend but he could not bring himself to stand by his brother's graveside, alongside his estranged sister-in-law, among villagers who were fully aware of the ill-feeling that had existed in the family. On the day of his brother's funeral, fond memories of his brother came regularly to my grandfather, they flooded his thoughts: their days as youngsters playing together, standing up for each other, shepherding the household sheep and goats, working in fields and the companionship they shared during those long four years in America. He would dearly miss his brother .

Soon my grandfather almost found himself imprisoned again. His grieving sister-in-law, *tsrno oblechena*, dressed in black, now a relatively wealthy widow, had been targeted by a gang of unscrupulous, opportunistic *harami*, thieves, who sought to exploit her vulnerability. She had

been robbed and during the police interrogations, stressed over the loss of her savings and mourning her recently departed husband, *Sotir's* wife implied that she suspected her brother-in-law of personally stealing from her and if not strongly suggested that he was involved in some way in her misfortune. My grandfather, who was considered by the local authorities, as a non-conformist, a trouble maker, naturally became the prime suspect. He would have been arrested, despite his earnest proclamations of innocence, had it not been for the timely intervention of his niece, *Stasa*, who informed the investigating officers that the man, with the *tsrven*, red, scarf over his *l'itse*, face, who had held her tightly during the robbery, did not have hairy arms like her uncle.

The perpetrators of the crime were subsequently arrested and received lengthy twelve year jail sentences but this incident only served to further increase the bad blood between the two families. Since *Dedo Sotir* had no sons, *Stase Popoff*, who was married to his daughter *Ristana*, moved into *Dedo Sotir's* home as a *dommaski zet*. We often heard that *Stase* would deliberately allow his animals to enter our family fields in *Krepeshina* and we would witness at first hand the damage to our crops that was done there. In truth, *Dedo Kole* was not above retaliation and he would allow some of our sheep and goats to stray into fields owned by *Dedo Sotir's* family in *Maala*. It was a ludicrous situation with no good grace exhibited by either side.

#### Footnotes:

*Dedo Sotir's* family built a small shrine to his memory where for years, on *Sveti Sotir's* day, villagers gathered to celebrate his name day and spend some time praying for *Sotir Numeff*. This shrine still stands today and can be seen along the road to *Krepeshina*.

*The homes of Macedonian villagers and townsfolk were not individually designed but built according to long-established practices and traditional building techniques. Houses were built with resources: timber, stone and clay soils that were locally available. They were often multi-storey homes with the downstairs section generally used to shelter the family's animals during the cold winter months while the upstairs was divided into two odaji, rooms, a bedroom and a meals area where families ate together and offered hospitality to their guests.*

## Chapter 10: The Land of the Giants

*In the 1920s, primarily as a result of the legislation of a more restrictive American immigration policy, a growing number of young men from Macedonia's villages and townships ventured to Australia to seek work. My father, like many of his compatriots, arrived in Western Australia to labour as a sleeper cutter in the State's South-West region. There, within the "Land of the Giants", densely populated forests, inhabited by towering jarrah and karri trees, he and his companions toiled from sunrise to sunset in an isolated and inhospitable environment.*

*When in 1926, my father, Risto Numeff left for Western Australia, he was in his early twenties, had only been married for just over four years and was the father of two young boys. Not only did he have to find the courage to leave behind his young family and travel to a far-off land but he also needed to display enormous inner strength to persevere in the face of the strenuous physical demands and intense emotional challenges that would confront him.*

*By late 1929, the onset of the Great Depression, a world-wide economic catastrophe, securely gripped the highly susceptible Australian economy. My father found himself unemployed and having to live off government handouts. He and his fellow migrant workers were increasingly ostracised by festering local anti-immigrant sentiments. To his great embarrassment he would return home penniless.*

Although few villagers went hungry, families generally laboured long and hard merely to subsist. In *Kole Numeff's* household there was an ever-increasing number of family members to feed, shelter and clothe and it was not surprising that the possibility of working abroad once again became the subject of conversation around the family, *masa*, dining table. This time it would be *Kole's* eldest son, *Risto Numeff*, my father, who would venture overseas.

So in 1926, my father, twenty-three years old, began preparations to depart for distant shores. My grandfather, with some drama and pathos, handed some *napoleonie* and Greek drachma to my father who soon after visited a travel agent in *Lerin* to procure a passport and sea passage aboard a British-owned passenger liner destined for the port of Fremantle, in far off Western Australia. When the day arrived, my father left among tearful farewells and the customary promise, to his father and young wife, that he would return home the very day that he had earned enough money to secure the family's financial future. He left behind my mother with two young sons, *Tanas*, my older brother, then a three year old and myself, a baby cradled in my grieving mother's arms. My father was *obl'eken*, dressed, in the same suit he had worn on his wedding day, the one that my grandfather had worn on his return from America and carried with him a few personal possessions and mementos which had been placed in an old suitcase. He was following in the footsteps of countless other *selski*, villagers, who had left to work abroad. In his case, he was destined for the vast forests of Western Australia's South-West region in the hope of finding work as a sleeper cutter, carving out wooden railway sleepers from the towering trees that grew in the vicinity of small, isolated timber mill townships with strange sounding names such as Nannup, Donnybrook and Balingup.

The ability of Macedonian immigrant workers to obtain work permits and travel to America had by this time been made far more difficult as a result of the passage, by the United States Congress, of the Johnson-Reid Act, in 1924. This piece of legislation restricted the number of foreigners entering the United States of America by imposing immigration quotas based on nationality which were set according to the existing numbers of people from different national groups who were already residing in the United States. It was now increasingly difficult for Macedonians to gain permission to travel there since most Macedonians had been recorded by American authorities, as Turkish and later as Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian or Albanian citizens. Many had also returned home rather than seeking U.S. citizenship. Australia, on the other hand, was desperately seeking British and European immigrants during the 1920s. The catch-cry adopted by the Australian Nationalist-Country Party coalition government was "men, money and markets". Australia's Prime Minister, for much of the decade, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, was determined to boost the Australian economy and achieve high rates of economic growth by more fully exploiting the nation's many untapped natural resources. The Australian federal government therefore negotiated large overseas loans, encouraged foreign investment and attempted to open up new markets for Australia's exports. In addition, the so called Bruce - Page government advocated that Australia welcome large numbers of skilled and unskilled

immigrants: farmers, miners, factory workers, domestic servants and timber workers to provide the human resources required to establish new industries, boost domestic spending and open up virgin farm lands. During this time, Canada, and more particularly the city of Toronto, also became a popular destination for Macedonian immigrants who typically secured employment in low paid jobs that were available to unskilled workers, in the city's emerging iron and steel industries, abattoirs and tanneries. There, these newly-arrived immigrants initially lived in rented, often dilapidated, inexpensive tenement houses located near the factories in which they worked before subsequently buying their own homes in the suburbs.

Following a fairly uneventful, but trying six week sea voyage, my father and his companions disembarked at Fremantle. He was much relieved to leave the cramped, sea-tossed passenger liner that had carried him thousands of kilometres from home and to set foot on land. Macedonian villagers generally had little or no affinity with the sea or ocean. Now safely back on shore, my father and some of his fellow passengers, decided to stretch their aching, *nodzi*, legs, stiff from a long period of confinement and inactivity, by strolling through the streets of a strange city so far from home. It had been arranged that they would be picked up by a fellow Macedonian immigrant, *Kosta Malko*, who would take them to stay briefly at his boarding house, situated in William Street, in Perth, before they departed for the tall, imposing forests that beckoned. Having disembarked a few hours earlier than expected, the *selski* walked away from the busy wharfs, full of men loading and unloading cargoes from large container ships, along footpaths lined by retail stores and red brick warehouses. With their home-made woollen blankets rolled up neatly and strapped to their backs, they strolled side by side, staring at this and that and chatted among themselves in their native tongue. Two young mothers, pushing prams, had walked towards them along the footpath and the strangers courteously made way for them to pass. As they did, one of the mothers commented to her *priatel'ka*, friend, in a low, but audible voice, on how ridiculous and out of place the group of strangers seemed and both women had laughed.

One of my father's company, *Tanas Peoff*, from *Maala*, who had previously worked abroad in the United States and was regarded as the elder statesman of the group, had heard and understood the derisive comment. Without explanation he left behind his stunned *selski* and turned to catch

**Footnotes:**

*Kosta Malko was born in a small village in Kostursko kraj, the villages located nearby the township of Kostur, and lived to the ripe old age of one hundred and seven. As a youth he had witnessed the glorious but ill-fated Illinden Uprising and sadly the subsequent Ottoman reprisals, including the burning down of his family home. Kosta had worked abroad in America prior to arriving in Western Australia in the 1920s where he found employment clearing farmland, in the vicinity of the small agricultural communities of Moora and Three Springs, before moving to Perth where he became a much respected and leading member of Perth's fledgling Macedonian community. With his ability to speak and write in English he assisted in preparing sponsorship and the required paper work that enabled many grateful fellow Macedonians to settle in Western Australia.*

up with the two young women who naturally were taken aback. However, the stranger, who now stood before them spoke calmly and in fairly fluent English, with a distinctive American accent. He told the young women that their unkind remarks had been overheard and were offensive and concluded by saying, "We too have mothers who love us. We too were children once. No one can say what the future holds for any of us. How do you know what is in store for your own young babies?" He added, "they too might, in desperate times, have to leave behind their homes and loved ones." The two young mothers listened red-faced and apologised for their insensitivity.

After a few days recuperating at *Kosta Malko's* boarding house, my father and his fellow *selski* journeyed, on foot, along a road which closely followed Western Australia's Indian Ocean coastline to the township of Bunbury, some two hundred kilometres south of Perth. This was the gateway to the vast forests that inhabited the South-West corner of Western Australia where they were destined to eke out a living cutting railway sleepers. My father knew nothing of the art of felling, *visoki drva*, tall trees, or carving railway sleepers but he was acutely aware that he would have to learn quickly. He and his companions would disappear daily into the dense, intimidating forests which were home to awe-inspiring, prehistoric trees, towering sentinels, that stretched upward to the very heavens and shielded the, *neboto*, sky above. There within these heavily-timbered hideaways he and the other members of his work gang toiled from sunrise to sunset, to *njadi*, find, the best specimens from which to carve out as many railway sleepers as possible. Dwarfed by their surroundings, they accosted their chosen trees with sharp, heavy *balti*, axes, and broad two-man *privoni*, saws, with prominent rasping metal *zambi*, teeth. In such challenging circumstances, teamwork and co-operation were critical for it could take up to six hours to fell a single giant of the forest with bloated trunks several metres in diameter. They would initially make a deep wedge-shaped belly cut, their axes biting deep, gorging hungrily, into the side upon which the tree was to fall. Having made this mortal wound, they would turn their attention to the opposite side of the tree and rip into the trunk with their two-man saws. In their death throes, the ancient ones would creak, groan and begin oozing sap and resin before finally yielding and crashing loudly to the ground below where they lay upon a disheveled canopy of smaller trees, branches, shrubs and native grasses. Then, they would *zafati*, begin, the painstaking task of removing the smaller branches and *korupka*, bark, and cutting the enormous trunks into more manageable lengths using axes, saws, metal wedges and iron bars. These smaller lengths of timber were generally raised off the ground and rested upon large timber *kalapje*, blocks, positioned at both ends.

#### Footnotes:

*The emergence of a commercial timber industry in Western Australia was almost as old as the European settlement of the State and by the 1890s a number of English city footpaths and laneways had been laid with imported wooden pavers sourced from Western Australian forests. Hardy karri and jarrah timbers, logged from the State's ancient forests, were also used in the construction of mines, jetties, bridges and as railway sleepers.*

Charcoal outlines of railway sleepers were sketched upon them before the sleeper cutters, standing legs apart, atop of the timber, would begin carving. Red, resin-filled splinters flew in every direction as sharpened axes sliced into the now life-less trees and railway sleepers would gradually emerge. Once carved to the desired shape and size the sleepers would be *vrzani*, bundled together, ready to be dragged along the forest floor to designated collection points. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Australian timber industry was still almost exclusively reliant on the efforts of man and beast. Men selected, cut down and shaped timber while teams of bullocks and horses dragged timber logs to railway sidings and mill sites. Whips cracked incessantly in the air and upon the sturdy backs of the snorting beasts as the bullockies shouted out directions to their trusted lead animals who in turn seemingly conveyed the instructions of their human masters to the other bullocks using a strange assortment of bellows and snorts. Meanwhile, the sleeper cutters moved to a new patch of the forest and the whole process would begin again. Each sleeper cutter would inscribe their individual markings, usually their initials or first name, onto the sleepers which they produced. If these passed inspection by contractors commissioned to procure sleepers on behalf of railway construction companies, the sleeper cutters would receive a shilling for each eight or nine foot-long sleeper they had carved. Rejected sleepers were not paid for but often cynically carried out of the forest by contractors and sold to local farmers as fence posts or as firewood to the residents of nearby townships.

The life of a sleeper cutter was back-breaking and monotonous. My father and his friends were constantly confronted by harsh working conditions and challenging experiences which were made only somewhat bearable because it was a lifestyle they shared with close companions who fully understood one another's despondency. Their fellowship was founded upon a stoic resolve since each day was the same as the day before. They would tramp to where the sun had disappeared and darkness had taken hold during the previous day and begin working when the sun re-emerged the following day. They would begin each *nov den*, new day, by hanging their Hessian water bags under the shade of a tree, sharpening and oiling their axes and saws and pouring methylate spirits over their calloused, bruised and blistered hands to clean their wounds and prevent them becoming infected.

In the early mornings, their workplace was filled with the tuneful singing of *vrapchze*, birds, and the cries of the native *zhivotini*, animals, but soon these gave way to the rhythmical sound of axes and saws slicing and ripping into timber which reverberated through the forest of the giant hardwoods. During the mornings, newly sharpened axes, clasped firmly by invigorated hands, did their work with great gusto but as the day passed and exhaustion set in, axes were swung more slowly and bit less deeply.

My father's earliest experiences of working in the forests of Western Australia were dogged by mounting frustrations and gnawing anxiety. He had found it *tesko*, difficult, to carve sleepers of an acceptable quality and was consequently *ustramen*, ashamed. It was hard to come to

terms with working long, back-breaking hours in challenging conditions, without being paid and therefore earning no money to send home. He spent sleepless nights *razbuden*, lying awake, thinking of his wife and young sons and questioning what had possessed him to venture so far from home. He was noticeably on edge and increasingly irritable. During this time, my father recalled one incident with deep regret. It was the day his rage had flared uncontrollably when a fellow sleeper cutter, a cousin, told him to stop feeling sorry for himself, stop brooding and to try harder to learn the art of cutting railway sleepers. It was his compatriot's way of trying to snap his fellow *seljanets*, villager, out of his morose mood but my father had reacted angrily, took hold of his axe and threatened to throw it at his relative. Indeed, a brief chase had ensued, one man fleeing into the forest with the fear of being seriously injured while the other followed blinded by pent up emotions that had been fuelled by intense despair and feelings of inadequacy. However, it was not long before both men were sitting on logs, only metres apart, thoroughly embarrassed over what had occurred. The older man stood up and walked slowly to his young cousin and said tearfully, "*Dete*, son, I'm sorry for my ill-chosen *zbor*, words. I know that you are doing the best you can and how much you are missing your wife and young sons." My father, tears rolling down his face, sincerely apologised for his irrational reaction, "*Striko*, uncle, please forgive me", he sobbed, "I am so ashamed, please forgive me", he repeated. The two men hugged and the matter was forgotten.

*Kole Peoff*, a few years older than my father a *krotok*, gentle soul, *umen*, intelligent, and compassionate, took my father aside. "*Braate*, brother, *Risto*, it is not your, *kabaet*, fault. It is not easy for a villager to quickly learn how to cut sleepers" he said in his usual mild manner. "Watch me and learn. None of us were born sleeper cutters", he added. For the next few days the two men worked *pokraj*, side by side, my father observing, asking questions and trying hard to imitate the actions his friend. Within days *Kole Peoff's* patience had been rewarded and so confident was he in his pupil's newly-honed ability that he offered to place his own mark on the sleepers that had been carved by my father and allow my father to place his mark on those that he had shaped. My father had become a fully-fledged sleeper cutter and was soon carving a respectable five to six sleepers a day. Subsequently, money from Australia began to trickle, then flow steadily, into the home of *Kole Numeff*, in far off *Maala*.

Local farmers would sometimes come to the campsite and offer the *selski* clearance work, contracting them to clear sections of farming properties that were to be cropped or used as pasture land in the future. On these occasions they would cut down the trees and surrounding scrubs and burn these in large bonfires which lit up the night sky, flaring red and orange and billowing black smoke, while wind gusts blew around the white ash and embers.

My father and his companions often felt that they had been abandoned like castaways on some far-off, alien landscape. Their orders of meat, vegetables and loaves of bread, were left by local butchers, store keepers and bakers at designated locations within the bush, usually on a tree stump or hanging from a sturdy branch. Within hours, the meat would begin to turn as the blowflies quickly did their work. At the same time a host of insects burrowed hungrily into their supplies of bread, fruit and vegetables. Initially, my father had refused to eat maggot-infested meat and would throw it away for the bush creatures, *zivotini*, to feast upon. When his work mates saw what he was doing a number of the older men reprimanded him by pointing out that he was being wasteful. They insisted that he would have to change his ways and showed him to do as they did. Henceforth, my father would boil his meat, tip out the hot water, teeming with dead maggots and then cook it within the large communal pot that hung over an open fireplace which was typically situated in a clearing near work-gang's tents.

However, during the ensuing months, my father became a little too complacent about preparing his meat order and nearly died of food poisoning after eating bacon that had spoiled in the sun. He experienced bouts of gut-wrenching nausea and was refusing to eat. A fit, strong, young man, he soon became a shadow of his former self and weighed a mere sixty kilograms. Weak and in pain he would lie in his tent, unable to work, depressed and having to resort to wrapping broad bandages round his *polojna*, mid drift, so that he could stand on his feet. It took much coaxing, by his companions, for my father to shake off his lethargy and agree to visit a Perth doctor. His decision to do so was partly influenced by the fact that the doctor, Doctor Georgeff, was the son of a Bulgarian immigrant who had an outstanding reputation. He would become an iconic figure among many Macedonians living in Perth and indeed other parts of the State. My father would often talk enthusiastically about the doctor's medical abilities and how he had saved his life. *Posl'e*, Thereafter, whenever there was illness in the family he would strongly recommend a visit to the good doctor.

In the strange setting that they found themselves, the *selski* lived totally dependent on each other's company, goodwill and understanding. This was demonstrated in many different ways and various occasions. *Dedo Kole*, in his letters to my father, constantly complained that the family was in debt and in urgent need of more money than my father had been sending home. My father therefore gathered all his savings, to the very last penny, to send home. His fellow *selski*, acutely aware of the enormous stress that my father was being put under agreed to offer him a loan. Once again, *Kole Peoff* had interceded on my father's behalf, despite the reluctance of his own father, *Tanas*, the nominal leader of their work-gang, who had personal reasons for having misgivings about assisting my father. He and my grandfather had not been on speaking terms for many years due to a disagreement that arose when *Dedo Kole* had refused to support *Tanas's* bid to be elected *Maala's* mayor. Worse still, my grandfather had endorsed his Greek rival for the position. My grandfather's decision, in this matter, had not been based on any personal or political considerations, more simply, the Greek villager was a friend who had regularly offered him the use of his horse and cart. He had never taken village politics

too seriously and urged all who would listen not to become involved in *selski raboti*, village matters, which he regarded as the domain of those with inflated ambition but little ability. However, in this case he had failed to appreciate the degree of hurt that his long-time neighbour, *Tanas Peoff*, had felt.

The money my father sent home, his own and that borrowed from his companions, meant that my grandfather's immediate financial woes had eased. However, my father had now accumulated a *borch*, debt, which he would have to work hard to *plati*, repay. Villagers recalled that *Dedo Kole* was overjoyed when he opened my father's letter with the enclosed money order and in an act of public acknowledgment he was said to have stood in the village square, where he solemnly lifted and tipped his cap and declare loudly to all who could hear that it was his *zelba*, sincerest wish, that his eldest son should have as much good fortune and health as the number of *kosi*, hairs, that remained on his aging head. A considerable, *blosoj*, blessing, indeed since my grandfather was not prone to baldness.

During the time the *selski* were caged within the towering forests of the South-West of Western Australia they had to come to terms with the tragic death of *Mitre Peoff*, the youngest of *Tanas Peoff's* sons. On one particularly hot day, most of the members of the work-gang decided to *odbega*, leave, the campsite and take the opportunity to go into the nearby township of Nannup to purchase supplies of fresh food. My father and the ill-fated *Mitre* had remained behind and as the heat intensified the cool, softly-gurgling river water, flowing alongside the edge of the campsite, was increasingly enticing. The two men, *ne pl'ivanje*, who could not swim, decided to cool off by wading into the river waters. Decency dictated that they change out of their clothes in privacy so my father undressed and tentatively entered into the water away from his friend. He was surprised by the strength of the current and was wary not to go any deeper once the water had reached his waist. Soon, he was lost in his surroundings, no longer hot and bothered but feeling refreshed and alive.

However, after a few minutes a dark foreboding slowly overtook him and he began to shiver even though he was not cold. He felt something was terribly wrong, time seemed to have suddenly stopped still. He had realised that he had not seen *Mitre* and quickly got out of the water, *si obl'eje*, dressed, and went to look for his friend. The sun's rays beat down upon him, blurring his vision and he had to shield his eyes as he hurried along the river bank. Suddenly he stopped, stunned, his *nodzi*, legs, refusing to carry him any further, there in the crystal clear water, laying face down in the shallows of the river bed, was a body, its lifeless arms and legs gently swaying in the current. My father waded in and frantically dragged *Mitre's* body to the river's edge. His heart pounding rapidly, hysterical, overwhelmed by a deep sense of helplessness, he turned and sprinted

toward the nearby gravel roadway in the hope of finding someone who might have been able to *pomoshi*, help. Standing in the middle of the roadway he waved down the first vehicle that had come along, shouting over and over again, while gasping for *veter*, air, which he desperately tried to force down into his lungs, “friend water, Tom’s son water.” A local farmer driving a truck loaded with bags of fertiliser stacked neatly upon the rough wooden tray, pushed against squealing brakes and stopped. He got out of the cabin and led by my father scampered through the forest to the river bank. The farmer knelt over *Mitre’s* body and felt despairingly for a pulse but *Mitre* was *umren*, dead. It was thought that he had lost his footing, fallen into the water and *se udaj*, drowned, after suffering an epileptic fit.

*Mitre Peoff*, one of their own, was buried in an unmarked grave in the Nannup township *grobishcha*, cemetery. His tortured spirit was destined, by tragic misadventure, to dwell forever in a small, isolated township in a foreign land so distant from home and his loved ones. For months my father was inconsolable and constantly admonished himself for not being more alert. Deep down he knew that *Mitre’s* death had been an accident but he found it hard to forget or forgive himself. The funeral was a *zhal’en*, sad, occasion with a loving father experiencing the ultimate personal grief, the death of his young son. *Tanas Peoff* had stood by his son’s final resting place long after the others had drifted away. He wanted to spend a few precious moments alone with his boy. Looking old and gaunt, peering *dolu*, down, upon his son’s *mrtovechki sandak*, coffin, he whispered how much he had loved him, how proud he was of him and how terribly he would be missed. He sobbed uncontrollably, tears running freely from his eyes, his utter despair heightened by thoughts about the letter he would have to write home to his wife and to his daughter-in-law. I know that my own father would experience similar feelings, many years later, when my brother *Tanas* passed away. On that occasion he commented that there could be few more devastating experiences than parents surviving their own children and bemoaned that such things were contrary to the natural order of things.

My father's prolonged absence from home was a challenging time for my mother. She would listen, anxiously for the sound of the postman's trumpet, which he typically blew to announce his arrival at the village, once or twice a week, as part of his regular rounds. The village postman would collect *knigi*, letters, and parcels from *Lerin* and then pass through *Nevoleny*, *Maala*, *Krepeshina*, *Neret* and *Lagen*, where he would sleep the night, before returning to *Lerin* to collect yet more mail. On hearing the shrill tune of his trumpet, the villagers would come scurrying to the village square in the hope that within one of the bags, hanging astride the saddle of the postman's horse, was a letter or parcel addressed to them. The roll call of names would begin, the postman, grinning, chatting incessantly and almost as an after-thought, handing out letters and parcels enclosed within in a variety of envelopes and wrapping paper bearing the stamps of many *chuzhi*, foreign, nations. On most occasions, villagers would walk away disappointed and left to wonder about the fate of their loved ones who were working so far from home.

However, there were days when my mother would be among the blessed who received a letter, *noviny*, news, from my father, addressed as it was *a det*, custom, to *Dedo Kole*, as our family patriarch. My father was not expansive in the letters he sent home which generally followed a familiar pattern of extending greetings to his father, wife and children, assurances that he was well and making a few fleeting references about fellow villagers with whom he was now living and working. My grandfather would slowly, almost theatrically, open my father's letters, unfold them and read them out aloud but not before he had carefully extracted the customary enclosed money order, which he would place with some ceremony within a *dzeb*, pocket, of his trousers. Later, when we lived, *bashka*, apart, from *Dedo Kole*, I became the proud reader of my father's letters. After all, I had always regarded myself as the best educated member of the family, a distinction founded solely upon several interrupted years of primary schooling. My mother had never been to school and could not *cheti or pishi*, read or write.

Occasionally, in odd displays of largesse, my grandfather would buy commercially made *cheli*, shoes, and other items of *pl'achki*, clothing, for family members. This was a real treat since we generally wore home-made *pinsi*, shoes, crafted from cattle or pig skin, cut to shape and which were sewn together with thin thongs made from animal leather. In the bitterly cold winter months we would insert *slamma*, straw, into our shoes, to trap in the warmth but we had to be careful not to leave our home-made shoes where our dogs, attracted by the smell of the animal hide find them and rip them apart. During the Second World War we would delight in finding remnants of tyres made of *lastik*, rubber, from motor bikes and military vehicles, discarded by the occupying Germans, which we used to make shoes that were far more water resistant and sturdy. However, these shoes did not compare with the those sold in *Lerin's* shops which we took great care to look after and would only wear on very special occasions. On his infrequent visits to *Lerin*, my grandfather would sometimes purchase small amounts of *maslo*, olive oil, *maslini*, olives, *oris*, rice, spaghetti, *sapun*, soap, *sehkerh*, sugar and *café*, coffee.

My father would tell the story, told to him by a neighbour, about the day his sister-in-law had received a letter she had assumed was from her husband, *na pechelba*, working abroad. Unable to read, she had gone to the home of her brother-in-law's to ask him to read the letter to her. She had listened intently as he conveyed love and warm greetings from her husband to her and the children, expressed hopes that they would soon be reunited and related some of his experiences and strange things he had seen. When he had finished, his sister-in-law had thanked him over and over again for reassuring her that her husband was *zdrav*, healthy, that he loved her and was yearning to be home again. Off she went clutching her cherished letter tightly in her hand and telling all that she met along her way that her husband was safe and well. For weeks, her spirits had been buoyed and she began to smile and laugh again. It was not until some time later that she found out that the letter, so dutifully read by her brother-in-law, was in fact sent by a government authority containing rather mundane information that had been sent to all village households. Angry and jaded, she jogged, almost ran, to confront her brother-in-law whom she found working in one of his fields, with mattock in hand, removing weeds from his corn crop. When she reached him he could see *mu prechi neshcho*, that something had upset her. His sister-in-law was normally so demure and even withdrawn but not on this occasion. She asked in a loud voice why he had *mami*, lied, to her about the letter. He fully understood her anger and was sympathetic and thoroughly embarrassed. He replied calmly that if he had known that it was an official letter then he would have read it as such, however, since he thought that it was a personal letter from his brother, her husband, he had read it in the way that he did. This was his way of apologising and informing his distressed sister-in-law that he too could not read or write.

My father would also tell the story of a young man from *Maala* who had left the village and found work in America as a short-order cook in a Detroit restaurant where he spent his days preparing meals, typically large servings of bacon, steak and eggs, for the workers of the city's thriving car manufacturing plants. A dutiful son, he would regularly send letters, money orders and parcels, covered with brown paper and secured with coarse string, full of clothes, *bakshishi*, gifts, to his parents and various members of his family. His letters home, invariably expressed warm greetings to his loved ones back home and would end with the comment *and that's all*. It would be this strange final sentence that became the cause of considerable consternation. This had only dawned upon him when he read, with great amusement, a letter from his father that ended ... " Son, we are so grateful to receive the money that you regularly send us and the clothes are of such good quality and much admired by our fellow villagers but for the life of me I can not find the *that's all*. What does it look like? Do you think that postal workers are stealing it? "There were many similar stories, including that of a distressed mother, grieving over the prolonged absence of a son who was working overseas. She had become frantic when a letter from her only boy which declared that he was now *boss*. He had been promoted to the prestigious position of foreman in one of Detroit's car assembly plants, a notable achievement for a young immigrant from a tiny, distant peasant village, now living in a far off, thriving industrial American metropolis. It was testimony to his admirable work ethic and initiative. The

young man had been proud of his promotion and was eager to share the good news which he thought would bring comfort to his lonely mother who was constantly fretting over his well-being. He had wanted to reassure her that he was doing well and that he was now a boss and she did not need to concern herself over his welfare. His mother's reaction was not what he had expected. Immediately after having the letter read to her, by a fellow villager, she went directly to the home of her married daughter and rapped loudly on the front door. Her daughter, who had been preparing dough for the weekly baking, wiped the flour from her hands with her apron and hurried to open the door. She looked with some trepidation at her visibly aggrieved mother whom she feared was ill or the bearer of bad tidings. Her mother blurted out, "*Kerko* daughter, we need to *pleti*, knit, your brother some warm woollen socks and buy him shoes. He is so poor that he is going to work *boss*." She then turned and walked quickly to the village church to pray to *Sveti Giorgi*, St George, to look favourably upon her destitute son. This was a natural reaction of a mother, separated by such a great *dal'echina*, distance, from her son whose only communication with her was through letters she could not read and which described a world so completely foreign to her. In Macedonian the word *boss*, means to be without shoes and socks, to go bare-footed, and therefore could be interpreted as a sign of extreme poverty.

I was proud to be proclaimed, at least by my mother, as having been a good student and subsequently wore my mother's assessment of my scholastic abilities as a badge of honour. The village school at *Maala*, in my youth, was attended by some eighty children divided into three classes. I recall my school days fondly, especially lessons conducted by my favourite *daskal*, teacher, who was not adverse to wielding the cane or delivering a swift rap around the head with his hand to inattentive students. At the same time he would frequently provide his more financially destitute pupils a note book or *mol'if*, pencil. Our lessons were conducted in Greek and consisted mainly of the study of the Greek language, Greek history and the central teachings of the Greek Orthodox faith.

I particularly enjoyed our teacher telling us stories about Trojan War and especially those involving Achilles and my favourite hero, Odysseus, the cunning red-haired, king of Ithaca, the inspiration behind the construction of the wooden horse and husband to the long-suffering Penelope. While Greek was the language of the classroom, my friends and I spoke *Makedonski*, Macedonian, the language of my *soi*, people, when we were *doma*, home, and in the playground. This in part explained the lack of enthusiasm and indifference toward schooling exhibited by many Macedonian elders who were suspicious of the ploy, adopted by the Greek authorities to indoctrinate, through the education system, Macedonian youngsters into mainstream Greek culture. They were acutely aware that winning over of the hearts and minds would begin in earnest within Greek schools. I would experience first hand this process of hellenisation. In our *skol'je*, school, we were taught that Macedonian was not a legitimate language but merely a hybrid, lacking in grammatical structure and complexity and spoken only by barbarians.

I recall the day that I was assaulted by an older student, a *prosfiga*, a boy from a Greek family which had returned to Greece after generations of living in Turkey, for speaking in Macedonian with a friend in the school yard. This unprovoked assault took place in full view of one of the teachers who chose to ignore it and had simply walked away. When I arrived home, shirt torn and trousers caked in dirt, my mother was furious and demanded to know what had happened. When I remained silent she grabbed me by my ear and began to twist it ever more firmly. “*Jovan*, what happened to you?” she asked. “Nothing *maiko*, mother’, I *odgovori*, answered, “I just fell over while playing at school”. My mother was not so easily misled, she knew that this was not *vistina*, true, so still firmly gripping my ear she tugged me closer toward her. “Now tell me what really happened,” she repeated, in a raised voice. My mother rarely controlled her emotions once riled and no one was ever left in doubt when she was displeased and on this occasion she was clearly upset. When I finally confessed to her that I had been pushed and punched by a fellow student and told her the reason she resorted to one of *Dedo Giorgi’s* favourite sayings, “*Kaj ima sila nema pravena*”, where there is might there is no justice. The next day, despite my protests, my mother insisted on coming to school with me where in, no uncertain terms, she made it clear, to a rather taken aback headmaster, that she would take matters into her own hands and personally dispense justice should I or any of my friends be bullied in this way again.

My mother’s reservations about the school curriculum and the discriminatory treatment of students with a Macedonian heritage were highlighted once again following an annual school concert when each class group performed items designed to highlight the achievements of Greek culture through the ages. She had sat fidgeting and frowning throughout the entire performance and left immediately after it had concluded. When I returned home I found her pacing about and muttering loudly. “They have taken our lands, changed the names of our towns, villages, of our rivers and mountains, they have removed the inscriptions from our holy icons and even those from the tombstones of our dead ancestors. Is it not enough for them to persecute the living do they also have to disturb the dead’, she concluded. It was also true that village patriarchs had a blinkered perspective of life beyond the village. They saw the destiny of the young as being irrevocably linked to working on the family fields, tending to the animals and caring for their aged parents and grandparents. Certainly, the education of girls was not considered important even by family matriarchs. Young women were to marry, give birth to healthy babies, work the land, *gotvi*, cook, *peri*, wash, *chisti*, clean, and obey their husbands. These were the things that mattered most.

The very best of my school days were those when my class visited schools in other villages. On such occasions, dressed in our finest, *pl’achki*, clothes, we would line up in rows and proudly march in step to the beat of two *tapani*, drums, invariably played by students who had been rewarded for their outstanding work or behaviour. Across our *gradi*, chests, secured by *konets*, string, we carried bread, cheese, fruit and vegetables in our colourful home-made bags.

I particularly looked forward to our school visits to nearby *Krepeshina* where my *rodnini*, relations, would invariably come to greet me with welcoming smiles, hugs and kisses. With knowing glances, a few treats would be placed inside my carry bag and they would ask me to convey their best wishes to my grandfather and my parents. During these visits we would compete in keenly contested foot races and tugs-of-war when winning and losing, at least temporarily, meant something. Victories, however, minor and insignificant, served to swell personal pride and were the subject of conversation at school and around the family table. Losses, as they often are, were quickly *zaboraveni*, forgotten. One of the highlights of my school days was the time that I was chosen to play one of the school drums. I remember how proud I was beating out a simple marching tune with my chest puffed out and consumed with an inflated sense of self-importance.

By late 1930, my father had returned home from Western Australia. He had become one of the many innocent victims of the economic and social turmoil resulting from the onset of the Great Depression. This devastating economic slump had surfaced with the collapse of share prices of publicly-listed companies on the New York Stock Exchange in late October 1929 and gave birth to an economic malaise that quickly spread beyond America's shores. The malignancy ravaged almost all national economies, including the Australian economy which was overly dependent on the foreign investment, borrowing overseas and on the sale of its primary exports, notably wheat and wool, in order to repay debts. The official unemployment rate soared to some thirty percent of the official workforce and many proud, hard-working Australians were forced to rely on government handouts, which were commonly referred to as sustenance or *susso*. Growing numbers of them found it impossible to meet home mortgage repayments or pay their rent and utility bills. In many Australia's cities, shanty towns, communities of makeshift shelters, cobbled together from old timbers, discarded metal sheets, rusting car bodies, cardboard boxes and hessian bags, sprung up in ever-increasing numbers to house the homeless.

Such stark realities were not confined to Australia's major cities, rural communities were also experiencing challenging times. As severe economic despair gripped the nation, fewer Australians could afford to purchase agricultural goods and consequently the domestic demand for farm goods contracted dramatically. The stagnation in world trade also led to a significant downturn in Australia's export markets, a situation made more severe by countries imposing rigid trade barriers such as highly restrictive tariffs and quotas in order to reduce the inflow of imports as a means of artificially protecting their domestic industries. Australian farmers with large bank loans used to purchase land and expensive farm machinery, now struggled to meet their financial commitments and a large number of them were forced to walk off their properties. Investment in building economic infrastructure slowed to a trickle and as the construction of new railway networks stalled so did the demand for railway sleepers. My father and his fellow *selski* therefore found that they could no longer earn a steady income and reluctantly joined the growing queues of the unemployed.

During those dark days, my father and his work mates were forced to leave behind their forest campsites and live in canvas tents alongside the banks of the Blackwood River, in the small township of Bridgetown. They were short of money, out of work and dependent on government charity which consisted predominantly of rations of stale bread and low grade potatoes which were delivered weekly by local authorities to their makeshift campsite. In utter frustration my father and his companions would trek from farm to farm looking for work. Farmers would greet them with a grin and a shrug of shoulders since there was work to be done but they had no money to pay them. Local farmers would occasionally arrive at the campsite to ask whether anyone was interested in doing a day's work in exchange for a hot, home-cooked meal. There would be no shortage of volunteers and the first to scramble onto the tray of the farmer's truck knew that they would at least eat well that day.

The frustration and sense of isolation felt by the *selski* increased when local residents, typically out a sense of their own despair, began to accuse immigrant *rabotnizi*, labourers, of taking their jobs and eating their food rations. My father and his friends found themselves not only unemployed but increasingly ostracised. He, like many of his work-gang, had had enough. My father had been away from his young wife and family far too long and was now tormented by his inability to find gainful employment, he, along with most of the others, decided it was time to go home. Following a *dgl*, long, dusty walk during the height of summer, when they were constantly harassed by flies and a host of other annoying insects, the *selski* reached Fremantle where they purchased ocean-going passages that would enable them to return home.

A lengthy, often unpleasant,, sea voyage to the Athenian port of *Pireaus*, a bus ride to *Lerin* and a short stroll to *Maala* and my father was home. He would sometimes reflect on how he walked those last few kilometres, in familiar surroundings, with great anticipation but also with a nagging foreboding. He was not looking forward to having to tell his father, *Dedo Kole*, that not only had he not brought any money with him but that he was in debt since he had to borrow the money required to pay for a part of his voyage home. My father was happy to be home but was *ustramen*, embarrassed, to be there *bez pari*, with no money, in his pockets. He sat at the low family dining table, head down, feelings of failure surging, wave after wave, within. He simply could not look his father in the eye. *Risto Numeff*, was truly his father's son, his eldest son, he was proud and accepted his commitment to the family seriously. He knew that his father would not listen to the explanation that unique economic circumstances had conspired against him and that he was not to blame for returning home with an empty money belt strapped around his waist. Indeed, there would not be a single reassuring word or any hint of understanding and my father would carry feelings of guilt for years to come.

