

The National Herald

December 22, 2007



*Merry Christmas
&
A Happy New Year*

The National Herald

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The Wonders of Christmas

Welcome to our Christmas 2007 issue. Inside these pages you and your family will experience some of the wonders of the Christmas Season. You will read about the “where” of Christmas, such as in Diana Farr Louis’ article about Christmas In The Ionian Islands and Jan Pierce’s story about Discovering Christmas Traditions on Kefalonia as well as Oree Gianacopoulos’ touching and comical personal account about Christmas At Sea. We also have a piece by Gundi Harriss, A Season Of Love, which discusses Christmas traditions and their origins.

We have not forgotten about some of the feelings that surround this time of year. Dione Dodis skillfully re-creates a very meager holiday, Christmas 1944, which lies in sharp contrast to today’s holiday experiences. Areti Kearns also shares with us through her story, Her Name was Mary: Miracles at Christmas, a lonely child’s experience of the meaning of Christmas.

Sharing and giving come in many forms. Just in case you haven’t a clue about that last minute gift -Fotios Stamos presents a very interesting historical twist on Greek Wines, The Gift of Wine, An Ancient Greek Formula, as well as his choices for December wines in, Our Sommelier’s Pick.

To all of our readers, we at The National Herald wish to express our deepest wishes for a very merry Christmas and all the best for 2008!

Beverley MacDougall
Special Inserts Managing Editor

Patriarchal Declaration For Christmas, 2007

By the grace of God
Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome
And Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, mercy and peace
From the savior Christ born in Bethlehem

Christ is born, glorify Him;
Christ comes from heaven, meet Him.

Beloved brothers and children in the Lord,

It is with great joy that our Church calls us to glorify God for His loving and personal presence on earth of Christ in divino-human hypostasis, being one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

We must, therefore, examine very carefully the true and life-giving significance of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. For, first, it reveals to humanity that God is personal and is made manifest to us as personal, just as He has also created us as persons; second, it reveals to us that God embraces us with His love. These two events, the personhood and love of God, express fundamental truths of our faith, which of course we have heard about many times. Nevertheless, their impact upon our lives is not as great as it should be, inasmuch as many of us do neither experience Christ’s brotherhood and His boundless love for us in a personal way, nor do we in turn return our love to Christ in order that, by sharing in His love, we may also share by grace in His other properties.

If others – who have not known Christ and, as a result, drown in their search for an impersonal being that they perceive as divine – are somewhat justified, we Orthodox Christians are not at all justified in pursuing such ways that lead to an impasse. For, instead of seeking God as person and approaching Him in the one who approach us, namely Jesus Christ, these deceived people desperately strive to become divine through their own powers, like Adam thought he could achieve by obeying the evil spirit. However, the true and personal God, who is known only through Jesus Christ – the one born in a manger out of love for us – promised us adoption and return to the bosom of the Father, as well as deification by grace through Christ. It is only through Christ that one may fulfill the uni-



versal human desire to transcend the corruption and isolation of an existence without love and the cultivation of communion among divine and human persons in love, which leads to eternity and incorruption.

Let us, therefore, turn the gaze of our hearts toward the newly born Jesus Christ in the manger, so that – by considering how much He loves us – we might love Him with all our heart, mind and being. It is only through the love of Jesus Christ that we may by grace become participants also in His divine nature, just as through love He shared in our human nature. Anthropocentric efforts and thoughts, psychedelic states and ecstasy, together with similar non-Christian experiences do not lead to an encounter of the truly personal God of love, but to a deep and cold darkness, to the gloom of eternal destruction, as well as to a sense of complete and abysmal vacuum.

For this reason, beloved children in the Lord, love Jesus Christ, who

out of love for us and for our salvation became human; come to know the communion of His love, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, there is nothing sweeter than the love of the personal God.

The great herald of divine love is the one who identified God and love, namely St. John the Evangelist and Theologian, who pronounced the supreme uttering, that “God is love.” After him, the great herald is St. Paul the Apostle, who love God to the end and who asked the fervent question: “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” Neither sorrow nor sword, neither death nor any other love can be more powerful than our love for Christ. In remembrance of the words and loving works of St. Paul, and in celebration of two millennia since his birth, we declare the coming year 2008 as the year of the Apostle Paul.

We pray paternally and fervently that Jesus Christ, who was born in a manger out of love and for our salvation, may render our hearts as

His manger, through the intercessions of His ever-Virgin Mother, as well as of our predecessor St. John Chrysostom, to whose memory we had dedicated this past year, together with the intercessions of another Patriarchal predecessor, St. Niphon, restorer and second founder of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of St. Dionysius on Mount Athos, which next year celebrates the 500th anniversary since his repose, as well as of Saints John and Paul the Apostles, par excellence heralds of God’s love, but also of all the saints, so that He may reveal to everyone the person of His love.

We invoke upon all of you His grace and rich mercy. Merry Christmas; may the twelve days of Christmas be blessed; and may the New Year be spiritually and materially fruitful.

Phanar, Christmas 2007
BARTHOLOMEW
Fervent supplicant for all to God



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*express their warm Christmas greetings
to all their relatives, friends
and colleagues for the sacred
and glorious miracle of the birth
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*

May the New Year bring peace
love and harmony to everyone



**WISHING ALL OF YOU
A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A JOYOUS NEW YEAR**

*For to you is born this day...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe
wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.*

(Luke 2:11-12)

On behalf of the



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*A Joyous Christmas
and a Blessed New Year*



*May the pure peace of Christ Jesus,
born on this day for our salvation,
abide within your homes, families,
and communities during this holiday season;
and may the infinite love of Almighty God
fill your hearts every day of this New Year.*



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Her Name was Mary: miracles at Christmas

By Areti Kearns

Special to The National Herald

It was the usual Christmas Eve frenzy in my Toronto home where I lived with my two children, husband, dog and cat. My seven-year-old son whining constantly about being allowed to open at least one gift before Christmas morning; counting the presents to make sure his baby sister didn't get more gifts than he got and shaking all the boxes in hope he might be able to guess what was what. It all seemed wrong. This was not Christmas. How had I failed to teach my son about the spirit of Christmas? When did it become all about things prettily wrapped up under a tree?

Well, tonight was going to be his lesson on giving and not just receiving greedily. I was going to show him the true meaning of Christmas. I hadn't a clue as to how I was going to do this. However, on that bitter cold night, I bundled up my baby girl, stuffed my son in his snowsuit, and packed them into the car. I drove slowly around the city looking for the desperate and the homeless for my son to see what Christmas was like for some other people. Not one person to be found in the streets of Toronto. Not this late on the eve of Christmas. They were all in the shelters or the soup kitchens trying to get a meal except for this one fragile bag lady who was positioned in front of a dilapidated movie house. The wind was high and sharp, swirling all the garbage around her as she sat on a little stool, surrounded by all her worldly belongings crammed into several bags.

Before I knew what I was going to do with this picture of sadness in front of me, I stopped the car, dragged my son over to her and said, "wish this lady a good Christmas". He reached in his pocket, pulled out a five-dollar bill, which was his Christmas money and gave it to her. She then turned around, rummaged through her bags and gifted him with an orange. I asked her name and she said, "Mary, my name is Mary". Of course it was. What other name could she have had? My mother's name was Mary. Just then the wind stopped, it started to snow softly. Ah, the wonderful scent from the orange. In an instant, I was again that five year-old girl in Athens full of anticipation for the magic of Christmas to happen.

