

“Big” Pa Pou – One of His Parents’ Ten, A Man Alone, A Man for His Family

Paternal-Side Family History Review

By Timothy Stathis

(From Discussion with my Father, Demosthenes C. Stathis around 1999)

There were 10 children, 7 boys, 3 girls, and I am not talking about the children of Demo and Maria. Defying the odds against such an identical match, Demo’s own father was one of 7 boys and 3 girls born of his grandparents on his father’s side. Demo himself would later bring forth not only the same number of children, but also the exact same number of boys and girls.

The order of those 10 children of the grandfather patriarch and grandmother matriarch was first a girl, name unknown, then George, the eldest son, followed by 2 girls: Katarini and Vasau, followed by 6 boys: Vageli, Kosta (Demo’s father), Andoni, Panyoiti, Mihali, and Gregori.

The eldest 5 boys are those who came to America.

They came for work, or a dream, or for dreams that work could bring from vision to reality. George, though a willing participant in the dream, was not found willing for the work. Already grown in habit from adult loathing in the Greek cafés, satisfied with the simple and the days spent in relaxed conversation of the café atmosphere, his transfer from village Greece to American city with “little Greece” in the neighborhood, found him as well frequenting the local café rather than making the rounds for employment. So the general support for his existence fell on the others who, unlike their eldest brother, had put determination into action for starting a life where they could branch anew the family tree and expand its fruit-bearing capacity in nourishing soil and sunlit opportunity.

George wasn’t gardening the family tree nor growing the strength of his branch, but rather was a burden and he couldn’t be encouraged otherwise. The other brothers followed-through on their stated position that unless he worked, found a means to support his presence, they would send him back to Greece rather than continue to support him. With that, he exits the stage of the family history, other than this action taken by the brothers as an on-going example of what was and further became instilled in the brothers’ bloodline in regards to the work ethic.

This was Massachusetts, where from an aerial point of view one would find these Greek village brothers mixed in a conglomerate of immigrants with little-to-no English, grouped in language and ethnic heritage bondings, all intertwined in the work-day in factories, steady employment, work they were capable of, with little pay, yet pay enough for sustenance, and a few extra pennies that each could watch grow slowly to build toward buying a new life and new freedom beyond the factory. But as day led on to day, and week led to month, and the months followed one another like the one before it, little progress was made toward something more than this inevitably being perpetuated into years ahead. Each started in his own mind to ever seek something more, some work, some opportunity that could

bring a greater sense of independence, and hope for a better life. No roots were really begun at the beginning, the distant relative who received them gave them a start but no great ties to the people or area of this their place of origin in America was braided there in Massachusetts.

And the work, the well drawn from the depths of the American soil, the means to the end in pursuit of the dream, dried up. The factories of the area closed. A prelude depression here in the first decade of the 1900's, prelude to the Great Depression of the late 20's and early 30's, had overcome the East, and one of the brothers, got on with work that was moving west, work working its way West, the Railroad. Broad-built and hands like a baseball mitt, Kosta, the future progenitor of Demo, got on with the labor crew building America's transportation network.

He woke that morning, the morning of another departure, but this one was different than the first from Greece. That one had been with his brothers, as part of himself as himself from his birth on Earth; adventurous, yes, but then not alone, like now. He looked over his shoulder now as he lifted a small duffle bag of the few belongings he had, representing everything he owned of property, the morning being misty and cool, and the home where he left his brothers sleeping was still and quiet, and he thought of them, how they arrived together and had the youthful optimism of getting from day-to-day in hard work, evening folly, and talks of their half-conceived dreams of their future. He peered deeper past that humble dwelling they had here and beyond over the ocean back to Greece, his mother and father, the large family, the village, his friends "back there." He shifted the weight of the bag to the other shoulder and still peered back as he thought how all he had now in comparison to what he had in Greece was a duffle bag and a few dollars, not much difference in amount of personal property of his own, but separated now from what belonged to all when they were together.

He thought about why he was where he was in this moment in time and he felt lonely and a twinge of uncertainty made him blink as the sun rose above the horizon and a ray of light penetrated the mist. There hadn't been enough for everyone in Greece. His own father and mother were too burdened, and anxiety of having enough to feed each child sufficiently was making them old before their time, and that anxiety overshadowed what made life worth living. It was a given that they had to depart, relieve the burden upon the family, and the brothers had the honor of feeling their departure made life better for their older sisters and youngest 2 brothers who stayed behind with their beloved parents. He hadn't counted on being alone, though, in this moment in time. And he felt lonely with each breath.