While he talked little of his time abroad and settled back into the inevitable flow of village life, my father seemed moody and distracted, his mind was clearly elsewhere. He was home and we were glad to have him with us but he was obviously unsettled. He would wander through the fields, alone, deep in thought and with a distant look in his eyes. He would become particularly restless when anyone from *Maala*, or one of the nearby villages, left to seek work abroad. One day in a rare, quiet moment together he confided in my mother, "*Jordanna*, I must go abroad again. Our boys are growing older and how will they be able to support their own families in the future?" My mother, listened but said nothing as she sat nervously beside him. She had suspected for some time that this was what my father had been brooding upon. My father went on, "*Se grizha*, I worry, about how you and the boys will cope when I am away. My father is becoming increasingly difficult but we cannot all afford to go abroad together." He continued, "I need to go ahead and prepare for the time that you and the boys can join me. We have no future here". I think we can build a better *zhivot*, life, for ourselves in Western Australia and I would like to try again", then added "however, this time I have no intentions of returning." My mother replied in a steady *glas*, voice, that concealed her innermost thoughts, "*Risto*", she said, "you must do what you think is *naidobro*, best." She had steeled herself not to *predava*, betray,

her deepest apprehension. She accepted her fate, although there were moments when she found it hard to suppress thinking about the time she would have to endure without her husband at her side and having to co-exist with her difficult father-in-law. She had to face the prospect of having to raise five young boys by herself. For a second time, my mother waved my father good-bye and wondering when she would see him again. So, it was that some *pet godini*, five years, after his first sojourn abroad, my father was in Western Australia once more wanting to start afresh but this time determined to stay and become a citizen of his adopted homeland. He would never see the land of his forefathers again.

## Chapter 11: Our Family Matriarch

*In 1936, my father, unsettled and eager to build a better future for his wife and five young sons, embarked once again for Western Australia. His departure, the onset of the Second World War and rising tensions in the personal relationship between my mother and grandfather all conspired to announce a new chapter in the lives.*

*Exiled from our family home, by my grandfather, we were forced to fend for ourselves under the guidance of my mother who assumed the role of our family matriarch. During this time our little family unit would need to find a new home to live, secure a small allotment of land to raise crops and over time earn sufficient funds to purchase livestock. Despite such daunting challenges and coping with German occupation during the Second World War our mother kept us safe.*

My father boarded an Italian passenger liner, the *Viminale*, which arrived at Fremantle on 7 December 1937. He returned to sleeper cutting in townships with which he had some familiarity and was deeply relieved that he had not lost the skills required to carve timber railway sleepers which he had so much difficulty mastering at his first attempt. Soon, my father had saved sufficient money to *plati*, pay, to acquire passport papers and a sea passage for his brother, *Giorgi*, to join him so that he too could earn Australian dollars to pay for other family members to join them. Wives and young children were often the last to be reunited with their families living abroad largely due to the difficulties that they would face finding gainful employment and therefore earning an income. It was commonly said that Macedonian women *ne tzupi voda*, did not travel by water, at least, until they really had to. About this time, the Australian government's immigration policies now dictated that migrants living and working in Australia could only sponsor the immigration of members of their immediate families. This meant that my older brother, *Tanas*, and not *Striko Mitre* or *Striko Vasil*, my father's two other brothers, would be the next member of the family to depart for Western Australia.

However, a particularly severe winter meant *Dedo Kole* had spent the money that had been sent home by my father and *Striko Giorgi* to pay for my brother's passport papers and sea passage on buying fodder for the family's sheep and goats. Consequently, the *Numeff* family patriarch expressed a grave reluctance regarding my brother's impending departure and refused, despite my mother's pleas, to give her permission to borrow the money that would enable my brother to journey to Western Australia. It was useless arguing with him when he was in such an obstinate mood and my mother knew it. He could not *razberva*, understand, the hopes expressed by his eldest son of building a new life beyond the ancestral lands of the Macedonian people and to live among strangers with cultures and customs that were so different to their own. He had experienced working abroad and on both occasions all he ever wanted to do was to return home as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, my mother was increasingly convinced that another *golema borba*, lengthy and murderous war, was imminent. She had as a young girl had witnessed the horrific devastation of the First World War and despite the isolation of the village she had heard talk among the villagers and townsfolk of the expansionary territorial ambitions of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. The vision of German and Italian troops sweeping through Europe and into Macedonian villages and township seemed to her to be inevitable. My mother feared that in such the forthcoming conflict my older brother would be conscripted into the Greek army and sent to the battlefield. In the absence of my father, her strong maternal instincts, nurtured by an independent spirit and a formidable personality, surfaced. Undaunted, by my grandfather's unbending stance, spurred on by her love for her first born, she defiantly borrowed the money needed to enable my brother to travel to Western Australia from her cousin, *Tanas Ilioff*, a tobacconist from *Lerin*. Within months, a letter sent by my father, arrived containing a money order with sufficient funds to repay the debt that my mother had incurred.

## Footnotes:

*The Viminale was built in Trieste, Italy in 1925, as a passenger liner. However, the vessel rarely sailed during the early 1930s due to the dramatic decline in the demand for sea passages by European immigrants resulting from the Great Depression. At this time, Italy's Benito Mussolini-led government had placed all national shipping companies under a state-operated syndicate, the Societa Italia Flotte Reuniti. However, by the second half of the 1930s, as economies of many countries showed signs of economic recovery and European immigrants were once more seeking sea passages to America, Canada and Australia, the Italian government responded by releasing shipping companies out of state control. Consequently, the Viminale began to regularly carry European immigrants to Australia.*

*Giorgi Numeff (George Velios) was born in Krepushina in 1918. He was the second youngest of the seven children of Dedo Kole and Baba Yana and fifteen years younger than my father. When Striko Giorgi joined his brother in Western Australia he recalled how overwhelmed he had initially felt coping with the crippling isolation of being locked away in an isolated environment which was in such sharp contrast to everyday life in the village. He described how he would sometimes weep in utter frustration and comment that only the reassurances of my father got him through those first few months. Slowly, he progressed from doing simple tasks like "boiling the billy", cooking and helping to carry the axes, saws and other equipment of work-gang members, into becoming a competent sleeper cutter.*

*Striko Giorgi was married in Manjimup on 14 January 1945 to Nika Konsolova, the daughter of Yovan and Kia Konsoloff. Yovan was from Bapchor and his wife from Korchkovini. Yovan had arrived in Western Australia in 1926 and was a close friend of my father during his first sojourn abroad. However, unlike my father, he opted not return home during the Great Depression. Instead, in 1933, he purchased a farm situated along Paganini Road, near the Manjimup township, where he was joined by his wife and daughter, Nika, three years later.*

*Striko Giorgi and Strina lived on the Konsoloff farm for seven years and during this time had three children, Victor, Nick and Yana, born in 1945, 1946 and 1948 respectively. Later, the family moved to a farm in Yanmah where they grew tobacco for several years. In 1953, their third son, Alex, was born and two years later Striko Giorgi purchased his own tobacco farm which was situated on Graphite Road, on the outskirts of the Manjimup township. Following the collapse of the local tobacco industry Striko Giorgi worked for the Manjimup Road Board until retiring. He eventually moved to Perth in 1995. Striko Giorgi died on 14 September 2007.*

When he became aware of my mother's actions, *Dedo Kole* was deeply offended by what he interpreted as an open disregard to his authority as dictated by the traditions of the patriarchal society in which he was so deeply grounded. In his, *ochi*, eyes, individual needs and aspirations were to be subservient, put aside, in order to promote the welfare of the entire family. Communal living was the order of the day and all members of large extended families, from the very young to the elderly, had shared responsibilities and commitments. Decisions regarding family matters were seen as the sole domain of the family patriarch whose word was to be obeyed without question. It was undeniable that to co-exist all members of traditional Macedonian families needed to work harmoniously together. As authoritarian and frustrating patriarchal system was it did provide a focus, a sense of identity, security and a feeling of belonging. In a society where formal education was rare and illiteracy was the norm, age and experience were considered integral to the getting of wisdom. Elders were therefore to be respected since they were *especheny*, well-baked, experienced, and therefore knew best. It was the established way of doing things and based on the adage *slooshame*, listen to what I say, and *praj*, do, as I tell you. My grandfather felt *navreden*, insulted, over my mother's actions and made his feelings obvious by sulking during long ominous silences which were occasionally interrupted by sharp, loud, angry outbursts in which he asserted that it was for him to make the important decisions involving family and not his son and certainly not his daughter-in-law. My mother tried to placate him, "*Tatko*", father, she would say, "I am worried about *Tanas*, he is my son, he is your *mnuk*, grandson, I do not want him caught up in the murderous conflict that is brewing. He will be safe in Western Australia with his father." She would continue, "I borrowed the money to protect him from harm not to offend you." However, my grandfather would not be swayed. He had a habit of insisting on having the *posl'edna дума*, the last word, and on one angry outburst said, "If you want to *reshi*, make decisions, by yourself take your *detsa*, sons, and go and find somewhere else to live."

Perhaps my grandfather had misspoken, made a *greshka*, mistake, thinking that my mother would buckle under such a blatant ultimatum. He might not have meant to say what he said, but it was said. Emotionally distraught, trying hard to compose herself, my mother walked into the family home for the last time to gather our meagre possessions which she hastily wrapped in several old blankets and then closing the front door behind her she sat outside on the porch. There, with my youngest brother, *Stase*, at her side, she waited for us to come home from school. I vividly remember returning home at midday, for the customary school lunch break and seeing my mother and younger brothers *nadvor*, outside, with all of our belongings by her side. She was clearly upset and it was obvious that she had been crying. When I had sat beside her she tore small pieces from a loaf of bread and handed these to me along with clumps of white *fetta* cheese and without too much fuss hurried me back off to my afternoon lessons. At the end of the school day my brothers and I gathered together beside our mother and things became clear. *Dedo Kole*, deeply offended that his eldest son should send money orders directly to his wife, had evicted us from the family home.

We were destined to spend the night in the open and huddled together on the river bank close to where the villagers washed their clothes, a mother hen and her young chicks, keeping ourselves warm round a small *ogan*, fire, that we had lit by setting alight the rubber sole of a discarded shoe and fed the *plamen*, flame, with branches collected nearby. The villagers typically washed their clothes along the river's edge. They would take a *kotel*, kettle, fill it with river water and boiled it over a small fire. The piping hot water would then be placed into a large *kopanka*, tub, in which the dirty clothes were agitated with long sticks to avoid scolding. Once rinsed in the flowing river water the family's washing was taken to dry in the *goomni*, courtyards, of the homes of the villagers. News of our sad predicament soon spread through the households of *Maala* and a first cousin of my grandfather took pity on us and insisted that we go with him to his home to share a meal of warm, filling *fasul*, bean soup, and to sleep the night. My mother was too proud to ask her father, *Dedo Kuzo*, for help. She distinctly remembered the last words he had said to her when she married into *Kole Numeff's* family, with his muted blessing, that she should not think about returning home when things would surely turn sour.

My mother lay on the floor of our cousin's home surrounded by her four young sons and I still recall how she would turn her face toward me and smiled reassuringly. *Jordanna Numeva* possessed an indomitable spirit and we always felt safe around her. We spent the following week living with *Baba Velika*, my father's sister. Even in such dire circumstances my mother was concerned that we were not being a burden and she borrowed a small quantity of flour from the village church with which to bake our bread. It was not long after that she, once more, proved her ingenuity. Determined to find a *chatia*, roof, to place over our heads she asked whether we could move into an unoccupied house in the village. The owners, the *Bakrnchovi*, were friends of our family who lived in nearby *Neret* and only stayed in *Maala* during certain times of the year when they came to tend to a number of their fields which were located there. As it happened they were only too glad to have the house occupied and maintained during their absence. During the times of the year when the owners came to stay in *Maala* we would live together as one family and our hosts would refer to my brothers and I as their sons. Later, when we moved into a *prasna*, empty, house which had been vacated by a family who had immigrated overseas, my mother never forgot the kindness that had been extended to us and henceforth during the weeks the *Bakrnchovi* spent in *Maala* she would regularly invite them to share a meal with us. My mother was strong-willed, enterprising and highly protective and soon restored some normality back into our lives.

Each morning, when we lived with *Dedo Kole*, would begin with our grandfather issuing instructions regarding the day's activities so that every member of the household knew exactly what he or she was required to do. My grandfather would then eat breakfast, generally alone, which typically consisted of a drink of hot goat's milk and a few slices of bread cut from his *pogacha*, a round loaf made from wheat flour, which he ate with home-

made cheese and a few olives. Now it was my mother who mapped out our daily activities and reinforced the importance of each of us accepting a shared responsibility to promote the welfare of our now small, tight-knit family unit. Under my mother's tutelage our days were long and arduous. When working in the fields or shepherding our flocks, we would carry our *jadenje*, food, with us, usually clumps of rye or corn bread, cheese and a bean paste spiced with hot peppers which we washed down with cold, refreshing water scooped from local streams and underground springs. Returning home, exhausted at day's end, we would be invigorated by the inviting aroma wafting from our mother's cooking pot: *fasul*, bean soup *lescha*, lentil soup, and a variety of stews which we invariably ate with *turshski piperki*, hot peppers, and assorted pickled vegetables. My mother made sure, during these difficult times, that we ate well. Even in later years, no visitor would ever leave her house without her insisting that they have something to eat. When we shepherded flocks of sheep and goats in more distant locations we took larger helpings of food with us and sometimes slept under the *dzvezdi*, stars, with our *gooni*, overcoats, draped over us to keep us, *topli*, warm.

My mother was granted a few acres of land under a Greek government land distribution scheme under which families, living in a separate household, were given a portion, *delba*, of thirty *pogoni*, approximately five acres of land. Now that my mother had been exiled from our family home she was entitled to receive such a grant of land. In fact she was awarded a partial allocation of thirteen *pogonni*, since local officials reasoned that my grandfather and my father and brother, who were working abroad, should have to assume some responsibility for contributing to our financial well-being. No deed of ownership was issued and when we left for Australia this land was reclaimed by the government and redistributed to other families who lived locally. However, during our darkest moments we were so grateful for those few acres of land. My mother, *Jordanna Numeva* nee *Iliova*, was one of a family of four children who survived into adulthood. She had two sisters, *Velika* and *Dosta*, and a brother *Vasil*. It was said that she had been born on New Year's Day, 1902, the first child of a highly respected family from *Krepeshina*. *Kuzo Ilioff*, her father, was a gentle and unassuming man, a disposition he shared with his wife, *Stasa*.

While my mother had inherited some of the admirable personal traits from her parents she would often exhibit an independence of thought and action that were traditionally associated with a first born and many of her fellow villagers commented that she was more like her feisty grandmother than demure mother. My mother's maternal grandmother, *Baba Shimirova*, was born in *Pavlin* and was reputed to be extremely strong-willed and self-assured. She had to be, her husband, *Traiko*, had died relatively young and she was left to raise four young girls on her own. Her youngest daughter, *Stasa*, was my maternal grandmother. My mother liked being compared to *Baba Shimirova* and often told the story of the day a local Turk had approached her grandmother while she was working in one of her fields with her daughters at her side. She had seen the intruder out of the corner of her eye but did not look up and

proceeded to gather and cut, *shooma*, which consisted of *rooski*, small twigs and *lisah*, leaves, from a clump of trees that grew along one side of her fields. The leaves were used to feed the animals while the twigs were destined for her ravenous fireplace. The brash Turk had walked up to her hands outstretched and demanded that she hand over some of the bundles of twigs and leaves that she had *sobrano*, gathered. Smiling mischievously, he made a jocular remark about how *prepni*, beautiful, her daughters were. *Baba Shimirova* had had enough and subjected the startled interloper to a viscous attack with her mattock which she swung with violent intent and invariably found its mark. Her daughters, with the exception of *Baba Stasa*, who watched on, joined in the frenzied assault. The Turk, bleeding profusely from several deep wounds to his legs and arms, finally managed to scramble gingerly to his horse, mount and make a hasty escape.

However, it was not the end of the matter since the injured party, cut and bruised, dignity dented, was determined to teach his assailant a lesson. He therefore pressed charges and *Baba Shimirova* was summoned to attend a court hearing. Minor civil law cases in the *Lerinsko* region were heard in a court house located in *Lerin* while those standing trial in the *Kostursko* region traveled to the village of *Konomlaty* to a court house that the Turks called *Orman Kadie*. More serious criminal cases were dealt with in Bitola. The Ottomans divided the administration of their occupied Balkan territories into *beylerbeylics*, districts, each governed by a *Pasha* as the personal appointee of the Sultan. These governors in turn issued instructions to local Turkish officials who administered smaller regions known as *sanjuks* or *kazi*. Every *sanjuk* had a functioning judicial system with law courts, headed by panels of regional judges. It was said that on the day of her trial *Baba Kata Shimirova* confidently strode from her home *gotofva*, ready, to vigorously defend herself. She was not one to be intimidated by authority and entered the court house with her *glaa*, head, held high. Once inside she had deliberately stopped to stare directly into the blackened and swollen *ochi*, eyes, of her accuser, who also bore the *luzni*, scars, of their encounter on several parts of his *mrsha*, body, before acknowledging the judge who began proceedings in a stern tone and in Macedonian. Pointing in the direction at his injured countryman, seated at the front row bench of the small court house, he said, "*Cheno*, woman, look at the wounds, that you have inflicted on this man." My great maternal grandmother listened, outwardly unmoved but anger welling, surging, ready to explode. The judge continued, "*Zashcho*, Why, would you do such a thing?" The judge paused and *Baba Kata* took this as being her time to speak, she stood up, back straight, eyes forward and replied, "Honourable judge, if you had come to steal from me and make fun of me, insult me and my young girls, I would have done the same to you." She then proceeded to tell her story while standing defiantly and looking directly at the judge who began to smile knowingly. Subsequently, he took little time to pronounce his verdict. Addressing my great grandmother he simply said, "I agree with you *cheno*, woman, you had every right to do as you did." He continued, "You are free to go home." The Turkish judge's demeanour changed dramatically as he turned to the plaintiff

whom he also told to go home and on his way there pray to Almighty Allah and thank him that he was still alive. Such feistiness appears to have been somewhat of a family trait. *Baba Kata Shimirova's* brother, *Risto*, was also not to be riled or offended. He was a relatively wealthy villager with a large number of livestock and fields. Since he had only one child, a daughter, *Tsveta*, he had taken into his home, and raised, his future son-in-law. In time, the two married and subsequently went to live in Melbourne and leaving *Risto* alone for some time before they were able to persuade him to join them. However, this arrangement would be short-lived and *Risto* would soon return to *Krepeshina*, deeply offended by the comment ,made by his son-in-law, regarding the irony that once he had been a *zet na kurka* and now his father-in-law was living in a house that he owned.

**Footnotes:**

*Bitola is an ancient Macedonian town located at the foot of Mt Pelister. It was founded in the fourth century B.C. and had grown into an important trading centre during Roman times. Under Turkish occupation, Bitola, would emerge as a significant military and administrative outpost of the Ottoman Empire. Its importance was evidenced by the many European ambassadors to the Empire who were resident there. It was where the Ottoman authorities housed many of the official documents concerning the surrounding region, such as property deeds and tax records.*

The gathering *oblaksi*, clouds, of war soon hovered menacingly over Europe as my mother had predicted. This was an *opasno vreme*, dangerous time, and soon the European continent would be engulfed by the Second World War. Fortunately, we were spared some of the more oppressive manifestations of German occupation experienced by other ethnic and religious groups in other parts of the continent. Nevertheless, these were extremely anxious times. In 1936, General Ioannis Metaxas, the head of a Greek military junta, announced a dictatorship and suspended the Greek parliament which would subsequently not be reconvened for a decade. At the outbreak of the Second World War, General Metaxas and his political colleagues, were determined to maintain Greece's neutrality in the hope of avoiding the ravages of war and the distinct possibility of foreign occupation. However, his political successors subsequently sanctioned the presence of a British expeditionary force in Greece convinced that expansionist German and Italian foreign policy would inevitably involve the invasion of Greece irrespective of the Greek government adopting a non-aligned foreign policy. In October 1940, Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, Nazi Germany's Axis ally, with the support of Bulgarian military contingents, launched an invasion of Greece and Albania.

The initial enthusiasm exhibited by Italian and Bulgarian troops, spurred on by several early military successes, soon disintegrated as the Italian assault slowed and then came to a grinding halt in the face of heavy winter snowfalls. However, the subsequent deployment of German forces witnessed the rapid annexation of Crete and German battalions were soon sweeping through Greece at the head of their flagging Italian and Bulgarian allies. Greece fell under Axis occupation and significant numbers of Greek soldiers were disarmed and simply told to go home. Only small pockets of resistance remained as the country was occupied and effectively neutralised. The Axis powers proceeded to partition Greece into a number of zones: the Italians administered the Dodecanese and Ionian Islands, the Bulgarians eastern Macedonia and parts of Thrace while the Germans patrolled Greece's major cities, western Macedonia, territories along the Turkish border, the Aegean Islands, Crete and the remainder of Thrace. A small, highly-disciplined contingent of German soldiers, immaculately attired in their smart military uniforms, were regularly seen in *Maala*, patrolling on foot or riding military motor cycles. Their primary mission was to seek out English military personnel who had been dropped behind enemy lines and were operating covertly in the area and who, to avoid capture, often mingled among the villagers and adopted local names and dressed in village clothing. Not surprisingly, the question most commonly asked by German patrols was whether we had seen any Englishmen in the vicinity.

#### Footnotes:

*Captain P. H. Evans was a member of British Special Operations during the Second World War who had been dropped behind enemy lines during September 1943 and spent some time hiding among Macedonian village families. He would report to his superiors that most Macedonian villagers did not consider themselves Bulgarian, Serb, Croatian or Greek but as having a distinct Macedonian heritage. He noted that the majority of the villages adamantly maintained that Macedonia was where they were born, it was where they lived and that they spoke po nasi, in their own, distinct language.*

We experienced minimal harassment from German patrols who typically ignored us as we did them. However, there were some tense encounters. One of these involved my wife-to-be Letta, then a young girl and her grandmother. They were both fortunate to escape being killed when a German soldier patrolling through *Maala* spotted an Englishman lurking in the school grounds. In desperation, the *Englander* had shielded himself behind the two startled women and swung them from side to side while the German, only a few metres away, attempted to take aim, his rifle swaying with the movement ahead of him. Fortunately, the German soldier was not willing to shoot two innocent female villagers and his quarry managed to scramble to safety. Many years later, my wife's younger brother, *Yovan Peoff (John Paioff)*, who owned and operated a successful tailoring and menswear business in Kalgoorlie, befriended a British immigrant who was working in the mines of the well-known Western Australian gold mining town. During the course of a few drinks and a rather amiable conversation, the Englishman revealed that he had been in Macedonia *bionovreme*, during the war, and that he was fortunate to have saved his life, in a small village called *Maala*, by shielding himself behind a young girl and an older woman. My brother-in-law listened disbelieving and both men would shake their heads and remark that it was indeed a small world.

There were no Jewish families living in *Maala* since they tended to reside in the larger townships. During the Second World War, villagers who had visited *Lerin*, would talk of seeing Jews wearing a yellow star, the star of David, on their clothes. There were stories circulating of Jews being removed from their homes and taken away to unknown destinations and of Jewish families going into hiding in the mountains and forests to escape capture by the Germans. However, the rapid erosion of Greek resistance and the isolation of our villages and small townships, from the major centres of commerce and industry, largely spared us from coming into contact with the more horrific aspects of German occupation and we were generally ignorant of Nazi atrocities. Only later, did we learn that over fifty four thousand Jewish Greek citizens had been transported to Nazi death camps and brutally murdered. The great majority of them had been residents of *Solun*.

Ironically, during these terrible times, on a personal level, events seemed to have conspired in our favour. In 1941, much of Greece, now under German occupation, suffered from the ravages of a devastating *susha*, drought, which led to severe food shortages and widespread *glados*, hunger, and malnutrition. A prolonged period without *dosh*, rain, was followed by a severe winter and the subsequent increase in the requisitioning of ever-diminishing food supplies by our German occupiers. The villages of the mountains, where the land was less fertile and productive, also suffered badly as the flow of grain and other produce from low-lying rural communities slowed to a trickle. Villagers from the more bountiful lowlands also experienced some crop failures and low yields and in their anxiety resorted to hoarding food in the event that conditions did not improve in the near future and they themselves would go hungry. Increasing numbers of families from Greek cities and townships, with valuable personal possessions to barter began drifting into rural villages in search of food. Some of the more desperate even went

into the fields to scavenge for grain after the villagers had finished their harvest. These unfortunates wandered through the countryside despondent and embarrassed by their plight and willingly exchanged expensive items of clothing, jewellery and various household appliances for a few bags of grain. One of our neighbours became the proud owners of a near-new sewing machine which was exchanged for a few *oorke*, kilograms, of rye, barely enough to *pechi*, bake, a few loaves of bread.

Fortunately, our small family group was largely unaffected during this period of widespread gloom and despair. We worked hard in our few fields and the yields were relatively good. We also received additional grain from villagers whose flocks of sheep and goats my brothers and I shepherded for a large part of the year except during the winter months when snow covered the pasture lands and the livestock had to be kept warm within the *auri*, household stables. By selling and bartering our surplus grain we were able to begin purchasing livestock of our own. I distinctly recall journeying to *Bapchor*, a three to four hour walk from *Maala*, carrying with me a few bags of grain. The picturesque village, caressing the mountains sides and under the shadow of *Vicho*, was only accessible by walking along a number of well-worn pathways, guarded by forest, rocky outcrops and deep ravines. As I approached the village of my earliest family ancestors, the surrounding landscape came alive and I could hear the voices of the *ofchari*, shepherds, shouting out instructions to their obedient dogs and the chatter of villagers working on their *bresni nevi*, fields carved out of the sloping terrain. A large number of *maaski*, mules, popular in the mountain villages, since they ate less and could carry bigger loads on their sturdy backs than horses, came into view. As I walked on, I could see the stone and timber walls of the homes of the villagers, their rooftops of yellow, *slama*, straw, or grey, weathered slate and the white smoke billowing from the stone, *odzhaki*, chimneys. I remember standing for a few moments to marvel at the beauty of the village landscape.

I passed by the village church, *Sveti Giorgi*, and saw its much admired *kambana*, church bell, nestling within its bell tower. It was reputed to be one of the best specimens in the region and its resonate call could be heard in several of the nearby villages. The villagers of *Bapchor* had commissioned its manufacture in *Prelip* and it had been transported to *Bapchor* in an ox-drawn wagon until it could no longer be carried any further up the rugged mountain side. The villagers therefore constructed a sturdy wooden frame upon which they placed and then dragged the bell to their village church. Even after this had been done there remained the problem of how best to hoist the weighty bell. It was subsequently lifted into position by villagers using a pulley system. While the men strained on the pulley rope the women watched and prayed as the bell rose slowly ever upward and into its resting place.

Sadly, *Bapchor* now lies abandoned, an isolated place, barely accessible by road and where only occasionally local shepherds, herding their flocks, wander through the ruins. The church of *Sveti Giorgi* still stands defiant but is sadly in a poor state of disrepair. One can still see the weathered walls of the village school and if one looks closely the remnants of the crumbling

stone walls of some of village homes, hidden among the ever-encroaching undergrowth. *Sveti Giorgi* has been vandalised, its floor boards ripped up it is said by unwelcome visitors looking for *zlato*, gold, and items of value that might have been buried underneath. The holy icons have long been removed while its famed church bell now adorns the church in the village of *Zherveni*, in the *Kostursko* region, where the inhabitants had been forced to convert to Islam during Ottoman times. On the departure of *Zherveni's* Turkish occupiers, the village became the home of a large number of refugee families returning from abroad and *Bapchor's* majestic church bell was relocated there to symbolise the triumph of Christianity over Islam, of the Greeks over Turks.

I beamed with enormous inner pride as I headed home from my visit to *Bapchor*, those many years ago, trying hard to pick out the least difficult pathway home through forested areas, shrubs and rocky outcrops, while holding tightly onto a rope attached round the neck of a healthy bull calf which I had purchased from the maternal head of one of the village households, the *Paikovi*. The old lady and her youngest son lived in the family home, both despondent and anxious, stranded there by the cessation of sea passages out of Greece during the Second World War. Like many other Macedonian families, at the time, the men of the household, her husband and her two older sons, were working abroad.

Only months later, my mother sent me to the village of *Vishini*, also in the uplands, to buy a few lambs to add to our small, but growing, herd of livestock. At the time, *Vishini* was home to some eight hundred peasant farmers and well-known for its abundant supplies of water, well-irrigated fields and green, lush pasture lands. As our fortunes turned for the better we purchased a second bull calf which like the one I had previously purchased grew into a large and healthy beast that could be shackled to a plough. During this time we would often *ora*, plow, our grandfather's fields. He had experienced a crippling financial setback when invading German forces requisitioned his *vol*, ox, two young steers and a number of his sheep and goats. On our visits he would invariably *opita*, ask, what our mother was saying about him. Rather naively we would tell him, perhaps in hindsight rather too bluntly, that she did not like him.

We milked our small flock of ewes and nanny goats in our courtyard where we confined them within a crudely constructed *ograda*, enclosure. We milked by hand, in the early mornings and in the afternoons, except during the breeding season which was announced by the muffled sounds of mucus-covered, wobbly legged, new-born lambs and kids which fed eagerly on their mothers' milk. Traditionally, this was the time when older animals were sold to *kasapi*, butchers, who owned shops in the townships and visited the villages to purchase animals to *zakoli*, slaughter. The livestock owned by the villagers was identified by personally devised patterns of cuts and nicks that were usually made on the ears with *nozhichki*, scissors, or small *nozh*, knife. Our family's brand was a round nick on the bottom of the *l'evo*, left, ear and a L shape cut on the top of the *desno*, right, ear which was referred to as *za dorezzo i stolche*, a nick and stool. *Dedo Kole* would nick the bottom of the left ear and take a small slice from the right ear of his

livestock. This was known as *za dorezzo i chepeno*, nick and cut.

Villagers told time by listening to the crowing of the village roosters in the early mornings and evenings and by observing the *senkata*, shade, cast by the sun as it proceeded on its timeless journey across the sky during the day. The changing length of daylight and prevailing weather conditions distinguished the passage of the, *godishno vreme*, seasons, which in turn determined how we cared for our animals. During the winter months, livestock was typically housed in family stables with special attention given to the powerful and aggressive oxen which were secured to sturdy wooden poles deeply embedded into the straw-covered, dirt floor. We further guarded against their often erratic behaviour by placing their food within troughs arranged in such a manner that they could only put their heads through a narrow gap in order to eat.

During other times of the year, my brothers and I not only shepherded our own small herd of sheep and goats but also the animals of some of our neighbours. We would rise early in the mornings and milk them in the enclosures of their owners and then pour the *ml'eko*, milk, into *tenekina*, cans, with narrow necks to minimize spillage, which the owners would collect later. We would then herd the flocks to *mesta ubao za pasenje*, pasture lands, within the established *merra*, boundaries, of the village, careful at all times to not incite the angst of the *pollatsi*, village reeves, by ensuring that the animals in our charge did not stray into the fields and damage the life-sustaining crops. We would often pasture the sheep and goats separately since the goats were far more hardy and could survive on eating the twigs of deciduous shrubs found up the mountain sides whereas sheep have more sensitive stomachs and prefer to graze on the grasses of the meadow lands. In the late afternoons, we would herd the sheep and goats back into makeshift *straagi*, pens, and milk them a second time.

In late autumn, we were particularly wary, especially during the warmer days, when it was still possible to pasture livestock, of *vlksi*, wolves, hunting alone or in packs. Their natural prey was more difficult to find at this time of the year and *ofchari*, shepherds, needed to be alert and to rely on their vigilant guard dogs to help *brani*, protect, their vulnerable flocks. Our dogs were therefore prized family possessions and well-treated. The carrying of firearms was strictly regulated and a license to legally possess them was difficult to obtain. Without recourse to firearms, the task of repelling attacks by hungry wolves was hazardous and potentially life-threatening and we depended on our *kuchina*, dogs, to warn us of their presence. Wolves are skilled predators who generally launch attacks by quickly darting upon their prey, grabbing their victims by the throat and dragging the dying animals to their lairs. On occasions, our guard dogs would catch up with the ravenous and clinical killers and the result was often a fight to the death. One particular year, over a two month period, three of our best dogs were mauled to death by wolves. Village shepherds who observed that wolves usually seized their victims by the throat, placed collars ringed with sharp, protruding metal teeth, *okolu*, around, the necks of their family dogs. *Dedo Kole*, would constantly remind us to *rani*, feed, and groom our family dogs. He

would say that while we might fall asleep while watching over our flocks our dogs could be relied upon to be permanently on guard. He was particularly fond of one of his female hunting dogs and villagers setting out to stalk *zaek'je*, rabbits, and other game would often ask my grandfather if they could take his favourite dog along with them. We often commented, only among ourselves, partly in jest, that *Dedo Kole* seemed to care more for his dogs than he had for some members of his extended family. On one occasion I had the opportunity to observe the skills of grandfather's prized dog while shepherding a flock of goats. I had come across a villager who was hunting rabbits. When I asked whether he had any success he remarked that he had been completely out of luck despite spending many hours scouring the surrounding area. On that same day, my grandfather's dog, which had accompanied me, cornered three rabbits that were destined for our family's cooking pot.

Villagers were paranoid about being attacked by *besni*, rabid, animals. *Baba Lozana's* brother was bitten on the arm while trying to comfort one of his dogs which had been mauled by two hungry, mangy-looking wolves and was bleeding from a number of deep wounds inflicted by long, deadly fangs. The dog survived the attack but died within days. Shortly after, my great grandmother's brother began to suffer severe fits during which he would sweat profusely and shake uncontrollably. Knowing that he had, in all probability, contracted rabies and concerned that he might do harm to members of his family as his mental state deteriorated he called for my grandfather's help. *Dedo Kole* subsequently went to *Bapchor* where he was constantly on guard, ready to spring into action, at the first signs of a seizure when he would restrain his uncle by wrapping his hands around his back and holding on to his arms as tightly as he could. Sadly, there was no cure and within weeks my grandfather's uncle had died.

Villagers believed that infected animals contracted rabies by eating *vaprche*, birds, which had died while soaring high in the sky and then fell to the ground. There were many similar stories of villagers becoming ill and dying after having been attacked by a diseased animal. I also had first-hand experience with the deadly illness when shepherding a small flock of goats on pasture land, bordering a forested area, when a large dog, foaming at the mouth, *zabi*, fangs, exposed, growling menacingly, appeared from the cover of nearby shrubs and dashed toward me. I composed myself as best I could and managed to kill my attacker with my shepherd's staff. I was fortunate to have landed my initial blow across the animal's skull as it lunged at me and as my foe struggled to regain its composure I clubbed it repeatedly until it lay motionless on the ground nearby. When I told my mother about the incident she insisted that I visit a villager in *Lagen* who was said to be able to tell whether one had or had not contracted rabies. Following a brief examination, the elderly villager, a reputed gifted healer and the conjurer of a variety of home-made remedies, assured me that I had nothing to worry about. Thankfully his diagnosis proved correct. On another occasion one of my grandfather's dogs had contracted the dreaded disease and proceeded to run amok, killing a number of sheep during a brief, frenzied rampage before curling up under the cover of a clump of thick shrubs where it died a painful death. I

recall that *Dedo Kole* retrieved the decomposing carcass and set it alight in our family's courtyard, while our family dogs looked on. He told us that this would serve as a warning to the other dogs never to succumb to the disease.

## Chapter 12 : Tragedy of Civil War

*The jubilation and relief that was so widespread at the conclusion of the Second World War and the departure of German occupying forces in late 1944 was all too soon snuffed out by the onset of a deadly and divisive Greek Civil War. Once again our Macedonian homeland became a bloody battleground for a political and ideological struggle that Macedonian villagers and townsfolk knew little about but were unable to ignore. It was a time that pitted brother against brother and friend against friend.*

*During this murderous conflict many Macedonians - young and old - lost their lives fighting as partisans or as Greek army conscripts. These were dangerous times for even those not involved in the fighting, one false word or unintended action could mean harassment, imprisonment or execution.*

*In reality the Macedonian people were mere pawns in a power struggle staged by others who cared little or nothing for them. When the guns were silent and the bombs stopped falling Macedonian families were left to mourn their lost loved ones and to try to rebuild their shattered lives. Consequently, an increasing number, disillusioned and emotionally scarred, would leave their beloved homeland forever.*

The long-awaited defeat of Nazi Germany and its Axis allies announced what proved to be an all too brief period of, *mir*, peace. The immense relief that accompanied the end of the Second World War evaporated much too quickly with the onset of yet another bloody conflict that would tragically impact on Macedonian families.

The Greek Civil War, fought between royalist, pro-government and communist-inspired forces, would pit members of the same family, close relatives and fellow villagers and townspeople, against each other. It would be a time of needless death, widespread destruction and considerable heartbreak. For most Macedonian families this would be the final humiliation, the last straw, and many of them would subsequently seek to build their futures upon distant shores. Once again, the Macedonian people became immersed in a bitter struggle of political ideologies and international intrigues that few of them understood. They knew little of Marxist doctrine or of the complexities of Cold War politics but found themselves immersed in a conflict in which they would be forced to make great sacrifices but from which they would reap no reward, regardless of which of the combatants emerged victorious. Some Macedonians were drafted into the Greek army while others fought as members of the communist-led *partizani*, partisans, in hope that the downfall of the Greek government would lead to the creation of a Greek communist state which would acknowledge the existence of the Macedonian people and offer them autonomy.

In late 1946, atop *Vicho*, commanders of the larger Macedonian partisan bands huddled together in the *studen*, cold, night air to thrash out how best they could offer their lives for the Macedonian cause. The more *ispetcheny*, the older and wiser, among them wanted to join in the battle as independent brigades, as the forces of a *plaaninsca derjaavaa*, an independent confederation of the villages of the mountains. However, in the end, they reluctantly resorted to taking, what at that time seemed to be the more expedient option, that of fighting alongside the Greek communist forces. This would be an uneasy alliance bound together by a shared dislike for the Greek royalist government and its adherents but compromised by *vazhni*, important, cultural differences from which emerged an atmosphere of enmity and distrust. Thus the *Numeff* family, like so many others, would become embroiled in events from which they had no way of extricating itself.