The wonderful fragrance of oranges, all the baking smells of cinnamon and cardamom, even the smell of snow, all the signs were there, it was the eve of Christmas in

Athens almost five decades ago. This would be my first white Christmas as snow in southern Greece is almost unheard of. For the five-year-old girl that I was at the time, I was bristling with excitement concentrating hard to contain myself before I exploded at the risk of imploding. Surprisingly enough, it had nothing to do with presents. I didn't know that gifts were part of Christmas way back then.

It had everything to do with this special little baby who was about to be born. The "One" who would grow up to protect all children and

There had been a car accident. They were not expected to live. The adults had correctly decided this was not the night to tell me. Or perhaps, they just couldn't bring themselves to break the high spirits of their little niece. Not that night anyway. They waited till New Year's Day. Nevertheless, I decided it must be that the adults were being quiet in reverence of this special event, behaving as they did when they were in church. That must be it! What a wicked child I was to think such bad thoughts of them. I turned my gaze towards the win-



keep them out of harm's way - including me. No child would ever have to go to bed listening to the growling music from an empty stomach - including me. No child would ever feel sadness, pain or fear - including me. What a nice life, which was about to unfold! Yet the adults in the household were exceptionally quiet, whispering to one another and giving me long sad looks. Something wasn't quite right. They were starting to irritate me. Why are they already thinking ahead to the sadness of Easter? I remember thinking, even at that young tender age, why can't they feel this special moment of hope and joy?

I did not know then that 'erroneously' I was already being treated as an orphan. My parents were far, far away in the 'Strange Land', as my aunt would often call it.

dow, the snow started to fall. I ran out to the courtyard in my bare feet, my head lifted way up to the sky, my tongue sticking out to catch every snowflake. Like magic, there was music and singing everywhere. The Carollers had started their rounds. I felt such perfect happiness I thought I would burst.

It wasn't till a year later when my mother arrived like an angel (via airplane), unannounced, to take my brother and I back to the 'Strange Land' where my father was awaiting us, that I became an orphan. They had survived. Of course they had. Baby Jesus makes all the bad things go away for the little children. Another Christmas was coming. I could hardly wait for that year's Christmas miracle.

Areti Kearns is a freelance writer living in Toronto.

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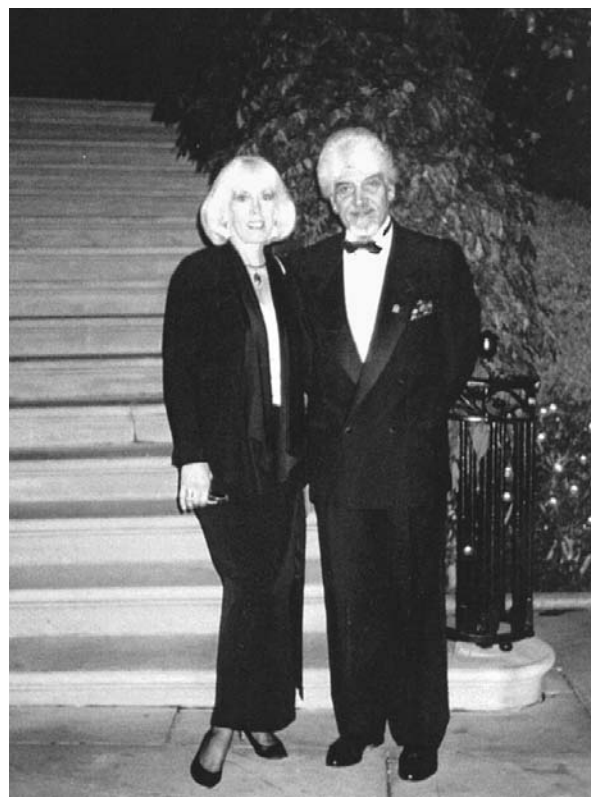
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and a Happy New Year***

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wish all
a Merry Christmas
and a Joyous New Year



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3020/368

The Gift of Wine: An Ancient Greek Formula

By Fotios Stamos
Special to The NATIONAL HERALD

By now the holiday season is in full force and the challenges of gift buying increase by the day. Consumers are scrambling between limited day sales at major shopping malls to strategic online department store campaigns. The craze over gift cards, as the ideal gift, has never before reached this year's popularity and sales. The thought process and approaches to gift buying has completely changed from what it was years ago. Traditions and customs have slowly diminished in the wake of this consumer-buying monster. The essence of the holiday spirit always seems to fade year after year. But there are still great opportunities to ignore the craze and bring back the holiday spirit in many ways. We can utilize the online world as a tool to research and to creatively select that special gift for our family and friends. Wine is a timeless gift.

As a one of the pioneering cultures, Greece has once again given something special to society that deserves a toast, Eno (wine). Thanks to our adventurous ancestors, the voyages to explore and discover new lands were always accompanied by enticing foods and flavorful wines dating as far back as 3,000 years ago. What amazed the locals of the discovered lands, was the science of winemaking and its lush effects. Plantings of ancient Greek grape varieties stretch from the valleys in France to the hills throughout Italy and finally, to the corner of the Middle East. In a way, the Greek vessels played the role of an ancient Santa sleigh carrying vines throughout the known world. On a more serious note, the ancient Greek culture believed that the combination of good wine, good food, and good company was essential to a healthy life. These elements of socializing brought together thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and opinions that have continuously enlightened people.

Most of the grapes that are cultivated today in Greece have some affiliation or connection to other international varieties. The presence of DNA testing has opened the doors to Greece's credibility as the frontiers of most of today's reputable grapes grown worldwide. Xynomavro, which translates to black acid, is genetically identical to Pinot Noir, France's premier red grape that has created an enormous amount of recognition. Of course there is speculation amongst French winemakers as to its validity; but DNA can never be proven wrong. Xynomavro mainly grows in the northern regions of

Greece, specifically Naoussa, is a very versatile grape that can be produced in many different fashions, as does Pinot Noir.

As we move towards the south, to the island of Crete, the ancient city of Malvasia is where many experts believe it all began. Malvasia, is recorded as the first port to export wine commercially worldwide. The grape Malvasia, which receives its roots from the ancient port has been planted all over Greece and Italy throughout the centuries. As the centuries went by, many different grapes from Greece began to acquire different names throughout Europe, but in the southern regions of Italy there are still ancient Greek grape varieties with their original identities such as Aglianico (Hellenic), Greco Di Tufo, Grecante, Nero di Troia, and many others.

A recent article published in Decanter Magazine acknowledges that wine expert Miles Lambert-Gocs proposes that Cabernet Sauvignon is a direct descendant of an obscure Greek grape variety called Volitsa. Due to his extensive research he is convinced by the visual identities that Volitsa has enough evidence to merit a DNA test.

These findings will continue to create additional research and testing to introduce more fascinating facts about the presence and affects Greece's grapes have in today's modern wine world. This is truly a gift that deserves adequate acknowledgment

and understanding. Where would today's wine industry be if it were not for gift bearing Greek voyagers? It is said that ancient Greeks wanted to spread their culture and beliefs in the form of giving what was important to them, apart from the famous "wooden horse".

This season, surprise your loved ones with the gift of wine from Greece. There is a great variety now available in the U.S. that can be purchased in most major retailers. A holiday gift basket filled with your selection of wines from Greece will make a great impression. Wines from Santorini and Crete are considered to be some of the best wines produced internationally. Some of my personal recommendations are Sigalas Santorini 2006, Kotsifali and Dafnes from Lyrarakis, Arhanes from Lidakis, and Nemea from Palivou Vineyards. Northern Greek wines are also exceptional such as Xynomavro and Rose from Kir-Yianni and Syrah from Gerovassiliou. To learn more about grape varieties and wine regions of Greece, you can visit the following websites that I highly recommend, www.greekwinemakers.com and www.allaboutgreekwine.com.

