

George Pappas
SOC. 120.002
Inst. Kathleen Westman
Honors Paper
12/10/17

The American Dream

Making the move to another country is never an easy choice to make, especially when you're moving half way across the world. Now think about if you had to make that move by yourself at a young age. This is a decision that some people have to make in their life; many of those people being from other countries, but even some of those people being from the U.S.

My great uncle one was of those people. About 67 years ago, my great uncle was born into a very poor family located in a small village named Kato Dafni in Nafpaktos, Greece. He grew up in a very poor family that lived in a one room house with a dirt floor. His family struggled very much to put food on the table every night; some nights they didn't have food to eat. Because of this poor upbringing, he had to get a job at a 10 years old. He worked in construction and he was a bus boy at a restaurant. When he about 14, he was considered a "ladies man" which sometimes got him in trouble. His older brother (who we call the general because he was a general in the Greek army) was 27 at the time and had a job in the army. Because the general had a stable job and a wife, my great uncle, who was 16 at the time, moved in with them which gave him the opportunity to finish school. My great uncle stayed with the general for about six months until he decided that he wanted to leave Greece and make a better life for himself. The general's wife found out about my great uncle's plan and decided to help him leave Greece; which was his dream at the time. The general didn't know that he was leaving and would never allow him to leave without finish school. My great uncle was able to leave Greece and he left a note for his brother saying "thank you for everything but I want to make a better future for myself and I'm going to America for a better life." He then applied for a janitor-like job that was

on a cargo ship. He spent over a year and half working hard as the ship docked in different parts of the world.

When he finally docked into the U.S., New York specifically, he quit his job on the cargo ship and then immediately started to make his way towards Chicago. In the same clothes that he wore on the ship, he began the long journey to Chicago; taking many busses and spending multiple days traveling. He choose Chicago because he knew a childhood friend that moved here a few years before. His friends name was Nick Skaliotis. They grew up in the same village and spent a lot of time together. Skaliotis was about 5 or 6 years older than my great uncle and he came to the U.S for the same exact reason; he also eventually wanted a family and so a big reason why he wanted to move was so that could better provide for them and make a better life for himself. Once he did move to Chicago, he created that family and shortly after my great uncle showed up. Skaliotis gave my great uncle a place to stay until he got his first job in the U.S; which was a couple months after getting to Chicago. It was hard for him to get a job due to the fact that he was illegal, had no high school degree, and he did not know how to speak English. Another family that he knew was the Kozonis family, specifically Bob Kozonis. The family had been settled in Chicago for a few years before my great uncle arrived so they had the connections that got him his first job in the U.S. For his first job, he worked as a dishwasher for a restaurant. Soon after, he decided to move out of Skaliotis house and live by himself in a very small apartment.

He was very happy at the time for finding a job in Chicago but still wanted better. He began to stay after his shifts to watch how the cooks did their jobs. After a few months of watching them and teaching himself how to cook, he asked his boss for a cooking job and got it. It was only a small promotion, but he was extremely thankful for it.

A year and half later, when he was about 20 years old, he got married to the woman he loves and who is still with him today. This also gave him a green card which he says was a bonus. During or right after his wedding day, which was one of his most memorable moments in his life, he had a moment of realization with some anger mixed in. This is because of one of the presents that he received on his wedding night. The mother of the Kozonis family, who knew my great uncle was still struggling at the time, decided that she should give him a tie as a present. This was not something he needed, and it made him feel horrible about his financial situation. At that exact moment he “felt like shit” and swore to himself that he would go above and beyond living paycheck to paycheck.

Because of that situation, he became even more determined to become successful; so determined that he started working another job. This meant that he would work as a cook at the restaurant in the morning, and at night he would go to a different Greek restaurant and work as a waiter. After two long years of working two jobs, after many days hard work and dedication, he was finally able to buy his first restaurant about two hours away from Chicago. He had no other choice but to move closer to the restaurant; however it also meant moving away from his pregnant wife who didn’t want to leave her friends and family. This eventually caused him to sell his first restaurant after only six months of owning it. He moved back to Chicago but was still determined to own a restaurant. With that determination, he managed to buy a restaurant here in Chicago; it was much smaller than the one he originally owned but he was still very proud of his very own business. He didn’t know it yet, but this restaurant was just the start to his legacy.

His restaurant was lucky very successful and it allowed him to save up some money. At this point, he was still working very hard, taking care of his wife and daughter, and finally enjoying life a little more than he originally did. After six years of opening his first restaurant, he

sold it for more than double what he originally paid for it because of how successful it was.

During those six years he had another daughter which meant selling the restaurant was somewhat risky. However, his plan was to use that money to try and buy a new restaurant in the suburbs so that he could fix it up and create it into another successful business. After doing this a few more times, making more money each time, he began to find a thrill in it. Being able to open a business, make it very profitable, and then selling it for a lot of money was something that he enjoyed doing very much.

He continued to do this for about 35 years, making a lot of money for each restaurant he sold. His goal at that time was to have enough money to be able to retire at age 50. He managed to reach this goal, however, being the very aggressive business man that he is, he didn't stop looking for new opportunities to make money. The downside to working so much is that he didn't get to spend a lot of time with his two daughters growing up, this is something he very much regrets. Soon after hitting age 50 he started to invest in real estate and was also very successful at that.

He is currently a millionaire that lives a relatively humble lifestyle. He still works two days a week at his restaurant for fun, he spends a lot time with his family and grandchildren, he travels around the world (mostly in Greece), and is simply enjoying the life that he made for himself. I could not be more inspired by him.

My great uncle changed the entire path for not only my generation, but many generations to come. One summer, he decided to take a vacation to Greece; this was the first time my mom ever saw her uncle and she was 17 years old. Sometime during those three months, my uncle told my mom that if she didn't get a good score on her SAT and couldn't get into the university she wanted, then that she should come to the U.S. and go to school there. So after her senior year, not

passing her test, she decided that it was time for a change and decided to take him up on his offer and leave everything behind. This was a huge choice to make for a 17 year old, but my mom got tired of seeing the same things everyday. She wanted to see something different and she always heard good things about America. After finally getting there and moving to Chicago, she moved in with my great uncle and stayed there for about a year and a half. She was working at his restaurant and by age 20 she had enough money to put a down payment on her own condo. Soon after she bought her condo, her brother (my uncle) decided he wanted to leave Greece also and he came to live with my mom. He could not have shown up at a better time because it was around the same time where she started to feel homesick; however, because her brother came, she was able to get rid of the homesickness and continue on with her job and life in the U.S.

My great uncle was never a follower, he always went down his own path and tried something new. Because of this, my whole family is living in the U.S; there is very high chance that if my great uncle decided to stay in Greece that I would also live in Greece. During the interview with them, I asked them if they would ever move back. Both of them agreed that the U.S. is now part of them; Greece will always be the best place in the world but the U.S. is their home. My mom said that her biggest surprise is that after living in America for 29 years, she still feels Greek, but when she takes a trip to Greece, she feels American. She's always feels torn between the two countries. But on the other hand, she loves this feeling because she can take the best from Greece and the best from America and make it her own.

I ended the interview with one more question; I asked both of them "if they had a million dollars what would they do with it?" My mom said that she would keep some for the family but donate the rest of it to children's charities or hospitals. My great uncle said that he would use the money to take care of his family and the people around him, help many people in need, and use

the rest of it to further his business. This is what separates him from many other people; he is driven. He never stops and will always find another way to keep progressing and advancing.