I clearly remember the evening when *Maala's* town crier called upon all the older teenage boys to gather quickly *vo stret selo*, in the village square. Naturally, inquisitive villagers gathered to hear what seemed would be a significant announcement and within minutes they were milling around, talking in excited tones, asking whether anyone knew why the young men of the village had been asked to assemble. Animated chatter soon turned to muffled whispers before an eerie silence descended when a number of well-armed men emerged from the shadows. Their leader, an imposing figure, holding a rifle in one hand and with a hand gun hanging ominously from his broad leather *remen*, belt, stepped forward into the dimming light, planted his feet slightly apart

and in a *visok glas*, loud voice, demanded everyone's attention. In Greek, he ordered all of the older teenage boys, some twenty of us, go directly to our homes, gather our belongings and return to the village square within minutes. He made it abundantly clear that anyone refusing to do so or was tardy would be killed and that the possessions of their families would be confiscated. The villagers were in no position to argue and the young men, including myself, did as we were told. There followed hasty and tearful farewells, before we, the most recent recruits to the partisan cause, were marched off carrying with us only a few clothes and pieces of dry rye bread that we had quickly tucked into our pockets.

As we walked toward our unknown destination we were joined by other similarly disheveled young men from other villages. I recall that we *pomenami*, passed, through several villages on the way to *Precopana*, a village of some one hundred households where I was handed an old, strapless English-made rifle but no bullets. Obviously, our new comrades-in-arms harboured reservations about the level of commitment of their newest recruits to Marxist ideology and to the partisan cause. Following a short rest, we trooped through *Bapchor*, on our way to brigade headquarters located along a hillside overlooking the village of *Toorye*, another of the villages of the mountains known for its independent spirit and for being proudly Macedonian. This would be our base camp for the next two weeks and where, along with my fellow recruits, I spent much of my time scanning the terrain below looking out for royalist Greek, *vojniki*, soldiers. During this time we commenced our military training that consisted almost entirely of being instructed on how to load and fire our antiquated rifles. Clearly, we would have to learn the art of warfare under enemy fire. It was autumn and once the sun's warming rays had left the sky it became extremely cold and I was thankful that I had brought a few blankets and my overcoat to keep out the chill as we slept behind clumps of trees or shrubs which served as windbreaks.

Occasionally, we were ordered to conduct night raids on nearby villages in search of tobacco, bread, cheese and livestock. It was something I really disliked doing since it was not generally the case that the villagers were unsympathetic to the partisans but that they simply had so little to spare. As the war dragged on demands placed upon villagers and townsfolk for food and other provisions intensified and to add to their woes Greek royalist soldiers would march into these same communities, by day, accuse the inhabitants of assisting the partisans and demand food and other supplies. During their visits they would regularly harass suspected partisan sympathisers many of whom were imprisoned, beaten and tortured. This was a time of unrelenting misery, a vicious cycle of accusations and acts of oppression, by both sides, that continued unabated. One could imagine the soul-destroying anxiety associated with family members volunteering or being forced to join the partisan cause while others were being unwillingly conscripted into the royalist Greek army.

Camping atop our high, desolate mountainous position I tried hard to submerge my innermost thoughts and fears and distracted myself, for a time, by making a strap for my rifle with the leather from my *remen*, belt, which I *posechi*, cut, longwise into two equal halves. Then came the day we were told, by our Greek partisan commanders, that we would soon engage royalist troops who had been observed moving toward our lofty vantage point. These were tense moments that seemed to last an eternity. My comrades and I were hungry, poorly trained, inadequately armed and very afraid. Only now were we each given a paltry ration of bullets. Fortunately, it turned out to be a small skirmish as the enemy Greek regiment opted to move around our position and out of firing range.

Not long after my brigade was on the move again and preparing to make a dangerous crossing of a swiftly-flowing river bloated by a number of torrential downpours. We entered the cold, surging waters with hands linked to form a human chain. Each of us clung desperately to the soldier in front while we trailed our pack horses that led the way. The rapid current pushed against our uniforms and although exhausted there was no time to rest since on reaching the opposite river bank we came under fire from a large force of royalist Greek soldiers, supported by British air cover. The ensuing battle was fierce as we were attacked on the ground and from the air. We were outnumbered and outgunned and within a short time a number of my comrades lay dead while others were wounded or captured. I cannot forget the lifeless, mutilated bodies lying scattered upon the bloody battleground. One of them was a former school friend who had been cut down by a volley of bullets *blizu*, near, where I had stood. He had been shot through the temple and had fallen onto his back, his eyes absently staring up at the dark, rain-shedding clouds above. Time seemed to stand still as drops of rain cascaded from his eye sockets giving the illusion that he was crying. He was my friend, I knew his family and tears began to well in my own eyes. Then shaken from a temporary malaise, I remember scurrying desperately in retreat amid a volley of enemy bullets. My mind raced and I was overwhelmed by thoughts of my impending death as I dived headlong into a patch of long, *treva*, grass, where I lay awhile before rising and making a dash for a nearby grove of *kosteni*, chestnut, grove. Here I knelt down to thank the good Lord that I was still alive. In the morning, cold, hungry and disoriented survivors began regrouping, each with a story to tell of their miraculous survival. While our hearts were weighed down by the loss of our friends, our Greek unit commanders spoke only of the ultimate sacrifice made for the cause by those who had been killed and captured. One of them recounted, with great pride, how one of our fellow partisans, who had been taken prisoner, had grabbed a soldier's side arm and killed three of the enemy before he was shot dead. The royalist soldiers had retaliated by shooting all of their partisan captives.

Over the passing months, I developed a dark, nagging premonition that my greatest *opas*, danger, did not come from facing the enemy in battle but from friendly fire, discharged by one of our ideologically-inspired Greek commanders. I had a number of indications that one of my

commanding officers had a particular dislike for me and I reasoned that this did not bode well for my long-term survival. My suspicions were heightened when he ordered me to cross a *drevn most*, wooden bridge, which straddled a flooded river and was regularly patrolled by royalist army soldiers, with the flippant comment that if I was shot my company would know not to cross the river by walking over the bridge but would look for an alternate route. Our mission had been to lay land mines on the other side of the river on a road that was frequently used by the enemy to transport soldiers, supplies and ammunition. I knew at that moment that my life was expendable but when I tried to voice my reservations, the officer pulled out his revolver from his leather holster, held it to my head and barked out that if I disobeyed his order he would shoot me right then and there. Angry, but alert, nerves tingling, I crept under cover of trees and shrubs, toward the bridge and to my enormous relief found it unguarded and signalled my company to follow. The terrain on the other side of the river rose steeply upward and we found ourselves crammed along the edge of a *breg*, cliff, and the river bank. Small pebbles began falling gently down upon us and some of us wondered whether these were being disturbed by royalist soldiers patrolling above our position or it was a warning from an enemy sentry who was trying to tell us that we had been seen and to turn back. This would not be too surprising since many of the conscripted royalist soldiers found themselves reluctantly fighting against family members and close friends who were partisans. Our *inadzha*, headstrong, commander, however, *reshi*, decided, with typical bravado, that the rubble tumbling down upon us was being dislodged by shepherds walking along the edge of the cliff with their flocks and he ordered our company to begin to climb the cliff face. Suddenly, the night sky was punctuated with flashes of rifle fire as we came under heavy enemy attack. Amid the confusion, in a rare moment of clarity, I knew what I had to do if I was fortunate to survive this attack. Thoroughly disillusioned I decided to desert.

My whole family were staunch Macedonians and craved an independent homeland but it appeared to me that my pride in my heritage and ancestry made me a target in the eyes of one of my bigoted Greek commanding officers. It had become acutely obvious that he regarded Macedonian partisans as “cannon fodder”, essential to achieving victory but ultimately of having little or no other value. Having made such a momentous decision, my initial resolve quickly diminished but although overwhelmed by nagging doubts I did not turn back. Tired, hungry and afraid, I keep jogging toward the Albanian border until I came to an abrupt halt. There in front of me, bent over, hands cupped, drinking from a fountain fed by an underground *isvor*, spring, was a soldier dressed in the uniform of the Greek royalist forces. His rifle lay on the ground nearby. He had not heard my approach and when he looked up he was clearly shaken but made no attempt to retrieve his weapon but asked in a stuttering voice whether I was a Greek army sniper. His *ochi*, eyes, widened and body tensed when I told him that I was a partisan. He got slowly to his feet but remained motionless as he weighed up his options. I was quick to assure him that he was safe, that I was a deserter. Roles now reversed we walked into a royalist Greek army camp where I was imprisoned within a stockade before being interrogated.

To my great surprise I was told that I could go home with the warning never to rejoin any partisan band. There were dangerous times ahead since partisans were active in the mountains above *Maala* and as a deserter my capture would have meant certain death. Royalist Greek forces had set up a patrol centre in the village to screen anyone travelling to *Lerin* and this naturally became a partisan target. I therefore had to hide in the homes of relatives in *Krephesina* where each week my mother would discretely visit me to bring food and items of clothing. She had been told that local partisans had threatened to confiscate some of our family livestock in reprisal for my action but that she was pleading ignorance and it helped greatly that the family were well-known as patriotic Macedonians. The scarcity of food supplies meant that partisan bands were particularly severe on those whom they considered royalist sympathisers and in their eyes I might now have fitted that description.

Although I had hoped otherwise, my soldiering days were not over I soon found myself conscripted into the Greek army since the Greek government required that all twenty year olds complete two years of military service. I was subsequently sent to *Volos*, a town near Athens, where new recruits undertook three months of military training before being attached to fighting battalions. I had arrived later than my fellow draftees and within a week found myself on board an army transport barge headed for Corinth, built only kilometres from the ruins of the ancient city state. From there we were taken to *Solun* aboard a ship where we were crammed alongside military horses and donkeys and a large arsenal of armaments. In *Solun* we were bundled onto the back of a convoy of army lorries destined for the battlefield where partisan forces had established themselves in well-concealed hill side vantage points within trenches covered with branches and leaves and layered with dirt.

During one particularly fierce skirmish in which our battalion lost at least a dozen soldiers we captured a number of partisan fighters. When the fighting ended my fellow soldiers removed their helmets, unbuttoned their jackets and stretched out on the grass-covered ground, exhausted and soaked in perspiration. They were glad to be alive but angry over the loss of their companions and some thirsted for revenge. The situation became particularly tense when three partisan prisoners, stripped to the waist and barefooted, were escorted at rifle point into our campsite. These young men were the innocent victims of a war, when few, but the extremists on either side, truly believed was worth fighting. With bowed heads, shaking with fear, they walked through a growing throng of soldiers, some of whom swore, hit and kicked them as they were being shoved forward. To my surprise I knew one of them, a certain *Mito*, a villager from *Kortori*. I approached the cowering youngster and pulled him aside. He did not immediately know who I was but when I told him my name he nodded in recognition. He was so shaken that he could neither eat the scraps of food I offered him or light the cigarette I pressed into his trembling hand. Subsequently, *Mito* was spared, at least for the time being, by the fact that he was known to *Yanis Vellios*, the Greek name that had been assigned to me.

A number of my company, openly expressed their distain at my intervention on *Mito's* behalf but others were genuinely concerned that if *Mito* should escape or cause any disturbance that I would be held responsible and be severely dealt with. I had a mounting suspicion that a few of the more fanatical members of unit were conspiring to do *Mito* harm and to try to ensure his safety I requested to see our commanding officer, a three-star general, who would later serve with distinction as a Greek parliamentarian. The general beckoned me into his headquarters, a canvas tent, full of *karti*, maps, and piles of papers precariously balanced upon old wooden boxes and lying scattered on the floor. He was absorbed in poring over a tattered map. As he looked up I saluted. "Yanis Vellios, isn't it?" he said. "Yes, General, thank you for seeing me." I responded. He asked what it was that I wanted to see him about and I replied, "General, we have a captive in our camp who is known to me and I have grave fears for his safety. I am more than happy to vouch for him." I assured him that *Mito* was willing to join our unit and fight along side me. As a result *Mito* was handed an ill-fitting uniform and ordered to transport , on horseback, military supplies to the front line.

I soon had a further reason to be grateful to the General for intervening on my behalf. It was the day, when to my disbelief I saw my younger brother, *Sotir*, a mere boy, at the battle front and was told that he had been seconded as a civilian stretcher bearer to help carry away the dead and wounded. Concerned for my younger brother's safety I requested another meeting with the General and was again escorted to his headquarters where I told him how my mother and my younger brothers had been evicted from our family home and that my father and older brother were working in Australia. I explained that my mother desperately needed *Sotir's* help to tend our fields and pasture our animals. The General subsequently sent orders that my younger brother be permitted to return home.

Royalist Greek forces, with superior numbers and benefitting from air cover provided by British and American fighter planes, eventually forced the partisans to retreat from the region and my division was reassigned to an area near *Vicho*, close to my ancestral home of *Bapchor*, which was one of the major headquarters of the partisan cause. It was here that I was wounded. My bren gun had jammed just as partisan fighters had come upon us. Within seconds of scrambling away my position was destroyed by exploding bazooka shells. I sustained shrapnel wounds to my arms and eyes while *Mito* was wounded in the back. I subsequently received medical treatment at a mobile army hospital and was then placed aboard a military truck destined for *Lerin*. On the way, the driver passed through *Maala* where I glimpsed a villager walking along the road side. I asked the driver to stop and I revealed myself to him. It was my *Striko*, uncle, *Vasil* who was concerned when he saw my bandages but I reassured him that my *rani*, wounds, were superficial and that I was expected to make a full recovery. I asked him to tell my mother not to worry. I eventually found myself in Athens and in the care of an eye specialist who recommended that I be granted three months leave from active service to recuperate. However, when my eyes did not heal as quickly they should have, my doctor signed my discharge papers.

*Mito*, too, recovered from his wounds and he and his family would, at war's end, begin a new life in South Australia. Many years later our youngest daughter, *Fania*, Feni, who had accompanied Letta and I on a rare holiday to the eastern states, was taken aback, when our train arrived at Adelaide's railway station, by the sight of a grown man running toward me, bending down and kissing my shoes. Letta sat down with our youngest daughter on one of the railway platform benches and recounted *Mito's* story while the two of us hugged and reminisced about old times.

In the confusion of the Greek Civil War whether one lived or died was often a matter of good or bad fortune. My unit in pursuit of partisans raided a small village in the *Kostursko* region with orders to storm into the homes of the villagers and flush out the enemy. On entering one of the houses I glimpsed a young woman with a rifle resting by her side and wearing a cap with the initials *D.M.S.E.* which clearly indicated that she was a member of the Democratic Army of Greece, a communist guerilla fighter, a partisan. Speaking *po nashi* I instructed her to hide her weapon and cap among the woodpile outside and to mingle with the women of the household until my companions had passed through. The mood of the room changed dramatically as the women whispered among themselves that he is one of us, a Macedonian. The young female partisan's life had been spared, at least on this occasion. This was a time of heightened suspicion and unimaginable suffering when villagers and townsfolk were mere pawns in a deadly conflict that the vast majority of them did not want to be involved. In an ill-conceived partisan offensive near *Lerin*, some eight hundred of their number were captured while in full retreat. Their dark coloured uniforms, clearly visible against the white snow-covered landscape, had help to pinpoint their whereabouts. They were soon rounded up and forced to dig a long shallow ditch in which they were executed and buried by their royalist army captors. Often the bodies of the fallen were left to the elements and during this time, it was not unusual for villagers going about their daily lives to come across the gruesome sight of bullet ridden, decomposing bodies which had been partially consumed by wolves and other scavengers.

When a number of partisan fighters were caught hiding in the *Peoff* family stables in *Maala*, *Tanas Peoff*, the family patriarch, was accused of being a partisan collaborator and escorted to a dark, dingy, overcrowded prison cell, where many innocent men were subjected to torture and all kinds of degradation. During his internment, *Tanas Peoff*, would sit in the murky gloom of his prison cell and think of times past when, on his first sojourn abroad, those many years ago, he had worked laying rail tracks and wooden sleepers in America. He recalled the day when a group of railway engineers, carrying with them an array of sophisticated surveying equipment, visited the work-site. They were there to chart the most expedient route for the railway to follow across difficult terrain and walked here and pointed there while making measurements that were meticulously recorded in impressive leather-bound notebooks. However, for all this, the visiting experts could not seem to agree. *Tanas Peoff* recollected having asked his work-gang foreman what they were trying to do and when told he observed the lay of the land that stretched before him and pointed out the most appropriate route for the railway line to follow.

When his foreman relayed *Tanas's* observations, the engineers huddled together, chattered animatedly and subsequently agreed with his suggestion.

There in his stark cell other memories came flooding back to him. He thought about how in the early 1920s, accompanied by his eldest son, *Kole*, he had ventured once again to America. There, father and son had found employment with an Oregon timber-mill company which had constructed several small railroads linking its tree-felling sites with lumber mills where the timber was processed and dressed into a variety of lengths and thicknesses. He recalled the time his son, a camp cook, had been appointed caretaker of one of the Company's mills during a strike staged by mill workers in the hope of achieving better wages and improved working conditions. The workers were also aggrieved over the Company policy of transporting them in open railway carriages to their work-sites during cold early mornings so that they could begin working but not collecting them in the evenings when they had to walk some distance back to their sparse lodgings.

One particularly bitterly cold winter when *snek*, snow, blanketed the landscape, a major disagreement erupted between the Company's owners and their employees which soon escalated into a full-scale industrial dispute. Unfortunately, for the striking workers the Company which had large inventories of milled timber, ceased its operations and cynically retrenched its employees who for the following three months found it difficult to survive financially without their regular pay packets. *Tanas Peoff* would smile to himself as he remembered that during this time good fortune had smiled upon his son *Kole* who had been left behind to act as the mill-site caretaker, surrounded by plentiful supplies of food and drink stored within the campsite kitchen. His son's splendid isolation was only temporarily disrupted by hunters passing through the now silent mill-site, tracking cougars which they hunted for their skins or the occasional large, ambling, black *mechki*, bears, rummaging outside in search of food scraps.

After a time, things returned to normal, the workers were given back their jobs, received a small pay rise and in an added conciliatory gesture were issued with new mattresses. The Company even agreed to transport their employees to and from their work-sites. *Kole Peoff's* days as a recluse, spending his time, doing little, relaxing, seating in the plush leather sofa belonging to the Company site manager, were over. Father and son had then moved to Chicago where they worked with a number of fellow *selski*, among them *Spiro Ilioff*, from *Krespehina*, as short order cooks in a restaurant catering for a steady clientele of office workers and factory labourers. The servings were generous with plates stacked high with eggs: scrambled, poached, sunny-side up or over-easy, and with slices of thick bacon, steak and chips which were washed down with strong, pipping hot coffee. Ironically, the two of them rarely ate their own cooking preferring instead to visit *Dedo Racho*, a Bulgarian friend, who lived nearby, who would prepare a number of exotic dishes, including their favourite roasted sheep heads which he jokingly referred to as "dog heads". The old man would

serve these upon his old, wooden kitchen table with piping hot bowls of bean soup, which they ate with hot peppers, freshly pickled onions and crusty bread. Thoughts came to *Tanas Peoff* of the time he spent in the forests of Western Australia and of his young son who had lost his life there and whom he had left behind buried in a lonely, *grop bes pametnik*, unmarked grave.

Tragically, *Tanas Peoff*, respected for his worldly wisdom and good sense, would not return home but died in prison, his tired and ailing body, finally succumbing to deprivation and the frequent beatings inflicted by his jailers. My wife's grandfather, *Kosta Peoff*, *Tanas's* brother, would also be detained on several occasions as a political prisoner during the Greek Civil War. On the first occasion he had been wrongly accused, along with a number of other villagers, of laying land mines along a road frequently travelled by royalist army vehicles carrying arms and military equipment. Subsequently, he was charged with providing sanctuary to two partisans, both of whom were relatives. He was eventually released but was a mere shadow of his former self and extremely bitter. His freedom was only secured after the family agreed to pay a financially crippling ransom to the Greek authorities. Even my wife, Letta, then a young girl, spent time in *Lerin's* prison charged with supplying food to partisan fighters. She recalled this as an anxious time, but in hindsight and with some amusement, would tell how newly-arrived prisoners to the dingy, primitive cell housing female detainees, would invariably have to sleep on the dirt floor nearest the latrine can.

Tragedy and heartache were common during these times. *Tanas's* eldest son, *Kole*, who had been working abroad in Western Australia had saved sufficient funds to sponsor his younger brother *Risto* to join him. However, *Kole* would experience unexpected delays in arranging the passports and sea passages for his son, *Sotir* and his cousin *Stoian*. In the meantime, both men would be consumed by the Civil War, killed fighting as partisans in that violent conflict which reaped such a bountiful harvest of human lives and left in its wake only misery and destruction. In the ensuing chaos, the widow of *Dedo Kole's* brother, *Sotir*, was accused, by local partisans, of having had *predade*, betrayed, one of their young comrades. They insisted that she had seen the young man hiding in his family's stables and had unwisely told other villagers. This was a time of heightened suspicions, changing allegiances and general distrust when everything was in a continual state of flux. It was when, *grkomani*, Macedonian pro-Greek informers, were active in endearing themselves to the Greek authorities. A number of well-armed police officers and soldiers had descended on the home of the parents of the young partisan and threatened his mother that they would set ablaze the family stables unless her son surrendered. Frightened and hopeful that her co-operation would help spare her son's life his mother had called to him to come out and the young man tentatively crawled from of his hiding place. He was immediately arrested and his hands, that now unsuccessfully reached out to touch those of his grieving mother, were bound ever-more tightly and the rope bit deeper into his *kozha*, skin. We subsequently learned that the young partisan had been shot dead by a Greek Orthodox

priest. The young man was reputedly a fine singer and his guards, who would often ask him to sing for them, had taken pity on him and openly discussed the possibility of releasing him. The priest, a zealot, dressed in a long, black, flowing robe with his unkempt beard drooping all the way down to his well-rounded girth, regularly visited the army barracks to conduct religious services. He had been angered by the compassion that was being directed toward the prisoner and demanded that he be brought before him in the exercise yard. The young recruits, who had reluctantly done as they had been told, looked on in disbelief as the priest took a revolver from under his cassock and without any hesitation shot dead their prisoner. Not surprisingly, partisan bands were merciless in their dealings with more fanatical Greek Orthodox priests and it was not unusual for villagers to stumble upon their black-robed, mutilated bodies dangling from branches of trees or lying life-less within church grounds. Loyalist village mayors and Greek collaborators were also targeted and killed or taken to partisan bases, like *Bapchor*, from where few enemy prisoners ever returned. *Sotir's* widow's fate was sealed when the news of the young man's execution spread throughout the surrounding villages. Within days, a group of partisans came to the village at nightfall and dragged the poor woman screaming from her home. There was no trial to adjudicate on her guilt or innocence and she was found hanging upside down from a tree on the outskirts of *Krepeshina*.

One of *Dedo Giorgi Numeff's* four brothers, *Risto*, had two sons, *Stoian* and *Tome*. The latter, in particular was a staunch supporter of the partisans, but being too old to fight he assisted the cause by delivering food and equipment to their well-concealed hideouts and by organising safe houses. His subversive activities naturally attracted the attention of the Greek authorities and he was often harassed and threaten. Consequently, *Tome* was forced to flee the village and he and a young companion went into hiding near *Pavlin* where they built a small warming fire behind a large boulder to keep out the winter chill. However, they were spotted there by loyalist villagers, who informed local police and the two fugitives were soon surrounded. When the arresting police officers ordered them to put down their weapons and surrender, the younger man, athletic and daring, took his chance and escaped by scurrying off into the nearby forest leaving *Tome*, cold and exhausted, to hold his ground and stoically accept his fate. He expected no clemency and was killed and his body thrown onto the back of a cart and taken to *Lerin*. *Tome Numeff's* own two sons, *Pavle* and *Traiko*, were also partisans, *Pavle* died in battle while *Traiko* escaped across the border to Yugoslavia where many years later he was finally reunited with his long-suffering mother.

*Kole Traindoff*, of *Maala* was the husband of *Baba Velika*, my mother's sister. He was constantly being threatened and harassed, during this time, by a group of *prosfigi* living in the village. He feared for his life and that of his wife and young family of five girls and a son. He wanted to leave the village and join his brother *Jovan* and sister-in-law, *Mara*, who were living in New York but found it difficult to obtain the necessary immigration permits due to the U.S. Congress legislating more exclusionary immigration laws. He would rarely venture outside his home despite the need to tend to his fields and shepherd his livestock. He subsequently expressed his

fears to his *barzarnk*, brother-in-law, *Mitre Kitin*, who at the time was completing his compulsory two-year term of military service. Subsequently, *Dedo Mitre*, requested *ardya*, leave, under the pretext that he needed time to help plough his family fields in *Krepeshina*. With his military-issue rifle in hand he agreed to watch over *Kole* while he worked his fields and pastured his flocks. One day, hidden among a cluster of trees, he watched *Kole* prepare to work on one of his fields. He had just finished harnessing a wooden plough to the family oxen when two *prosfigi* approached and beckoned him to go with them into nearby bushes. When he refused they began manhandling him. *Dedo Mitre Kitin*, his temper well and truly surging within, emerged from his hideaway brandishing his rifle and loudly shouted in Greek that he would kill the two ruffians right where they stood. Alarmed the *posfigi* had turned and quickly ran away. Nevertheless, the situation would continue to remain far too dangerous for *Kole Traindoff* to stay in the village and he and his family subsequently emigrated to Toronto, Canada.

#### Footnotes:

*Dedo Kuzo Ilioff and Baba Stasa subsequently moved from Krepeshina to live in the abandoned Traindoff home in Maala. Dedo Kuzo's house in Krepeshina is now a mere outer shell but it continues to defy the rain, snow, heat and invasive undergrowth. Surprisingly, still growing alongside the decaying outer walls is the very krusha, pear tree, that Dedo Kuzo planted when he built the house those many years ago.*

*Many Macedonians experienced harassment under Greek rule. In the 1930s, Tanas Kitin, Vuicho Mitre Kitin's uncle, was in such fear for his life that he deserted his wife and family and fled. It would be many years later that the family learned that he had settled in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Vuicho Mitre Kitin also spent time in jail as a political prisoner. Indeed, he was sentenced for sto i edna, one hundred and one years, for life, and was only released after the family paid a substantial fine.*

*Vuicho Mitre Kitin journeyed to Australia in 1949 in rather unusual circumstances. Determined to make a rapid and clandestine departure he had enlisted the assistance of the Topalis family, relations, who operated a travel agency in Lerin and who frequently prepared immigration papers and negotiated sea passages for villagers and townsfolk wanting to travel abroad. Instead of boarding a passenger liner sailing from the Athenian port of Pireaus, where the scrutiny of those leaving Greece was particularly thorough, Dedo Mitre departed by aeroplane headed for Cairo. He stayed in the Egyptian capital for a few weeks before boarding the "Cyrenia", a passenger liner carrying European immigrants to Australia.*

*On his arrival in Western Australia, Vuicho Mitre worked as a sleeper cutter and then for a time in a Boyup Brook flax mill, alongside my father and brother and one of his life-long friends, his numko, Tanas Ilioff, from Krepeshina. On 12 May 1955, Vuicho Mitre was joined by his wife Dosta and their children, Fania, Boris (Basil), Christine and Vicky. Their youngest son, John, was born in Western Australia. The whole family, including Vuicho Mitre's father and mother, subsequently moved to Perth where Vuicho Mitre found employment with Cullity Timber at the Company's Victoria Park premises. He would frequently ride his bicycle over the Causeway to get to work or catch a train at the Claisebrook railway station where he recalled being regularly harassed for cigarettes and a few coins by the homeless, those sleeping rough, who frequented the area. He then went to work with the Water Board, now the Water Corporation, alongside a number of his fellow selski, including his old friend Tanas Iloff. His work-gang would wade knee high in reeds clearing local snake-infested swamps and waterways. He briefly worked at Diamond Poultry, where again many Macedonians were employed and where he spent his days slaughtering chickens, before he resumed working for the Water Board before retiring.*

Even the very young were unable to *pobegni*, escape, the ravages of Greece's Civil War and lived in constant, *opas*, danger, in villages and towns where royalist troops and partisans engaged in numerous deadly encounters. My younger brother *Noume*, on one occasion, found himself caught in the middle of a mortar attack, launched by royalist troops, while he was shepherding the family livestock. The shells killed one of our goats which had been grazing only a few metres away from where my brother stood and he was forced to jump into a *padinka*, hollow, in the ground, to seek shelter. He recalled listening nervously for incoming shells which he said sounded like the cooing of, *gulapi*, pigeons, as they fizzed through the air. Soon he found himself surrounded by a small detachment of stern-looking soldiers, who reasoned that he might be a partisan, or at least a collaborator, involved in distributing supplies to the enemy. *Noume* was not one to be easily overawed and complained bitterly to the officer-in-charge that his soldiers had nearly killed him. When openly accused of being a partisan sympathiser he defiantly challenged the commanding officer to find proof of any footprints in the snow that would indicate the presence of partisans whom he was supposedly there to meet. On another occasion, *Noume* was suspected of laying explosives along the road leading to the village of *Kotori* and was arrested. He had been walking along the said road when he was passed by a military jeep carrying a number of Greek soldiers. Shortly after, he had heard a loud bang and saw that the jeep had blown one of its tyres. The soldiers, reasoning that they had run over some deadly device, turned back, seized my brother, and took him to *Lerin* where he was interrogated. While quizzing him about his movements, one of the officers offered to give *Noume* a few confectionaries if he co-operated. *Noume*, bemused at the suggestion that he could be bribed with sweets, like a small boy, had smiled, a gesture that was interpreted as a sign of disrespect. He subsequently received a severe beating with his own *kerlok*, shepherd's staff, which he had been carrying. He was only released due to the intervention of *Maala's* mayor who willingly vouched for his good character.

Young children witnessed the enormous sadness and anguish as *novini*, news, of the death of a loved one, friend or *komshia*, neighbour, filtered into the households of the villagers and townsfolk. The anxiety of the adults were transmitted unwittingly, but no less tellingly, to the young. Indeed, young children were among the tragic civilian casualties of war, killed by stray bullets, by bombing raids or by treading on unexploded land mines. Concern over the safety of the young, caught up in battle zones, led to a proposal to evacuate them to various safe havens. This was originally mooted at a conference of young partisan sympathisers living in Belgrade and although the Greek Communist leadership was generally lukewarm to the plan, the idea appealed to General *Markos Vafiadis*, the commander of anti-royalist forces, operating in the *Lerinsko* region and around *Kostur* and *Voden* and successful negotiations were conducted through the International Red Cross. As a counter measure, the Greek government pursued a policy referred to as *pedomazoma*, which involved the removal of Macedonian children to the island of *Leros* where they were declared wards of Greece's

German-born queen, Fredericka of Hanover, and were required to attend Greek schools where they were subjected to an intensive program of hellenisation

A voluntary, child evacuation strategy, that involved some 28 000 children, was subsequently devised. The plan, beginning in the spring of 1948, was to relocate children, aged two to fourteen, especially those from the villages of the *planina*, mountains, where the fighting was most fierce and village communities were increasingly subjected to aerial bombing attacks, to European eastern bloc countries such as Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the various republics of the Soviet Union and East Germany. Partisan forces had vowed that the mountains would be defended to the bitter end and that much, *krf*, blood, would be spilled. Clearly, the children needed to be protected by being sent to live, if only temporarily, within ideologically sympathetic socialist regimes. Many grief-stricken mothers reluctantly allowed their children to be taken from them but occasionally parents refused to be parted from their children declaring that given that death was to be their fate they would rather all die *zaedno*, together. Exhausted and hungry, evacuated children had to *bara*, walk, a considerable distance daily along rugged terrain, usually by moonlight, to avoid detection. They tramped ever-onward toward the Greek-Yugoslav border while watched over by surrogate mothers, often the widows of partisan fighters, who were each entrusted with safeguarding up to twenty youngsters. These Macedonian children, taken from their homes, would become known as *detsa begultsi*, the children who had left behind their families and homes. On crossing the Greek border they were transported, usually by train, to hostels and dormitories located in Eastern bloc host countries where they were fed, clothed, educated and generally well-treated. Sadly, during the final days of the Civil War, the partisans, desperate to enlist new recruits, began conscripting *begultsi*, especially young boys, aged over fifteen. Inexperienced and poorly trained and equipped, many of them would be killed in *borbi*, battles, with royalist Greek forces during the last months of that tragic conflict.

When the Civil War finally ended, it was difficult for *begultsi* to return to their parents since the so called "Iron Curtain" had descended over Europe and travel out of Soviet bloc countries became severely restricted. It was only through the intervention of the International Red Cross that *begultsi* were permitted to be reunited with their parents, many of whom had already emigrated to Canada, the United States and Australia. Children, with parents still living in Greece, found it especially difficult to return home, particularly those from families that had supported the partisan cause and continued to reject hellenisation. Some of the younger children, returning home felt like strangers and found it difficult to bond with their biological parents.

Personal tragedies did not end with the cessation of armed conflict, the Greek Civil War still had the propensity to harvest innocent lives even after it had officially ended. My mother's brother, *Vasil Ilioff*, then in his early forties and the father of five young boys, was tragically killed, along with his relative *Mitre Dimoff*, when the two men had come across an unexploded land

mine on the outskirts of *Bapchor*. The device had gone off while they had been handling it. *Dedo Vasil Iloff* died instantly from a large stomach wound while *Mitre*, who had been injured less severely, slowly bled to death as he attempted to *lazi*, crawl, away to seek help. There were many such live explosives buried in the ground in the hillsides and valleys which had not long before been the scene of fierce fighting. By a strange twist of fate, one of *Vasil's* son, *Sotir*, would marry *Mitre Dimoff's* sister, who along with *Vasil's* widow and children, immigrated to Toronto, Canada. Similar tragedies had also occurred after the First World War when unexploded, partially buried munitions, left behind by foreign troops, predominantly the French, were dug up by villagers some of whom attempted to recycle the metal in order to fashion ploughs, horseshoes, mattocks and *lopati*, shovels and were killed.

The Greek Civil War was full of irony. My brother *Tanas* was known for his independence of spirit, a petulance for thinking for himself and being less constrained by the unbending traditions of the highly regulated and structured society in which he was raised. As the eldest son, he had joined my father in Western Australia and the two of them had worked together as sleeper cutters and clearance workers, at a flax mill in Boyup Brook and on several tobacco plantations in Manjimup. *Tanas* experienced mixed emotions during the Second World War from which he was geographically removed but emotionally involved. Letters from home greatly distressed him, as they did my father, both of them living with the knowledge of German occupation and were naturally concerned over the well-being of the family so far away and now living independently from *Dedo Kole*. However, they would be far more anxious regarding the onset of civil war.

Inspired by the vision of an independent Macedonia, where all Macedonians could live freely, many Macedonians fought alongside Greek communist forces as partisans. Such patriotic feelings were not confined to the villages and towns of Macedonia but reverberated across the oceans to distant shores and firmly gripped the hearts and minds of many Macedonians working abroad. Some were so moved that they were determined to return home to take up arms in the cause of a free Macedonian nation. My older brother was one of them. He informed my father that he would leave Western Australia and travel to Yugoslavia and from there cross the Greek border to join the partisans. Similar thoughts had occurred to my father but it was agreed that my brother would go first to observe events at first hand. So confident was *Tanas* that the cause was right and that it would succeed that he defiantly refused to arrange an immigration permit that would allow him to automatically return to Australia. To make matters worse, on his departure, he uttered several derogatory remarks about life in Australia which immigration officials placed on record. He had left declaring that he would never return to Australian shores but that he would live the rest of his life as a free man in a free Macedonia. However, not long after arriving in Yugoslavia he had become acutely aware that things were not as they should have been. He discovered that certain events and political intrigues had once more conspired against his Macedonian kinfolk leading to the border between Yugoslavia and Greece being closed by Yugoslavia's leader, Marshall Tito.

My older brother found himself stranded north of the Greek border for the next three years where he lived in *Marjorie*, a suburb of *Skopje*, the capital of the now Republic of Macedonia. Eventually, he would reconcile himself to the reality of his predicament and settle into building a new life. He married and had a son, Phillip and a year later a daughter, Lozana. Ironically, had my brother been successful in crossing the Greek border and joined the partisans, we might have met on one of those many deadly battle grounds as members of opposing armies, brother unknowingly fighting against brother.

My older brother's decision to travel to Yugoslavia potentially had severe repercussions for the members of our family in *Maala*. During the Civil War relationships between villagers and townsfolk, even within extended families, had blurred. Suspicion and mistrust were common and a false word or action could mean reprisals or death. In such dangerous times, village gossip that *Tanas Numeff* had returned from Australia to fight alongside the partisans would have pleased some but angered others. If the information was deemed to be true our family would certainly have attracted the attention of government officials and might have exposed us to considerable harassment. My brother's movements therefore needed to be kept secret or at best the local Greek authorities should have had reason to doubt the validity of his rumoured return. The letters that my father wrote from Australia were therefore careful to convey not only his own, but also my brother's, best wishes to the family even though my eldest brother was living just across the border in Yugoslavia. It was a deliberate attempt at deception and the ploy proved successful.

Years later, a close friend of our family and more particularly my brother *Sotir, Yanis Mantamadiotis*, came to Australia where he was an employee of the Manjimup Road Board and during most weekends would supplement his income by labouring on our family farm. He listened incredulously when he was informed that *Tanas* had been in Yugoslavia during the Civil War. He could not believe what he was hearing and told us of the times he had heated arguments, sometimes leading to fisticuffs, with fellow Greek villagers, who were adamant that my brother had returned from Western Australia. His reaction stemmed, in part, from his friendship with my brother *Sotir*, the two were such close friends that they had asked the village *pop*, priest, to perform a ceremony in which they swore an oath that they would be blood brothers for life. From that time, my mother treated *Yanis* a son and my brother was considered a member of *Yanis's* family. *Yanis* had seen the letters sent home by my father in which my brother had passed on his warmest wishes to his mother and brothers and he had believed them.

#### Footnotes:

*Marshall Tito, had initially been the major patron of the Greek Communist movement and provided food supplies, military equipment and sanctuary to the partisans. However, in June 1948, after a "falling out" with Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform, the organisation of eastern bloc nations. As a result, Marshall Tito withdrew his support for the Greek communists to focus on the survival of the Yugoslav state and he subsequently ordered the closure of the border between Yugoslavia and Greece.*

When the time came for *Tanas* and his young family to return to Australia, his refusal to apply for an automatic re-entry permit caused complications since Australian immigration authorities highlighted this omission. My brother had left Australia under the name *Tanas Vellios* and when his immigration permit was not approved he was advised to lodge another application under the name *Tanas Numeff*. It seemed to have made a difference and subsequently an entry permit was granted allowing our family to be reunited with our brother and his young family. Soon after, my brother received a visit from two Australian federal police officers who informed him that they were aware of his ploy and reminded him of the harsh words that he had said when departing for Yugoslavia. Fortunately, they told my brother that since he had no criminal record the matter would be overlooked and he would be permitted to stay.

In August 1949, the Greek Civil War ended, the communist cause was lost and Greek royalist forces had prevailed. Cold war politics had conspired against the partisans as the American and British governments would not contemplate Greece becoming yet another of the now significant number of socialist nations that had emerged in Europe. The United States, in particular, donated significant sums of money to Greece and much of these funds were diverted into winning the Civil War. In the end, the partisans found themselves outnumbered, outgunned and friendless.