Spread what our ancestors did centuries ago, by giving others the gift of Greek wine. This year let your Christmas dinner be paired with a variety of wines from Greece that will create a completely different experience. Stin H Gea Sas!

Our Sommelier's Christmas Wine Picks

2005 CHATEAU LAZARIDIS
WHITE

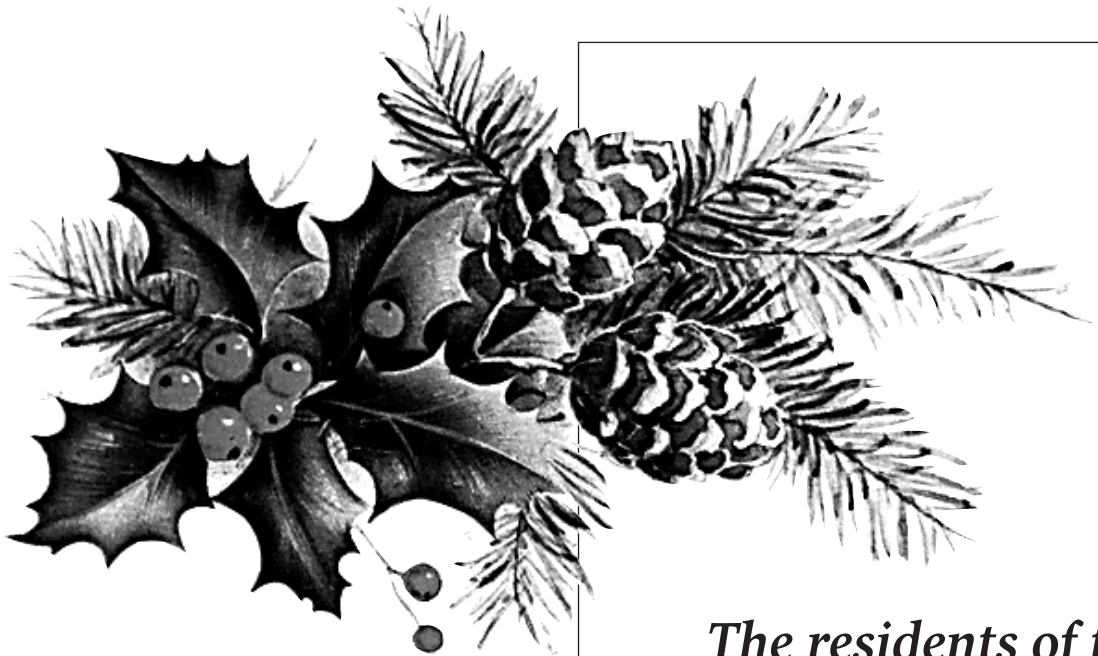
As the dramatic artwork from Iannis Nikou on the label captures your attention, so will the bouquet on this blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, and Ugni Blanc. The inviting aromas of apples and unripe pears draw you to a finely balanced white wine that has pleasant citrus flavors and a smooth finish. A slither of creaminess indicates a short period of barrel ageing that gives an additional five years of life to this French style blend. Its clarity and shine reminds us of the beautiful region of its birth and the picturesque vineyards that King Phillip used to frequent.

Retail: \$20 U.S.

2002 TSANTALIS RAPSANI
RESERVE

This blend is comprised of three indigenous Greek varieties, Xynomavro, Krassato, and Stravoto. The grapes are cultivated from the vineyards of Rapsani, which are at the foothills of Mount Olympus, considered one of the best regions in Europe. The ripeness of all three grapes blended together produce this finely balanced selection that has solid structure of fruit character and a long finish. Its elegance is accompanied by its velvety texture and colors of deep purple. An eight time gold winner at the International Wine Competitions in Europe, Tsantalis Rapsani Reserve is a natural born winner. This selection is also a cellar item that can hold up to ten years. Due to its consistency in quality from the mid 90s, it's well worth investing in verticals of this blend.

Retail: \$35



*The residents of the Philoxenia House
of the Holy Metropolis of Boston
wish a Blessed Christmas and
a healthy New Year to all.*

*Most respectfully, they send this message to
His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios and to all who
assist him in this philanthropic ministry:*

*We are most appreciative for providing us with a home
away from home and for comforting us during very
difficult times do. We thank you very much for all that
you do, and pray that the Joy of the Christmas Season
remain in your hearts throughout the New Year 2008*

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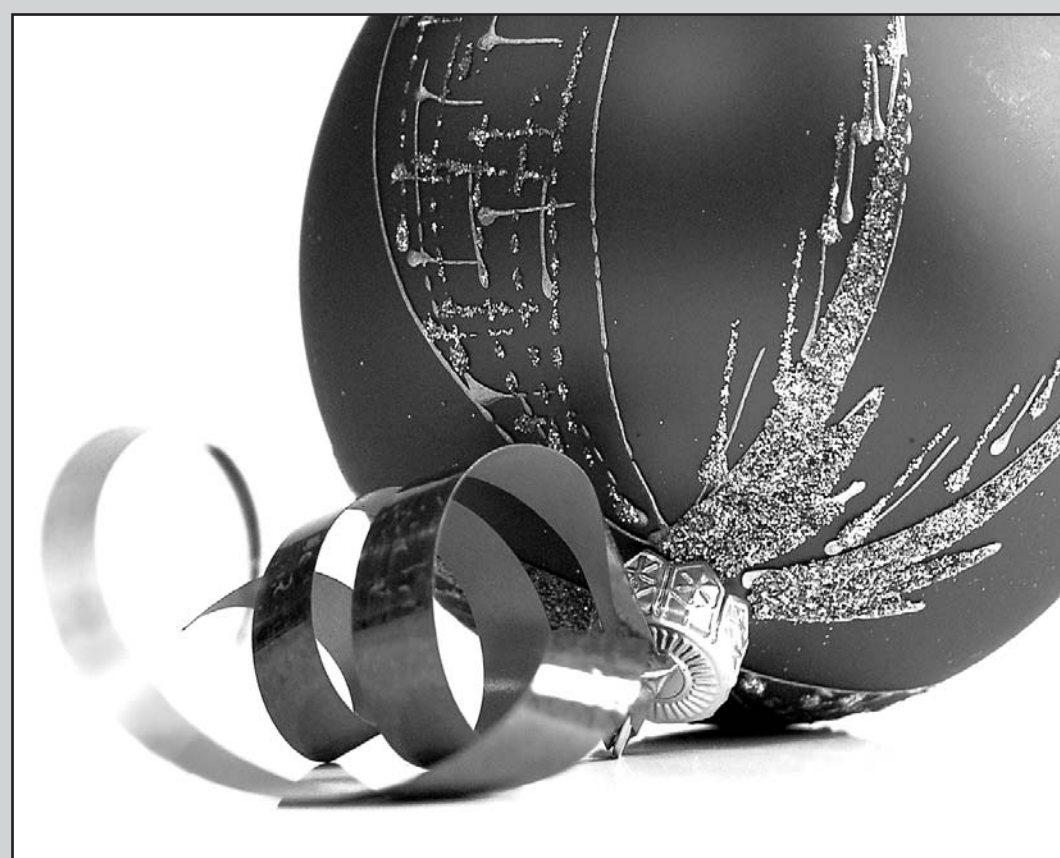
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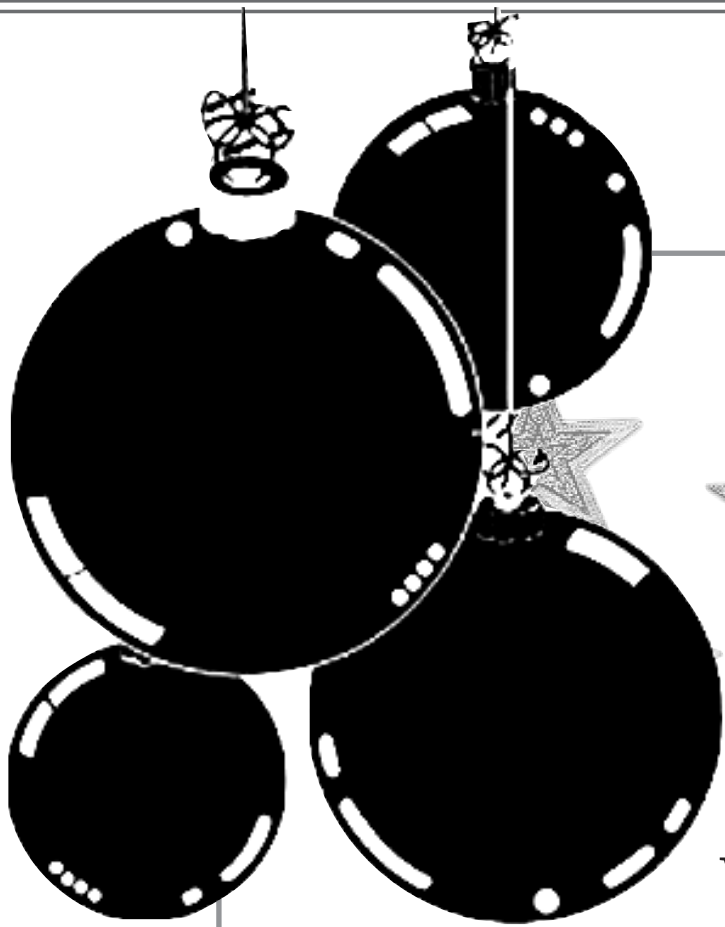
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A Very Merry Christmas to All
and a Happy
and Prosperous New Year