The train whistle blew and a hundred men like himself, all strangers, turned their heads back from the past they peered into, and they bumbled together forward climbing one after another into the train cars.

All that's known of this period of his life is he was soon made a crew leader directing the many Chinese workers working the rails. He was gone from the East many years. He had ended-up in St. Louis and married and had 2 children, first a son, John, then a daughter. Tragedy struck in the influenza epidemic taking from Earth, from him, his cherished wife and beautiful daughter. He and John survived but he had now lost all direction other than he was duty-bound for bringing-up and providing for his son, and he knew, other than that sense, all he really had was the family in the East he had so long ago said good-bye to. And they encouraged his return.

Kosta's elder brother, Vageli, and his wife, Nota, took him in and persuaded him that alone he could not bring-up his son and the sooner he married again the better, though he felt despair and his pains of separation in his loss still overshadowed him. Nota made connection back in the old country and was certain she had the right woman for her brother-in-law. She, back in Greece didn't just go along with it blinded, but took initiative herself to travel to the HORYAU, the village home of the family outside Nafplion to see of what sort of family her prospective husband came from. Being satisfied of their moral character, she consented, and accepting her destiny, and with blessing from her own mother and father, knowing they might never see her again, they saw her off as she entered the huge ship to cross the vast ocean to the mysterious other side of the world.

Kosta, together with his brother Vageli's daughter, Sophie, went to New York City to greet the arriving bride-to-be at Ellis Island. And so, a life of love and family devotion begun anew for her, a second beginning for him.

The marriage was not only a taking of vows of devotion to one another, but, as well, a commitment too, that each would reinforce in one another and in the family life they would establish, all that it meant to each of them to be Greek and have an obligation to honor those who came before them, their parents and ancestors, to live as a Greek should live. Each had this expectation of one another, and promise to one another.

Marika had left behind her parents and 2 sisters, Ireni, and Eleni. She knew inside that if her rebirth here in America as wife to this man she had never seen before failed, if ever he asked of her to be different than how she was raised to be a Greek woman with pride in all that her family had given her in beliefs and values, that she could, that she would find some way to leave and return to her origins. Kosta and the extended Stathis family never gave her any cause to so wish to leave and she would never see her parents and sisters again. Ireni became a Teacher and never married, Eleni had 2 children it is believed. Though later after his mother had passed away, her son Demo always regretted having not sent her back for a visit in her later years, he would honor his mother's memory by visiting her sisters himself, going out of his way to do so when in Greece for other reasons shortly after her death. Somehow Marika's knowing that that connection would be made, that the pride she had in a son would one day be shared with her beloved sisters of her youth, gave her the strength to not demand her own return. The final connection was made some 2 decades after the first when both Demo and Maria traveled to Greece and sat for coffee and conversation with the daughter of Eleni, Demo's first cousin. At the time of the writing of this, no one has any knowledge of that continuing branch of the Family Tree.

Notes about Upstate New York early days. There is much more yet to add to this from the living memory of those still around to tell it.

Schenectady

Though my father was born in Eastern New York State in the small town of Glens Falls, New York, he was raised since about age 1 through his High School education in Schenectady with his older half-brother, John, and his younger brother, Pete.

Also present was the family of Stello. Stello's Father and Mother were the God-parents of my Father. Later, my Father would baptize Stello's daughter. At one point and for a lengthy period of time, Stello lived with my Father. Stello was like a brother to my Father and that closeness, though not of blood, but of life-connection from the beginning has remained throughout their long lives.

Stello served in the Korean War as a Sergeant in charge of a tank group.

Dr. Jordan was of the Schenectady Greeks, that group who were the close friends that my Father would recall. Dr. Jordan was in the Marines.

The extended family in Schenectady consisted of my father's father's brother Vageli, his wife Nata, their 3 children: John, Vasili and Sophie. John was married to Irene and they had 2 children, Van (Schenectady) and Pam (Detroit). Sophie married Parascava and they had 3 girls: Dimitra (Never Married - Bank – Schenectady), Penny (2 Kids - Schenectady), and Georgia (3 kids, Teachers – Poughkeepsie)

My father's father and mother always kept a garden of vegetables and he even made his own wine each year at harvest time; friends would gather at his house for the annual experience.

“Big” Pa Pou, though living his last years in Syracuse, was buried in Schenectady.