#### Footnotes:

*A Greek communist general, Vasilis Bartzotas, commented that Macedonians who fought with the Greek partisans were heroic in their actions and had given their all, sacrificed everything, their children, property and homes and that every household had someone wounded or had died in the conflict. However, these sacrifices made by so many Macedonians only served to increase the victimisation of the Macedonian people at war's end and led to a significant number of them to seek new lives beyond Greece during the late 1940s and early 1950s.*

*The Mantamadiotis family were profigi, refugees, one of many families who had returned from Turkey during the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey that occurred during the early 1920s. My mother recalled how the women of these families often dressed in the long flowing robes that were traditionally worn by Turkish women. Yanis Mandamodotis had three brothers, Tanas and Giorgos who was married to Ristana the eldest of Dedo Mitre Numeff's three daughters and Vasili Mandamodotis who married Letta's younger sister, Ristana.*

## **Chapter 13: Bound for Western Australia**

*After finally completing my term of compulsory military service I was free to leave Greece and begin my Australian adventure. In February 1951, accompanied by my mother and Striko Vasil Numeff, I arrived at the port of Fremantle to be reunited with my father and younger brothers, Noume and Stase. My brother Sotir, who had travelled separately, arrived shortly after.*

*My mother and I had not seen my father for some fifteen years and during his time away we had lived under German occupation and then became embroiled in Greece's Civil War. My family was now steadfastly determined to build a new future in our adopted homeland. This would be where I would marry, raise a family and live the rest of my life as a loyal Australian citizen with a proud Macedonian heritage.*

The Greek Civil war was a decisive fork in the road, a turning point, for our family. Our future was now well and truly vested in establishing a new life in Western Australia. It was, therefore, agreed that my younger brothers would join my father in Manjimup. Before leaving, they visited *Dedo Kole* to say their final goodbyes and were cordially received. When it was time for them to go, our grandfather hugged and kissed each of them and wished them a pleasant voyage and a long life filled by good health and much happiness. This would be the *pos'eden*, last time, that they would see each other, my brothers were entering into an uncharted future, full of hope and anticipation, while my grandfather retreated back into his world, more than ever alone, a world which he never contemplated leaving. He reasoned that this was where he was, *roden*, born, and it would be where he would *umri*, die, my paternal grandfather had experienced the "new world" during his time in America and he had rejected it. Despite his four years abroad, he spoke few words of English and was only capable of uttering a number of poorly mispronounced phrases and American place names. He was said, after our departure, to lament that he had been abandoned by his sons who were not there to look after him in his declining years. Those who knew better were generally unsympathetic and would remind him how he had evicted my mother and later *Striko Vasil* and his grandchildren from the family home.

My brothers left *Maala* in late November 1949. They caught a bus travelling to *Solun* and from there embarked in a small boat for Athens, where they spent four days sightseeing while awaiting the arrival of the *Toscana*, the ship that would take them to Western Australia. My mother and I were sad to see them leave but were comforted in the knowledge that we would soon be joining them. Their Australian adventure was beginning while ours remained temporarily on hold because I had not officially completed the full term of compulsory military service and therefore was not permitted to leave. My mother had refused to go without me.

*Noume* would often describe the dingy conditions he experienced aboard the *Toscana*, on the way to Australia in the company of his brother *Stase* and a friend and relative, *Mitre Elovoroff*, from *Krepeshina*. He recalled having seen several welt marks on *Mitre's* back which he told my brother were the result of being beaten while detained in a Greek prison. *Noume* would recall how their small group was constantly harassed by a number of young Greek passengers who had returned to Greece from settlements in the republics of the Soviet Union and were now on

#### Footnotes:

*The Toscana was built in Germany in 1923 and purchased by the Italian government in 1935 to transport soldiers during the invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). In 1937, it became a ship of the Lloyd Triestino Line and was converted into a passenger liner. During the Second World War it served as a hospital ship and at war's end it was refitted, and in 1948, began carrying immigrants from Europe to Australia by way of Port Said where it stopped to take on board new passengers, fresh water and food supplies. During their three-day stay, Noume and Stase, along with the other passengers were accommodated in an Egyptian hotel where they had the unusual experience of being waited upon by Arab servants. The Toscana also made a brief stop over at Colombo in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka.*

their way to settle in Australia. They were apparently *na l'teni*, angry, over my brothers and their companions speaking *po nashi*, in Macedonian. Fortunately, my brothers found a rather surprising ally, in the inevitable assault that followed, in the form of a physically imposing Greek passenger who had sided with them. When asked why he had helped them their new found friend remarked that while it would be impolite not to speak Greek to him, since he did not understand Macedonian, that my brothers and their friends had every right to speak Macedonian among themselves.

The *Toscana* anchored in the port of Fremantle on 20 January 1950 where my brothers were greeted by my father, whom *Stase* and *Noume* only recognised from a few photographs they had seen of him, *Noume* was a very small child and *Stase* was not yet born at the time of his leaving. My brother *Sotir* arrived four days later. *Sotir*, who was now old enough to be called upon to begin his compulsory military service had boarded an aeroplane headed for Cairo in order to avoid the stringent passport checks conducted at Pireaus.

In early 1951, my mother and I also embarked for Western Australia, in the company of *Striko Vasil*, my father's youngest brother, who was pioneering the way for the eventual relocation of his own young family in Western Australia. Having obtained our official immigration papers we paid for our passports and sea passages with money that had been sent by my father and that obtained from the sale of our animals. We walked to nearby *Lerin* where we boarded a bus destined for Athens and the port of *Pireaus*. Our travel agent, *Telli Topalis*, organised a hotel room for us and we enjoyed the novel experience of eating a meal at a restaurant prior to boarding our ship. *Telli Topalis* was an interesting man, who, with a limited knowledge of English and French, established a thriving travel agency even though some of his clients would often joke that *Telli* seemed to know only a few more words in both languages than they did themselves. Reservations expressed about *Telli's* linguistic abilities seemed to be confirmed when he recorded my name as *Jean*, the French version of John, on my official passport papers. While in Athens, we spent a pleasant afternoon sightseeing with the highlight being a visit to the majestic Acropolis where we walked among the awe-inspiring ruins of ancient and historically significant buildings and sites.

There were no tears or regrets. We knew that we were leaving behind our ancestral home and if we should ever return it would be as visitors and citizens of Australia. This was not our home any more. We had each paid the then considerable sum of fifty English pounds for our voyage. However, once aboard, the *Radnick*, we discovered that we had been overcharged and subsequently sent a letter of complaint. In a conciliatory gesture *Telli Topalis* refunded ten pounds to each of us which we sent to *Dedo Kole* who failed to acknowledge our gesture.

Our initial impression of the Yugoslav-owned, *Radnick*, our home for the next six weeks at sea, was distinctly unflattering. Ironically, my brother *Tanas* had sailed home, with the aim of fighting for the partisan cause, aboard the *Radnick's* sister ship, aptly named the *Partisanka*. Our ocean-going home was a rust-bucket and we were told later that this was to be its final voyage. The vessel had been commissioned as a troop and livestock carrier during the Second World War and hastily converted into a passenger liner at war's end. There were no individual sleeping quarters but two designated areas, one for the women passengers and the other for the men. The off-white bed linen was infested with *voshki*, lice, which made our life aboard particularly unpleasant since we spent so much time lying on our bunks while suffering from acute bouts of sea sickness, especially when the weather turned ugly and strong gales whipped up towering waves which tossed the ship from side to side and up and down. During the rare days when the weather was fine and the ocean calm we would walk along the decks where we were somewhat comforted by the presence of the number of lifeboats that the *Radnick* carried. On these occasions we and the other passengers, were frequently entertained by the antics of large pods of carefree dolphins swimming playfully alongside.

I recall two personal highlights during that voyage to Western Australia. The first was our ship's passage through the Suez Canal when the *Radnick* was towed through the narrow sea channel by a number of straining, old tug boats. The second was a brief stop over at the port of Aden where passengers were encouraged to go ashore for a few hours of sightseeing and to stretch their legs. It was here that I purchased a *saat*, wrist watch, from a wily Arab shop keeper who wore a perpetual smile that exposed a number of gold front teeth. We bartered for some time over the price, resorting to hastily conceived hand gestures, before having haggled long enough, nodded heads and shook hands. I paid two British pounds for that watch which would become a prized possession and something of a family heirloom.

#### Footnotes:

*Many Macedonian immigrants journeyed aboard vessels that made stopovers at Cairo during their voyages to Australia. There they heard of the extravagance and lavish lifestyle of the country's King Farouk who had come to the throne as a popular sixteen year old in 1936 and reigned until his forced abdication in 1952 when he was forced to flee to Monaco. The King's glamorous lifestyle, it was said, involved lavish palaces, exotic mistresses, extravagant tours abroad and a deep love of fine food and the best of wine. Consequently, Macedonians, living in Australia, would sometimes refer to anyone exhibiting a disposition for the "good life" as living like King Farouk.*

*Striko Vasil Numeff journeyed to Western Australia with my mother and me He left behind his young wife Stoianka, nee Ylova, young son, Risto (Chris) and baby daughter, Sandra. The couple had married in Maala, in 1943. Their first child, Yovan, born in 1944, died from a fever when he was only eighteen months old. Risto, born in 1946, was their second son. A third child, Peter, born in 1949, died when only six months old. Such tragedies associated with high infant mortality rates were common given the lack of doctors, hospitals and the financial sources required to access professional medical care. Their second surviving son, Pando (Peter), was born in Manjimup in 1954.*

*Striko Vasil and his young family had also been exiled from the Numeff home by Dedo Kole and went to live with Dedo Kuzo Ilioff and Baba Stasa, my mother's parents, who had relocated from Krepeshina to Maala to live in the*

**Footnotes:**

*former house of Kole Traindoff and his wife Velika, my mother's sister, after they had left the village for Canada. Striko Vasil was reunited with his family in 1952 and for a time lived on our family farm in a small, two-room asbestos and timber home, one of several that were built on the property.*

*Chris's earliest and most striking recollections of life on the Numeff farm included helping to bring in the cows for milking, working in the tobacco fields and his traumatic first few weeks of school. Chris had attended one year of school in Maala but Manjimup Primary School, seated in Mrs Lee's Grade One class, was by far a more daunting experience. In those days, the school had few students of Macedonian ancestry, with Chris and his good friend John Peos, being among the few. He recalls having a sound grasp of mathematics for his age but struggling with the English language with which he was completely unfamiliar and was not spoken at home. In the following year, Chris would be joined at Manjimup Primary School by Striko Giorgi's sons, his first cousins, Victor and Nick Velios.*

*In 1956, Striko Vasil and Strina Stoianka purchased a one hundred acre farm at auction on which the family successfully grew tobacco.. To supplement the family income, Striko Vasil also milked a small herd of dairy cows in a milking shed which had previously been used to store farm machinery. With the demise of the tobacco industry, Striko Vasil initially increased the number of the family's dairy cows but later sold his entire herd and concentrated on raising beef cattle on his farm and a number of neighbouring properties that the family had subsequently purchased. Later, Striko Vasil found employment at the Shannon Timber Mill, located between Manjimup and Walpole, and then worked for the Manjimup Shire Council. He retired in 1976 and for years he could be seen driving around the Manjimup district in his old FJ Holden. Strina Stoianka died on 26 December 2000 and Striko Vasil on 16 April 2001.*

On 26 February 1952, twenty six days after departing Pireaus, the *Radnick* berthed at Fremantle where we were met by my father and my mother's cousin, *Petre Ilioff*, formerly from *Krepeshina*. I had not seen my father for over sixteen years and he was like a stranger to me and even my mother and *Striko Vasil* were reserved in their greetings. We waited in an atmosphere of half-smiles and little conversation until our suitcases were placed onto the back of cousin *Petre's* truck. With my father and mother sitting in the front seat and my uncle and I in the back of the vehicle's exposed tray we journeyed through several Perth suburbs to a small market gardening property in Osborne Park. Significant Macedonian communities were emerging in several locations in Western Australia, most notably in the rural townships of Manjimup and Geraldton, where Macedonian immigrants would use the farming knowledge and skills that they had learned over many generations. In the Manjimup District, many of them became dairy farmers and tobacco growers, while Macedonians living in Geraldton and those who had settled in Perth, often turned to market gardening. Macedonian market gardeners in Perth tended to purchase properties in the neighbouring suburbs of Osborne Park and Balcatta, which at that time, were regarded as outer northern suburbs. My mother's cousins, *Petre Ilioff* and his younger brother, *Tanas*, both owned market gardens in Osborne Park, on which they grew a variety of vegetables: tomatoes, lettuce, onions, corn, beans and cauliflowers. They would typically rise in the early mornings, in darkness, to pack their produce which they transported to the Metropolitan Fruit and Vegetable Markets, in West Perth, to be auctioned. There, they would enter a world of seemingly organised chaos: trucks moving in and out of tight laneways, crates stacked high with fruit and vegetables being loaded and unloaded by forklifts violently swerving side to side and the shouted, animated voices of the auctioneers. It was a place to meet with their fellow market gardeners and chat about crops, fruit and vegetable prices, the weather and life in general before returning to the everyday monotony of plowing, weeding, watering, fertilising and harvesting.

At the end of the Second World War, the Australian government adopted an immigration policy that welcomed European immigrants, including refugees left homeless by the war, to settle in Australia. Labor prime minister Joseph Chifley's government saw this as a way of stimulating the Australian economy and as a means of better being able to defend Australia from any foreign incursions as an integral part of a "populate or perish" philosophy. The Australian government therefore offered assisted passages to prospective European immigrants. We however, paid our way and despite the initial financial outlay, we could live and work where we chose and we were not sent to government administered migrant camps and be required to participate in government-sponsored job placement schemes. Although new arrivals often came ashore during the sweltering heat of summer and found themselves surrounded by drab, tin-clad buildings and busy wharves, they were glad to leave behind the confined spaces of the ship's quarters and their uncomfortable bunks which were stacked one atop another. Assisted immigrants disembarking at Fremantle would typically be given a hot pie, an orange or apple and a piece of fruit cake. They would then be taken by bus to the Perth Railway Station where they boarded a train bound for Northam, a small rural township located

in the north-east of Perth, where a migrant reception and training camp had been established. Their new home was a former military barracks and training base that had more recently served as an internment camp for Italian prisoners-of-war. For some of them the initial impression of their new homes: nissen huts, constructed of timber and corrugated iron, which had no heating, running water or internal toilets were not what they had expected. These huts had been built to accommodate military personnel and were relatively inexpensive to build and not designed for comfort. They were made from metal sheets which were moulded to form a cylindrical shape roof. They had wooden floors resting on a foundation of timber stumps. Macedonian immigrants tended to be less taken aback by their new lodgings than some other European nationalities especially former city dwellers, some of whom, had enjoyed high standards of domestic living in their homeland prior to German occupation. Indeed, few Macedonian migrants had experienced better living quarters at home where they were accustomed to having little privacy and sharing all basic amenities. They were, therefore, genuinely surprised to hear the criticisms, made by some of their fellow immigrants, that they had been taken to an isolated, arid place where there was nothing but sheep, flies and extreme temperatures. Nor could they comprehend the negative comments regarding the quality of the food, a hearty, traditional Australian diet of steak, eggs, peas and cooked cabbage.

Immigrants who had come to Australia on assisted passages were required to work for two years in jobs that were designated by the Australian federal government and could only be released from such an undertaking under extraordinary circumstances and with the approval of the Federal Minister for Immigration. Younger male immigrants were generally seconded into unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, such as farm labourers and railway and factory workers. A number of them, from the Northam immigration Centre, were assigned to work on a project designed to increase the capacity of Mundaring Weir by raising the height of the Weir's walls. Newly - arrived unmarried immigrant women on assisted passages were typically offered jobs as domestic servants, cleaners in schools and hospitals and as factory and laundry workers.

One of the benefits of living in a migrant camp was that there was an attempt to teach English to "New Australians", as they were often called, who had little or no knowledge of the language. English lessons generally consisted of twenty or so immigrants standing in front of a teacher and singing traditional Australian and English songs and mouthing common English words and phrases. Many of them still recalled the songs that they had been taught even if they did not fully understand the lyrics at the time. These lessons were designed to begin to overcome one of the major hurdles confronting new immigrants, the language barrier. Only after two years of proving themselves "*satisfactory in every way*" were these immigrants officially acknowledged as permanent residents of Australia and free to live in communities of their own choosing and to seek their own employment opportunities.

**Footnotes:**

*The building of the Mundaring Weir, across the Helena River, had been one of a number of major engineering projects proposed by Western Australia's best known engineer, Charles O'Connor, who envisioned that water from the Weir could to be pumped to the newly-emerging agricultural communities of Western Australia's wheat belt and to the then booming gold mining towns of Kalgoorlie, Boulder and Coolgardie. The construction of Mundaring Weir was completed in 1903 and despite the harsh criticisms of O'Connor, at the time, would prove an enormous benefit to many rural communities.*

## Chapter 14: Plantation Number Two

*During the next few years our family lived and worked on Plantation Two, one of nine tobacco producing properties owned and managed by the Michelides family, which at that time operated one of Australia's leading tobacco growing and manufacturing companies and produced an extensive range of tobacco-based products. The Michelides Company employed a large number of Macedonian immigrants on Manjimup tobacco plantations and at their Perth factory. For most of the members of my family, Plantation Two, was their initial introduction to the Australian way of life.*

*While our lives were extremely restricted and focussed predominantly on working hard we did have opportunities to observe new ways of thinking and behaving, many of which, we too, would gradually adopt along our journey to becoming Australian citizens.*

After spending several days in Perth, we were driven to the Perth Railway Station where we purchased train tickets to Manjimup. There we were met by *Vasil Paikoff*, formerly of *Bapchor*, a family friend, who drove us to Plantation Two, one of several tobacco plantations owned by *Petro Michelides* where my father was working. Investing his own savings and money borrowed from a local Greek businessman, *Petro Michelides* purchased a few bales of Turkish tobacco and a hand-operated tobacco cutting machine to begin manufacturing cigarettes within a one-room shed, located along Murray Street, in Perth's central business district. His operation quickly expanded beyond hawking cigarettes at Perth hotels and night clubs and in 1921, he established *Michelides Tobacco Limited* and subsequently constructed a tobacco manufacturing factory, at the corner of Lake and Roe Streets, in the Northbridge district of Perth.

Determined to source his tobacco leaf locally, *Petro Michelides* initially established a tobacco farm in Waroona. However, when this venture proved unsuccessful, the ever enterprising *Petro* first leased and then purchased land in the vicinity of the Manjimup and Pemberton townships in 1931. The firm, *Michelides Tobacco Limited*, would become the third largest cigarette manufacturer in Australia and produced a wide range of tobacco products. The Company's popular roll-your-own tobacco was marketed as Luxor Fine Cut Virginia tobacco and sold in impressive red and blue tin containers. The Company also marketed a variety of ready-made cigarettes which included its popular Golden West Virginia brand. As part of the Company's promotions its Sport Club Gallery cigarettes contained images of leading Western Australian footballers of the day. *Petro* also secured the Australian rights to produce the popular Rizla cigarette papers, from the French parent company.

#### Footnotes:

*Successive Western Australian state governments of the 1920s looked for ways to expand the agricultural potential of the State's South-West region and initially encouraged the establishment of dairy farms and later the growing of tobacco in the hope that these would become viable industries and boost the regional economy.*

*Petro (Peter) Michelides, was born in 1878, on the island of Kastellorizo. He had arrived in Australia in 1901 as a twenty-three year old from Port Said, Egypt, where he had worked as an apprentice with a tobacco manufacturing company. Petro was fluent in seven languages and worked in a variety of jobs in Perth, one of which was as an Immigration Department interpreter, when one of his roles was to administer the controversial Dictation Test administered to prospective, non-white immigrants who were required to pass this test before being permitted to settle permanently in Australia. The test, that was generally presented in a language that non-white applicants were unable to read, was used by successive Australian governments, of all political persuasions, as a means of excluding non-white immigrants with the primary aim of preserving a "White Australia" which was overwhelming culturally British.*

*Petro Michelides died In 1966 and boldly inscribed on his tombstone, in Karrakatta Cemetery, is the epitaph that he had been a founding father of the Greek community in Western Australia and honorary consul of Imperial Russia, Spain and France. After Petro Michelidis died, his home, at the foot of Mt Eliza, served as the local Japanese Embassy until it was demolished to make way for the construction of the Kwinana Freeway.*

In the hope of developing the South-West region and boosting the West Australian economy, former Australian Anzacs and demobilised World War One British soldiers, who had been promised a “land fit for heroes to live in” after the war but who had been forced to join long unemployment queues, at the end of the Great War, were encouraged to establish farms in the region. A comprehensive advertising campaign was conducted in Britain to entice British immigrants, predominantly unemployed former soldiers, to the South-West of the State. Glossy brochures depicted “a land of milk and honey”, a place where British migrants could establish productive dairy farming properties, within an idyllic earthly paradise.

At that time, most of the State’s milk supplies were sourced from small dairy farms located on the fringes of the major population centres and milk production levels were so low that quantities of even basic dairy products, such as butter and cheese, had to be imported. However, establishing financially sustainable dairy farms in the South-West would prove extremely difficult to achieve. Many of the pioneer settlers, former Anzacs and British soldiers, would find their new surroundings harsh and unforgiving. Most had little or no farming experience and suffered severe bouts of insecurity and crippling isolation and not surprisingly many eventually walked off their properties. In these circumstances, a thriving tobacco industry was seen as a way of helping to bolster the region’s flagging economic fortunes.

On *sekoj*, each, of his nine tobacco plantations *Petro Michelides* employed between ten to fifteen workers, a truly multicultural mix: Australians, Italians, Yugoslavs and a significant number of Macedonians. My father worked on Plantation Two which was situated along Graphite Road. By the time I had arrived, *Petro Michelides* had taken up residence in Perth in a stately home on Mounts Bay Road, near the old Swan Brewery, along the Swan River foreshore. However, the old man would regularly visit his tobacco plantations, invariably sporting a black French beret atop his balding head. This obviously made an impression on my father who was rarely seen outdoors without his own tattered, sweat-stained, black beret. By the time of my arrival, the day to day management of the Michelides tobacco plantations had passed to *Manoli*, one of his three sons, who employed several plantation foremen to assist him.

#### Footnotes:

*The Australian tobacco industry had its origins with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 but initially failed to flourish. However, serious interest in fostering a thriving tobacco industry surfaced in the 1930s when the Australian federal government legislated to offer domestic tobacco growers government subsidies. In 1936, to further protect the industry, the Australian Local Leaf Content Scheme required tobacco producers, operating in Australia, to use a certain percentage of locally grown tobacco in manufacture of their products. These local content procurement rules significantly assisted Australian tobacco growers and helped to increase their domestic market share.*

On his return to Western Australia, in 1936, my father resumed work as a sleeper cutter but employment in the timber industry was becoming increasingly difficult to find. The carving out of railway sleepers, using axes, saws wedges, was giving way to sleepers being produced in increasingly modern, mechanised saw mills. So for a time, my father and my brother, *Tanas*, along, with some of their fellow Macedonians, found employment in a flax mill situated in the small South-West township of Boyup Brook. At that time, flax was important in the making of string and rope and in manufacturing parachutes which was especially significant during the war years. However, when my father heard that there was work on the *Michelides* tobacco plantations in the Manjimup area he and my older brother decided to try their luck there. They were not unfamiliar with tobacco since they had seen it growing in the fields of their Turkish neighbours. Indeed, tobacco grown on Macedonian soil, had been widely used in the manufacture of the finest quality Egyptian cigarettes. Therefore, in a strange quirk of fate, the descendants of *Dedo Petre*, from *Prelip*, a region well-known for the fine tobacco produced in its vicinity, a reputation that continues to this day, would themselves become tobacco growers.

Our home on Plantation Two was a two-room structure with walls crudely constructed of hessian bags, sewn together and nailed upon a timber frame supporting a tin roof. There was a small kitchen and eating area which was the domain of my mother and a bedroom for my parents. The rest of the family slept in nearby canvas tents and one thing I still fondly recall of that time was how much we enjoyed listening to the sound of rain falling upon the canvas roof our tent during the winter months. There was no inside bathroom or toilet and we washed within a primitive shower enclosure which contained a discarded, water-filled tin container, with a tap attached to the bottom, that was positioned somewhat precariously above our heads. We would shower by opening the tap and letting the water flow over our bodies. Our showers lasted mere seconds before the container was *prazno*, empty. Cold showers were the norm and that was fine for the majority of the year but during winter we would shiver under a stream of cold water because we could not be bothered or were simply too tired, to heat our shower water.

#### Footnotes:

*For years the Michelides Company thrived despite intense competition from large foreign multinational tobacco producers. However, its eventual demise was in part the result of an unforeseeable, financially crippling, catastrophe when large stocks of tobacco, stored in the Company's warehouses, spoiled and could not be processed. To add to the Company's woes, restrictions on the inflow of imported tobacco, were lifted. The introduction of king size filter-tipped cigarettes, containing more aromatic tobacco varieties and sold in flip-top packages, also compromised the competitiveness of Michelides Limited. The subsequent loss of income meant that the Perth factory was closed and that one by one, the Company's tobacco plantations were sold.*

On Plantation Two, our bread was delivered daily by a Manjimup bakery and we erected a Coolgardie safe, under the shade of nearby trees, to store our meat, which was delivered once a week by a local butcher. Our foreman, George James, was an affable man who treated us well. At first we could only communicate with him through simple gestures and a limited number of standard greetings and phrases which were generally confined to observations about the weather, such as, *"It hot", "It cold" or "It look like rain today."* Such verbal exchanges would often end with a smile, the shrugging of shoulders and the comment, *"Sorry, me no speaka da English good."* Later, when many of my compatriots had learned to speak, read and write English, they would not hesitate to resort to using that old retort when they did not want to, rather than could not, respond to touchy questions being asked of them.

I had arrived during the middle of the tobacco harvesting season and had to quickly learn the routine by working alongside other family members. The normal working day typically stretched from seven in the morning to three thirty in the afternoon. The early start and finish times were primarily instigated to avoid the oppressive late afternoon heat typically associated with Western Australian summers. My brother, *Noume*, who was under twenty one years of age, would often express a deeply felt grievance that he was not receiving the full six pound adult weekly wage even though he was working as hard as everyone else. *Noume*, who earned four pounds a week, was particularly upset when he discovered that some workers his age were being paid the full weekly adult wage on other plantations. He was particularly annoyed that my father, then a trusted field boss, did not actively pursue his case. George James in a conciliatory gesture had advised *Noume* that he should not work so hard. This comment, although well intentioned, was of little consolation to my brother who did not mind working hard but wanted to be paid the adult wage.

At this time, my brother, *Noume*, not only attracted a well-deserved reputation as a diligent worker but also a dubious one of being a skilled wrestler. On one occasion, he had witnessed a young boy, the son of a local dairy farmer, who had been working on the Plantation during his

#### Footnotes:

*The Coolgardie safe was named after the once booming Western Australian goldfield township. In the days before refrigeration, gold miners in townships such as Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie and Boulder, in Western Australia's eastern goldfields, found it difficult to preserve their perishable food supplies especially during the sweltering summer months. Ice boxes were available but were extremely inefficient since they had to be constantly filled with blocks of ice and most foods placed within them tended to spoil fairly quickly. Not surprisingly, hard-working miners complained bitterly about having to resort to a diet of dried biscuits and salted meat. The invention of the Coolgardie safe was therefore regarded as a godsend, especially by those living in more isolated communities without electricity and refrigeration. A galvanised metal tray, filled with water, was placed on top of the frame resting above the ground which had a hessian bag draped over its front. The hessian would slowly absorb the moisture from the tray above and even the slightest breeze would cause the surrounding air to evaporate and cool. This meant that dairy products, meat and other perishables, would be kept reasonably fresh. Coolgardie safes were easily constructed and ranged from quickly cobbled together, home-made models, to elaborate, commercially produced structures.*

school holidays, being physically assaulted by an adult worker and had interceded on the youngster's behalf. The aggressor had turned upon him but *Noume* was quick to take the initiative and pushed the bully forcibly against a nearby barbed wire fence. After recovering his composure, and to save face, *Noume's* would-be-assailant declared, to those who had gathered to witness the altercation, that no one should contemplate upsetting my brother under any circumstance since he surely must have trained as a professional, *borach*, wrestler.

While I strongly sympathised with *Noume's* brooding about his weekly rate of pay, I was more sensitive to the feelings of my youngest brother, *Stase*, who dreaded having to attend Manjimup Primary School, where his inability to speak English meant that he, now a young teenager, had been placed into a classroom of six, seven and eight year olds. He became somewhat of a novelty and often the subject of ridicule for although he was not tall for his age he nevertheless towered above his much younger class mates. Seated in a chair and a desk that were far too small for him, *Stase* had few problems with his mathematical calculations but perennially struggled with even the most elementary school work that was presented in a language he could not read and did not understand. Embarrassed and out of place he kept to himself during recess and lunch breaks. No wonder he would constantly implore my father not to insist that he attend school but be allowed to begin working. My father was difficult to sway on this matter, he regarded the opportunity to receive an *n'auka*, education, as a privilege and was steadfast in his belief that sheer persistence was the key to overcoming all obstacles to learning. Finally, *Stase* would have his way but in the meantime he had suffered considerably from my father's well-intentioned but unrealistic academic expectations of his youngest son.

Many youngsters of Macedonian heritage would similarly struggle at school especially those who had come to Australia as children and even some who had been born in Australia during the early 1950s. Their parents did not speak English, they had no educational role models and there were rarely any books in the home. In addition, young school-aged children living on farms or market gardens, were required to help in the paddocks with milking, feeding livestock, picking fruit or raising crops of tomatoes, corn, beans, pumpkins and cauliflowers. It was not surprising that a considerable number of them were destined to struggle with their education as a result of their poor English literacy skills which clouded their educational experiences and compromised their natural intellectual abilities. Our son, Jim and daughter Stella, like so many others of their generation, could only speak a few words of English when they first attended Manjimup Primary School.

## Chapter 15: On Our Selection

*Our family farm in Manjimup would become the centre of our universe. It was our home. It was where my parents, brothers and a number of our close relatives lived, at different times, in a small, close-knit community much as we had done in our ancestral village.*

*We were enormously proud of our property, our selection, and in retrospect, our rather modest farm house. There we worked seven days a week from sunrise to sunset. There were trees and shrubs to clear, stumps and large boulders to remove, fences to erect, paddocks to plough, tobacco to plant and harvest, farm animals to raise, sheds and tobacco kilns to construct and cows to milk.*

*During this time, my father assumed the role of family patriarch and under his guidance we worked collectively and pooled together our income which was spent in ways that my father thought would best advantage the entire family. We did not always agree with his decisions but on such occasions we would, more often than not, begrudgingly remain silent.*

In 1952, my father, mustering all of his courage and taking with him his bank book, a record of the family's savings, entered the premises of the Manjimup branch of Rural and Industries Bank. The Bank was originally established as the Agricultural Bank of Western Australia in 1895 and renamed in 1945. Today, it trades as Bank West. Dressed in his best clothes, he was there to ask for a loan for the then princely sum of four thousand pounds. My father had heard that a two hundred and thirty eight acre farm, owned by a local, Doug Wren, situated in an area known as Donnelly Mail, was on the market for five and a half thousand pounds. Our savings, coupled with that nervously acquired bank loan, far more money than my father could have ever contemplated at that time, meant that we had become the proud owners of a farming property of a size that we could never have envisaged back in our Macedonian homeland.

Our newly acquired farm soon took on the appearance of a blossoming medieval village. The centre of activity was the main family home, in reality a humble structure, which to us, at that time, seemed like a grand manor house. This is where my parents and younger, unmarried brothers *Nuome* and *Stase* lived. Close by were several small two-room wooden framed, asbestos-clad, tin-roof homes with small front verandas which at various times other members of the family and a number of our family friends called home. My father had purchased the property on a walk-in walk-out basis which meant that we were also the owners of a herd of twenty eight dairy, *kravi*, cows and a Clydesdale-cross horse named *Smokey*. However, now that we were no longer living on Plantation Two we needed to solve the problem of getting to and from work, a lengthy trek, there and back, by foot. We finally settled on a rather ingenious solution. As it happened we had purchased a bicycle from my cousin *Mitre Numeff*, who with his family, had moved from Manjimup to live in the rural township of Wauchope, in New South Wales and found an old bicycle that had been left behind by the previous owners in one of the farm sheds. Two of us would ride half-way to work and then lay down our bicycles just off the side of the narrow, tree-lined gravel road and walk on. The other two would begin walking to work, stop to collect the bicycles and pedalled them to work. This ride and walk, walk and ride routine significantly reduced the time taken to travel to and from Plantation Two.

We were enormously proud of our farm which was situated some ten kilometres from the Manjimup township. The farm house was set back, some one hundred metres or so from a gravel road that was only occasionally travelled upon by a few motor cars, farm trucks or tractors. The main house seemed so spacious and modern and indeed it was in comparison to the makeshift dwelling and tents that had been our homes on the tobacco plantation. There was a small kitchen leading to a dining area where we ate at a long rectangular timber table seated upon two long wooden benches positioned on each side. There was a small lounge room with an open fireplace, two bedrooms and a back veranda with a sleep-out to one side. The house contained an internal bathroom, with a wood-fired water heater, located to the left of a small, raised front entrance which was approached by several wooden steps. There was an outside laundry with a copper set alongside a cement basin where the women of the household

washed our clothes and an adjoining store room filled with jars of pickled vegetables and preserved fruit. Our outside toilet was a small hut-like structure constructed with wooden frames supporting walls made with asbestos sheets and clad with a tin roof which was entered through a hinged wooden door. Inside was of a deep pit covered by a crude wooden seat with a hole in the middle of it. Our toilet paper, hanging from a large nail, consisted of pages from the local newspaper which had been roughly cut into squares. The stench was often overpowering and large blowflies *muvi*, incessantly buzzed around our outdoor toilet especially during summer.

A *orgrada od tel*, a fence with barbed wire, threaded through wooden posts, kept the livestock and native animals from the main house and the variety of fruit trees that grew around it. However, we fought a constant battle with small, ravenous green eyes, beautifully coloured parrots and occasionally against highly destructive, loud squawking black cockatoos, all eager to feast on the ripening fruit. My favourite was a yellow plum tree growing near the farm house which annually produced large, juicy and sweet-tasting fruit. There were apricot, pear and apple trees and along one side of the farmhouse grew a row of large, ancient *smokvi*, fig trees, which provided an ideal canopy for delicious but difficult to get to prickly blackberry vines. To us that humble house and its surrounds appeared so grandiose and idyllic. It was warm and inviting, it was where we ate, talked, rested, rejoiced, laughed, commiserated and argued. It was our home. There was work to be done seven days a week and unlike the good Lord we did not rest on Sundays. We adhered to a well-established routine of commencing work in the paddocks early each morning and then around ten o'clock stopping for morning tea which usually consisted of copious rounds of thickly-sliced sandwiches filled with tomatoes, roasted peppers and home-made fetta cheese. At lunch time, we would walk to the farm house, wash quickly in the outside laundry and sit down to a hearty *manja*, stew, of *meso*, meat, cooked with a variety of vegetables, which my mother served with crusty white bread and an assortment of pickled peppers, *zel'ka*, cabbage and cauliflower. Having eaten, we would spend an hour or so relaxing which in summer meant stretching out under the shade on the lush buffalo grass that grew on one side of our armhouse. Then we would walk briskly back to the paddocks and continue working until three o'clock in the afternoon when my mother would routinely arrive with a *koshnitsa*, basket, containing a flask of tea or coffee and more sandwiches.

Before leaving for Australia, I was engaged to be married to *Letta Peova*, from *Maala*. Our two families had much in common and lived as *selski* and friends for generations. *Letta* and I had wanted to marry before I departed so that we could travel to our new home together as husband and wife. However, there were delays associated with *Letta* obtaining a passport and so I had to reluctantly leave without her in the company of my mother and *Striko Vasil* but with the firm understanding that my wife-to-be would be joining me within a few months. *Kole Peoff* and his wife *Stoianka*, originally from *Bapchor*, were my wife's paternal great grandfather and grandmother. They had two sons, *Tanas* and *Kosta*, both of whom had worked abroad in the United States. Much of the money they had earned there had been used to purchase fields in

*Maala* from a Turkish family just as my own paternal family ancestors had done. There the two brothers lived in homes that had been built side-by-side and had a shared entrance. *Kosta Peoff's* son, *Vasil*, was *Letta's* father while *Tanas* and two of his sons *Kole* and the ill-fated *Mitre*, had worked alongside my father as sleeper cutters in Western Australia where they were close *priateli*, friends.

Letta's maternal grandparents were *Kole Yloff* and *Yana Ylova* of *Krepeshina*, *Mara*, Letta's mother, was one of six children. *Kole* died tragically after *si napi*, drinking, contaminated water while being seconded into the Greek army to take part of a disastrous campaign against the Turks in Asia Minor following the end of the First World War. During this conflict, it was not uncommon for Greek officials to regularly visit villages and insist that village priests and *kodzobashi*, mayors, select villagers who would be required to take a family horse or donkey to the battlefield to carry food supplies and armaments to Greek soldiers fighting there. The *Yloff* family's misfortune was further exacerbated by the refusal of Greek authorities to pay the customary compensation to families of conscripted military personnel who had been killed in this conflict. It appeared that they had reasoned that *Kole Yloff* was a Macedonian, a Bulgarian sympathiser, and therefore his loss was of little consequence and as such any financial restitution was not warranted. Letta's maternal grandfather had been sufficiently *Greek* to give his life fighting for Greece but not *Greek* enough for his destitute and grieving family to receive some much-needed assistance following his death.

Letta's father, *Vasil Peoff*, had been living in Western Australia for some years before I arrived. Originally, he had worked alongside his fellow *selski* in the South-West of the State before moving to Perth where with a number of partners purchased and operated a restaurant, which was situated at the corner of Hay and Milligan Streets, in the central business district of a growing city centre. The venture had prospered having particularly benefited from the custom of American servicemen, generally sailors, who had been stationed as part of a large American naval presence at Fremantle, during the Second World War. Cashed up and looking to take advantage of their rest and recreation American servicemen spend lavishly on food and alcohol. To his credit, my future father-in-law would regularly send money home to support his wife and young children, *Londe*, *Letta*, *Jovan* and *Ristana*. However, far from home, lonely and away from prying eyes and village gossip, he had entered into a de facto relationship and had no intention of returning home and little enthusiasm for arranging for members of his family, in far off *Maala*, to join him in Western Australia. This was at the very heart of his constant procrastinations over completing the necessary paperwork to enable my fiancée, his daughter *Letta*, to obtain an official permit that would allow her journey to Western Australia so we could marry.