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Best Wishes for
a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year
with Peace, Health and Prosperity!

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The Chryssis Family:
George, Margo, Lily and Alex
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for the Season and the New Year

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ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ

3192/601

Christmas in the Ionian Islands

By Diana Farr Louis
Special to The National Herald

Until Santa Claus and fir trees infiltrated Greek traditions in the final decades of the twentieth century, Christmas on the mainland was merely an important name day – an occasion for people called Christos or Christina to entertain. The Ionian islands, however, had adopted many of the customs of their British “protectors,” so that even in the 19th century Christmas was a three-day holiday with a two-month build-up.

In Corfu, the first harbingers of the holiday season were the tiganites or holeless doughnuts fried in huge copper cauldrons of sizzling oil under the arcades in the center of town. The first cauldrons appeared on the evening of October 20th, St. Gerasimos's day, the last ones vanished the day after St. Spyridon's on December 12th. As the name day of Corfu's patron saint approached, more and more cauldrons would be bubbling there, and more and more passers-by would amble home with a paper cornet of the crunchy fritters dusted with sugar and cinnamon. The tradition remains alive but starts later in the fall with fewer vendors.

Because daily life was regulated by the saints, St. Philip's on November 14th marked the beginning of the pre-Christmas fasting period, 40 days of self-denial as stringent as Lent. This was when the farmers and butchers would slaughter their pigs and start to make salamis, sausages and pancetta, as well as smoked fillets and hams for the Christmas table.

The atmosphere became more festive in early December around the days honoring the popular saints, Barbara, Savvas and Nicholas, on the 4th, 5th and 6th of December. Even the most pious fasters relaxed the rules at what the Corfiots call “the first Christmas” on December 12th. This was the time to worship their own beloved St. Spyridon and every family that could afford it sat down to turkey and avgolemono soup. During this period the church bells seemed to ring nonstop. The British, who occupied the islands from 1815 to 1860, used to complain vehemently about the Ionian bell-ringing, which they called “auricular torture” or the “tintinnabular enemy,” but it was music to the ears of the locals.

Around this time, the normally hectic bustle became even more ebullient with pre-Christmas shopping. Greetings shouted over the

stentorian cries of the vendors and the clanging bells ricocheted through the arcades. The shopkeepers outdid themselves with extravaganzas of decoration. The butchers draped evergreen boughs over the hams, baby lambs and sausage garlands that dangled above their chopping blocks and left unplucked tail feathers as a decorous veil for turkey posteriors; hampers of walnuts, chestnuts, dried figs, prunes and glistening oranges extended so far into the narrow alleyways they made walking difficult; and pyramids of cheeses, imported and domestic, rose above myrtle-bedecked salamis and charcuterie.

Adding to the ferment were the strolling nut sellers and hawkers of small items, who would dart under the arcades when Corfu's notorious rains poured down and console themselves and the crowds by singing carols in perfect harmony. In the evenings after church and after practice, members of Corfu's many philharmonic societies would stroll round town crooning and playing more carols. Carol singing continued throughout the season, peaking on Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and Epiphany. In all the Ionian islands, the carols are set to western-style melodies and have nothing in common with the nasal chants of the mainland kalandas.

Meanwhile, housewives on all the islands carried out a virtual spring-cleaning in preparation for the Christmas feasting. Besides polishing to a brilliant sheen the silver and the copper pots and molds that in those days covered kitchen walls, they even whitewashed the kitchen itself. Their final task was to set the dining room table with a white damask cloth taken from the dowry chest. Apart from meal times, a carafe of wine and bowls of Christmas koulouria or biscuits stood there in permanent readiness for impromptu visitors.

As for decoration, some houses – even in less-anglicized Ithaca – boasted one very un-Greek feature: a Christmas tree, trimmed with homemade ornaments, tufts of cotton masquerading as snow and candles. Buckets of sand and water stood concealed nearby in case of fire. In the Aegean and around Athens, the traditional Christmas symbol was a model fishing kaiki placed in a central position and surrounded by gifts. Now that too has been replaced by a tree, though there are signs that the kaiki is making a tentative comeback.

On the first day of Christmas in Corfu and Zakynthos, egg-lemon



soup was the prescribed dish, followed by the beef used to make the broth. The more prosperous might also serve a haunch of roast pork, studded with garlic, or roast lamb embellished with the first tender artichokes. The turkey did not appear until the second day. It frequently shared pride of place with the gargantuan Venetianiko pastitsio, a pie of sorts containing everything from game to meatballs and mortadella, sandwiched be-

tween two layers of macaroni encased within a sweet crust. Supplementing every meal were peppery salamis, the Corfiot smoked port fillet known as noumboula, cheeses and a relish called moustarda, a piquant quince marmelade. For dessert, although some families with British connections would serve plum pudding, more common were fresh and dried fruits, including the confection called sykomaïda. Translated as fig bread, it also



contains walnuts, pepper and ouzo. Needless to say, this groaning board did not grace the humble houses of the poorer country people, who might have sat down to an old hen or a joint of lamb. For them even a stew of salt cod would have been a treat after their usual sparse vegetarian fare.