Apparently, when *Londe*, *Len Peovitis*, my wife's older brother, then a teenager, arrived in Perth in 1948, with his cousin *Giorgi*, *Kole Peoff's* son, my future father-in-law was reluctant to openly introduce him as his son and would refer to his first born, to those who knew no better, as his

brother. So apprehensive was he about his family and relatives joining him in Australia that his first cousin *Risto Peoff*, *Kole Peoff's* brother, had to arrange for the arrival of his own wife and daughters in secret and never mentioned it to my future father-in-law although they saw each other regularly.

I travelled to Perth on several occasions to plead with Letta's father to begin arranging the necessary paper work that would secure an immigration permit for her. Each time I would return to our farm hopeful of hearing some good news. Although my future father-in-law would be reassuring and promised to act immediately I would *cheka*, wait, in vain. Ironically, his restaurant occupied the very building that housed the Western Australian division of the Australian Immigration Department and was regularly frequented by departmental staff whom he knew well and was on friendly terms. Finally, there were harsh words exchanged and the two of us were no longer on speaking terms and that is how it would remain for the rest of our lives.

My frustration finally ended when Letta's uncle, living in New South Wales, agreed to apply for the immigration permit that would allow her to come to Australia. He had guaranteed to provide lodgings and gainful employment for her on his farm. This done, Letta boarded a British passenger liner, the *S.S. Hector*, a vessel of the Blue Funnel Line, which birthed at the port of Albany in late April 1952 where she disembarked rather than continuing to Sydney as it had been officially arranged, but never intended. I met her there with my father and a family friend, *Tanas Tannin*, who had lived for a brief time on our farm with his family until he purchased a property nearby. A month after her belated arrival, on 2 June 1952, Letta and I were married in Manjimup's Anglican Church of St Martin, a church of the Bunbury diocese, in a traditional Anglican wedding ceremony. There was no officially recognized Macedonian Orthodox Church at that time and although there were Greek, Serbian and Russian Orthodox churches in Perth and a large and impressive Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Bunbury we regarded ourselves as Macedonians and decided not to be married in any of these. My father and mother, who had reluctantly exchanged their wedding vows in the Greek Orthodox Church in *Krepeshina*, were fully supportive of our decision.

#### Footnotes:

*My brother-in-law Londe Peoff (Len Peovitis) on arriving in Western Australia was employed in a number of Perth restaurants before moving to Manjimup to work on the Michelides tobacco plantations. He was, for a time, employed as a barman at the Manjimup Hotel before returning to Perth where he worked in the Como fish and chip shop owned by his uncles Kole and Risto Peoff. Later, he became an employee of International Seafoods, a company processing crayfish for export and supplying a range of seafood products, predominantly to fish and chip shops throughout the Perth metropolitan area, many of which were owned by Greeks and Macedonians. Subsequently, he would established his own successful seafood supply business. On his arrival to Australia, Letta's younger brother, Yovan Peoff (John Paioff) was apprenticed to Nick Paikos, a relative, through marriage, who operated a tailoring and menswear business in Manjimup. He subsequently moved to Kalgoorlie to run his own successful tailoring and menswear store before relocating to Perth where he was the proprietor of several real estate agencies and became involved in property development.*

After our wedding ceremony we had gone to a photographic studio in the Manjimup township for the taking of the traditional wedding photographs. The photographer, was a rather cantankerous man of German descent, a perfectionist, who took good quality photographs but was short-tempered and would often engage in pushing and shoving his photographic subjects into his preferred positions. This *dokazhva*, explains, the absence of my brother *Noume* in our group wedding photograph. Subjected to several brusquely delivered instructions as to how and where he should stand and nudged this way and that he had stormed out of the photographic studio muttering to himself and set out for home on a long trek in the cold and rapidly fading winter light.

Our wedding celebrations were held at the Manjimup Town Hall in the company of some eighty guests. Our *numko*, best man, *Vasil Pandu*, also known as *Vasil Shestevsky* and as tradition dictated was subsequently best man to my brothers *Noume* and *Stase*. My brother *Sotir's* best man was *Kole Dimiroff*, *Vasil Pandu's* son-in-law. I stumbled nervously through my speech as did my father but *Kole Peoff*, who spoke on behalf of Letta's family, regaled our guests with his eloquent recollections of the days past when our two families, the *Numevi* and the *Peovi*, were neighbours in *Maala*. As he spoke, many of our guests were drawn back to their villages and warm memories of long-departed relatives and friends. He also referred to the close friendship that he had shared with my father during those trying times when the two of them had worked as sleeper cutters. When he had finished and sat down my father, tears welling in his eyes, went to where he was seated and firmly shook the hand of his old friend. Also absent on our wedding day was Letta's mother. She did not arrive in Western Australia until 1955, still hopeful of being reunited with her husband.

#### Footnotes:

*Our Macedonian homeland had a long association with Christianity. The apostle Paul had visited there. However, the region remained steeped in paganism until the arrival of Kyril and Metodi, Christian monks from Solun, who are credited for initiating the development of the Cyrillic alphabet in which the Bible was translated from the Greek. As early as 893 AD a Macedonian bishopric had been established in Ohrid and retained its distinctive Macedonian character before it was abolished in 1767 by the Sultan Mustafa 11 in response to intense lobbying from leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church residing in Constantinople who had powerful connections within the Sultan's court.*

*In 1919, the remnants of the Macedonian Orthodox Church were placed under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church but with the formation of Yugoslavia, which incorporated Vardarska Makedonia, the present Republic of Macedonia, there emerged moves to revive the idea of a self-governing Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, it was not until October 1958 that an independent Macedonian Orthodox Church was officially sanctioned.*

Shortly after my mother-in-law's arrival, I recall going to see my father-in-law with Letta, to ask him about his intentions regarding his wife. He had just arrived home with his partner who refused to leave the car thinking that my mother-in-law was with us and that there might be an unpleasant scene. She only tentatively came over to greet us when she had been reassured that the visitor was the daughter and not his wife. Reserved, but friendly, she smiled at Letta and asked whether she could hold Stella, our baby daughter in her arms. My wife, sad about the treatment her wronged mother, had initially refused but then hesitantly, passed Stella to her. In private, my father-in-law assured Letta that he would reunite with his wife but that it would take some time to sort out his personal affairs. It would prove a forlorn commitment. Subsequently, my mother-in-law temporarily stayed in the home of *Kole Peoff* before going to live with her youngest son, *Jovan*, then a bachelor, in Kalgoorlie.

Macedonian weddings in Manjimup were as much anticipated as they had been in our traditional villages and townships. A six o'clock wedding invitation was generally extended to more immediate family members and close friends. They were invited to a sit down meal, typically consisting of pieces of roast chicken or slices of roast meat with vegetables and salads followed by a dessert, usually a trifle. Individual, *plati*, plates, of food along with jugs filled with beer and soft drink, were placed upon tables that had been pushed together and covered with white tablecloths. After the guests had finished eating and the speeches had been made, the tables were quickly cleared away and the chairs placed along the walls to create a spacious dance floor. While this was happening, a Macedonian band, made up of local amateur musicians, just as in the villages and townships, would begin tuning their instruments: drums, piano accordions, saxophones and flutes, on the elevated stage. This interlude was the part of the evening the children enjoyed most as this was the time for them to slip and slide along the polished wooden floorboards of Manjimup's Town Hall. At eight o'clock more guests would arrive to join in the celebrations.

The band would begin with the obligatory bridal waltz but soon would be playing traditional Macedonian music and most of the night would be taken up with Macedonian dancing. At all times the catering staff would move around the Town Hall with jugs of beer and soft drink which they poured into the empty glasses of the guests. Many of the male guests adopted the habit of putting their drinking glasses within the pockets of their trousers or jackets so that these were readily at hand for frequent refills. The children would invariably join in the dancing but at some time during the evening would sneak off to a nearby store, the Warren Inn, where they would spend a few pennies on a bag of mixed confectionaries or an ice-cream, treats which were rarely available at home.

All farms needed a farm truck and soon after moving onto our farm, we too, became the proud owners of a new, white, two-tonne Austin truck. It was agreed that our designated driver would be my brother *Noume* who therefore needed to acquire a driver's license. My brother began practicing driving around the farm in eager anticipation of the day that he would have the distinction of being the first member of the family to possess such a license. However, my younger brother's plans would soon, at least temporarily, be shattered.

When the day finally arrived that *Noume* felt that he was ready to take his driving test, he with my father sitting in the passenger seat beside him, nervously drove off headed for the Manjimup Police Station. My father had observed my brother driving on the farm and had convinced himself that his son was a competent driver. Both men were therefore feeling optimistic as my brother carefully maneuvered our new truck into one of the bays outside the Police Station. Inside they were politely greeted by an officer who proceeded to hand my brother the application form that had to be completed by all seeking a driver's license before they undertook the practical driving test. *Noume* had never attended school in Australia and my father was of little help in such matters as his own English language skills were almost non-existent even though he had lived in Australia for many years. In my father's defense, he had generally worked in isolated communities, alongside fellow Macedonians, and had few reasons or opportunities to speak English. Consequently, *Noume* stared vacantly at the strange words on the form placed before him. The young, rather naïve, police officer wrongly assumed that my brother's hesitation must have been the result of poor eyesight which was to his way of thinking the most logical explanation for *Noume's* inability to respond to a single question posed on the standard driving licence application form. My brother never got as far as a practical driving test. The policeman suggested that he should have his eyes tested by an optometrist and try again once he had acquired a pair of prescription glasses.

My father, who to this time had been a passive observer, slowly began to make sense of the events unfolding before him and a heated exchange followed during which my father made himself extremely unpopular with the local representative of the law. *Noume*, too had been taken aback, his personal pride had been dented, since not only had he not acquired a driver's licence but it had been strongly suggested that he was legally blind. My father and brother stormed out of the police station and on my father's insistence my brother drove directly, without his driver's licence, to the surgery of Doctor Williams who proceeded to give *Noume* an eye test and declared that he had perfect vision. A terse telephone conversation followed between the young police constable and the medical practitioner which ended with Doctor Williams asking the officer which one of them was the doctor and insisting that his patient had excellent eyesight. Two weeks later, my brother tried again and on this occasion secured his driver's licence with the considerable help from a more understanding policeman.

When it was my time to obtain a driver's license I begun having lessons with *Noume* and drove around the farm until I felt that I was ready. Then accompanied by my father, in his

customary position in the passenger's seat, drove to the Manjimup township. I was so anxious about driving on the open road and possibly losing control of the vehicle that I drove our Austin truck for the majority of the journey in second gear. Fortunately, we arrived safely and I parked outside the Police Station where I dispatched my father to the Manjimup Hotel telling him to meet me within an hour. I was not going to compromise my chances of obtaining a driver's licence since I was concerned that his previous altercation with the law might not have been forgotten. I knocked on the front door, entered and asked whether I could take a driving test. Out came the dreaded application form but fortunately the police constable on duty was aware that I could not read or write English and patiently guided me through the form by telling me which words to put where and how to spell and write this word and that. I recall that this was a slow, monotonous process as I struggled to form the letters of the English alphabet correctly to construct words that provided information regarding name, date of birth, address, height and eye and hair colour. Relieved that there were no issues regarding my eyesight I was nevertheless extremely nervous about undertaking the practical driving test. However, a turn here and a turn there and I was soon awarded a driver's licence with the distinct suspicion that the officer had been exceptionally forgiving regarding my lack of driving skills. His opinion of my questionable abilities was confirmed by the parting comment that I should not drive long distances and certainly not to Perth and that I needed to keep practicing on the farm and on isolated local roads. The amiable officer, to whom I was deeply indebted, really had little to worry about since at that time I had neither the money, motivation or opportunity to do otherwise. Indeed, our Austin truck rarely left the farm except for an occasional trip to the Manjimup township for regular servicing and mechanical repairs at Thompson's Garage. We rarely drove to work on the Michelides plantations unless it was raining heavily and only then when the truck was not required on our farm.

Before purchasing our truck, every two weeks, my father seated atop a horse-drawn buggy or occasionally as a passenger of a car driven by one of our neighbours, usually former *selski*, *Mitre Doneff* or *Risto Rimpapoff*, would do the family shopping in the Manjimup township. My mother rarely, if ever, accompanied him. My father was a man who adhered to set routines, he was very much a creature of habit. Items of food and clothes were purchased at Foys, spray pumps and paint from Clarsons while poisons and calico were to be procured at Mackays. Cases of soft drink *shishina*, bottles, would be loaded onto the buggy or into a car boot at the local Robbies factory while beer, Swan Lager in king brown bottles, would be purchased, five dozen a time, from the Manjimup Hotel. There was a unfortunate downside to this arrangement as my father would buy all our *koshul'i*, shirts, and *pataloni*, trousers, in his size. In those days, we were young and fit and the clothes he purchased for us were generally far too big and billowed like sails flapping in a strong breeze. What a sight we must have been. However, it was useless complaining since my father would point out that he wore the same clothes as we did and that they fitted him perfectly.

My father, was rather partial to a glass or two of wine and more particularly port, which he routinely ordered from Luisini Wines in Perth. His order, a five gallon wooden *boche*, keg, would arrive regularly at Manjimup's railway siding. Each time a full keg arrived an empty keg would be dispatched in the opposite direction.

**Footnotes:**

*Enzio Luisini was a native of Umbria, Italy, who had spent time clearing scrubland in the South-West of Western Australia. During the First World War, fearing that he would be conscripted into serving in the Italian army or shamed into volunteering into the Australian army and sent overseas to fight, he had gone "underground". After the war, Enzio worked in a Manjimup sawmill before moving to Perth where he lived in the top floor of a drapery and wine saloon business he had established in William Street. Like his fellow storekeeper and neighbour, Kosta Malko, Enzio Luisini assisted many of his compatriots to immigrate to Western Australia and would often offer them a temporary place to stay. Despite his many years in Australia and a reputation of being a solid citizen Enzio Luisini had to endure the indignity, along with some others with an Italian ancestry, of being interned as a suspected fascist sympathiser during the Second World War. Subsequently, Enzio, purchased a significant parcel of land, in the then sparsely populated outer Perth northern suburb of Wanneroo, where he established a vineyard and began producing wine.*

Working hard was the focus of our, *zhivot*, life. It was a simple equation for us, the harder we toiled the more money we could earn to pay off our farm. However, Christmas was an exception and a time when for a few days of the year we could relax. During the Christmas period it was customary for Macedonian families living in the Manjimup district, to gather at Fonty's Pool. There, under the canopy of an ancient grove of willow trees and tall pines which inhabited a rolling hillside, covered in lush buffalo grass, families would picnic with their relatives and friends and feast upon Macedonian pastries and a variety of salads and fruit. Fonty's Pool was a special and picturesque place. Swimmers and visitors would pass by an old, crudely constructed wooden hut situated at the entrance of the pool area where Archie Fontanini collected a small fee from those wanting to go for a swim and from where he sold soft drinks and ice creams. On one side under a row of tall cherry trees were change rooms which bordered an enormous swimming area filled with cool, clear water with a diving platform at the far end.

A few of the men, but rarely any of the women, would enter the pool area. Most of the Macedonian men and women, of that generation, could not swim and the women in particular were too embarrassed even to be seen even paddling their feet in the shallow end. However, the children had no such inhibitions despite many of them not being strong swimmers since few had the opportunity to attend swimming lessons. Our son Jim had learned to *pliva*, swim, at least to keep afloat and execute a few awkward, rudimentary strokes, during his regular visit to his cousin Phillip when the two would cool off in the murky, reed and leech-infested waters of a small side water catchment near to the main dam on *Striko Giorgi's* farm. Even when we moved to Perth and lived only one street away from Como Beach both Jim and Stella remained poor swimmers. Our son participated with great enthusiasm in most sports in and out of school but never looked forward to the swimming lessons conducted at Como Beach during his primary school years and certainly not to the dreaded annual school faction swimming trials and swimming carnival at Applecross Senior High School. Our youngest daughter, Feni, on the other hand, was an excellent swimmer and spent considerable time at Como Beach, which for her was like a second home.

#### Footnotes:

*The building of Footy's Pool was the inspiration of Archimedes Fontanini an Italian immigrant who arrived in Western Australia in 1904. After working in a sawmill in the small township of Greenbushes he took up a land grant which had been offered by the State government as part of a scheme to open up the lower South-West region to farming. Archie was attracted to the property by the presence of a stream that continued to flow through the land allotment even during the dry summer months.*

*Undaunted by the isolation and lack of basic amenities he and his wife set about building a home and clearing ten acres of land on which they planted fruit trees and vegetables. Archie would travel, by horse and cart, along dusty or water-logged rudimentary bush tracks, to the nearby township of Bridgetown and to isolated timber mill communities such as Deanmill and Jardee where he found eager customers for his apples, potatoes, cauliflowers and other fruit and vegetables. Archie subsequently dammed the stream that ran through his property and it soon became a popular swimming place for his children and their friends.*

*Following mounting support, in the Manjimup community, for the construction of a public swimming pool, an inspired decision was taken by the local Shire Council in which it agreed that Archie Fontanini could charge a fee for people swimming in his pool and in return he would use some of the admission money to cement the dam walls and enhance the look of the surrounding gardens. Fonty's Pool was officially opened to the public in 1925.*

A considerable part of the day-to-day activities on our farm revolved around preparing our tobacco fields and planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, curing and grading our annual tobacco crop. Tobacco *seme*, seed, is best not sown directly into the fields but planted in well-prepared seed beds to promote germination. The production cycle would commence in August when tobacco seeds were placed within some ten feet long and four feet wide rectangular beds bordered with wooden planks and raised above the surrounding earth to aid drainage. These seed beds had to be weeded and sprayed regularly to prevent disease and insect infestations and required fertilising with a special tobacco, *gnoj*, manure. The fledgling tobacco plants required constant vigilance, regular watering and had to be protected against overexposure to the elements. To safeguard the seedlings during the cool, spring nights we would cover the beds with sheets of calico and strategically scatter small tin containers filled with Benzol within them. As the fuel evaporated it produced much-needed heat for the newly-emerged tobacco plants. However, we had to be extremely careful not to allow even the slightest contact between the liquid and the young plants. During the day the calico covers were removed so that the seedlings could greet the morning sun and be nurtured by its warming rays which was so essential for promoting healthy growth. When the young plants were some three inches high it was time to begin ploughing our tobacco fields in preparation for planting.

On the Michelides tobacco plantations and the properties of more well-established tobacco growers tractors were increasingly being used to plough the tobacco paddocks but on our farm we initially had to rely on our Clydesdale-cross, *Smokey*, inherited from the previous owner and two horses that we subsequently purchased, *Blacky* and *Toby*. We would harness two of our horses to a plough and take turns walking behind them, directing them, snapping out orders and words of encouragement while maneuvering the plough through the yielding soil to form long furrows, some two feet apart. Planting was done by hand and during this time family members could be seen seemingly perpetually bent over planting tobacco within the newly-ploughed furrows. After planting we would often cover the fledgling plants with pieces of newspaper which had been cut into squares and secured with small stones in order to protect them from the cold at night and the intensity of the sun's rays during the day.

Since it was critical for our financial well-being to do everything possible to maximise the income received from our tobacco crop we did not have the luxury of adopting a crop rotation system by leaving one or more of our tobacco paddocks fallow for a full growing season. It was therefore imperative that our fields were regularly fertilized so that they possessed the essential nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, to yearly produce a high yielding crop. Bags of commercially produced fertiliser, manufactured by a Bunbury-based company, were therefore regularly delivered to our farm by Cutts Transport, a local, family-owned trucking firm. However, this fertiliser not only promoted growth spurts in the young tobacco plants but also led to the proliferation of highly intrusive, quick-growing weeds.

We therefore had to spend long days weeding our tobacco fields, with mattocks and carefully uprooting, by hand, those weeds growing close to the delicate roots. This was physically demanding work and we regularly needed to stand up, straighten and stretch, to try to ease the strain on our aching backs. It was no easy task raising a healthy tobacco crop since tobacco plants are highly susceptible to a variety of diseases and insect infestations. One of our more interesting annual purchases was a batch of several hundred newly-hatched, fluffy, yellow chickens, which would arrive at the Manjimup railway siding, in cardboard boxes with small holes punched along the sides. We would load the noisy brood onto the tray of our Austin truck and take them to our farm where the tiny, chirpy, pest controllers - in - waiting were housed in one of the farm sheds or an empty tobacco kiln. At night we would put corrugated iron sheets over their makeshift shelters and place a number of tilly lamps on top of these in order to keep the chickens warm. Within weeks, the chicks were ready to roam our tobacco paddocks during the day to feast on grasshoppers, worms, beetles and aphids, which if left uncontrolled, would have endangered the survival of our tobacco crop. Each night we would round them up into a fenced area in the corner of one of the paddocks where they were guarded by our dogs from being attacked by the many *l'istsj*, foxes, that regularly visited our farm. I often assumed the responsibility of looking after two legged pest controllers and earned the nickname, *pilicharo*, he who looks after the chickens, it would be a nickname that my youngest brother *Stase*, in particular, would jokingly use when referring to me for years to come. Within a month or so a variety of chicken-based meals would frequently be served at the *Numeff* family's dinner table. A number of commercially - produced pesticides were also important in safeguarding our precious tobacco crop which was prone to various fungal, bacterial and viral diseases: rot, mildew and wilt and we regularly sprayed our tobacco plants with highly dangerous poisons from metal spray packs strapped onto our backs. These chemicals are harmful to the skin, eyes and the respiratory system but rarely would we wear protective masks, since at that time, the adverse after-effects were not widely known.

We would *top* each tobacco plant by pulling off the flowers and some of the suckers to encourage the growth of healthier and bigger leaves and toward the end of January harvesting by hand would begin. In such a close-knit community a number of families would gather together to pick the tobacco crop of their neighbours and then move on the next farm and collectively harvest there. There were several harvests since tobacco leaves ripen at different rates. The leaves at the bottom of the plants, referred to as *lux*, were the first to be removed, then the larger leaves, known as *cutters*, which were further up the stalk, while a third harvest took off the *tips*, those leaves at the very top of the tobacco plants.

**Footnotes:**

*The tobacco plant is said to have originated in the Americas where it was smoked by native American Indians as a sign of friendship and to seal trade deals and was considered, by them, as a gift from their creator god. The plant belongs to the genus, nicotiana, some say named after Jean Nicot, a French ambassador to Portugal, who was said to have sent tobacco, as a medicinal cure, to the court of Catherine de Medici in Florence. Others claim that tobacco gets its name from the Turkish word, tabbaq, which is a reference to a variety of herbs.*

The harvested tobacco leaves were placed into hessian bags spread on the ground, which when full, were rolled up into round bales secured with metal hooks that were attached at one end. Bags, bulging with tobacco leaves, were then loaded onto a horse or tractor-drawn trailer to be taken to the drying kilns. There the freshly-picked leaves were threaded onto rows of rigid wire which protruded from either side of specially-designed wooden tobacco leaf holders which were in turn stacked onto timber railings located inside the kilns. The heat needed to dry the harvested tobacco leaves flowed from wood-fuelled fires burning within long, semi-circular, brick fireplaces located outside each kiln. Initially, it was critical to maintain an internal temperature at a constant eighty degrees Fahrenheit so the leaves would slowly yellow and begin to shrivel as the chlorophyll and moisture was drawn from them. The temperature was then increased in order to complete the drying process. After several days, the kiln doors were opened to allow the dry tobacco leaves to absorb moisture and soften before they were transferred to a grading shed where they were assessed as *ripe*, *green* or *red*. There were seven grades of *ripe* tobacco which were lustrous yellow, smooth leaves without any green colouring. This was the premium grade tobacco and most sought-after by the tobacco company purchasing agents and therefore that part of the crop that attracted the highest prices at auction. The quantity of *ripe* tobacco, however, usually only comprised one bale for every five acres of crop. There were four grades of *green* tobacco, leaves which were green or lemon in colour and two grades of *red* tobacco, leaves with a reddish or mahogany shade. We became experts in grading our tobacco but in the end the final arbiters as to the quality of the crop were always the buyers and reflected in the prices that they were prepared to bid on the auction house floor.

Once graded, the tobacco was wrapped into bundles of ten to twelve leaves which were bound together with a single leaf of the same grade. These were then placed within large hessian bales suspended within a press. When full, each of our bales was proudly marked, *Vellios and Sons* boldly inscribed with a metal stencil placed along the sides of the bulging bales and then brushed over with charcoal using a stiff broom. The bales were then transported by truck to Fremantle to be auctioned. This was an exciting but anxious time as we nervously awaited the *pismo*, letter, from the auctioneers informing us of the price for which our tobacco had sold. The content of that letter would to a large degree determine our financial fortunes for the year and our outlook on life in general. A company cheque would inevitably follow within the month or so and in the good years it could be anything up to five thousand pounds which was a substantial sum of money at the time but we certainly worked long and hard to earn it and not every season was a good one.

When we had initially moved onto our family farm our priority was to clear additional acres of arable land on which we could plant a financially viable tobacco crop. The seventy acres of the land that had previously been cleared were required to pasture our herd of dairy cows and was deemed unsuitable for growing a high yielding, fine grade tobacco crop. We therefore set about carving out new paddocks on which we would grow our first tobacco crop. The result, however,

was to prove most disappointing and morale-sapping. Our neighbours, across the road, were Bob Hall, his wife and sons, Neil and Louis. Louis Hall was a self-taught but gifted mechanic whom we would call upon whenever any of our farm machinery broke down or failed to work properly. During the clearing of our new tobacco fields Louis would often jump aboard our former World War Two armoured vehicle, with tank-like wheels, which Doug Wren the former owner had purchased at an auction of redundant military equipment. We would place a heavy chain around the smaller trees and shrubs and Louis Hall, sweating profusely, face blacken with dirt and dust and revving a screeching, defiant motor, would pull them to the ground. Our farm tank would dig deeply into the soil as it moved forward and back and slid to one side to the other straining against the more stubborn, deep-rooted trees which were determined to hold their ground. Our Macedonian ancestry had precluded us from contact with such machinery and we knew little about technological gadgetry therefore Louis Hall's help was much appreciated. The larger trees had to be bulldozed down and we would invariably have to call upon the services of local bulldozer contractors, Kenny Geisser and Phillip Brown. We used some of the timber as firewood but the rest was invariably set alight in large bonfires that lit up the night sky for days. During clearing, my father, wearing his black beret pulled down low over his eyes, would look on and offer advice. However, he rarely took part declaring that his own land clearing days were well and truly over.

In exchange for Louis's help my father would regularly volunteer members of the family to assist in harvesting our neighbour's extensive potato crop. On these occasions, Louis Hall or his brother, Neil, would sit on their Massey Ferguson tractor which pulled a plough that gently exposed the mature potatoes. It was our task to follow behind and collect and grade the potato crop into "firsts" and "seconds". Large, undamaged, smooth skinned potatoes, without lumpy nodules, were thrown into separate bags from the second grade potatoes we harvested. It was hard, back-breaking work only interrupted at midday when we would walk across the road to our farm house to eat a hearty *ruchok*, lunch, cooked by my mother. We would also take a short break in the afternoon for a traditional Australian cup of tea and biscuits provided by our neighbours. Bob Hall would often comment, in his distinctive Australian accent, "Chris, this is an unfair exchange mate, you are offering me far too much in return for Louis's occasional help and a few second grade potatoes." The rest of us strongly agreed with our neighbour's honest assessment of the situation - but not my father. "She be right Mister Bob," he would say in his broken English, "she be okay". My father never harvested potatoes on our neighbour's farm and we often thought, but rarely voiced the view, that he was in some ways very much like *Dedo Kole*, a little too concerned about pleasing others even to the detriment of members of his own family.

We planted a large vegetable garden which produced copious quantities of peppers, capsicums, lettuce, corn, onions, pumpkins, tomatoes and beans. Juicy watermelons and sweet rock melons, guarded by a strange assortment of brightly dressed scarecrows, grew so abundantly in our *bostun*, melon patch, that we would only select the best looking specimens: the large, dark

green, round or oblong watermelons which we would throw into the air, watch crash to the ground and then feast on the sweet heart of the fruit. The rest was left to slowly *skapi*, decompose in the hot sun.

We did not bake our own bread as we had done in the village, instead a large number of crusty Italian loaves, from Hughes Bakery, would arrive every second day. Indeed, our bread order was so large that our loaves were delivered to our door step rather than being placed in the bread box that was situated at the entrance of the gravel driveway that lead into our farm. It appeared that our custom was so valued that the Bakery gifted us a large cake every Christmas. Our purchases of butter and cheese from the Sunny West factory would arrive inside our empty milk cans with the cost deducted from our monthly milk cheque.

While we cleared the paddocks on which we would grow our first tobacco crop, my father contracted Petre Karamfiloff and his sons *Giorgi, Pavle* and *Mitre*, local Macedonian builders, to construct two tobacco drying kilns and a grading shed on our property. However, the many hours of hard work and not inconsiderable expense seemed to have counted for little. The reality was that the land cleared was simply too dry to nurture a good quality tobacco crop. This was a time before the widespread use of irrigation due primarily to the expense associated with buying the equipment required to irrigate on a large scale. We were therefore forced to clear a new portion of land and set about the task a second time and to our great relief the yield and quality of our tobacco crop improved considerably. Over the following years the family had agreed that my brothers and I would share in the profits of the family's tobacco crop and that my father would receive the earnings from the milk produced by our herd of *kraavi*, cows.

Much of my mother's time was spent standing in front of a hot cast iron, wood-fuelled *soba*, stove, which she cleaned weekly, removing the ash and scrubbing the metal surfaces with rags dipped in lemon juice or vinegar. Each day she would, *gotvi*, cook, several meals to feed a large family of young, hungry workers with big appetites, for although we worked hard, we ate extremely well. Meat was no longer a delicacy as it had been in the villages but eaten almost daily in a variety of *manji*, stews, large roasts and thick, juicy steaks were regularly served at our wooden kitchen *masa*, table. All the male members of the family fancied themselves as amateur butchers and would take it in turn to slaughter one of our litter of *bishki*, pigs or a *тели*, calf, but more commonly old ewes, purchased for ten shillings a head from local farmers, a bargain price since we would consume the meat and then sold the sheep skins for five shillings apiece. Our kerosene-fuelled refrigerator was always full of different cuts of meat, home-made *lukansi*, sausages, and *jubrini*, delicious pork rinds, layered with congealed fat, which when warmed were regarded as a delicacy.

I remember when we first arrived in Western Australia we were very self-conscious about the *jadenje*, food, that we traditionally ate: bean and lentil soup, peppers and capsicums which were pickled, stuffed or roasted and then peeled and drizzled with olive oil and flavoured with crushed garlic, and a variety of Macedonian stews and pastries. We would quickly scramble to clear food from the dinner table when our meal was interrupted by the arrival of a non-Macedonian visitor out of embarrassment that many of our staple meals were not eaten in the broader community. Our children also experienced the same awkward feeling at school, during recess and lunch breaks, when they would open their lunch boxes containing thick, crusty bread sandwiches filled with salami, roasted peppers and fetta cheese, in contrast to the thinly-sliced peanut paste, vegemite or ham and salad filled sandwiches and rolls, of their school mates. Today in a multicultural Australia this is no longer an issue, indeed, it has become fashionable, much to the amusement of my generation of Macedonian immigrants, to see a large variety of ethnic foods on the menu of the more trendy and expensive restaurants.

## Chapter 16: On Our Own

*There came a time when Letta and I would depart the family farm and build a new life for ourselves on a farming property nearby. The years that followed, although challenging, were among the best of times. Although estranged from my parents we maintained regular contact with my brothers and other family members and made a number of new life-long friends including our neighbours: the Youvkovi, Michovi and Kalamarovi. Letta and I would grow to appreciate the freedom of being able to make important decisions that would guide our future.*

*Although sad to leave the family farm, where they were fussed over by all, Jim and Stella, would also flourish in their new environment. They genuinely liked each other's company and there were trees to climb, ropes to swing on, wooden planks and old cardboard boxes to build with, sheds and tobacco kilns to hide in, animals to care for, creeks to paddle in and neighbouring children to play with.*

*During this time, we milked a small herd of dairy cows and leased a portion of land, on a neighbouring farm, where we raised a tobacco crop. Letta and I worked hard and although we had few luxuries, both of us and the children were happy and our more immediate life's journey seemed to have been clearly mapped out for us.*

My father was our undisputed family patriarch. As such, he was responsible for making all major decisions concerning family matters and everyone was expected to accept his judgment without question. This was the way it had been for generations and firmly grounded on time-honoured traditions.

However, there came a time, as it often does, when there would be the inevitable simmering of discontent, heated argument and occasionally open challenges to patriarchal authority. As a result Letta and I would move from the family farm and go it alone just as my older brother *Tanas* and his family had done. One of my regrets was that as a consequence my parents and *jas*, I, would not be on speaking terms for over a decade. This dramatic change in our personal circumstances, in part, had its origin in a series of disagreements between my brother *Noume* and my father over all manner of things. As a result, my younger brother had talked about leaving the farm and going to live, *sam*, on his own, on the new three hundred and seven acre property that my brothers and I had purchased along Lindfarn Road, Yanmah on which we pastured a small herd of dairy cows. We had attempted to dissuade my brother, a *bekar*, bachelor, at the time, concerned that he would not be able to clean, cook and wash for himself after spending long hours working on the property by himself.

I tried to mediate and voice my reservations to my father regarding my younger brother's plan. On these occasions my father would often become agitated and during one of our conversations, in the peak of anger, he declared that I too might consider leaving the farm. This heated exchange and subsequent pig-headedness, exhibited by both sides, led to our inability to talk matters through. The outcome was particularly heartbreaking for our two young children, Jim and Stella, who were devoted to their grandparents and uncles, and for whom our family farm was home. Rather ironically, my father also left the farm shortly after and moved into a home he and my mother built at 60 Mount Street, on a half acre block, just on the fringe of the Manjimup town centre. My father was now approaching sixty years of age and while not eligible for the old age pension he was no longer particularly interested in finding gainful employment reasoning that he had worked hard all of his life and the time had come for him to rest.

Our new homestead was a modest structure, typical of the farm houses built in the Manjimup district during the 1920s. It had a tin roof, weather-board and asbestos clad walls and wooden floorboards. The roof was rust stained and the exterior walls were drab and dry during the summer months and water logged in winter. Nevertheless, there were no leaks and the walls kept out the cold, this was now home. During many nights, we were pleased to see a dim light emanating from a gently swinging tilly lamp moving ever closer toward us. Our dog, *Tippy*, would stop barking when he realised that it was our neighbour, *Tanas Kalamaroff*, a friendly, intelligent man, whom we came to regard as a member of our family. He often visited during evenings, especially when his son, *Londe*, and daughter-in-law, *Vasso* and two grandsons, Tom and Con, were in Perth or holidaying in Greece. *Londe* and *Vasso Kalamaroff* were both talented artists and sculptors whose farm house and garage doubled as a makeshift art studio.

*Vasso* would subsequently earn a reputation as a gifted author and playwright. They lived distinctly different lives: one of high culture and sophistication, the other as hard-working farmers in a small, rather obscure, rural community. Despite this, we found that we had more things in common than we had differences and we were good friends with a genuine respect and liking for one another. Our son was especially fascinated by the collection of abridged, illustrated versions of classic stories, that belonged to the *Kalamaroff* boys. He would come home from his regular visits with Tom and Con and talk excitedly about a white whale called *Moby Dick*, the murder of an ancient Roman general named Julius Caesar and the guillotining of a French king and his queen. These books would foster within him a great enjoyment of reading and an interest in history. Jim and Stella always looked forward, with great anticipation, to the *Kalamaroff* family returning from an overseas holiday because they knew that there would inevitably be a thoughtful *podarok*, gift, for each of them.

We had no electricity on the farm so Letta cooked on a wood-fired stove and stored our perishables within an old kerosene-fuelled refrigerator. At night, by the dim light of a tilly lamp, we sat around a wooden table in our small kitchen to eat our evening meals in semi-darkness but in an atmosphere that was warm and loving. Our outdoor toilet, nestled under a large, sprawling and seasonally bountiful loquat tree, was a small asbestos outbuilding housing a wooden toilet seat resting over a large tin can. A copper and two crudely-moulded cement basins, one with an old, hand-operated ringer attached, served as our outside laundry. A small, orchard containing *kajsija*, apricot, *krusha*, pear, *jabolko*, apple, *praska*, peach, and nectarine trees, flourished in the area surrounding our homestead and we were in constant competition with the *vrap'chi*, birds, especially small green eyes, over who would feast on the ripening fruit, although in truth, there was more than enough for all of us. Our domestic water supply was sourced from a large water tank situated on a sturdy wooden stand next to the house and we pumped water from a smaller tank to wash out our dairy. There were two creeks running through our property: the main creek, flowed swiftly during the winter months and teemed with small crustaceans, while a smaller creek, further away from our farm house, was the home of a number of long-neck turtles.

A number of less welcome animal intruders periodically visited our property. These included foxes harassing our hens, despite the best efforts of *Tippy* and visits by inquisitive flocks of emus and mobs of kangaroos. By far the most numerous and destructive of these wild visitors were rabbits which grazed in large numbers on the grasses in our paddocks. We would fight back by mixing strychnine with oats and injecting the mixture within baited apples which were scattered on the ground. The furry pests, initially suspicious, would over time become less wary and we were constantly removing dead rabbits and poison baits from the paddocks so our cows could continue to safely pasture there. We very rarely ate rabbit or kangaroo meat, although rabbit cooked in a *makolo*, thick gravy, was popular. However, we were aware that these meats were regularly eaten by many of our Australian neighbours as we would often see the hind legs of kangaroos hanging under their shaded verandas. Several of them were

only too willing to offer to cull some of the kangaroos pasturing in our paddocks and would typically arrive at nightfall to begin spotting and stunning kangaroos, with powerful lights, before shooting them. They would take some of the meat home for the dinner table while the rest was used as food for their pets.

We were largely self-sufficient on our new farm. We grew our own vegetables and fruit and I would occasionally butcher one of our home-raised calves or piglets for meat. My daughter, Stella became a committed vegetarian and remained so for many years after she had inadvertently witnessed me killing a *tel'e*, calf, which she had hand-fed and treated as a pet. As on the family farm, our bread was delivered by the local baker and our butter and cheese by the milk tanker drivers, employees of the Sunny West Company, who regularly came to our farm to take away our full milk cans.

There were few reasons to travel to the Manjimup township and these occasions were so rare that going into town became an event of some significance. I generally went alone, as my father had done. Jim and Stella would particularly look forward to such infrequent visits, in the hope that I might bring home some *blagi*, confectionaries, ice cream or even a small toy. I regret to say that they were regularly disappointed. My standard explanation was that the people who sold such things were seriously ill or had died and that they would have to wait until I visited town another time. Not that they expected much for they received little in the way of such things. Nevertheless, they were *radosni*, happy, well-fed and healthy and found ways to entertain themselves. Our son would spend hours scratching outlines of imagery paddocks into the bare earth and erecting simulated fences made from twigs to enclose cattle in the form of dry gum nuts collected in varying sizes, to represent bulls, cows and calves. He particularly enjoyed recreating ancient battles scenes, alongside the *Kalamaroff* boys, who being talented artists, like their parents, constructed rather realistic helmets, shields, swords and long spears which mimicked those of ancient Greek hoplites and Roman legionaries. These mock battles, which included Stella and some of the neighbouring children, were staged in the paddocks and in and out of tobacco kilns and farm sheds.