The Zakynthians preceded the feasting with a modest meal of boiled broccoli on Christmas Eve, the last day of the fasting period. Even nowadays shoppers scurry round town with trimmed bunches of the purple-sprouting variety spilling out of their carts or tied to the backs of their motorbikes. Christmas Eve is also when households cut their kouloura, a large cake shaped like a ring and containing a coin for luck. It is made of the same dough as Zakynthos's Christopsomo or Christmas bread, a kind of spice cake with nuts and raisins that resembles the Italian panettone. In the countryside you can always tell when a family is cutting the kouloura from the fusillades fired from the farmers' shotguns. As for the islanders' turkeys, they were and are particularly juicy, for they feed on windfall olives. In the old days, the farmers used to bring their live turkeys to town, filling the streets with gobbling while buyers selected them in full feather.

As for Ionian New Year's customs, there is little to distinguish them from the celebrations of the rest of Greece. Typically, the eve is dedicated to card playing for luck. The day itself belongs to Ai Vassili, the Greek Santa Claus, and families get together to exchange presents, eat a lavish meal and cut the Vas-silopitta. This relative of the pound cake also conceals a coin that is supposed to bring good fortune to the finder.

The feasting finally comes to an end on Epiphany and January 7th, St. John's day. A brief recovery period follows before another round of festivities starts with Carnival, which usually begins in early February.

Foreign visitors to the Ionian islands were taken aback by so much frolicking. An American traveller named Charles Tuckerman rebuked the islanders in 1875 for “being excessively fond of amusement and display . . .

The number of holidays seriously interferes with the industry and prosperity of the people. Scarcely two thirds of the year are occupied by working days. [Then] the people give themselves wholly up to pleasure; which . . . consists in an un-

usual modicum of bell-ringing, martial music, discharges of cannon, perambulation in the streets in holiday attire and fireworks.”

Doesn't that make you yearn for the “good old days?”

Here are a few recipes so you can recreate an Ionian Christmas in your own home.

Turkey-Egg-Lemon Soup

Soupa avgolemono apo galopoula

Avgolemono soup features on the holiday menu in both Corfu and Zakynthos. You can make the broth from the wings, neck and giblets or even by boiling a whole turkey. In many parts of Greece, when turkeys were free-range and apt to be tough, they were boiled before being browned and crisped in the oven. Of course, you can also serve this after your Christmas meal, made with the turkey carcass. The Zakynthians always sprinkle grated cheese on their egg-lemon soup, a practice not found elsewhere in Greece.

6 servings

12 cups (3 liters) of turkey broth
6 tbsp short grain rice
2 eggs, separated
juice of 2 lemons
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1/2 cup grated kefalotyri, myzithra or Romano cheese (optional)

Bring the broth to the boil in a large saucepan, add the rice and cook until soft. Remove the saucepan from the heat. In a large bowl beat the egg whites until fairly stiff and beat the yolks in a separate smaller bowl.

Very slowly add the lemon juice to the yolks, beating constantly. Stir this mixture slowly into the egg whites. Add 2 cups of the broth to the egg-lemon bowl, again very slowly, stirring all the while.

Pour this liquid, a bit at a time, back into the remaining soup, stirring in one direction only. Season with salt and pepper and reheat without allowing the soup to boil. Serve with grated cheese, if desired.

Tip: Do not cover the saucepan while reheating or the soup may curdle. Although it will still taste fine, it won't look very appetizing. This is June Marinos's foolproof method for making any egg-lemon soup. It also works beautifully with mageiritsa (Easter soup).

Continued to page 12



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extend warm greetings
for a Blessed Christmas Season

Christmas is here to once again attest to the enduring love of God richly bestowed on all humanity...to the truth that God --- and He alone --- has the power to transform sadness into joy, despair into exaltation, darkness into light.

Christmas is here to invite us to encounter God, to break the chains that bind us to secular concerns and material preoccupations, and to reach out for the Redeemer.

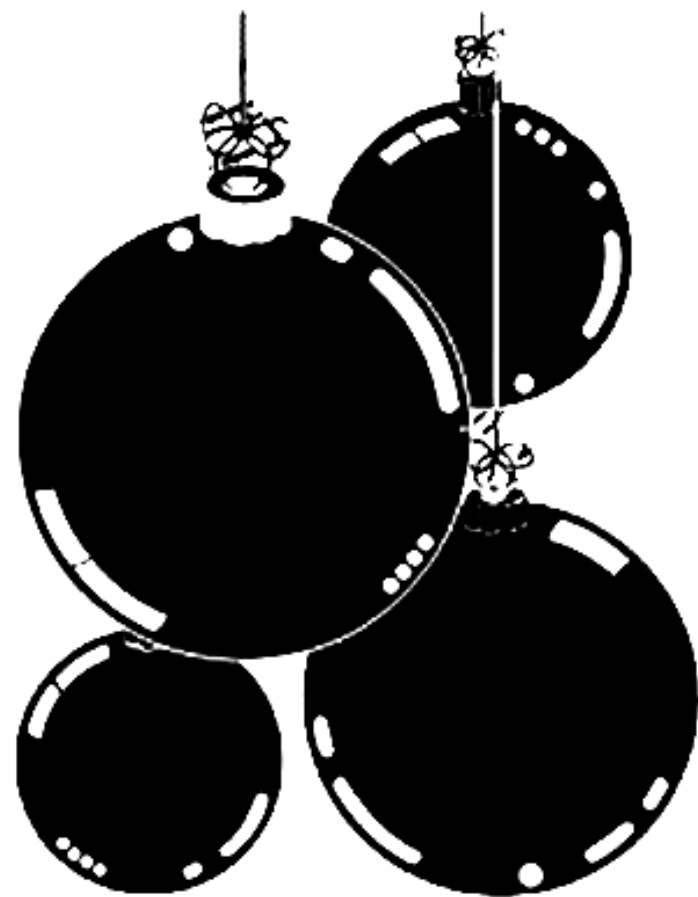

May we be especially attentive to those whom we have forgotten in our neighborhoods and cities - the impoverished and imprisoned, the hungry and the homeless, the battered and the abused.

Let us pray for the brave men and women of our Armed Forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and throughout the world.

May the Incarnate Lord choose our hearts as His manger this Christmas and may He bless every day of the New Year 2008 with health, joy, peace and every heavenly gift.

ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ

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A very Merry Christmas
and a Healthy, Peaceful
and Prosperous New Year to all

ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ

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Christmas in the Ionian Islands

Continued from page 10

Venetian Pasticcio

Venetizianiko Pastitsio

A description of a very similar dish can be found in The Leopard by Giuseppe Tomaso di Lampedusa. It was and still is a favorite for special occasions from Corfu to Kythera, but every household has its own recipe and the ingredients seem to vary depending on what is available. It could almost be called a “kitchen sink pie,” as you could put in game birds, different cuts of meat, chicken, ham, mortadella, little meatballs, hard boiled eggs and chicken livers, along with the macaroni, which is the one thing everyone agrees should be there.

THE PASTRY (PASTA FROLIA)
4 cups (560 g) all purpose flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
2 1/2 tbsp sugar
1/2 tsp salt
1 cup (240 g) cold unsalted butter
2 large egg yolks, at room temperature

Sift together the dry ingredients. Cut the butter into small pieces and with your fingers rub it into the flour mixture until you have coarse crumbs. Beat the egg yolks with 4-5 tablespoons of water in a separate bowl and add to the mixture. Stir until a dough begins to form, then press it with your hands to make it smooth, but don't overdo it. Add a little more water if necessary to make a pliable dough. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour and bring it to room temperature before you roll it out.