Our son enjoyed playing with his treasured collection of marbles which he would empty from an assortment of disused tins and jars and lay out, often according to colour, in rows on the floor of our front room which we used to grade our tobacco following harvesting and kiln drying our annual crop. He had his favourites, his taws, *stickers*, he called them, since he would explain that these were more likely to stay within the hard-packed dirt marble ring after hitting and knocking out one of a number of marbles that had been placed within. This meant that he could “knuckle down”, execute his next shot, close to other marbles within the ring and thereby increase his chances of hitting them out of the ring. Apparently, there were well-defined rules associated with playing marbles and children accused of not abiding by these would not be permitted to play. One of the most common forms of “cheating” was known as *fudging*, which referred to a player rapidly jerking their hand forward over the line of the ring to gain added momentum and to shorten the distance of the shot. The children ‘played for keeps’ and had a saying, “the winner keeps and the loser weeps.” They also played a game that required more good fortune than skill where players placed in their hands marbles of their own and an equal number of those of their opponent, formed fists and challenged their fellow player to identify the hand which contained the mutually-designated marble. Before school and during recess and

lunch breaks large numbers of school children could be seen whirling and twirling their hands, formed in tight fists, in all directions, in an attempt to confuse their opponents as to the whereabouts of the mutually agreed upon marble. This game was banned by the school administrators who deemed it to be a form of gambling.

Our son frequently practiced playing marbles on the farm. He would carefully sweep a patch of earth, sketch a circle upon it and then place a number of marbles within. Then using his favourite *taws* he would then try to knock brightly-coloured marbles out of the ring. He would also practice *lagging* which involved lobbying a marble as close as possible to a line drawn in the dirt. This was an important skill since the player who could lob his marble closest to the line would have the all important first shot. At other times he played what he called *long taw*, which involved shooting a marble along our gravel driveway, which linked the main road to our farm, and attempting to hit the original marble with a second marble. If he missed he would then try to hit the second marble with the first and so on. He would also practice *bombies*, the dropping usually larger marbles, tom bowlers, from a standing position, onto marbles laying on the ground.

He would often arrive home from school with his short, grey school uniform trouser pockets full of marbles. For a time I had thought that this identified him as a skilled marbles player but the truth was that our son would frequently give most of his marbles to his first cousin Phillip, my brother *Tanas's* son, at the beginning of the school day and then collect the marbles which Phillip, a gifted marble player, had won on his behalf, before catching the school bus home. I recall the day he arrived home rather agitated because his teacher, Miss Wishart, whom he liked, had apparently confiscated a number of marbles which had fallen out of his pockets and rolled along the floor during class and had refused to return them. For years one of our son's biggest regrets was that in our move to Perth he had forgotten to pack his marbles collection. A minor compensation was that playing marbles was never the rage at his new school, Como Primary School, as it had been in Manjimup.

We spoke Macedonian exclusively at home and our two eldest children, Jim and Stella, always conversed in Macedonian with each other. Shy, unfamiliar with the world outside the farm and struggling with their school work they could not wait to return home after enduring the daily frustrations of trying to cope with lessons in what for them was, at least for a time, a foreign language. When our son, then a six year old, broke his arm by falling off the school monkey bars, during morning recess, he had made a run for it and had to be pursued by his teachers and a number of older students who were concerned about the extent of his injury. He had behaved like a cornered animal until his cousin Phillip was called upon to calm him down. It was not that he was a disruptive student, indeed he was never in any trouble during his entire school life and was respectful and well-behaved but also unworldly and frightened. It had occurred to him that there would be a host of strangers in the doctor's surgery or hospital ward where he would surely be taken.

On another occasion I learned, from a father of one of my son's Macedonian classmates, that he had been extremely upset when Miss Wishart displayed one of his drawings on one of the class pin-up boards. He had drawn a camel, inspired by a gift of a toy camel, that the *Kalamarovi* had kindly given him after returning home from a holiday to Greece. He was so self-conscious that he did not want any of his work to be put on show for others to see and he would remain embarrassed for weeks until a new selection of student art work was pinned up and his drawing of a camel had been removed. Stella's shyness was more visible, she would bend down her head and suck on her thumb when in unfamiliar surroundings or company. Both brother and sister would never use the school toilets but would "hang on" which led to a few embarrassing moments which I will not go into detail but do not require much imagination to work out. Consequently, the very best of school days were those when the school bus failed to arrive along the gravel road that ran along the front of our farm because it had broken down or had been halted by a fallen tree or large branch. It would take hours to make repairs or to clear the offending obstruction. After waiting an hour or so for the bus to arrive it would be obvious to Jim and Stella that it would not be coming and they were free to spend a enjoyable day playing together on the farm.

While school was initially a rather unpleasant experience for our children their anxieties were in part eased by the fact that a significant number of their fellow students also had a Macedonian background and so they could talk, play and commiserate with each other. Jim and Stella also looked forward to sharing their school lunch breaks with their grandparents who lived nearby. Since I was not on speaking terms with my parents our children rarely saw them socially. They adored them and would sneak off the school grounds at lunch time to see their grandparents knowing that they would be warmly greeted and fussed over. My father, on his regular strolls into town, would make a special effort to buy food that he knew they liked and he would always purchase a knob of salami, Jim's favourite.

Fortunately, unlike some of their school friends, who were required to repeat Grade One, both our son and daughter were both able to enter Grade Two on the back of some rather dubious academic results.

Jim enjoyed playing Australian rules football at school and followed Deanmill, a local team competing in the Lower South West Football League. I did buy him a football, only one, which he regularly kicked around by himself in the rain-soaked grass in front of our house. That football, after a while, became heavily waterlogged and some of the stitches holding it together split open and part of the inner bladder, like a red, infested boil, popped out. In the end only the bladder remained to be kicked around until it burst. Our son would wait in vain for a new football.

On very rare occasions I would take him to see Deanmill, "the Mill", play in their maroon and gold jumpers, generally in fixtures against the often dominant, Jardee Tigers, who played in black and gold and had in their side a young Macedonian defender, with a reputation for being rough and tough, the often reported and much suspended *Pondo Saliakos*. Later, when *Pondo* moved to Perth he became player-coach of an enthusiastically supported amateur Australian rules football team sponsored by the Macedonian Community and was a much admired mentor by all who played under him. While our son greatly admired *Pondo*, he was a staunch Deanmill supporter and his favourite player was the team's captain, "Juggy" Rice. During those years, he came to support East Perth in the WAFL competition because his football hero was the legendary footballer Graham "Polly" Farmer. I recall him listening to WAFL games on an old radio, a large furniture piece, which rested on our back verandah and more often than not he would be bitterly disappointed by the results as East Perth experienced a number of poor seasons in the early 1960s. When we moved to Perth his side's fortunes revived but he would often be extremely upset over East Perth repeatedly losing grand finals to arch rivals Perth and West Perth. Ironically, we lived in the Perth district and Perth was a dominant force in the late 1960s and mid 1970s. Playing for the South Perth Junior Football Club, Jim was one of the few not to wear a Perth jumper to training and endured the constant ribbing of his team mates. I East Perth, to his great disappointment, were destined to be perennial bridesmaids.

During the first year on our new property, Letta and I failed to raise a tobacco crop. We simply did not have the money to buy the equipment that was required. Instead we worked as farm labourers for more established growers in the district and supplemented our income by milking our small herd of dairy cows: an unfashionable mix of Shorthorns, Friesians and Jerseys. The majority of our cows were red-coated, white-bellied Shorthorns, one of the first British cattle breeds to be introduced into Australia. They could be harnessed into bullock teams and were generally docile, hardy and highly adaptable to the extreme heat of summer. Shorthorns were not fussy eaters being content to *pasi*, graze, on the local *trevi*, grasses. They calved more easily than most other breeds and their offspring were generally healthy and grew quickly.

We milked twice daily, each morning at five o'clock and then at six o'clock in the evening. I would therefore rise early and in the winter months, trudge through the darkness in the biting cold, across dew-covered paddocks, to bring in the cows for milking. During those crisp, frosty winter mornings, I would be occasionally drawn back to my younger days, across vast oceans and expansive land masses, to my tiny Macedonian village where my brothers and I regularly shepherded and milked herds of goats and sheep in seemingly similar conditions. At such times, I would become a little nostalgic but there was never any desire to return to my former life for I clearly understood the reality that my pride in my Macedonian ancestry would have to be carried deep within my heart. Australia was now my home and I knew that in retrospect I was fortunate that circumstances, however tragic they might have appeared at times, had offered me an opportunity to start life over again in a young nation, bursting with potential, full of possibilities and accommodating cultural differences. While it is true that, over time, most of my compatriots returned to their ancestral homeland to see their former villages and townships but such visits have been more about reminiscing about loved ones who had passed and reviving memories of their youth rather than any on-going attachment to the land itself. Most of us had come to the frustrating conclusion, that despite centuries of hope, our part of Macedonia, the land where my ancestors were born and lived, was now within the borders of Greece and it was extremely unlikely to ever be a land that we could truly call home.

Our dairy cows would swagger, unhurried, rocking slowly from side to side, into the enclosed yard of our small dairy. Invariably, at their head was Rosie, an old, large cow distinguished by her red and white patchwork markings, who would insist on being the first to be milked. She knew her predominant place in the herd and that she was the family favourite since the milk that she produced was often reserved for our personal use. The rest of the herd instinctively conformed to an established routine with each cow knowing its turn and entering the milking shed undirected into one of dairy's milking bays. The milk would flow through a network of pipes into a large galvanised container and was then put through a separator to remove the cream before being poured into metal *tenekina*, cans, that were engraved *J. C. & L. Vellios*.

Each year we raised a small litter of piglets which we fed with food scraps and skim milk poured into wooden troughs to be eagerly consumed by our aggressive, over-protective sows and their unruly offspring. We hand fed our young calves with milk from metal buckets after having secured their tiny heads with a brace made from two lengths of timber that crossed over their necks and which were locked together with a bolt to keep them still. The children liked to dip their fingers into the milk and allow the new-born calves to suckle from them with their rippled, moist tongues. We were fortunate that we lost only a few of our cows to illness although one of our best milking cows did die of mastitis, a painful bacterial infection of the udder, despite the local veterinarian having injected her with a powerful dose of antibiotics. We would find the poor animal's grotesquely swollen and fly-blown body laying dead in the creek bed. It was clear that her hind legs had given way and she had died a painful death in the shallow, muddy waters.

Once Letta and I had finished milking we would eat breakfast and go off to work as *hrgati* or *rabotnizi*, farm labourers. On many of these days, our children, still too young to attend school or on school holidays, were left home to care for themselves. These were different times and we never thought that we were neglecting them. We reasoned that they would be safe in the familiar surrounds of the farm and we knew that both preferred to stay home rather than having to sit for hours out of the rain in winter or under the shade of a clump of trees trying to entertain themselves while we worked in the heat on the properties of our neighbours, in the summer months. They quickly learned to be self-reliant. However, there were occasional hiccups. I recall arriving home in the late afternoon of a sweltering summer's day to see the tall, dry grass that had been growing along one side of our house was now a blacken tarpaulin of ash. Jim and Stella had apparently decided that they would remove this eyesore and the quickest way of doing so they reasoned was to set it ablaze. Once the *orgun*, fire, had taken hold they became aware of the danger and anxiously tried to put out the fire with buckets of water filled from our water tank. In the end, there was no harm done but in reflection their punishment, forced to sleep outside huddled together under the clothes line at the front of the house, in the dark and cold, was harsh.

With the money we earned from working as farm labourers and the income from the milk produced by our dairy cows we were able to save sufficient funds to contract a local Macedonian builder, *Stan Dimitriades*, to construct two tobacco kilns on our farm in preparation for planting and harvesting a tobacco crop in the following year. My brother *Tanas* briefly worked with Stan and my nephew, Phillip, who would in time establish his own successful building company in Manjimup, was his apprentice. Subsequently, one of Phillip's own apprentices was Louis, my brother *Noume's* son. It might have been that *Dedo Kole's* handyman skills had resurfaced in the family genes after having skipped an entire generation.

As it had been on our family farm, our first tobacco crop was hugely disappointing. We had painstakingly cleared and ploughed the paddock on which we intended to raise our initial tobacco crop with the aid of our two horses, the aging *Smokey* and the recently purchased *Silver*. However, our crop was of such poor quality that it was rejected by the purchasing agents. This was a crippling financial and emotional blow and we were desperate to find a portion of land on our farm that would be more suitable for growing tobacco but sadly we came to the conclusion that this was a false hope. We were therefore forced to continue to earn our income working as farm labourers and on several occasions worked on a nearby property owned by Eric and Beryl Trotter. Their farm had been one of those that had been part of a generally unsuccessful land settlement scheme implemented during the 1920s when many novice farmers were settled on one hundred and sixty acre land allotments.

Letta and I talked about whether to ask Eric Trotter if he would be willing to lease us one of his fields so that we could raise a tobacco crop there. He readily agreed to the proposition and as a result our lives now revolved around working on two properties and travelling between them in our one tonne Chevolet truck, which we purchased from Thompsons car dealership in Manjimup, or riding on our second-hand, dull-grey Massey Ferguson tractor which we had acquired from the *Kalamaroffs* who had bought a powerful, shining new one. Such a development was bad news for our farm horse *Silver* whom we informed the children had been sent to the Perth Zoo. However, we omitted to say that he had gone there not as a pampered exhibit, living the good life in his old age, but as pet food. Old *Smokey*, wracked with severe rheumatism, had previously died and was buried on the farm.

#### Footnotes:

*Massey Ferguson tractors were popular with Manjimup tobacco growers. Massey Ferguson was a Canadian Company internationally known as the manufacturer of quality farm machinery. The Company had purchased the Australian Sunshine Harvester Company, founded by H. V. McKay, which too produced a fine range of farm equipment. H.V. McKay was the inventor of a harvesting machine that could reap, thresh and winnow grain from a standing wheat crop which was acclaimed and used world-wide. The Sunshine Harvester Company was also associated with the ruling made by Australia's Conciliation and Arbitration Court in 1907 to introduce a basic wage, the so called "Harvester Judgment" that enacted the concept of a fair and reasonable living wage for Australian workers.*

## Chapter 17 : Off to the Big Smoke

*Just when we thought that our future had been settled our lives would take a dramatic turn as a result of a series of unexpected events which were largely beyond our control. We had envisaged ourselves as long-term tobacco growers, farmers, who would spend the rest of our lives in Manjimup but we were soon confronted with the prospect of having to move from our farm, family and friends and relocate to Perth.*

*The main catalyst for such a change in our circumstances was the demise of the tobacco industry in the Manjimup district, stemming from the major international tobacco companies refusing to purchase tobacco grown in the area. The restructuring of the local dairy industry was also a contributing factor.*

*In the end, with great reservations, Letta and I left Manjimup and began a new chapter of our lives as city dwellers, living in the “big smoke”, an initially daunting experience, that would require considerable changes to our lifestyle and outlook.*

We now felt that our long-term future had been clearly mapped out and that we would spend the rest of our working lives as tobacco growers in the Manjimup district. However, such aspirations would be thrown into chaos in 1959 when the major tobacco companies delivered Manjimup tobacco growers the grim news that they would not be buying tobacco produced in the region after the 1960-1961 growing season. They pointed to a severe decline in demand for light Virginian tobacco leaf, grown in the District, given the changing trend to filter-tipped cigarettes which were produced with richer and more aromatic tobacco varieties. They also expressed the concern that the tobacco we raised had a relatively high salt content which resulted in cigarettes not burning as well as those manufactured from tobacco leaf with less salt content that were grown in other Australian tobacco growing regions. The imminent demise of the local tobacco industry forced us to seriously consider our future since our tobacco crop was by far our most important source of income. Manjimup tobacco growers, among them a significant number of Macedonians, subsequently diversified into growing vegetables, notably potatoes, beans, peas, corn, cauliflowers and cabbages, while others planted apple orchards or turned to raising beef cattle. There were some job opportunities available in the Manjimup township and in the local timber mills. I found work at the Peters Creameries factory in Manjimup washing out the metal milk cans of dairy farmers with Company contracts to supply milk and was responsible for keeping the factory's boiler fuelled. The Manjimup operation was a subsidiary of a larger Peters Creameries factory at Brunswick Junction.

Letta and I were extremely frustrated by our changed circumstances. Our tobacco kilns now lay idle and our dreams of building a secure financial future based on growing tobacco had been shattered. Our tireless efforts and significant financial outlay seemed to have yielded little. We therefore began to think seriously about selling our farm and moving away from Manjimup. This was no easy decision since our close family and friends lived there and our two older children were now well-settled at Manjimup Primary School. They had grown up in a safe and secure environment surrounded by loving grandparents and adoring uncles and aunts and Letta and I were concerned about how they would react to leaving behind the people who meant so much to them. We too had lived a closeted existence totally absorbed in working in a small, rural community where our daily lives revolved around our extended family and a small circle of close, almost exclusively, Macedonian friends and neighbours with whom we shared our dreams and challenges, visited regularly and attended dances, engagements, weddings, christenings and funerals together.

#### Footnotes:

*The demise of the tobacco industry in the Manjimup district, occurred despite the enormous increase in the number of people who took up smoking in the 1950s. It was triggered by various factors. Primarily, it was the result of a decision by Rothmans, a large multinational tobacco company, which had aggressively sought to gain increased market share in Australia through well-funded advertising campaigns, to source its tobacco from Queensland, Victoria and overseas. Significant quantities of Manjimup produced tobacco therefore remained unsold at Fremantle auction houses in 1960 and 1961. The situation became so grim that Michelides Limited was forced to close its Roe Street factory in June 1960.*

Letta and I could not afford to experiment with diversifying into growing vegetables. The water in the main creek that flowed through our property was reduced to a trickle during summer and we would have needed to construct a substantial dam to provide the quantity of water necessary for irrigating a variety of vegetable crops. While we agonised over the direction we would take our future was largely decided for us when the Sunny West Company announced that it would only issue milk quotas to dairy farmers committed to upgrading their facilities by installing expensive technologies such as on-site refrigeration. Our monthly milk cheque only ranged between eighty to one hundred and twenty pounds and there would be further financial demands on our personal finances as Letta was pregnant with our third child. We simply could not afford to proceed with the required upgrades.

Our daughter Stella was born ten days before our son had turned one. When Letta left for the Warren District Hospital to give birth to Stella he was still crawling. By the time she returned home, cradling our baby daughter in her arms, she was overjoyed to see him taking his first unsteady steps. Letta had kept her pregnancy a secret for months being too embarrassed to tell my mother that she was having a second child so soon after her first. Stella was nearly born in the cabin of our farm truck. At that time I was working with Michelides Limited and had been sleeping a few nights a week at Plantation Two. One evening I was surprised to see my brother *Noume* arrive in our family truck with Letta in the front seat and obviously experiencing severe labour pains. My wife subsequently gave birth only minutes after we had arrived at the hospital.

Now, our third child was on the way but things were not as they should have been, Letta was experiencing a difficult pregnancy. She was normally so resilient and uncomplaining and I was worried to see her so downcast and listless. After undergoing a number of medical tests our family doctor announced the grave diagnosis that our baby was either dead or would not be born alive and that he was worried about the well-being of my wife. Emotionally shaken, we were determined to seek a second opinion from specialists in Perth and left Jim and Stella in the care of their uncle *Noume* and aunty *Vasilka*. The children did not complain about this arrangement since they knew that their uncle would regale them with stories about kings, princesses, evil witches, giants and ogres. They also knew that their aunty always kept an orange cordial bottle in the pantry and that she would offer them large jugs full of sweet-tasting drink and give them plenty to eat. Their uncle *Stase*, then still a bachelor, was also living on the farm and the children loved him dearly and were constantly being spoilt by him.

Letta and I travelled to Perth with heavy hearts despite Letta's unwavering conviction that our baby felt very much alive. We were therefore much relieved when a nurse who examined her unreservedly declared that our baby was kicking vigorously and healthy. We were immensely relieved when the attending doctor confirmed the nurse's earlier assessment and told us that our child would be born within days. Our younger daughter *Fania*, Feni, was born at King Edward Hospital on 21 September 1960 and within days she had recovered from a slight bout of jaundice. We left Perth with our new-born baby daughter securely cradled in Letta arms and

filled with enormous relief and joy. Our Manjimup general practitioner, Doctor Phelan, shook his head in disbelief when we took her to receive her first immunisation needles. She was healthy and very much alive.

**Footnotes:**

*My brother Noume married Vasilka (Vicky) Andriova from Krepeshina on 27 October 1956. She had previously known of my brother through family connections but had only seen one photograph of him. She recalled how, after having made her decision to marry my brother, the villagers jokingly told her that she would be eaten alive by flies in Western Australia. My mother sent a letter asking her to visit Baba Kuzovitsa Iliova, her mother, before leaving. She remembers gifting Baba Stasa a small bag of sultanas and how on parting my maternal grandmother had hugged and kissed her and wished her well.*

*My brother Stase, married Elena (Helen) Mostakova on 1 October 1960. One of my mother's cousins had apparently visited the Mostakoff family home where she was greeted by a young woman who informed her that her parents were not at home but out collecting firewood. She had subsequently written to my mother that she had found the ideal wife for my youngest brother. Elena also recalls visiting Baba Kuzovitsa who had greeted her warmly and when leaving asked whether she would be kind enough to send her a warm jumper in which she could be buried. She had also visited Dedo Kole and remembers being told, by those who knew him well, to wipe off any lipstick or other make up before meeting him.*

The new requirements being imposed upon local dairy farmers effectively meant that few dairy farmers could afford to remain in the industry and a large number of long-established milk producers were forced to sell their herds. On many previously efficient and productive dairy farms the milking machines were silenced and once busy dairies were left unattended and were left to decay. Our decision to move to Perth was confirmed by yet a further financial setback that arose primarily out of ignorance and an unfortunate misunderstanding. In the midst of such trying times Letta and I had discussed all kinds of options. One of these was to stay in Manjimup and buy a property that would be suitable for growing potatoes and raising beef cattle. An opportunity arose when a farm owned by a local, who had moved to Wongan Hills to work with the Road Board, was put up for auction. The sale was conducted by Dalgetys Auctioneers and held at the Manjimup Hotel. I asked my good friend and relation, *Kole Paikoff*, Nick Paikos, to accompany me and to bid on my behalf since he had a better understanding of the English language and the auction process than I did. There was some interest in the property but once the auctioneer's hammer had fallen for the last time I was declared the successful bidder. The property was mine for the then considerable sum of seven thousand pounds and I wrote out a cheque for eight hundred pounds, the agreed deposit.

However, alarm bells soon began ringing when I subsequently learned that former group settlement scheme properties, such as the farm that I was buying, could not be purchased outright but on the basis of ninety-nine year leases. I was therefore no longer keen to proceed and informed the auctioneers that I had misunderstood the terms of sale. They responded by saying that it was my responsibility to have been aware of all the sale conditions and that the auction had been conducted according to proper procedure and therefore my bid was legally binding. Since they refused to annul the sale I went to Perth to consult a lawyer over the matter and he informed me that I might claim in a court of law that a hotel was not an appropriate venue for such an auction, that my understanding of English was limited and even that I had been under the influence of alcohol at the time of bidding. I was not prepared to tell untruths and the matter dragged on for several months before my lawyer and a Dalgety Company legal team finally thrashed out a compromise, in which I lost my deposit, the full eight hundred pounds, which represented the average annual wage at that time. Letta and I were so downcast that moving to Perth now appealed to us as the most logical option.

**Footnotes:**

*Dalgetys was established in the early 1840s by Frederick Dalgety who had come to Australia to seek his fortune on the Victorian goldfields. However, instead of engaging in mining he opted to establish a company selling mining and farm equipment which later diversified into the marketing of wool, livestock and rural properties. Dalgetys had a good reputation throughout Australia's rural communities. Today, it is owned by Wesfarmers, one of Australia's largest listed public companies.*

Life has a habit of taking one along unexpected pathways. Too often, just when one thinks they are travelling in the right direction toward one's desired destination obstacles emerge that necessitate a radical detour. While such changes have the potential to turn out for the best they are, at the time, intimidating and stressful. For a brief period we had tentatively considered the prospect of building a new life in Melbourne and so Letta and I decided that I should go and talk to my brother *Sotir* who was living there. Subsequently, I went to spend a week with my brother but in the end we agreed that this would have been an even more tumultuous decision than moving to Perth. In preparing for our imminent departure I sold our Chevrolet truck and Massey Ferguson tractor and purchased a dark blue, British designed Zephyr Mark 11 sedan. Our farm was purchased by a local farmer of Italian decent named Parravicini for five thousand five hundred pounds and we sold our dairy herd to a farmer in the district who had only recently acquired a dairy farm in Harvey. By arrangement with the new owner we could remain living on the property for a year to allow us sufficient time to prepare for our move to Perth. During this time, I visited Perth on several occasions where I stayed in the riverside suburb of Como with *Kole Peoff*, a close family friend and Letta's uncle. *Kole Peoff* and his brother *Risto*, who lived in the house next door, were the proprietors of a fish and chips shop located on the corner of Preston and Mary Streets. Their shop was situated at the front of *Kole Peoff*'s home with the shop entry facing Preston Street. Prior to the proliferation of suburban shopping centres and medical clinics, many small store proprietors, as well as doctors and dentists, established their stores and surgeries in the front rooms of their family homes.

The *Peoff* fish and chip shop was a thriving business catering for families and groups of teenagers who regularly visited Como Beach. The Como Beach jetty had originally been constructed as a stop-off point for a ferry service which carried passengers commuting between the Barrack Street Jetty in Perth and the south of the river suburb of Applecross. In those days, Como Beach was a popular picnic and swimming area which had the added attraction of a nearby trampoline centre, a penny arcade housing all kinds of amusement machines and games of chance and an American-style milk bar which sold milkshakes and hamburgers. Many of the Fish and Chip shop's customers were cinema-goers who travelled via a tram service that took passengers along Canning Highway to Angelo Street in South Perth and then to Preston Street where they came to watch movies screened at the Como Theatre, later renamed, the Cygnet Theatre.

#### Footnotes:

*In Australia, Zephyr motor cars were manufactured at the Ford Motor Company's factory in Geelong, Victoria. The cars never achieved widespread popularity and poor sale figures saw the Company switch to producing the American designed Ford Falcon. However, Zephyrs had a good reputation for reliability and comfort and were marginally more expensive than the standard model Holden and Ford cars of that time.*

The Cygnet Theatre is an architecturally impressive building, now heritage listed, situated on an elevated position overlooking Como Beach. It was built by James Stiles, a real estate agent and a pioneer Perth movie theatre entrepreneur. The Theatre opened its doors in March 1938 chiefly in response to a boom in cinema going that had occurred during the bleak Great Depression years of the 1930s when film-goers sought a few hours of distraction from the prevailing economic woes. It was among the first suburban purpose-built cinema complexes capable of screening talking pictures and had a outdoor and indoor viewing areas. James Stiles also operated a number of other nearby open-air cinemas: the Gaiety Theatre on the corner of Coode and Angelo Streets and the Hurlingham Theatre situated along Canning Highway in South Perth. While I do not remember seeing any movies at the Theatre our children certainly found it a fairly regular and enjoyable experience. The entrance fee was inexpensive and in the foyer, next to the ticket booth, was a well-stocked confectionary shop. Next to the Theatre was a large empty block populated with dense outcrops of bamboo and native shrubs and was a idyllic playground for the young children of the immediate neighbourhood to play.

*Kole Peoff* with his American accent and jovial disposition became somewhat of a local celebrity and could often be seen sitting on an old wooden bench, under the shade of his grape vines, at the back of his house. There he would puff contently on his pipe and sing songs which he had learned during the time he had worked abroad in the United States, on the railways, in timber mills and as a short-order cook in Chicago, along with many other Macedonians, who had taken jobs as “men in white aprons” as they were often called. He had briefly served in the U.S. Army and would recount days he spent rounding up drunk, rowdy, brawling American servicemen. His favourite song, invariably sung in the presence of his wife, included the rather risqué lyrics, “I wish I was single again. I married my wife to ruin my life, I wish I was single again. When I was single my pockets would jingle, I wish I was single again.” He was a gentle soul, generous of spirit and a real character and *Baba Kolevitsa*, his wife, would have taken no offence even if she had understood the words he was singing. Many children of the neighbourhood knew that they could pick some of the juicy grapes hanging from his *lozinki*, vines, especially bunches of large, sweet Muscat grapes that were clearly visible from the footpath and which hung so invitingly for those passing by.

He would rise early most mornings and leave home sitting astride an old, low-powered green scooter, with a large silver metal box attached to its front, headed for several outlets to purchase supplies for his Fish and Chip shop. Some hours later he would return whistling and singing to himself with the metal box filled with fresh and frozen fish, potatoes, soft drinks and confectionaries. He was among the first Macedonians living in Perth to operate their own business. At one time, it was commonly said that every fish and chip shop seemed to be owned and operated by “*Nick the Greek*”. This was partly true, but in reality many *Nicks* were in fact Macedonians. The early morning, fish auctions held at the Metropolitan Fish Market, were conducted by the Kailis family. It was a meeting place for fish and chip shop owners, among them a considerable number of Macedonians, who would exchange greetings and chat about

family, business matters and world affairs in a strange mix of Macedonian and English. They would often add an “o” or “a” to the end of English words, for example, their cars were referred to as *carro*. This unusual way of speaking is generally explained by the fact that they had little or no knowledge of cars in the villages and even the nearby townships and therefore there were no traditional Macedonian words for them. Even as they became more familiar with English this way of speaking continued and has remained a feature of the way that succeeding generations of Australian Macedonians often talk to each other. During those early morning fish auctions, in between bidding for ice-filled boxes full of fresh fish and loading purchases of frozen fish, chiko and spring rolls, dim sims, crab sticks and other traditional fish and chip shop items into their vehicles, they talked and joked just as they had done in their native villages when walking side-by-side to their fields or on their way to shepherd their flocks.

Before the current proliferation of fast food outlets fish and chips was among the most popular take-away food. Operating a successful fish and chip shop was hard work and required all family members to contribute and on returning from school the children of fish and chip proprietors would often spend many hours, deep into the night, helping to peel and cut potatoes, make batter, replace cooking oils, serve customers and clean up. It was often a seven days a week job but it could also be financially rewarding.

#### Footnotes:

*It is interesting how so many Australian Macedonians have come to incorporate English words, spoken with a “Macedonian accent”, when talking to each other supposedly, po nashi, in their mother tongue. This is largely explained by the absence of some of these words in the Macedonian vocabulary at the time they had immigrated. There are many examples, carro (car), aeroplano (aeroplane), shoppo (shop), computerta (computer), televisiono (television), lighto (light), printata (printer). These are but a few of a long and rather amusing list.*

During my visits to Perth, a local real estate agent would arrive, in the latest model Holden sedan, to take me to look at properties, both established homes and vacant blocks of land, that were on the market. Without Letta being with me I had great difficulty making up my mind. One day in an attempt to clear my head, I took a short walk along Mary Street. I was anxious, acutely aware that the decision that I was about to make would impact on my family for much of the rest of our lives. I had been debating with myself whether I should buy an established house or a block on which to build a new home when I came across Wally Borden, standing on his front lawn. I stopped, exchanged greetings and we began talking. I noticed that I had just passed a vacant block which Mister Borden informed me that he owned. It occurred to me that this would be an ideal location to build our new family home. I knew that Letta would feel reassured by the fact that her uncles *Kole* and *Risto Peoff* lived on Mary Street and that further up the street was the home of *Kuzo Kiandoff*, whose wife *Sofka*, was my wife's aunty, her father's sister. During our conversation I could not resist asking Mister Borden whether he had any intention of selling his block of land and remember being bitterly disappointed when he informed me that the property was not for sale. He was a tall, large, elderly man and I suspected that he had some reservations about a migrant family, with three potentially noisy and unruly young children, living next door. I was therefore delighted when he approached me a few days later to tell me that he had changed his mind. Letta and I were now the owners of a quarter acre block at 8 Mary Street, Como, for which we paid the sum of one thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds.

Before returning to Manjimup I made several visits, in the company of *Kole Peoff*, to the Perth offices of Bunnings new home building division where I signed a contract for the Company to construct our new home, a rather modest red brick and tile, three bedroom house. Construction generally went smoothly but I recall having to travel to Perth for a meeting with Company officials over the building supervisor's reluctance to install a copper and to fit a ceiling in the laundry since he rightly pointed out these items had not been included in the original specifications. Prompted by *Kole Peoff* I had gone straight to the top and found myself nervously addressing the General-Manager who gave me a sympathetic hearing and assured me that a copper and ceiling would be installed without any additional cost.

#### Footnotes:

*Kuzo Kiandoff arrived in Western Australia like so many of his compatriots determined to earn sufficient funds to pay for the immigration permits and sea passages that would enable his wife, Sofka and children, Ristana, Vesa and Stase, to join him. The family were eventually reunited in Manjimup where they lived and worked on the Michelides tobacco plantations during the 1950s before Dedo Kuzo and his family moved to Perth where he purchased a home in Mary Street, Como. The Kiandovi were not only close relatives but also good friends and we often stayed with them when we visited Perth before moving there. Once we had settled in Perth, Jim would regularly wander up the street to play darts with his uncle Steve Kiandov under the shade of a pergola covered with grape vines and to pick sweet, white mulberries from a large and bountiful tree located within an expansive chook pen. For many years, Dedo Kuzo was his barber and he would invariably come home complaining that his hair had again been cut far too short and that the kerosene-dipped hair clippers had pinched. Despite this he would always return to see his Dedo Kuzo when it was time for another haircut.*

Letta was bitterly disappointed in the design and size of our new home. The lounge and the combined kitchen, dining and family room area were far too small. She had urged me before I had left for Perth to build a home similar to that of our neighbours, the *Kalamarovi* who had constructed a new, comfortable brick and tile home on their farm. However, I failed to take her advice, in fact I did not even take the plans of our neighbour's house with me, as she had urged me to do but relied solely on the guidance offered by *Kole Peoff* who convinced me that to build a bigger house would be an extravagant waste of money. In hindsight his views, although well-meaning, failed to take into account that we had three young children. Suffice to say, during the succeeding years, we spent considerable amounts of money on a number of patch-work projects upgrading and extending our modest Como home.

Our first few months in Perth were so frustrating that Letta and I seriously considered returning to Manjimup. My greatest frustration was the inability to find a job. I found not working a novel and emotionally draining experience and became increasingly depressed and moody. In Manjimup we lived among a close circle of relatives and friends and within settled routines but in Perth we seemed like "fish out of water". Fortunately, as it was customary in difficult times, members of our extended family came to our assistance. My cousin *Mitre Numeff*, Jim Vellios, had returned from New South Wales and was now living with his young family in Douglas Avenue in the neighbouring suburb of South Perth, on the same street as my brother-in-law Londe Peoff. *Mitre* and his father-in-law *Kuzo Kiandoff* were working as cleaners at the Majestic Hotel in Applecross. One of the hotel's permanent residents, a bachelor, was an executive with Robb Jetty Abattoirs, where cattle and sheep, typically from the North-West of the State, were transported, slaughtered, snap frozen and packed for export from the nearby port of Fremantle. During one of their chats the abattoir executive had commented that it was a busy time at work and the company was seeking new employees. Subsequently, for the next four years I was employed by Robb Jetty Abattoirs, stacking cattle and sheep carcasses into large freezers prior to them being loaded onto convoys of refrigerated trucks headed for the port of Fremantle where they were hoisted aboard merchant vessels destined for a host of overseas markets. The cold was so intense within the Abattoir's freezers that Company policy dictated that for every one hour workers spent inside the freezers they would need to spend fifteen minutes outside.

#### Footnotes:

*Bunnings was founded by two Englishmen, Arthur and Robert Bunning, who had originally planned to establish a building construction business in California. However, before embarking upon that venture they had visited their sister and brother-in-law, who were living in Perth and had decided to stay. Skilled carpenters and stonemasons they successfully acquired several significant Western Australian government building contracts. The Company flourished during the State's gold boom of the 1890s and then diversified into brick manufacturing and home building. Bunnings operated several saw mills in the South-West of the State, including the Donnelly River Mill, near Bridgetown, which produced cross arms for telegraph poles. Charles Bunning's wife, Elizabeth, was a distinguished artist well-known for paintings depicting scenes from the timber industry in the South-West of Western Australia. The Company was managed by succeeding generations of the Bunning family until it was purchased by Wesfarmers which retained the name in recognition of the positive public profile that the firm had established in the Western Australian community.*

Two pairs of trousers, a pair of warm jumpers, one worn over the other, a heavily lined fur coat, leather apron and a fur-lined cap was my standard attire while I worked surrounded by recently slaughtered, snap-frozen animals, wrapped in specially designed stockings. In the busy season, when Fremantle harbour was the home of a large number of foreign container ships, I would sleep in the back seat of my car so that I could work double shifts.

Over time, we would gradually settle into the lifestyle of city dwellers. However, there was still a lot of Manjimup left in us. We eagerly looked forward to our relatives and friends visiting us on their trips to Perth and we regularly travelled back to Manjimup. Jim and Stella would spend most of their school holidays there staying with their grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins. During the long Christmas holiday break we would drive them to the Perth Railway Station to board the Australind, a train carrying passengers between Perth and Bunbury, as it still does today. They both particularly looked forward to having a hot pie and sauce and a soft drink which could be purchased on the train during their three hour train journey. At Bunbury, they would catch a regular bus service to Manjimup.

As they opened the low iron gate of the home of their grandparents and walked into the front yard, along a cement path, lined on both sides with colourful annuals, they would see their grandmother peering through the kitchen window and grinning. When the front door opened their grandmother would greet them with a hug and kiss and usher them into the kitchen and living room area where their grandfather would be sitting upon a large wooden chair, leaning back slightly, with his left foot slung over one of the sturdy arms of his chair. More greetings and hugs followed and their grandmother would soon be hovering over her Metters stove cooking large quantities of bacon and eggs. On these visits the children looked forward to seeing their uncle Steve, aunty Lena and their young cousins, Rita, George and Nick, who for a time lived with my father and mother before they purchased a home along the same street. Soon after, they would wander off to see their uncle Tom, aunty Luba and cousins, Phillip, Lozana and Nada, who lived only a few blocks away. They enjoyed sitting with their uncle Tom, on the lounge room sofa, listening to him tell stories about the animals he had seen and captured while working as a forestry ranger. On these occasions they would remind him that he had never delivered on his promise to capture a possum which they had always wanted as a pet. They would spend time with their uncle Norm and aunty Vicky and cousins Peter, Louis and Lili, who still lived on the original family farm where my brother, had for a time, continued to milk a herd of dairy cows before diversify into growing vegetables, planting an apple orchard and raising baby beef.