THE FILLING
1 lb (500 g) macaroni, bucatini or ziti
1/2 lb (250 g) chicken livers, cut in small pieces
1 lb (500 g) ground beef
3 tbsp olive oil
3 tbsp butter
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

with chopped parsley. Cover with the rest of the macaroni and flatten it with a spatula. Roll out the second ball of dough and place the it on top. Crimp the edges together, cut a few slits to let the air escape, and brush with milk.

Bake for about 30 minutes until the crust becomes golden. Since all the ingredients are already cooked, it is just necessary to heat them thoroughly and brown the crust.
10-12 servings

Zakynthos Christmas Spice Breads

Christopsomo and Kouloura

The two breads are made of the same dough. To take the shape of a large ring, kouloura needs a tubular tin rather than a cake tin.

FOR 1 LARGE ROUND LOAF
2 lb (1 kg) all purpose flour
1 ounce (30 g) fresh yeast or 1 tbsp dried yeast
1/2 cup (120 ml) warm water
2 cups (480 ml) warm red wine
1 cup (150 g) currants
1 cup (150 g) golden raisins
1 cup (150 g) walnuts, roughly chopped
peel of 1 orange, finely chopped
peel of 1 tangerine, finely chopped
1/3 cup (50 g) pine nuts
2 cups (400 g) sugar
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 cup (120 ml) extra virgin olive oil
2 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp powdered cloves

For Decoration
Sesame seeds
10-12 walnut halves
Sugar
Colored sprinkles, if desired

Place the flour in a large bowl and make a well in the center. Put the yeast in a glass with the warm water and set aside for a few minutes. Stir the yeast and water until the yeast dissolves and pour it into the well together with the warm wine. Mix and knead well on a



1/2 tsp ground cloves
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/2 cup (120 ml) white wine
1/2 small chicken, pot-roasted with lemon juice and a little oil (optional)
1 lb (500 g) lamb or pork, roasted with garlic, herbs and wine (optional)
1/2 cup (45 g) grated kefalotyri, Romano or Parmesan cheese
1/2 lb (100 g) diced ham
3 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and halved
4 tbsp chopped parsley

Boil the macaroni in plenty of water until al dente and drain. Sauté the chicken livers in the oil and butter and brown the ground beef with them. Add the cinnamon, cloves, salt, pepper and the wine. Simmer until much of the liquid has evaporated. Cube the chicken and the meat (if using) – leftovers are permissible – being careful to reserve all the juices. Toss the macaroni with the liver/ground beef mixture, the cheese, and the juices from the roast meats/chicken in a large bowl.

Preheat the oven to 375 F (190 C). Divide the dough into two balls, one slightly larger than the other. Butter a deep, 12 x18 inch baking dish and roll out the larger ball. Place the pastry in it, leaving a couple of inches hanging over the sides. Spread half the macaroni mixture evenly on top of the pastry, then add the cubed meats, ham, livers and hard-boiled eggs. Sprinkle

lightly floured board for about 15 minutes until you have a smooth , non-sticky dough. Cover with a clean cloth and leave to rise in a warm place for about 1 1/2 hours.

When the dough has doubled in size, mix in the remaining ingredients thoroughly and knead again on a floured surface until it is smooth. Put it in a large oiled cake tin (or tubular tin, if you want a kouloura). Let rise again for about 30 minutes. Brush the surface with olive oil and sprinkle with sesame seeds, sugar and sprinkles. Decorate with the walnuts.

Preheat the oven to 425 F (220 C). Bake for 15 minutes. Lower the heat to 375 F (190 C) and bake for a further 30 minutes. Remove from the pan and cool on a wire rack.

The above text and recipes have been excerpted, in slightly modified form, from Prospero's Kitchen, Mediterranean Cooking of the Ionian Islands from Corfu to Kythera, by Diana Farr Louis and June Marininos (New York, M. Evans & Co., 1995).

Diana Farr Louis is an American food and travel writer who has lived in Athens since 1972. She is the author of Feasting and Fast-ing in Crete and is a regular contributor to the Athens News and Greek Gourmet Traveller. The Athens News has published two volumes of her travel articles, Athens and Beyond, 30 Day Trips and Weekends, and Travels in Northern Greece.



Discovering Kefalonia’s Christmas Traditions

By Jan Pierce
Special to The National Herald

Our first Kefalonian Christmas is but a few days away. I thought the fall season would go on forever. During those sunny fall days on the Ionian island of Kefalonia, with roses blooming and the sea turquoise, it was hard to believe that Christmas was only a few weeks away; but signs of the coming celebration were already starting to appear. One late fall morning; we awoke to the sight of snow on the top of our highest mountain, Mount Aenos. Poinsettia bushes, some as high as the roof, were just coming into bloom in gardens throughout our village of Pessada. In Vallianos Square in the centre of Argostoli, cherry picker trucks helped workers cover the tall palm trees with Christmas lights. At the same time, in the interests of efficiency, the municipal workers trimmed and removed the old leaves.

Greece is a modern country, part of the European Union. The artificial silver Christmas trees in the up-market furniture stores attest to this fact, as do the piles of various kinds of German Christmas cookies on sale in the local supermarkets. The other day we were surprised by the appearance of a larger than life-size animated Santa Claus in front of the bakery on the waterfront Paralia. Small children stopped, mesmerized by his large red stomach, his “Ho.Ho.Ho. Merry Christmas” and his very own rendition of Jingle Bells.

Modernity and Americanization are creating change, but many elements of the original Kefalonian Christmas traditions remain. While it is now more likely that the turkey is purchased in a supermarket, more than one house in our village has a few large turkeys, strutting among the chickens, whose days are numbered! Other people will serve pork or lamb for Christmas dinner, sometimes from an animal they have raised themselves.

Part of the enjoyment of spending a Christmas on Kefalonia is the pleasure of discovering Kefalonia’s holiday traditions and blending them with those of my home country, Canada. In Kefalonia, it is customary at Christmas to pick branches of the wild strawberry tree to bring into the house. This small tree, a member of the arbutus family, has glossy green leaves, small white bell-like flowers and, at Christmas, red mildly alcoholic fruits about an inch in diameter. I wondered how I would ever find a tree since I had never seen anything like this. On a recent drive through the mountains in the interior of the island, a small bush by the side of the road stood out because of its bright

red color. We jammed on the brakes to see, up close, what it could be. There was a strawberry tree laden with fruit! As we looked up the rocky slope, we suddenly noticed dozens of other bushes with a few fruits and many small white flowers. As we drove on, we realized that these trees are everywhere. It is just that in summer they blend into the goat-resistant Mediterranean shrubbery known in Kefalonia as ‘frigania’ meaning ‘tough like toast’. An excursion into the mountains is now on our Christmas itinerary.

In Canada, I love to fill my house with evergreen branches, pine cones, and holly. Fortunately, on walks near my house in Pessada with my dog, Mojo, I have found many groves of evergreen kermes oaks growing in the wild deep valley that runs down to the sea. These have small tough holly like leaves that have made perfect wreaths and table centers. Other wild bushes called ‘skinos’ have red berries and dark red leaves. Pine cones and pine branches are also in good supply, blown down by the wild gale force winds that have been battering the island. They litter the ground under the Italian pines growing near Saint George’s castle.

For me, the delicious foods associated with the Christmas season are an essential part of the celebration. On Kefalonia, for the most religious, the Christmas season begins on November 15 with fasting, cutting out anything from meat, eggs, milk or fish, possibly because all are related to blood. This is one tradition I won’t adopt because for me the good food leading up to Christmas is as important as the food on the day itself.

I have been searching out recipes for traditional Greek Christmas cookies- kourabiedes and melomakarona. Many of these sweets have become gifts mixed in with my Canadian shortbread. Throughout the year, I have been enjoying my friend, Eleni’s, spicy green tea. This has become my favorite non-alcoholic drink to serve with Christmas sweets. She brews it by boiling mountain tea, a herb she collects in the mountains, with cinnamon and cloves.

One of the most loved aspects of Christmas for Kefalonians is the Christopsomi (Christ’s bread). As one woman exclaimed “We are all becoming more modern but everyone still has Christopsomi. That’s tradition.” I have been asking all my friends about this round Christmas bread, decorated with a cross, a walnut, and sometimes almonds. After midnight mass on Christmas Eve, the head of the household holds the bread over the fire, pours oil over it and breaks it while he says, “Christ is born, the light grows.” The reference

to light has a religious meaning but it may also refer to the earth’s motion back towards the sun after the winter solstice. Members of the family each have a piece and the rest is given to the animals in memory of their role at Christ’s birth.

Some of my friends buy their Christopsomi ready made at a bakery; another makes it the same as any other bread. Finally, I spoke to our friend, Makis, who, along with his pet donkey, Jenny, runs Divino winery and cafe based in an ancient stone Venetian armory in our village of Pessada. On a recent evening, while he made coffee for some men from the village, he told me that his grandmother had a special recipe for the real Christopsomi as well as one for a chestnut and orange stuffing for turkey. He has agreed to share his family recipes with us. I’m not sure I’ll be willing to give away much of my Christopsomi to the village cats; but we will certainly carry on the tradition by giving a piece to our dog, Mojo.

During the week before Christmas, groups of children started nightly travels through the village and along the Lothostrato, Argostoli’s pedestrianized shopping street. In return for singing and music, they receive sweets and money. Makis said that if they didn’t find our house, at the end of a long unlit lane through an olive grove, he would come instead. On Christmas Eve we will attend midnight mass at the monastery of Aghios Andreas near our home. Its restored stone church is famous for its icons. The next day, we will cook a turkey stuffed with chestnuts and oranges according to Makis’ recipe. To accompany it, we will drink one of his superb bottles of Occhi de Mare, a blend of Robola, Chardonnay and Muscat grapes from 2004. With dessert, we will have one of his sweet Muscats.

Christmas Day will be just the first part of the holiday celebrations. On New Years Eve we will go with friends to Argostoli for singing and return home to break the basilopita. The holiday season will end on January 6 (Epiphany) when we hope to witness the famous ceremony when men and boys will jump into the cold water of Argostoli Bay to retrieve the Holy Cross. We will savor every moment of this very special Kefalonian Christmas.

Jan Pierce is a freelance writer and local Historian in Vancouver, Canada. Her expertise concerns the community of Kitsilano, which was the geographic and cultural center for Greeks in Vancouver. Currently she divides her time between Kefalonia and Vancouver.



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Christmas of 1944

By Dione Dodis
Special to The National Herald

On December 23rd, my mother, my sister and myself, sat around the kitchen table to discuss the feasibility of having a small family reunion on Christmas day. It was an unusually cold morning, by Greek standards. The snow was falling softly on the terrace, and, although we had our coats on, we were shivering as there was no heating in the house. All three of us agreed that it was an important occasion for celebration – the first Christmas in a free country after four years of German occupation. But there were some insurmountable obstacles to overcome – what to drink, what to eat and how to cook the food. For the past three weeks, Athens had been in the grips of a civil strife, a war of Greek against Greek, of the leftists against the establishment, which had paralyzed the city. For the last twenty days we had been living with no water supply, no electricity, no telephone and hardly any food. Our sole entertainment had been listening to a cacophony of sniper shots, hand grenades and dynamite blasts. Hardly two months had passed

since the day the German occupation army had withdrawn from Greece. On October 12, 1944, that unforgettable day of freedom, when the exuberant crowds converged toward the centre of the city, when the church bells never stopped ringing, when the Swastika was lowered from the Acropolis and people were hugging and kissing each other, on that very day the first signs of civil disagreement became obvious. Certain groups, marching in unison, were waving fists in the air and chanting slogans. I still remember how strange I thought that was but in the euphoria of that morning things like that did not seem to matter. Two days later the British arrived, another unforgettable day. First the Australians came, with their broad brimmed hats, then the English and the Scots. The Greek girls went mad – dates with the “Tommies”, outings to bars, pastry shops, dance halls. The Greek boys were furious. The happy interlude lasted almost two months. Relief supplies started coming into the harbour of Piraeus, sent by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency), the grocery stores opened

their doors and the coffee shops served coffee and cakes (pastes). The anxiety of storing supplies at home was over “now that the worst was over”. Consequently, when on December 4th the citizens of Athens were suddenly faced with the complete shut down of stores and restaurants and they were trapped in their homes with almost empty cupboards. At least we were. And so, for us, the darkest days of the war years started. The communist party, EAM-ELLAS, the former heroes of the Greek resistance, decided to take the bull by the horns and strike at the heart of the country. Athens was paralyzed. Services such as water supply, gas and electricity ceased. The docks and the airfield were shut down, transportation came to a halt, street to street gun battles started and curfew was imposed. For the first few days we were only allowed out for two hours, from 12 to 2 pm. My mother sent us with two buckets each to the closest well to get water. We lived then in Kolonaki and the closest well was quite a distance on the slopes of Lykabettus. By the time we came back with our heavy load, we hardly had time to do anything else. For us,

young teen-agers, that was what hurt us the most – not being able to see our friends. But who would do the heavy work? The last of our servants, Evangelia, the chamber maid, had left us some weeks earlier. Her sister Ana and the cook, Maria, had left a couple of years earlier. One morning, Evangelia had cornered me and told me “when the communists come the first person I will slaughter is your father”. I was shocked. Then she disappeared, never to be seen again. In another few days British troops were called in to help the situation. They came with armoured cars and ammunition and were able to liberate the centre of Athens, that is, Constitution Square and the Kolonaki area. We were glad to be living in the free zone. There was no street to street fighting and no snipers. Nevertheless, all else was the same – lack of food, water, lights and heating. The curfew was extended until 6 pm which was a help. But the evenings were long and dark. We usually shared them with the family who lived on the first floor, huddled together on their sofas, covered with blankets, with the light of a single candle. In

the other districts of Athens the fighting was fierce. In the Patission area stores were looted, tramlines uprooted, houses destroyed and corner buildings blasted so as to barricade the streets. Whole families started moving to the free zone looking for shelter. The provisional government requisitioned rooms for the refugees. We were asked to give shelter to a family of five and so we parted with our dining room and sitting room. The presence of so many extra people living under one roof with no adequate facilities made our lives even more miserable. We were in this predicament when my mother, sister and I had our discussion around the kitchen table. We decided to take stock of our supplies. The shelves were practically empty – some dried beans, some rusks, a small amount of black raisins, a container with some powdered milk, another with some salt, no sugar, no coffee, no olive oil. How would the beans taste with no olive oil, no lemon juice? And how would we boil them? The wood we had gathered from the streets, remnants of the pitiful Kolonaki trees, was all but

gone. Chop the wooden kitchen chairs? Who would chop them? And matches? What about matches? Suddenly, I had a bright idea: “why don’t I take two large containers tomorrow and get some soup from the Soup Kitchens? These were organized by ML (the British Military Liaison) in the poorer districts where I had been working as a volunteer distributing soup to the hungry and desperate people. “Oh, no way”, said my sister, “that soup is not edible, not even for animals”. She was right, of course, I knew it, I couldn’t eat it myself. I shut my mouth. The discussion was over – no celebration. On December 25th, my father, my mother, my sister and myself sat around the kitchen table, shivering, and had a meager bean soup.