Jim and Stella also looked forward to their visits with their *Dedo Vasil, Baba Stoianka* and their cousins Chris, Sandra and Peter. Chris and Peter were both sporting enthusiasts and Peter and Jim would engage in all kinds of competitive games and contests with the highlight being the time when Chris would return home from work to find that the two of them had already meticulously swept a section of the gravel driveway leading from the road to the farm

house, the designated cricket pitch. Chris was allocated two innings and Peter and Jim one each and the younger boys would wicket keep for Chris when not batting. A wooden crate, the stumps, was erected along the driveway and then the game would begin in earnest. They played competitively and disputed decisions were common especially as the light began to deteriorate. The traditional modes of dismissal were added to by a few of their own making: over the wire fence that enclosed the vegetable plot to the left of the pitch or over the fence on the right that surrounded the house and into the large strawberry patch that grew there was out. This meant that it was dangerous playing cut or pull shots, especially on the uneven gravel surface and the straight drive, to a full delivery, was by far the safest and most productive scoring stroke. These matches continued until it was too dark to see the bouncy and increasingly dirty and tattered tennis ball. At the end of each session of play the scores were recorded and the game would resume the following late afternoon.

On New Year's day *Baba Stoianka* traditionally served a sumptuous meal that included roast turkey, a bird selected from a number that *Striko Vasil* raised on the farm. After a hearty meal the boys would play cards to welcome in the new year. Jim would also visit his *Dedo Giorgi* and spend time with his cousins Vick, Nick and Alec. Where ever they went, our children were treated like members of the immediate family and I know that they dearly treasured every moment and would count down the days remaining before they would have to reluctantly return to Perth.

**Footnotes:**

*Several times a year we would visit our relatives and friends in Manjimup. On these occasions we would travel along Albany Highway and then take the South-West Highway at Armadale. The children played the game which involved correctly naming the next township we would pass by: Byford, Pinjarra, Mandurah, Yarloop... I would stop at the small township of Wokalup, situated between Harvey and Brunswick Junction, and park in front of a roadhouse which sold delicious home-made pastries. While Letta and the children ate their pies I would cross the road and go to an old two-storey hotel to enjoy a glass of beer at the front bar. When we reached Brunswick Junction the children knew that we were half way along our journey to Manjimup.*

*At that time the South-West Highway passed through Bunbury on its way to Boyanup, Kirup and Donnybrook. Further along we travelled past the sleepy town of Balingup and proceeded onward to Bridgetown which was approached by a stretch of road perched above a number of deep valleys. The excitement grew as we crossed the Bridgetown bridge and headed along the road to Manjimup. On this final section of our journey we drove through Yornup, a small timber mill town where, for a time, my brother Tanas had worked. After some four hours of travelling we were in Manjimup and it felt like being home. The homeward journey, the boot of our car filled with boxes of fruit and vegetables, was in sharp contrast to our drive to Manjimup when the excitement rose which each passing kilometre. On the way home there was genuine sadness as we approached Perth.*

In the backyard of our Como home, beyond a lawn of lush buffalo and kikuyu grass, was a small white brick shed divided into two rooms, one of which was enclosed and used to store Letta's jars of preserved fruit and pickled vegetables and several dozen wooden crates full of Weaver and Lock soft drink bottles, in assorted flavours, which I regularly purchased directly from the factory located in nearby South Perth. The other, without a door, housed our tools and gardening equipment. Adjacent were grapevines hanging over a wooden, unpaved pergola and beyond, at the entrance of our large vegetable garden, stood a crudely cobbled together wood shed which my father had built, on one of his rare visits, from old wooden planks and metal sheets. This is where we stacked the firewood that fed our ever-hungry Metters 2 stove. A load of jarrah off-cuts were annually deposited on the Council verge and we would have to split the larger blocks of timber by axe so that we could feed them into our kitchen stove. Then the entire load was wheel-barrowed to our wood shed and meticulously stacked inside. It became a well-rehearsed routine and within a day or two our year's supply of firewood would be neatly put away.

In keeping with what would become an established tradition with most southern European immigrant families living in the suburbs we nurtured a highly productive backyard vegetable garden. Our vegetables and our few fruit trees were irrigated with water sourced from a bore which we installed by placing several heavy cement cylinders on top of the sandy soil and lifting the earth within to the surface with a bucket attached to a rope. As we dug and removed the sand the heavy cement casings slowly moved downward and into place. At the base was a water pump and since our house was only one a street from the river we did not have to dig too deeply before we could access abundant supplies of water.

We regularly fertilised our vegetables and fruit trees with copious quantities of chicken manure. However, the chicken droppings collected from our own chicken coop, located at the end of our block, were never sufficient for our needs and so at least twice a year I would go with a relation or friend to one of a number of commercial chicken farms which were then located in Perth's outer suburbs, to shovel nourishing, natural chicken fertiliser into a dozen or so hessian bags. We took great care not to scoop too much of the sawdust that had been spread at the bottom of the cage floors. It was also customary to fill one or two extra bags of chicken manure that were not declared to the proprietor and therefore not paid for. Arriving home I would carry the bulging bags on my shoulders and heap them in a bundle in the backyard before covering them with tarpaulins or discarded sheets of metal to prevent them from becoming waterlogged. On these occasions chicken droppings would cascade all over my clothes, arms and legs and the potent smell would linger for days despite regular scrubbing.

It was said that in those days if one did not know the exact address of a n ethnic family one wanted to visit they only needed to arrive in the general vicinity and peer over the nearby fences into the backyards. If one saw vegetables, particularly peppers, capsicums and tomatoes growing in a well-maintained vegetable garden, grape vines hanging over a

pergola and several olive and lemon trees, then one knew that it was most likely the house that they were looking for. This strategy, however, was not entirely foolproof. Occasionally people would look out of the front windows of their home surprised to see a group of unfamiliar faces walking up the driveway toward the front door, smiling and animated and anticipating a warm welcome.

We always planted far too much and could never consume the quantities of vegetables we harvested and as a result many of my fellow workers regularly went home with plastic shopping bags overflowing with freshly picked tomatoes, peppers, onions, leeks, cucumbers and silver beet. Our hens, too, were extremely well-fed on commercially produced pellets, domestic wastes and the inevitable surplus of vegetables. For a time they also feasted upon a far more exotic diet of crayfish legs and shells. I had started working two to three hour night shifts, during the height of the crayfish season, at International Seafoods a company where my brother-in-law *Londe* had been employee for a number of years. There I packed processed crayfish within sealed cartons which were placed into large freezers to await export. There was invariably some damaged crayfish which employees were permitted to take home. In those days we did not regard crayfish as a delicacy and Letta would often complain that they smelt badly and was reluctant to keep them in our refrigerator. Many of these crayfish were therefore fed to our chooks. This rather unusual diet did not seem to adversely affect our hens as there was never a shortage of eggs. Letta would give cartons of surplus eggs to relatives and friends and on occasions sell them, at a highly discounted price, to our neighbours. We bred our own chickens and the old hens and young roosters were regularly culled with a sharp axe wielded over a wooden chopping block.

I was relatively content with being employed at Robb Jetty but it was some distance from home and I reasoned it could not be healthy working in such an extreme, artificially-created environment. I therefore began actively seeking alternate employment and once again my cousin *Mitre Numeff* would lend a helping hand. He was at that time employed as a cleaner with West Australian Newspapers where his brother-in-law, *Stase Kiandoff*, also worked as a printing machinist. On *Mitre's* suggestion I submitted my name to the Company should a vacancy for a cleaning position arise at the West Australian Newspaper offices and printing plant which were situated along St Georges Terrace before relocating to the current larger, more modern premises, in Osborne Park. I would work for the Company for twenty two years until retiring in 1986. Over that time, I got to know many of the prominent Western Australian Newspaper executives and leading journalists and particularly enjoyed discussing the WAFL football results with the newspaper's sport journalists and listening to their thoughts about the prospects of my team, West Perth, often referred to as the "*garlic munchers*", because of a number of ethnic players in the team and more particularly its die-hard, passionate ethnic supporters. Western Australian Newspapers was a particularly good employer, paying wages higher than other firms at that time and offering its employees a rather generous superannuation

scheme. Even after I had retired, the Company graciously ensured a free newspaper was delivered to my front door, Monday to Saturday. I sometimes regret that I missed out on the gold watch awarded to employees with twenty five years of service but as I approached sixty three years of age I felt it was time to retire.

Despite the occasional lingering of personal issues, often the result of long-past family disputes or minor village rivalries, immigrant Macedonian families, from so called *Aegean Macedonia* who had settled in Perth, remained a remarkably cohesive group. We knew each other well and had far more in common than we had differences. During the 1940s, a representative group of Macedonians living in Western Australia, formed a organisation known as *Edinstvo*, Unity. The first official meeting at which the formation of *Edinstov* was discussed was said to have taken place at the *Malko* family coffee shop and boarding house in William Street, Perth, where the proposed new organisation's motto, *Slobodna, Nezavisna, Ednokupna Makedonia*, a free, independent and united Macedonia was adopted. This organisation would subsequently become the model for similar Macedonian communities in Australia and soon commenced publishing a newspaper which was distributed throughout Australia *Makedonska Iskra*, "Macedonian Spark", which contained articles written in both Macedonian and English.

The number of Macedonians from *Aegean Macedonia* arriving in Western Australia increased dramatically at the end of the Greek Civil War and Macedonian community leaders in Perth began to openly embrace the vision of building a Macedonian Community Centre. By 1964, the year we moved to Perth, there was already a commitment to proceed with the construction of such a Centre where Australian Macedonians could celebrate and share their cultural heritage within the context of Australia's multicultural society. Extensive fundraising had begun in earnest and included holding dances in rented premises such as the North Perth Town Hall, organising picnics at the Wanneroo Showgrounds and screening Macedonian films at a Subiaco open-air theatre. Many patriotic Macedonians voluntarily contributed to ensure that these fundraisers were successful and the profits were deposited directly into a Community bank account. When Community leaders believed that sufficient funds had been saved they sought to secure a bank loan to build the ground floor of the Macedonian Community Centre, in Albert Street, North Perth. The Commonwealth Bank agreed to approve this loan on the proviso that it was guaranteed by the personal assets of a sufficient number of Macedonian community members, including myself. Importantly, our Community Centre incorporated the Macedonian Orthodox Church of *Sveti Nikola*, St Nicholas. A second floor, officially opened by the then Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, was subsequently added.

The Macedonian Community of Perth, Western Australia, flourished and subsequently acquired land in Balcatta in Albert Street on which the Macedonia Park Sporting Complex was built. Community members were justly proud of these achievements which were primarily motivated by the pride felt by them in their Macedonian heritage and from opportunities provided to them, as Australian citizens, to freely express their culture and traditions. Countless committee and community members, over a long period of time, generously donated financially and so willingly gave their time to build and maintain our Community Centre, Community Church and the Macedonia Park Sporting Complex.

The day-to-day administration of the Community was vested in committee members elected at annual general meetings. In my time a large committee, consisting of an executive group and representatives from the Community's many sections and associated sub-committees, officially met one night a week and during numerous extraordinary meetings. Committee meetings invariably dragged deep into the night and early hours of the morning and committee members would often find themselves driving home, along empty streets, to get a few hours sleep before waking and going to work early the next day. Meetings dealt with a range of issues from the extremely complex to the most mundane but on all matters every committee member was given an opportunity to have their say. There were federal and state politicians and community leaders to welcome and lobby, government departments with which to liaise, diplomats and church leaders to greet, lawyers to consult, contracts to sign, dances and cultural functions to plan, bar and bingo work rosters to negotiate and work parties to cut the lawns, paint, garden and make repairs, to organise. Despite an intense shared sense of purpose Macedonian Community committee meetings could be feisty affairs typified by strong disagreements, raised voices and even the occasional storming out of meetings by irate committee members. However, in the end it was pride in our Community that helped to overcome our differences and more often than not the disgruntled would return and were welcomed back into the fold.

A ladies committee catered all Community functions, the cultural committee organised visits by Macedonian performers, musicians, dancers and singers and staged the all important Illinden celebrations and village dances. The church committee liaised with the Community's priest and assisted him during Sunday services and during weddings, christenings, funerals and the well-attended Easter and Christmas celebrations. The youth committee held functions that appealed to the young, the control committee monitored the Community's finances while the sports committee managed a senior soccer club and was responsible for supervising a host of junior soccer and netball teams and for a time an extremely popular amateur Australian Rules football side.

The highlight of the Community's involvement in the sponsorship of sport was the establishment of a highly successful senior soccer club, which after stormy beginnings would rise through the lower ranks into the first division of the State Soccer League where for years under a number of different names, West Perth Macedonia, Stirling Macedonia and Stirling Lions, won a host of league titles and cup competitions. Games, especially those against major rivals Floreat Athena and Kingsway Olympic, a club which also had Macedonian origins, were extremely well attended and it was not unknown, during the halcyon years, to have crowds of many thousands of spectators at such major encounters. Most community members were buoyed by our soccer team's successes and would proudly read about its performances in the *West Australian*, *Sunday Times* and now defunct *Daily News* newspapers.

There were members who criticised the Community spending so heavily on financially supporting our Community premier league soccer team. They pointed out that many of the players were not Macedonian and that our club tended to pay higher playing and transfer fees than other State league clubs. However, the generally positive publicity derived from the team's performances was an important factor in easing some of these concerns. Primarily the funds spent in sponsoring the Community's sporting teams were generated from popular bingo sessions that were conducted over a number of nights each week at our Community Centre which regularly attracted hundreds of players and which were staffed and supervised by Community volunteers. The secret of the Community's success had always been the voluntary work undertaken by its members as an overt way of exhibiting pride in their Macedonian heritage. I served on the main committee for many years as did other members of my extended family and friends. Subsequently our son Jim would hold various positions within the Community and served three years as president. My nephew Phillip also played a significant role in the building of a Macedonian Community Hall in Manjimup where he served a lengthy term as Community president. While the halcyon days of the Macedonian Community of Perth might well be behind it, our Community Centre and newly constructed Church of St Nikola remain important meeting places for Community members.

While our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren have not found it difficult to seamlessly assimilate in the wider Australian community, this was not the experience of my generation who, as newcomers, had to overcome the language barrier, did not always know where to go, who to see, what to do and when to do it. We needed to be in close contact with our own *drugji*, friends, people who understood us, on whom we could rely, those who were experiencing similar anxieties and challenges. The Macedonian Community Centre and the Church of St Nikola, located in the now appropriately named, Macedonia Place in North Perth and the Macedonia Park Sporting Complex on Albert Street, Balcatta are lasting edifices to the achievements of Macedonians living in Perth. These buildings might merely be brick and mortar to some but to the people of the towns and villages of Macedonia they symbolise pride in our heritage that has always burned strongly within us. These buildings represent indisputable evidence that ordinary folk can overcome even the most trying circumstances. They are testimony to the resilience of the Macedonian spirit which lived within our ancestors and of their determination to pass on their pride in their Macedonian heritage onto succeeding generations. We carried our pride of being Macedonian across vast oceans to a new land despite concerted attempts, over countless years, by many nationalities, to deny us the right to refer to ourselves as Macedonian.

When people ask me about my ethnicity I reply that I am an Australian but am quick to add that I am an Australian with a Macedonian heritage. I will never forget the credo passed on through the generations which implored, *Nikogash da zaboravish sho nie sne Makedonski*, never forget that we are Macedonian. My response to this question does not imply any diminished pride about being Macedonian but acknowledges how fortunate I and my fellow *selski* have

**been to be able to build new lives for ourselves in Australia where we can live in peace, are respected not discriminated against, can prosper from our labours and are not exploited and are able see the new branches and leaves of our family tree escape poverty, receive an education and be offered boundless opportunities.**

During 1975, Letta noticed a lump on her breast which was subsequently diagnosed as an aggressive, malignant tumor and her doctor strongly recommended immediate surgery. My wife was determined to overcome her illness and there were times when she appeared to be in remission. However, within a few years the invasive cancer returned and we watched despondently as she endured the unrelenting pain associated with the unforgiving affliction spreading to other parts of her body. My wife spent her final days laying in bed consumed by fever, eating little, breathing with difficulty but still finding the strength to raise a warm, broad smile to the many well-wishers who visited her. She bravely clung on to life but was having so much difficulty controlling her pain that she had to be transferred to the intensive care unit of South Perth Hospital. Not long after she left us. She was only forty-four years old.

Letta was a kind and loving person who spent her life caring for others and working tirelessly to build a better future for her family. Her life was not one of luxury or extravagance. She never asked for such things even though she thoroughly deserved them. We were very happy together although with the benefit of hindsight we had spent too much time and energy trying to secure our financial future. Simply, we worked too hard, worried too much and enjoyed some of the more pleasant aspects that life has to offer, too little.

I was deeply saddened by my wife's death and that she was not able to experience occasions and events that I know would have given her great joy: the marriage of our youngest daughter, the birth of our six grandchildren, the first of whom, Tracy, was born only four months after she had passed. I know how much she would have fussed over our grandchildren and how much they would have adored her. I recall her crying, discreetly trying to wipe the tears from her eyes when our son had whispered into her ear, in the hope of cheering her up, that her first grandchild would be born within a few months. Letta knew that she would not live to see that day. Her funeral service was conducted at St Hilda's Anglican Church, in North Perth on 14 September 1977 and she is buried in the original Macedonian Orthodox section at Karrakatta Cemetery. Her epitaph reads, *In loving memory of Letta, Born in the village of Malla, Macedonia. Passed away on 12th September 1977, Aged 44, Beloved wife of Jovan, loved mother of Jim, Stella and Feni, loved and remembered always by her family.*

This is where I end my story. I hope those who read it will find it an interesting account of times past and hope that in the future some member of our family tree, perhaps not yet born, will add to my faded memories, those of their own, as our family continues to grow new branches and as new leaves begin to sprout.

#### Footnotes:

*Under normal circumstances my wife's funeral service would have been conducted at our Macedonian Church of Sveti Nikola but at that time our Community was in dispute with the Macedonian Orthodox Church hierarchy over the administration and financial management of our Community and community church. As a result Church leaders in the Republic of Macedonia had withdrawn the services of our Community priest.*

**Footnotes:**

*Letta (Elefteria Vellios) had her Certificate of Naturalisation as an Australian citizen confirmed on 8 June 1957 on committing to swear allegiance to her majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and her successors and promising to observe faithfully the laws of Australia and fulfill her duties as an Australian citizen. Her address was recorded as "Boojetup" Donnelly Mail, Manjiup, her birthplace as Troupeouchos (Maala) and her date of birth as 3 March 1933.*

## PATERNAL BRANCHES

*The following entries of individuals from the paternal branches of my family tree are based on oral accounts, faded memories, passed on through the generations. I therefore can not vouch for the accuracy of these inclusions and apologise for any errors or omissions.*

### **Petre Petrevski (Prelip / Bapchor)**

Dedo Petre was said to have had only *eden sin*, one son, Vello.

### **Vello Petrevski (Bapchor)**

Dedo Vello reputedly had four sons.

### **Yane Vellioff (Bapchor / Krepeshina)**

**Giorgi Vellioff (Bapchor / Krepeshina)** My branch of our family tree is descendant from Dedo Vello Petrevski's *prv sin*, first son, Yane Vellioff.

### **Yovan Vellioff (Bapchor / Elovo / Krepeshina)**

### **Dimo Vellioff (Bapchor / Krepeshina)**

**My branch of our family tree is descendant from Vello Petrevski's *prv sin*, eldest son, Yane Vellioff**

### **Yane Vellioff (Bapchor / Krepeshina)**

Dedo Yane Vellioff had four sons and a daughter from his first marriage and a daughter from a second marriage.

### **Noume / Kole / Done / Stoian / Kata**

### **Toda**

**My branch of our family tree is descendant from Yane Vellioff's *prv sin*, the eldest son, Noume Vellioff.**

### **Noume Vellioff (Krepeshina)**

The family of Noume Vellioff consisted of *chetiri sinovi*, four sons and *tri kerki*, three daughters. In Australia, most of his descendants are called *Vellios* or *Velios*, a Greek imposed surname, after our earlier family patriarch, *Dedo Vello*. Among our fellow Macedonians we are known as *Numevi*, the descendants of Dedo Noume.

### **Giorgi / Gile / Marko / Risto / Elena / Dosta / Neda**

**Giorgi Numeff, was** the oldest of *Noume Vellioff's* children. He was married to *Lozana Kochova* of *Bapchor* and had three children *Kole*, *Sotir* and *Stoianka*. (*Extended information follows since my branch of our family tree are descendants of Dedo Giorgi Numeff.*)

**Gile Numeff,** had two sons, *Mitre* and *Vasil* and three daughters, *Dosta*, *Stoianka* and *Elena*

**Mitre Numeff,** had a son, *Kole* and two daughters.

**Vasil Numeff,** died soon after marrying, leaving behind a pregnant wife, with child, who was named *Vasil* in memory of his deceased father.

**Dosta Numeva,** married *Yovan Tascheff* of *Neret* and had two daughters, one of whom died in infancy. The other, *Letta*, migrated to Australia and married *Vasil Kolicheff*.

**Stoianka Numeva,** married into the *Narcheff* family of *Neret* and migrated to Australia. She had a son *Petre* and daughter, *Tinka*, the mother of *Fay Nikoloff*, who married (*Boris*) *Basil Kitin*.

**Elena Numeva,** married in *Krepeshina*.

**Marko Numeff**, had two sons, *Tanas and Lazo*, and two daughters, *Velika* and *Tsveta*.

**Tanas Numeff**, had two sons, *Gile* and *Yovan* and three daughters, *Ristana*, *Velika* and *Mitra* who married *Mitre Peoff* who was tragically drowned near the small Western Australian township of Nannup. *Mitra* then married *Pavle Petroff* from *Kotori* and had two children *Elena* and *Mitre (Jim) Petroff*.

**Lazo Numeff**, had two sons, *Mitre* and *Kole* and four daughters, *Kata*, *Slava*, *Tsveta* and *Stoianka*. *Mitre* and *Kole* both immigrated to Melbourne. *Kata* married into the *Markovsky* family from *Maala*, *Slava* married *Vasil Yloff* of *Krepeshina* and *Tsevt Boris Tolleff* of *Krepeshina* and had six children.

**Stoianka Numeva** married *Risto Stoicheff* of *Maala* and their daughter *Letta* married, *Giorgi Peoff (George Peovitis)* and lives in Perth. *Velika Numeva*, married *Vasil Stasinoff* of *Krepeshina*.

**Tsveta Numeva**, married *Tanas Rimpapoff* of *Krepeshina* and migrated to America but after they divorced she returned to *Krepeshina* and remarried.

**Risto Numeff**, had three sons, *Stoian*, *Tome* and *Kuzo* and a daughter, *Stasa*.

**Stoian Numeff**, had one son, *Noume*, who was the father of *Mitre Numeff (Jim Vellios)*.

**Tome Numeff**, had two sons and a daughter, *Traiko*, *Pavle* and *Sofka*.

**Kuzo Numeff**, died in infancy from pneumonia.

**Stasa Numeva**, died in infancy from pneumonia.

**Elena Numeva**, married *Mitre Stoicheff (Christides / Stoicheff)* from *Tourie*. The couple had four sons, *Todor*, *Tanas*, *Mano* and *Ylo* and three daughters, *Velika*, *Stoianka* and *Kata*.

**Dosta Numeva**, married in *Lagen* and had four sons, *Yovan*, *Tanas*, *Stepho* and *Koti*.

**Neda Numeva**, married *Noume Ilioff* of *Bapchor* and had three sons, *File*, *Petre* and *Yovan* and two daughters, *Ristana*, who was the wife of *Tanas Kalamaroff* and *Mitra*.

### **Giorgi Numeff /Lozana Numeva (nee Kochova)**

Giorgi Numeff and his wife *Lozana* had two sons *Kole* (my grandfather) and *Sotir*.

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**Kole Numeff**, married *Yana Dimova*, the daughter of *Krijako Dimov* of *Krepeshina*. (Extended information follows since my branch of our family tree are the descendants of *Kole Numeff*).

**Sotir Numeff** married *Stoianka Ylova* of *Krepeshina* and had two daughters, *Ristana* and *Stasa*. *Sotir* fell ill and died while completing his compulsory military service and his wife was killed by partisans who accused her of collaborating with royalist Greek forces.

**Ristana Numeva** married *Stase Popoff*, the son of the priest of *Krepeshina's* church of *Sveti Giorgi*. *Ristana* and *Stase* had four daughters and a son, *Giorgi*. Her husband was killed by partisans after being accused of travelling to *Lerin* against partisan imposed restrictions, *Ristana* never remarried.

**Stasa Numeva** died young.

### **Kole Numeff / Yana Numeva (nee Dimova)**

Dedo Kole and Baba Yana had four sons and three daughters.

### **Risto / Mitre / Kata / Velika / Dosta / Giorgi / Vasil**

**Risto Numeff**, (my father) married *Jordanna Iliova (my mother) both of Krepeshina* and had five sons.  
(Extended information to follow).

**Mitre Numeff**, married *Yana Koteva of Tourie*. Mitre was killed during the Greek Civil War while fighting as a partisan. The couple had three daughters, *Ristana, Dosta* and *Cilia*.

**Ristana Numeva**, married *Gorgos Madamadotou of Maala* and had a son and daughter, *Dimitri* and *Tasoula*. *Gorgos* died tragically in a tractor accident. One of his brothers *Vasili Madamadotou* married *Ristana Peova*, my wife's younger sister.

**Dosta Numeva**, married *Sotir Novachkov of Tourie* and had three children, George and twins, Anne and Faye.

**Cilia Numeva**, married *Peter Lukas* of Manjimup and had three children, Cathy, Jim and Paul.

**Kata Numeva**, married *Sotir Toleff* of *Krepeshina* and had three children, *Noume, Kole* and *Ristana*, all of whom lived in *Krepeshina*.

**Velika Numeva**, married *Noume Stavrevsky*, originally of *Bapchor*. They lived in *Maala* before immigrating to Melbourne. They had two children, *Stase* and *Kata*.

**Dosta Numeva**, married *Risto Pandoff* from *Maala*, who was killed fighting as a partisan. She and her two sons *Lambro* and *Pando* subsequently joined her sister *Velika* in Melbourne.

**Giorgi Numeff**, (George Velios) married *Nika Konsolova*, the daughter of *Yovan Konsoloff*, originally from *Bapchor*. The couple had four children, Yana, Vick, Nick and Alex.

**Vasil Numeff**, (Vick Vellios) married *Stoianka Ylova* in *Krepeshina*. Two sons, *Yovan* and *Petre*, died in infancy. They had three surviving children, Chris and Sandra, who were born in *Maala* and Pando (Peter) who was born in Manjimup.

### **Risto Numeff / Jordanna Numeva (nee Iliova)**

#### **Tanas / Yovan / Sotir / Noume / Stase**

**Tanas Numeff**, (Tom Vellios) was born in *Krepeshina* in 1923 and arrived in Western Australia, in 1939, to join his father. In 1946, he went to Yugoslavia with the intention of joining the partisans but unable to cross the Yugoslav border, settled in a suburb of Skopje where he married *Luba Stoichova*. The couple's two older children, Phillip and Lozana, were born there while their second daughter, Nada, was born in Manjimup. Tanas died on 7 October 1976. Phillip had three children Alexander, Sonia and Vera, Lozana and Nada both have two children, Tania and Sam and Graeme and Debbie-Joe.

**Yovan Numeff**, (John Vellios, the author) was said to be born in September 1925 in *Maala* and immigrated to Australia in 1951. He married *Letta Peova*, from *Maala*, in 1952, and had three children Jim, Stella and Feni. Jim has two children Tracy and Stephen, Stella, married Richard Walker and has two children, Ashley and Kym. Feni, married Russell Bembridge and has two daughters, Courtney and Regan.

**Sotir Numeff**, (Sam Vellios), has three children, Paul, and Joy and Chris. Paul and wife Freda have two children, Annalyce and Jason and now reside in Perth. Joy is married to Joe Dalben and with daughter Sinead lives in Victoria. Chris and his wife Noreen live in Queensland.

**Noume Numeff**, (Norm Vellios), married *Vasilka Andriova*, formerly of *Krepeshina*, and they have three children, Peter, Louis and Lili. Peter and wife Maria have a daughter Jennifer, Louis and wife Maria have two children, Sam and Anna. and Lili and husband Barrie Hutchins have a son and daughter Matthew and Danielle.

**Stase Numeff**, (Steve Vellios) married *Lena Moustakova*, of *Popchenovi* and has three children Rita, George and Nick. Rita has one child, Joel, and lives in Manjimup and George three children, Ashleigh, Mitchell and Alexia who live in Perth. Nick lives in Manjimup.

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**Footnotes:**

*My father Risto Numeff (Chris Vellios) died on 13 April 1990 aged 87. My mother Jordanna Numeva, nee Iliova died on 5 February 1993 aged 91. They are both buried in the old Manjimup Cemetery.*

## MATERNAL BRANCHES

*I have less knowledge of the branches and leaves hanging from my mother's maternal and paternal family tree. This record of my mother's ancestors begins with people of the same generation as that of my paternal ancestor, Giorgi Numeff.*

The following were members of my mother's *maternal* branch of her family tree, the *Shimorovi*.

### Traiko Shimiroff / Kata Shimirova (Krepeshina)

They had four daughters and a son. Stasa was my maternal grandmother.

#### Elena / Dosta / Velika / Stasa / Risto

**Elena Shimirova**, married *Stoian Rimpapoff* (Rimpas).

**Dosta Shimirova**, married *Kuzo Shestevsky*.

**Velika Shimirova**, married *Sotir Gilivichin* (Angelides).

**Stasa Shimirova**, married **Kuzo Iloff (Extended information follows)**.

**Risto Shimiroff**, had a daughter, *Tsveta*, who married *Tanas Stasinoff*.

The following were members of my mother's *paternal* branch of her family tree, the *Ilovi*.

### Risto Ilioff / Zoia who was from the village of Elovo.

The couple had four children.

#### Kuzo / Nuome / File / Yana

**Kuzo Ilioff**, (Extended information follows). He was my maternal grandfather

**Noume Ilioff**, had a son *Jovan* and daughter *Ristana*. *Jovan* immigrated to Melbourne and had four daughters and a son. *Ristana* was married in *Krepeshina* to *Mitre Gurevski* and immigrated to Sydney.

**File Ilioff**, married *Dosta Koleva* in *Krepeshina* and had two children, *Tanas* and *Kata*. *File Ilioff* drowned while completing his compulsory military service, *Tanas*, immigrated to the U.S.A. and *Kata* to Melbourne after her husband, *Traiko Mladenoff*, from *Maala*, was killed during the Greek Civil War.

**Yana Ilova**, married *Tanas Mitreff* of *Krepeshina*.

### Kuzo Ilioff / Stasa Ilova (nee Shimirova)

My maternal grandfather and grandmother had four surviving children.

#### Jordanna / Velika / Vasil / Dosta

**Jordanna Ilova**, married *Risto Numeff* of *Krepeshina* in 1922 (my father and mother).

**Velika Ilova**, married *Kole Triandoff* and immigrated to Toronto, Canada. They had six children *Vesa*, *Tanas*, *Dosta*, *Letta*, *Sofka* and *Fania*.

**Vasil Ilioff**, was killed while handling a land mine. His widow, *Gouga*, raised their five children, *Risto*, *Kole*, *Sotir*, *Tanas* and *Petre* and would joined her sister *Velika* and her family in Toronto.

**Dosta Ilova**, married *Mitre Kitin* and immigrated to Western Australia. They had five children, *Fania*, who married *Mitre (Jim) Stoichoff*, *Basil* (Boris), who married *Fania (Faye) Nikolova*, *Christine* married *Chris Sholdus*, *Vicky* married *George Eftoff* and *John* married *Helen Kiandova*.

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## LETTA'S PATERNAL BRANCHES

### Marko Peoff /

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#### Kosta / Tanas / Kata / Risto

**Kosta Peoff**, married *Stoianka Vishina* both were formerly from *Bapchor* and moved to *Maala*. (Extended information follows).

**Tanas Peoff**, married *Dosta Trpenova* of *Krepeshina*. They had three sons *Kole*, *Mitre* and *Risto*.

**Kole Peoff**, married *Kiratsa Fotina* of *Bapchor*. Their son *Sotir* was killed fighting for the partisans during the Greek Civil War and his wife *Dosta Tsapova* and daughter *Fania* immigrated to Western Australia. *Kole's* second marriage was to *Kata Bakrncheva* of *Neret* and they had a son *George*, who married *Rose Borschoff* and had two children *Linda* and *Nick*.

**Mitre Peoff**, drowned while sleeper cutting in Western Australia and was buried in the Nannup Cemetery. His widow *Mita* married *Pavle Petroff*.

**Kata Peova**, married into the *Markovsky* family of *Bapchor* and had a daughter *Ristana* who married *Nuome Yovkoff* of *Bapchor*.

**Risto Peoff**, married *Ristana Kalina* of *Krepeshina* and had four daughters, *Mara* married *Tanas Stoichev* and had four children, *Ylo*, *Chris*, *George* and *Kata*, *Menka* married *Mitre (Jim) Rumenoff* and had three sons *Nick*, *John* and *Tom*, *Tinka* married *Risto Gotcheff* and had three children, *Jim*, *Kata* and *Cilia* and *Tsula* married *Stase Anastasoff* and had three children *Doris*, *Chris* and *Jim*.

#### Kosta Peoff / Stoianka Peova (nee Vishina)

##### Vasil / Sofka / Stoian

**Vasil Peoff**, married *Mara Ylova* from *Krepeshina*. They were the parents of *Londe* (Len Peovitis), my wife *Letta* (Vellios), *Yovan* (John Paioff) and *Ristana* (Mandamadotou).

**Sofka Peova**, married *Kuzo Kiandov*, originally from *Bapchor* who relocated to *Maala*. They had three children *Vesa*, *Ristana* and *Stase*. *Vesa Kianova*, married *Mitre Numeff* (Jim Vellios) and had two surviving children *Faye* and *George*. *Ristana Kaindova*, married *Tanas Peoff* and had two children *Helen* and *Jim*. *Stase Kiandov*, married *Zoia Vlahova* and had two girls, *Helen*, who married *John Kitin* and *Anne* who married *Terry Manoff*.

**Stoian Peoff**, married *Tsanda Stoicheva* from *Tourie*. *Stoian* was tragically killed fighting for the partisans and his son *George* (George Peovitis) immigrated to Perth and married *Letta Stoicheva*.

#### Vasil Peoff / Mara Peova (nee Ylova)

##### Londe / Letta/ Jovan / Ristana

**Londe Peoff**, (Len Peovitis ) married *Soula Koppelova* and had three children, *Lorna*, *Stella* and *Victor*. *Londe* died on 20 April 2004.

**Letta Peova**, (Letta Vellios ) my wife.

**Yovan Peoff**, (John Paioff) married *Ann Risidis* whose family had lived in *Maala* before they had immigrated to Melbourne. The couple were married in Kalgoorlie and have three children, *Con*, *Helen* and *Christopher*.

**Ristana Peova**, married *Vasil Madamadotou*. The family resided briefly in Kalgoorlie before returning to *Maala*. They had four children, *Tasoula* and *Tasso* who were born in *Maala* and twins, *Danny* and *Mary*, who were born in Kalgoorlie and returned to Australia and reside in Perth.

**Footnotes:**

*It is remarkable that such detailed memories of family members were harboured by succeeding generations despite the absence of official documents such as birth, marriage and death certificates. It says much about the importance placed on the family that permeated all aspects of traditional Macedonian society and furthermore illustrates the reliability of oral history.*

*There have been many joyous additions to the family trees presented and sadly many members have passed on since they were originally constructed. However, it is my hope that the information contained will provide a sturdy trunk on which future branches and leaves can grow and be added.*

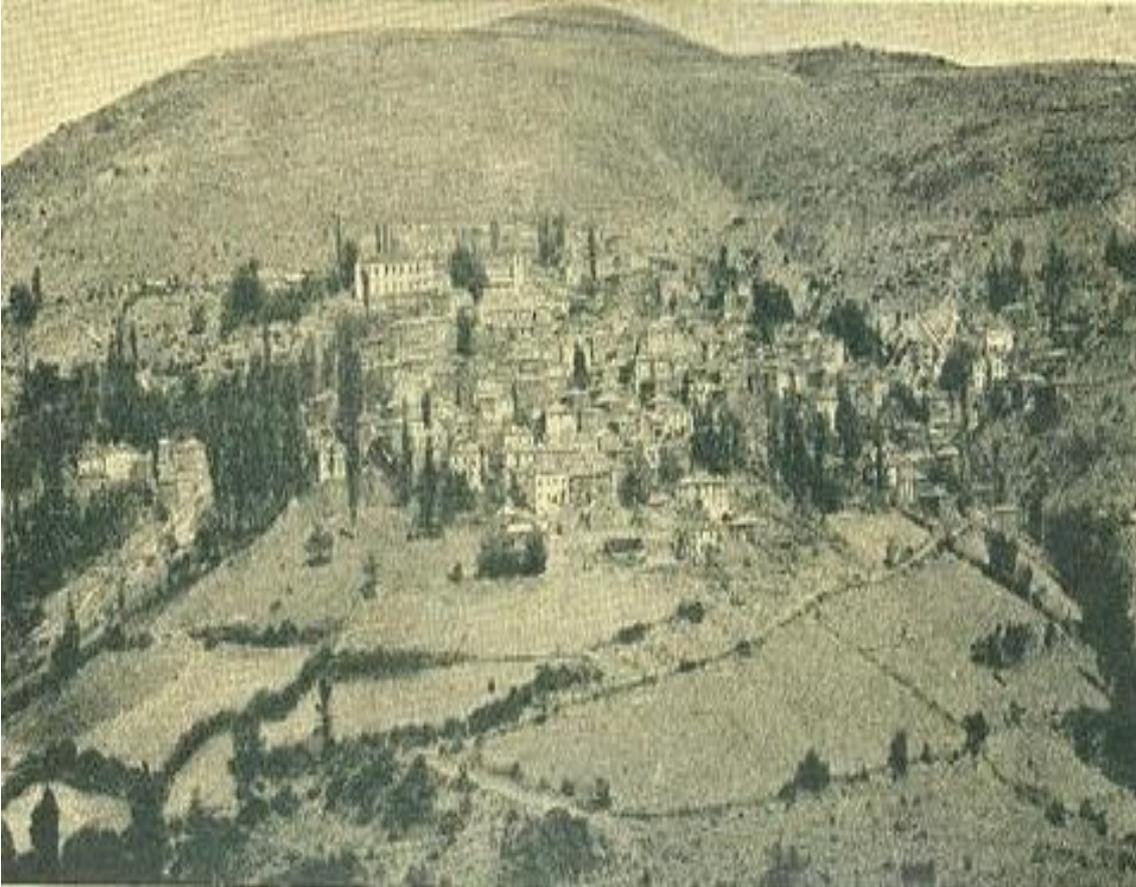
## The Village of Maala



*The village of Maala lies nestled in the Macedonian lowlands. In my youth it was a community of some one hundred and thirty houses and six hundred people. There among the humble houses of the villagers was the home of my grandfather Kole Numeff where I was born. Maala could be of any one of hundreds of villages of the Macedonian lowlands: small, largely self-sufficient rural communities, where generations of villagers carried out the time-honoured routine of striving to eke out a meagre existence by nurturing crops of rye, barley, corn and wheat on small strips of land, raising vegetables and fruit in household gardens and orchards and producing cheese and butter with the milk from their flocks of goats and sheep.*

*Macedonian villages were predominantly feudal, patriarchal, technologically backward societies. They were home to often large extended family groups bound together by necessity and strong bonds of kinship. Beyond the homes of the villagers lay their life-sustaining fields. There were no fences and the strips of arable land, owned by village families, were not consolidated into one but scattered within the confines of the village. Some of these fields had been inherited from generations past while others had been purchased from Turkish families who had departed for their ancestral homeland at a time when the Ottoman Empire was showing visible signs of decline. In a strange twist of irony, Turks sold back to Macedonian peasant families the very land that they had seized from them centuries before.*

## Village of Bapchor



*Bapchor, located in Kostursko kaj, the villages in the vicinity of the township of Kostur, Was the ancestral home of the earliest known member of our family tree. Our ancestor Dedo Petre Petrevski was said to have fled there while seeking sanctuary from Ottoman authorities who had falsely accused him of murder. There in Bapchor perched under the shadow of Vicho, a high mountain almost halfway between the townships of Lerin and Kostur, he had built a new life for himself among his adopted Bapchortsi selani, villagers of Bapchor.*

*In the time of Dedo Petre and his son Dedo Vello Bapchor was a village of some 180 houses and one thousand villagers. Along with other villages of the palini, mountains, Bapchor would experience severe land shortages and over a number of generations many Bapchoritsi would be forced to carve out new settlements beyond the established village boundaries or relocate to villages in the lowlands at a time when many Turkish families were compelled, by changing political circumstances, to sell their land and livestock and return to their own ancestral homeland. As a major partisan stronghold during the Greek Civil War Bapchor was subjected to persistent bombing raids and today lies in ruins. The most visible remnant of a proud and thriving village community is the Church of Sveti Giorgi, St George. Also standing are sections of the village school. A closer look among the creeping, ever-encroaching undergrowth reveals the crumbling walls of some of the village homes. However, to the heartbreak of the villagers the burial plots and grave markers of their ancestors have been lost forever.*

## Bapchor in Ruins



**ABOVE:** *An old drinking fountain located just at the outskirts of the village of Bapchor.*

**BELOW:** *The remains of Bapchor's village church, Sveti Giorgi.*



## Maala School Concert 1938



*In this rare photograph from my school days. I can be seen standing in the front row, second from the right, dressed as a king on the occasion of a school concert. Our class presentation was based on the story of a royal wedding and I had been chosen to play the lead role. In this photograph I am pair of my teacher's trousers. A paper crown sits atop my head and paper ribbons and braids add to my regal grandeur and bearing.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent at Maala's primary school but my school days were severely interrupted by having to help plough, plant, irrigate, weed and harvest our family fields and assist in shepherding and milking our flocks of sheep and goats.*

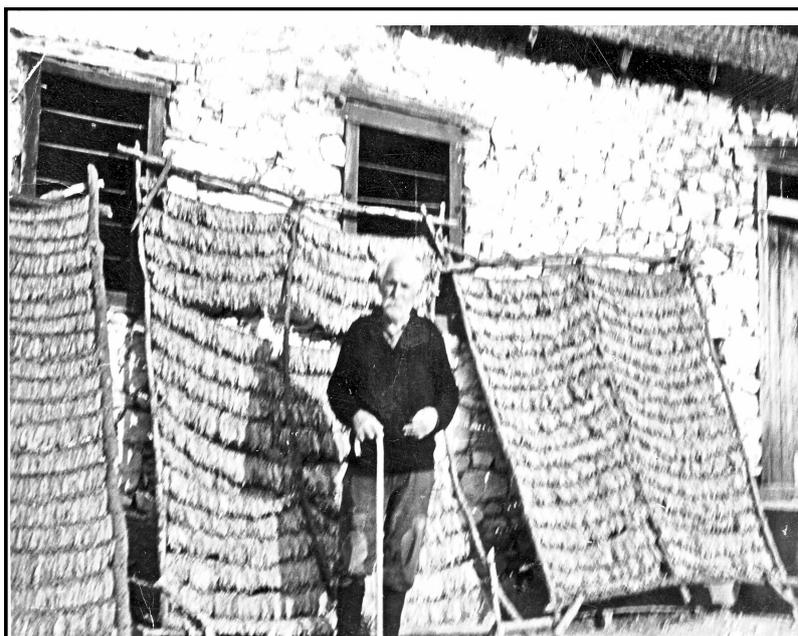
**“He Who Must Be Obeyed”**



*My paternal grandfather Kole Numeff was born in the village of Krepeshina in 1881 and died in nearby Maala in 1965. This photograph was taken in Lerin during 1951 on the occasion of a visit I and my grandfather made to the township to purchase small quantities of rice, sugar and coffee shortly before I departed for Western Australia. While we sauntered along one of Lerin’s streets I noticed a street photographer soliciting passers-by. The thought struck me that this might be my last opportunity to possess a photograph of my grandfather and I urged him to pose. He was hesitant at first but relented when I told him that I wanted a photograph to take with me to Australia to remember him by.*

*It was October and my mother, Striko Vasil and I had booked passages on a Yugoslav-owned ship to take us from the Athenian port of Pireaus to far off Fremantle in Western Australia. My grandfather sat upon an old chair positioned on the footpath outside a shop front. I paid the photographer a few drachmas for two copies of the developed print, one which I kept and the other which I gifted to my grandfather, whose copy would later adorn his tombstone in Maala's cemetery where he was laid to rest. In this photograph the patriarch of the Numeff family sits looking squarely at the camera with both hands resting on the crook of his home-made walking stick. A tattered cap, which he rarely discarded, sits on his head and he is dressed in an old coat and trousers and wears a pair of shoes with only a few of the eye holes threaded with frayed laces.*

*My grandfather was quick-tempered and head-strong but he took his role as family patriarch extremely seriously. He was a skilled craftsmen, a tool maker, carpenter, cooper and saddler. He was a forceful, complex personality with a reputation of having an opinion about everybody and everything. Although he tended to adopt a stern outlook on life there were times he would laugh, tell amusing stories, sing the traditional songs of his people and play the Macedonian bagpipe with great gusto at weddings and other festive occasions. He was renowned for giving good advice, which too often some commented, he failed to follow himself. Although he warned against becoming involved in village politics this did not preclude him from becoming embroiled in protracted disagreements with some of his fellow villagers. He was easily offended, bore grudges and was slow to reconcile. Despite this, he was my grandfather and I have treasured this photograph of him which always brings back memories of people and events from my past and of a world when things, like this photograph, were in black and white, where things were either right or wrong, a world that was seeped in tradition. This was Kole Numeff's dunya, world, it moulded his personality and guided his every thought and action. This then was my paternal grandfather, Kole Numeff, "he who must be obeyed".*



## Maternal Branches: Kuzo Ilioff and Baba Stasa



*This is a rare photograph of my maternal grandfather and grandmother Dedo Kuzo and Baba Stasa. Kuzo Ilioff was born in Bapchor but his father, Risto Ilioff and his young family were among those who had to leave their beloved but overcrowded ancestral village and relocate to nearby Pavlin, where they initially built makeshift huts with walls constructed from branches and twigs. There, they worked tirelessly to carve out fields from the shrub land so that they could grow life-sustaining grain crops. In time, the Ilioff family moved to the village of Krepeshina where Dedo Kuzo and his demure wife would become highly respected villagers. He was widely known for his common sense approach to life and as someone from whom fellow villagers could seek sound advice.*

*Dedo Kuzo Ilioff had worked abroad in America and on his return he had been conscripted to participate in the conflict between Greece and Turkey that followed the end of the First World War. He did not serve as a soldier but was ordered to take his horse to the battlefield and carry food, water and ammunition to Greece's frontline troops. This form of indentured military service was referred to as mekari and was extremely dangerous. As Dedo Kuzo's family grew he and his son Vasil built a new house in Krepeshina near the old family home in a part of the village where many of his close relatives had their homes. Next door was the home of Dedo Kuzo's brother File and across the road that of his first cousin Spiro Ilioff, while a little further up the road lived Spiro's brother, Sime.*

*My mother, Jordanna Iliova, was the oldest of Dedo Kuzo's and Baba Stasa's children. She had a brother Vasil and twin sisters Velika and Dosta. Another sister and brother had died in infancy.*

*Later, Dedo Kuzo and Baba Stasa moved to Maala and lived in the home that had been vacated by Kole Traindoff, the husband of their daughter Velika who with their young family departed the village to build a new life in Canada. Kuzo Ilioff died in Maala in 1954 but was buried in Krepushina. When Baba Stasa died in Maala in 1965 she was not buried with her husband since she had passed away during a bitterly cold winter and it proved too difficult to take her body to be laid to rest alongside Dedo Kuzo.*

## Military manoeuvrings



*This photograph shows my father Risto Numeff (left) with his brother-in-law Sotir Tolleff, the husband of his sister Kata, in military uniform. My father had completed his two year stint of compulsory military service but during the 1923 Greek-Turkish War he was one of those, along with other fellow villagers, who had been seconded to a paramilitary regiment responsible for the dangerous work of carrying supplies of food, water and munitions to Greek soldiers at the battle-front. Fortunately, by this time this conflict was almost at an end, with Greek forces in disarray and in retreat, while closely pursued by Turkish soldiers determined to drive their traditional enemy from Turkish soil.*



*This is a rare photograph of my uncle Mitre Numeff who during the Second World War had been conscripted to serve in the Greek army and fought along the Albanian border against invading Italian forces. He was tragically killed during the Greek Civil War while fighting as a partisan.*

*Dedo Mitre left behind his young wife Yana and three daughters, Ristana, Dosta and Cilia. His family was never provided with any details regarding the circumstances of his death and his body was never recovered.*



*Striko Vasil Numeff (left) is photographed with Vasil Kiandoff from Maala. Within weeks of being called up to undertake his compulsory military service he was diagnosed with appendicitis and was unable to take part in basic training. Bored, he found an old army bugle, which during his prolonged convalescence, he taught himself to play. He had no musical training but perhaps he had inherited some of his newly-discovered musical talent from his father who played the gadya, the Macedonian bagpipe. He was subsequently permanently stationed on the military base at Volos as an army bugler and watched as a succession of new conscripts came and went. He would laughingly recall that during this time he ate extremely well, in the army canteen, at the government's expense.*

## Western Australian's Macedonian pioneers



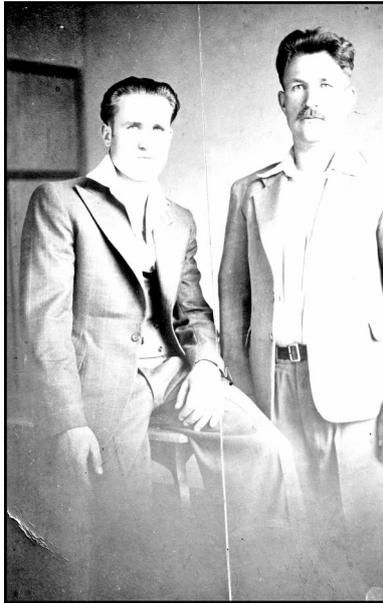
*This photograph was taken in 1937. At that time my father was sleeper cutting in the South-West of Western Australia. He is photographed with some of his fellow Macedonian selski from Krepeshina, the village of his birth.*

**Prvata reditsa od levata strana (front row from left to right)** *Sotir Doncheff, Tanas Toleff, Vasil Doneff, Sotir Trpenoff, Petre Ilioff, Noume Iloff, Giorgi Delanoff.*

**Stredna reditsa (middle row)** *Vasil Endrioff, Yane Endroff, Risto Numeff (my father), Dosta Bozinova, File Kalin, Kole Pandoff.*

**Treta reditsa (third row)** *Tanas Endrioff, Giorgi Endrioff, Vasil Pandoff, Giorgi Dimiroff, Tome Numeff, Leta Bozinova, Stojan Numeff, Kole Ilioff, Tanas Gilivichin, Stase Toleff.*

## Father and son working abroad ...



*My eldest brother Tanas Numeff (Tom Vellios) is photographed with my father. They spent many years working together in Western Australia's South-West as sleeper cutters, in a Boyup Brook flax mill and on various tobacco plantations in Manjimup.*

*During the Greek Civil War Tanas was determined to return home and fight alongside the partisans in the cause of a free Macedonia. However, he became stranded in Yugoslavia and after a number of years, in 1952, returned to Western Australia, a married man, with two young children, Phillip and Lozana. My brother died of cancer on 7 October 1976. He was only 53 years old.*

## ... and those left behind ...



**BACK ROW:** My brother Noume, Jovan (author), brother Sotir, Ristana (Baba Kata's daughter) and brother Stase.

**FRONT ROW:** Chris Vellios (Striko Vasil's son), Cilia (Striko Mitre's daughter), my mother, Yana (Striko Mitre Numeff's wife), Dosta and Ristana, (Striko Mitre's daughters).

## A lonely grave ... so far from home



*This photograph was kindly supplied by George and Jean Stoichev.*

*Working thousands of kilometres from home in unfamiliar surroundings and away from one's family was a challenging experience. In the case of Mitre Peoff, it would end in tragedy. He was only twenty six years old, married and committed to working hard to build a better future for his young wife and extended family. He had ventured to the towering forests of the South-West of Western Australia to toil alongside his father Tanas and his older brother Kole.*

*Mitre Peoff drowned near the small timber town of Nannup and was buried in an unmarked grave in the local cemetery. Years later, Tanas Stoichev, the husband of Mara Peova and his family, together with Nick Rumenos, the son of Mara's sister Menka Rumenos, nee Peova, located Mitre's final resting place and erected a tombstone to his memory.*

## Our engagement



*Prior to securing my passport and purchasing a sea passage to travel to Western Australia, where my mother and I were to join my father and brothers, I was engaged to Letta Peova the daughter of Vasil Peoff and Mara Peova nee Ylova of Maala. Our families were fellow selski and had shared many similar life experiences.*

*I wanted Letta to leave for Western Australia with me since her father was already living there but there were delays in securing the required documents. Letta finally arrived in Western Australian at the port of Albany in April 1952.*

## To Distant Shores ...



*Letta kept this postcard of the S.S. Hector the ship on which she had voyaged to Western Australia. The vessel was one of a large fleet of steamships of the Blue Funnel Line, founded in 1866 by Alfred Holt a Liverpool business man and railway engineer who had a fascination for steam engines. With the demise of England's railway boom Alfred Holt had turned his talents to establishing a fleet of steam-powered passenger carrying liners.*

*The ships of the Line were named in honour of the heroes of Homer's Iliad and other characters from ancient Greek mythology. The S.S. Hector was named after of the most capable and noble of the Trojan warriors during the Trojan War. It was built in Belfast and launched by British Prime Minister Clement Atlee in 1949. At that time it was among the Company's newest ships, one of a number built to replace the forty-one vessels that the Blue Funnel Line had lost to enemy attacks during the Second World War.*

... and those left behind ...



*Letta with her sister Ristana, her mother Mara Peova, brother Jovan Peoff (John Paioff) and their cousin, Giorgi Peoff (George Peovitis), the son of the ill-fated Stoian Peoff.*

***Letta was no stranger to hardship. Her father had left for Western Australia when she was a young girl, and as one of those left behind, she lived through the turbulent years of the Second World War and the Greek Civil War when she witnessed the imprisonment and mistreatment of family members and was herself placed in jail as a member of a family of suspected partisan sympathisers. She was there to observe the grief and despair when news reached the Peoff home of the death of relatives or friends, including that of her uncle, Stoian who was killed while fighting as a partisan.***

***My wife was particularly aggrieved that her father had not sent for her mother and the rest of the family to join him in Western Australia and was somewhat embarrassed by rumours circulating in the village that her father was involved in a de facto relationship. Her feelings for her father soured further as a result of his deliberate refusal to arrange the necessary immigration papers that would permit her to journey to Western Australia where she was to be married and his rejection of her mother when she finally did arrive. Father and daughter were never reconciled.***

## Sunday 2 June 1952: Our Wedding Day



*This is our official group wedding photograph taken in a Manjimup photographic studio.*

**BACK ROW:** Kole Paikoff, Giorgi Numeff, Vasil Numeff (Vick Velios), Kole Peoff, Noume Peoff, File Peoff, Kole Dimiroff, Sofka Kiandova, Yovan Peoff (brother-in-law), Mitra Paikova (holding son Arthur in her arms), Londe Peoff (brother-in-law), Giorgi Peoff, Sotir Numeff, (brother), Stase Numeff (brother), Stase Kiandov, Vasil Markovski, Vasil Numeff (uncle).

**MIDDLE ROW:** Kata Markovska, Tanas Markovski, Stase Youvkoff, Vasil Pandu (best man) Kuzo Kiandoff, Jovan Numeff (author) Vasil Peoff (father-in-law), Letta (my wife), Risto Numeff (father), Vesa Kaindova, Soula Yovkoff, Jovanka Doneva, Ristana Kiandova,

**FRONT ROW:** Stefo Mechkaroff, Kole Numeff (Nick Velios), Nikka Numeva (aunty) Yana Numeva (Yana Velios), Jordanna Numeva (my mother), Mara Paikova, Risto Numeff (Chris Vellios), Stoianka Numeva (aunt) and Tsanda Numeva (Sandra Vellios).

## On our selection



**BACK ROW:** I am holding our daughter Stella in my arms, Yanis Mantamadotou, Tsila, my brother Noume's wife and my brother Sotir.

**FRONT ROW:** Jim, Letta and my brother Stase.

*This photograph was taken by my brother Noume during on one Sunday morning in November 1957. Unlike the Good Lord our family rarely rested on Sundays. On this occasion we had spent the day weeding our tobacco crop and had just finished our morning tea break which we routinely took at ten o'clock. A close look at my brother Stase's baggy t rousers reveals that my father was still buying our clothes with the established adage that one size fits all. With us is Yanis Mantamadotou, my brother Sotir's "blood brother", who regularly worked on our farm on weekends during the five years he spent in Western Australia before returning to Greece. The tricycle on which Jim is seated was his and his sister's pride and joy. It was one of the few toys that they possessed. Subsequently, both would be extremely upset when I inadvertently ran it over while backing the farm truck. Years later we purchased our youngest daughter, Feni a brand new bicycle which proved to be the envy of her older siblings who had never owned a bicycle of their own even as teenagers.*

## Our First Home



*This was our first home, a two-room timber and asbestos dwelling with a tin roof. At the time this photograph was taken it was being used as a storage shed by my brother Noume.*

*Our family built a number of similar homes on the Numeff family farm which were located nearby the main house whose roof can be glimpsed in the background. Only a few old fruit trees of a once bountiful orchard remain.*

*In those early years such humble dwellings were home to various members of our extended family, my brother Sotir, Striko Vasil and relatives such as Tanas Tannin and Tanas Stoichev and their families.*

## On Our Own...

*This photograph is of the farm house in which we lived after Letta and I had left the family farm. While this is a comparatively recent photograph few of the exterior features have changed and the house appears much as it was when we lived there.*

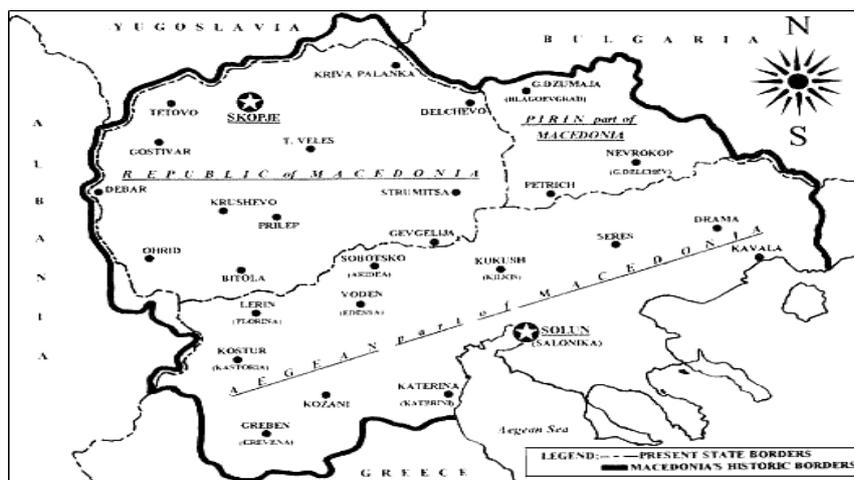


## Life in the “Big Smoke”



*This photograph is of our modest house at 8 Mary Street, Como. A far more grand residence than our farm house in Manjimup but in hindsight it should have been far more spacious to better accommodate my young family. Despite this we were fortunate to live only one street from Como Beach, near a well-maintained oval, an amusement arcade, picture theatre and it was just a short walk to Como Primary School. More importantly a number of our close relatives lived along the same street and in nearby in neighbouring South Perth. The suburb of Como is almost unrecognisable today with a large number of the old residential homes demolished to make way for the construction of modern two-storey townhouses or business premises. The vegetable gardens, grape vines, chook sheds and traditional quarter acre blocks have disappeared.*

## The Partition of the Macedonian homeland ... and the Macedonian villages of the Lerinsko and Kostursko regions



There were some 804 recorded traditional Macedonian villages and townships. The following is a list of the villages of the *Lerinsko* and *Kostursko* regions.

- |                          |                          |                        |                       |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ahil (Kostur)            | Gorno Drenoveny (Kostur) | Opaja (Kostur)         | Tarnaa (Kostur)       |
| Ajtos (Lerin)            | Gorno Nevoljani (Lerin)  | Orman (Kostur)         | Tarnovo (Kostur)      |
| Aposkep (Kostur)         | Gorno Papratsko (Kostur) | Orovnik (Kostur)       | Tarsje (Kostur)       |
| Armensko (Lerin)         | Gorno Pozharsko (Voden)  | Orovo (Kostur)         | Tikveny (Kostur)      |
| Babchor (Kostur)         | Gosno (Kostur)           | Osheny (Kostur)        | Tiolishcha (Kostur)   |
| Banitza (Lerin)          | Govlishta                | Oshchima (Kostur)      | Tuhol (Kostur)        |
| Bela Tzarkva (Kostur)    | Grache (Kostur)          | Papdia (Lerin)         | Turje (Kostur)        |
| Bel Kamen (Lerin)        | Gramos (Kostur)          | Papli (Kostur)         | Tzakoni (Kostur)      |
| Besvina (Kostur)         | Grazhdino (Kostur)       | Patele (Lerin)         | Tzerovo (Lerin)       |
| Blatza (Kostur)          | Gulintzi (Lerin)         | Pesjak (Kostur)        | Vambel (Kostur)       |
| Bobishcha (Kostur)       | Hrupishcha (Kostur)      | Pesochnitza (Lerin)    | Varbeny (Lerin)       |
| Bogatsko (Kostur)        | Izglibe (Kostur)         | Petersko (Lerin)       | Varbnik (Kostur)      |
| Bostandzievtzi (Kostur)  | Janovene (Kostur)        | Pilkadi (Kostur)       | Vidulushche (Kostur)  |
| Breshcheny (Kostur)      | Kabasnitza (Lerin)       | Pisoder (Kostur)       | Vichishcha (Kostur)   |
| Breznitza (Kostur)       | Kalenik (Lerin)          | Pleshevitza (Lerin)    | Vineny (Kostur)       |
| Buf (Lerin)              | Kalevishcha (Kostur)     | Popli (Lerin)          | Visheny (Kostur)      |
| Bumboki (Kostur)         | Kara-bunar (Solun)       | Popolzhany (Lerin)     | Vitan (Kostur)        |
| Churilovo (Kostur)       | Karadzha-kjoi (Solun)    | Pozdivishcha (Kostur)  | Voshtarany (Lerin)    |
| Dambeni (Kostur)         | Krepeshina (Lerin)       | Prekopana (Kostur)     | Zeleniche (Lerin)     |
| Dobrolishcha (Kostur)    | Kondorbi (Kostur)        | Prekopana (Lerin)      | Zhelegozhe (Kostur)   |
| Dolny (Kostur)           | Kosinetz (Kostur)        | Psore (Kostur)         | Zhelevo (Kostur)      |
| Dolno Drenoveny (Kostur) | KOSTUR                   | Rahmanli (Lerin)       | Zhelin (Kostur)       |
| Dolno Kalenik (Lerin)    | Krushoradi (Lerin)       | Revany (Kostur)        | Zherveny (Kostur)     |
| Dolno Kotori (Lerin)     | Kumanichevo (Kostur)     | Rudari (Kostur)        | Zhupanishcha (Kostur) |
| Dolno Nevoljani (Lerin)  | LERIN                    | Rulja (Kostur)         | Zhuzheltzy (Kostur)   |
| Dolno Papratsko (Kostur) | Labanitza (Kostur)       | Sarakinovo (Lerin)     | Zabardeny (Lerin)     |
| Dranichevo (Kostur)      | Lagino (Lerin)           | Semasi (Kostur)        | Zagoricheny (Kostur)  |
| Drenichevo (Kostur)      | Lazheny (Lerin)          | Setina (Lerin)         |                       |
| Drenoveny (Kostur)       | Lebishevo (Kostur)       | Setoma (Kostur)        |                       |
| Drenovo (Kostur)         | Leskovetz (Lerin)        | Shakovitza (Kostur)    |                       |
| Drobishcha (Kostur)      | Lichishta (Kostur)       | Shijak (Kostur)        |                       |
| Dupjak (Kostur)          | Ljubetino (Lerin)        | Shkrapar (Kostur)      |                       |
| Ekshi-su (Lerin)         | Loshnitza (Kostur)       | Shlimnishcha (Kostur)  |                       |
| Eleovo (Kostur)          | Ludovo (Kostur)          | Shtarkovo (Kostur)     |                       |
| Ezeretz (Kostur)         | Mahala (Lerin)           | Slatina (Kostur)       |                       |
| Fotinishcha (Kostur)     | Markoveny (Kostur)       | Smurdesh (Kostur)      |                       |
| Gabresh (Kostur)         | Mavrovo (Kostur)         | Snicheny (Kostur)      |                       |
| Galishcha (Kostur)       | Medovo (Kostur)          | Spantzi (Lerin)        |                       |
| Garleni (Kostur)         | Nered (Lerin)            | Srebreny (Lerin)       |                       |
| Gorentzi (Kostur)        | Nesram (Kostur)          | Starichany (Kostur)    |                       |
| Gorni Kotori (Lerin)     | Nestime (Kostur)         | Statitza (Kostur)      |                       |
|                          | Neukazy (Lerin)          | Stensko (Kostur)       |                       |
|                          | Neveska (Lerin)          | Surovichevo (Lerin)    |                       |
|                          | Nevoleny (Lerin)         | Sveta Nedelja (Kostur) |                       |
|                          | Omotzko (Kostur)         | Sveta Petka (Lerin)    |                       |

Note: A number of villages from these two regions might not appear in this list.

## **Eulogies**

*Jovan Risto Numeff, John Christos Vellios died at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital at 7.45 on the morning of Monday 1 November 2010. He was eighty five years old.*

*He was cremated at the Norfolk Chapel, at Karrakatta Cemetery, on Friday 5 November and his ashes were buried at the rear of his wife, Letta's final resting place.*

*The following eulogy was delivered by his son Jim Vellios.*

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*My father Jovan Risto Numeff, John Christos Vellios, was the second of five sons of Risto Numeff and Jordanna Numeva: our deceased and much loved Striko Tanas, Striko Sotir who lives in Melbourne and is ill and cannot be with us and our much loved Striko Noume and Striko Stase both of whom I am pleased to say are here with us today. My father's parents were Makedonski selani from the small village of Maala where my father was born in 1925 and previously from the nearby village of Krepushina. My father's more distant ancestral roots were in Bapchor, a village of the palini, the mountains, perched high, overlooking the communities of the pollye, the Macedonian lowlands. His father, Risto Numeff, was the eldest son of Kole Numeff and Yana Numeva, formerly Dimova. His mother, Jordanna was the eldest daughter of Kuzio Ilioff and Stasa Iliova, formerly Shimorova. Our Dedo Risto and Baba Jordanna were married in Krepushina's village church of Sveti Giorgi in 1922.*

*My father viewed life in black and white. Not for or him brightly flashing lights, the glitz and glamour of modern life, the technological gadgetry that seems today to permeate all aspects of our lives or rampant materialism. He was not a man of ceremony, pretence or pomposity. However, while my father's view on life was in black and white my father lived a life far more colourful than most of us could ever contemplate. From his earliest years, he learned what it was to face poverty on a daily basis and to share the responsibilities encumbered upon all family members, young and old, to help eke out a humble existence from grain crops sowed in tiny strips of land, from the vegetables grown in the family mala grdena, vegetable patch, from fruit harvested from a few fruit trees and vines and from the produce, milk, cheeses and meat, obtained from small flocks of sheep and goats. My father's childhood years were spent as a peasant farmer helping in the fields and as a shepherd herding the family's sheep and goats As youngsters, he and his brothers, would often sleep under a star-filled sky, wrapped against the biting winds in home-made blankets while protecting the family's precious livestock from marauding, hungry and often rabid packs of wolves or even the occasional bear. Although my father enjoyed attending school and would regale us all about how fine student he was ...top of the class and taking on the main roles in class plays ... family responsibilities took priority and his school days were limited to a few, interrupted years of primary school.*

*His father, our Dedo Risto, had spent many years abroad, na tuzuchina, working far away from his loved ones deep within the towering giant jarrah and karri forests of Western Australia's*

*South-West as a timber worker carving out railway sleepers. Dedo Risto had first arrived in Western Australia in 1926 but was forced to return, humiliated and penniless, when the Great Depression ravaged the Australian economy and there were no jobs to go to and no money to earn and send back home. Undaunted he ventured to Australia for a second time in 1936. This time there would be no turning back, his future and that of his family, who would eventually join him would be vested in his new, adopted land.*

*My father knew homelessness when he and his mother and young brothers were evicted from their family home and were forced, at least temporarily, to rely on the kindness of their relations and fellow villagers. My father would tell the story how he returned home to find his mother crying on the doorstep with all of their meagre possessions laying nearby. He would proudly tell how his mother and her brood of young sons were soon able to recover from such an ordeal - both emotionally and financially. He would often talk about the pride that he had felt when his mother and he and his brothers had accumulated sufficient funds to buy a few goats and sheep of their own and even a bull calf, which when fully grown, was harnessed to plough their small grain fields.*

*My father witnessed the terror and privation of foreign occupation during the Second World War when contingents of German troops patrolled through Maala and the surrounding villages, confiscating food and intimidating villagers. He lived through the tragedy of the Greek civil war , when brother fought against brother, a war that claimed a number of close family members, including his uncle Mitre Numeff and in which he was a reluctant participant first as a recruit of the partisans and then as a Greek army conscript. My father knew of the anxieties associated with leaving behind a world he was familiar with and venturing thousands of kilometres to build a new life in a land where he had difficulty understanding the customs, traditions and language. His was indeed a colourful life. He arrived in Australia in 1951, and here in his adopted homeland, which he grew to love and into which he gradually assimilated, he married my gentle, loving mother Letta Peova and together they raised a family.*

*My parents were married on Sunday 2 June in Manjimup's Anglican church. I often look at their wedding photograph and although many of their guests have passed on I recognise some of you here today ... a little older perhaps ... but nevertheless here and I am so deeply moved by the fact that you were there on such a happy occasion in the past, nearly sixty years ago, and are here today on such a sad one. My sisters Stella and Feni and I are so privileged and blessed to have had such parents.*

*My father was a tobacco grower and dairy farmer in Manjimup and an abattoir worker and cleaner once he had moved to Perth. He often worked two jobs at a time or would grab but a few hours of restless sleep in the back seat of his car while working double shifts. My father might have lived his life in black and white and at times even we who loved him most considered that he had old fashion views, habits and unrealistic, outdated expectations, which we jokingly felt*

*to more akin to the Jurassic period ... the age of the dinosaur. He could be stubborn and a little too serious in his outlook on many things but my father knew right from wrong, he knew it was right to put one's family first, he knew it was right to respect, if not agree, with one's elders, that it was right that a person's word should be their bond, that it was right when the chips were down, that one did not forgo their responsibilities despite the personal cost. We from succeeding generations can learn much from my father and his generation about what is important in life and what are the basic values by which life should be lived.*

*My father was a proud Macedonian and worked tirelessly to help build and sustain our Macedonian Community Centre and Church and I am proud to be the son of a Macedonian villager who tried to do the best that he could given what he had, what he knew and what he believed in.*

*My father sometimes found it difficult to openly express his love, unless this was directed toward his grandchildren whom he adored and would always greet with a broad smile, hug and kiss. But we knew that our father loved us, his children, and that he was immensely proud of us. With the sad passing of our mother he was the rock on whom we could rely. We loved him so much. I know that we will feel his presence especially during family occasions, impromptu gatherings, birthdays, engagements, weddings and christenings. I know that my father will be there in spirit and even if outwardly unsmiling and looking serious inwardly rejoicing over the festivities and enjoying seeing his family together and happy. Now as my father embarks upon his final journey when all his trials and tribulations are behind him and he can rest in eternal peace and as we say goodbye to his physical presence for the last time we wish him a most pleasant voyage. ... and if what is written is indeed what is... then I am sure that my father will be warmly embraced when he enters eternity.*

*As we will always remember my father so we shall not forget Yana and Faye and her family and we will be there for them. We thank, members of Yana's family, my father's brothers and their families, Vuicho John Paioff and his family and the members of Vuicho Londe's family - and you my father's relations and friends - for being here today to celebrate our father's life and for your kind condolences and your comforting thoughts. It is also appropriate at this time to remember our Teta Ristana our mother's sister who lives in Greece.*

*Dad, you will forever linger in our thoughts. We will catch glimpses of you, hear your voice when we need comforting and we are equally certain that we will sense your disapproval when you do not agree with what we might be doing. You are part of us and will always live within us. One of Stella's, Feni's and my own most important life-long personal goals was never let you down and we hope that we did not disappoint you too often.*

*Goodbye Dad.*

*May you rest in peace.*

The following eulogy was delivered by his daughter Stella Walker.

*My Dad was a loving father, a devoted grandfather and a respected gentleman. Dad was a very proud man and did not complain even in sickness. Dad and Mum worked hard and lived a humble life. The most important thing for them was to see that their children had a better future. There was no hesitation to give his children a helping hand and we are very grateful. Unfortunately, Mum did not see any of her grandchildren but Dad certainly made up for that. He loved his grandchildren and wouldn't go without seeing them every week.*

*I have lots of treasured memories to hold close to my heart. And some not so treasured. Like when he caught me and my friend Vicki at the back boundary fence of our homes smoking our first cigarette. I never touched a cigarette since and hate smoking with a passion. It was a good lesson. Say hello and give Mum a big hug from me. Please tell her I still miss her terribly. It breaks my heart to think she never got the chance to hold any of her grandchildren.*

*I know you will be in good hands Dad.*

*Love you so much.*

---

The following eulogy was delivered by his daughter Feni Bembridge

*When I think of my dad the first words that come to mind are:*

*Proud*

*Fair, and*

*Selfless.*

*He never asked for much but gave generously. He appreciated all he had and all that he was given. Right up until his last day, unable to speak, hooked up to machines and tubes and in considerable discomfort, he still attempted to say thank you to the nurse who had just shaved him. He chose a simple life - his life was not full of parties, holidays or fancy clothes. As I said, he didn't want much - he did, however, want everything for his children.*

*He had come to another country to make a better life and encouraged each of his children to pursue an education and change the pattern of hardship of the generations before. An education he was not able to have himself. He aspired to bring up children who had integrity and honesty and were 'good' people. These are the qualities that he modelled and that each of us has tried to live up to for our Dad. But, by far the best thing we did for our Dad was to have his precious grandchildren. They made his face light up. Dad would sit at his table and you wouldn't dare take the seat next to him if the grandchildren were present – they had pride of place and from that chair next to him, he could gaze at them, take their hand and whisper "I love you". During the past few days, I have had messages from friends who did not meet Dad and many said that although they did not know my Dad, they felt like they knew him because I told so many stories about him. When I told Dad that I used his stories, even in my work, he cheekily exclaimed: You should give me royalties then! There were so many stories. He just did things differently – there was a logic but it was his logic.*

*A story that sums him up was when he had asked Russell and me to drive him to get a video machine repaired because he wasn't sure how to get to the shop. We will be there at 1pm Dad we said. When we arrived, on time, he had left. An impatient man was Dad and single minded - He couldn't wait 'til 1pm so he had ordered a taxi. But how come his car was gone? Dad had ordered a cab and when it had arrived, and the driver said "Yep I will take you there hop in", Dad had said No, you drive in your car and I follow you in my car – once I been there I know how to get home myself – I don't need to pay both ways. So here was this taxi driver with his passenger following in another car, probably very slowly knowing Dad! That was our Dad – a lateral thinker! It wasn't about the money it was about the most practical solution. He thought everything through and did it thoroughly.*

*A family joke that Russell, he is a good bloke but slow as a snail! Good old Dad – he always did things so fast, efficiently and single-mindedly and wondered why everyone else wasn't the same!*

*So, the stories will continue and we will always remember that Dad was unique, he had his funny ways but they were his ways.*

*We love you Dad.*

**This eulogy was delivered by Courtney Bembridge, on behalf of our father's grandchildren, Tracy, Stephen, Ashley, Kym, Courtney and Regan.**

*Our Dedo was one of a kind.*

*Dedo would have done anything for us and we would always make sure we knew that he thought we were the best in the west ... and the north and the south and the east.*

*When we were sick, he'd feed us lollies on his couch, when we were hungry he'd clean out everything from the pantry and place it in front of us... Although he did that even if we were not hungry. He had a lot of love to give... even if, at times, he showed it in a different way... Like the time he looked after our family cat. It wasn't that he did not like animals he just wasn't brought up with them as pets... so here was his dilemma ... we had asked him to care for our cat and told him that she was used to affection. Knowing that is what his grandchildren wanted... he had to pat her... but he couldn't bring himself to do it ... Dedo's solution was to sit outside and scratch her back with the end of a golf club . He always found a way to get things done.*

*And it was no secret how much he loved his grandchildren. He told us each time he saw us and showed it with every warm hug ... every pat of the hand ... and every smile. We loved Dedo as much as he loved us, so on behalf of all of his grandchildren ... we'll miss Dedo... the best in the west.*