Dione Dodis was born in Karachi. She attended primary and secondary school in Athens and graduated from Concordia University in Montreal, where she was a lecturer for the Thomas Moore Institute. Dione Dodis is the author a published book, A Chronicle of the Greeks in India 1750 – 1950.

Andrew E. Manatos
President

May we celebrate Christmas and the New Year
by re-dedicating ourselves to the promotion and protection of
Hellenic and Orthodox issues in 2008.

And a special thank you to the *National Herald*
for all it does in this regard.

**Andy and Mike Manatos
and the Manatos & Manatos family**

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Ο ΚΑΙΝΟΥΡΓΙΟΣ ΧΡΟΝΟΣ**

A Season of Love: The magical world of Christmas and Christmas traditions

By Gundi Harriss
Special to The National Herald

Years ago when I was travelling through the Czech Republic, I approached a local man to tell me about Czech folklore, customs and traditions. Among the many folk tales that had grown around Christmas and its symbols there was a legend about Mary and Joseph having travelled as far north as the Republic in their search for a safe place where Mary could give birth to their child. But as no-one would give shelter to the couple, Mary and Joseph had to turn back south to Herod's kingdom. Their baby was later born in a stable in a manger among cattle in Bethlehem, a small town some five miles south of Jerusalem – not so far from the place where Jesus was later nailed to the cross.

The story is sad and simple and it is not important whether it is true or not. What is important is the message it contains. Extending the geography of Joseph and Mary's search somewhat the tale also brought closer to home the evils of betrayal and persecution of the innocent; and, on the other hand, the virtues of love and charity, kindness and humility and ultimately of peace. Whether Christian or not, this central theme of the Christmas message has touched the hearts of generations since. And it is kept alive by the symbolic re-enactment every year of the birth of Jesus in a pitiful stable among shepherds and cattle that brings together heaven and earth. In some European countries candles are put into the windows facing the street as a welcoming light for Mary and Joseph.

Though every country seems to have somewhat different Christmas customs and traditions, there are a few universals that lie at the heart of Christmas wherever it is celebrated and they are represented by the nativity scene: the birth of the child Christ, the family, children and the home, however humble. Later, at Epiphany, the Baptism of Christ, the Three Wise Men join the small family. Together they represent the fundamental principles of virtuous living and wisdom. Wisdom, whether human or divine, occupies a prominent place both in the Old and New Testament. Eventually Christ comes to personify all traditions of wisdom, whether practical or speculative or divine which together, according to Christian thinking, form the unity of God and the world.

The popular observance of the feast has always been marked by the joy and merry-making formerly

characteristic of the Roman Saturnalia and other pagan festivals that the Christmas celebrations replaced. An important part of the merry-making has been the ancient language of giving. And it is contained both in the nativity scene and in the ceremonial giving and taking of gifts on 6 January. In some countries, generally those where Advent plays a greater role, presents are also given on 6 December by St. Nicholas. In some regions of Germany a rather dark character called Knecht Ruprecht who is clothed in rags accompanies St. Nicholas and leaves a birch for the children who have been bad. In Holland it is Black Peter who carries the stick and Sinter Klaas arrives rather grandly by boat in full daylight and local church bells ring in celebration. Christmas Day thereafter is a quiet family day with fewer presents, I am told than in other countries! There is a rather nice tradition of a secret gift exchange in both Holland and Germany at school and the work place. No-one is to know who gave each present.

The modern orgy of giving that has come to characterize the festivities is much decried now as Christmas, it seems, has become commercially more important than ever. From a moderate family based activity in Euro-American societies it has evolved into an elaborate institution of gift exchange as a part of a global process. Christmas shopping now starts at the end of the summer and according to some estimates purchases account for at least one sixth of all retail sales in the United States. In Britain the story is not dissimilar.

Ideally the religious message of Christ's birth and the act of giving that it represents should be distinct from economic activity according to Christian teachings. Yet it seems that giving at Christmas has always been charged with meaning other than religious since the feast was popularly observed. Roger Highfield tells us in his book 'Can Reindeer fly?' that Henry III in England is said to have entertained a thousand knights and peers at York; a hundred years later Richard II entertained 10,000 guests; Edward IV fed more than 2,000 people each day over the Christmas period in 1482. Gift giving in this instance, we are told, is a moral act expressing some form of obligations to the relationships people are in, perhaps to ease tensions between the powerful and the weak or to flatter others. Kings in the past bound that way alliances and strengthened community bonds. But nothing –

anthropologists tell us – ever stays the same and eventually we move beyond giving as a way of underwriting feudal relationships or reinforcing the status quo, and we give now for different reasons.

A whole field in anthropology deals with the world of gifts and gifts exchange. Ceremonial giving constitutes an important social event and it may evolve rapidly in response to social and market changes. Christmas-giving is said to be typical of such a development because both group interests and collective identities are at stake.



Not just family members or classes but whole groups of people and nations and whole continents have now entered the spectrum of modern Christmas celebrations. Look at Greece. Athens is said to have now the tallest Christmas tree, once the main symbol of the season in England and Germany. Though Christmas was never considered much of a holiday in Greece its celebrations are now beginning to resemble very closely those in Western Europe and North America - together with its commercialization.

But there is hope for all that and the magic may not yet have gone out of Christmas. The problem with

a lot of rational exploration of the relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity is that it leaves out the emotional world of ordinary people and the role gifts play in expressing feelings. Taking emotions into account it could be claimed that the gift economy in the West now is actually part of a culture of love where the expression of personal feelings becomes more important than the value of the gift. However this may be, others will say that there is no gift without bond or obligation; nor seems there to be an end to the incentives and

It seems that as far as we can remember or people have left records, there has been a tendency to look back nostalgically to 'better times', to 'simpler pleasures' – to a real Christmas with high spirits, to joy, good will and that magic that is reflected in the lights of a Christmas tree or the candles we light at advent; or to the singing of Christmas Carols or kalanda on Christmas eve, before setting off (in my case) to midnight mass on Christmas Eve to the little church up on a hill to hear the Christmas message. I have only once found a little church like that, in Scotland, many years ago. It is an image of a Christmas picture-postcard that I have tended to look back to with dewy-eyed regret. No experience since then has matched the magic of that night. And then I read of light displays in Sydney in Australia where the people in one street managed to raise \$(AUS) 35,000 every year for charity with their co-ordinated street display and the memory of my little church in Scotland dimmed. And of course we must not forget that in Australia Santa gives the reindeers a rest and uses kangaroos or 'six white boomers' while discharging his duty. In Bombay, in India, Father Christmas delivers the presents from a horse and cart. In England he comes down the chimney and is amply rewarded for his troubles with seasonal goodies left for him the night before.

If we go back some 150 years, to the century that saw the development of most of the Christmas traditions in the West that we hold so dear and which appear now to be threatened by plastic Santas and snowmen, sleighs and reindeer, and all kinds of alternatives to the real thing, we shall find that some of the Victorians who helped to promote the very traditions we now seek to save from extinction felt very similar about their Christmas and their Christmas past.

'There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas', Charles Dickens wrote in 1843. At that time, at the tail end of the Industrial revolution in England, Christmas festivities started to go 'global', and a new way of celebrating Christmas was born. It was one where the birth of Jesus was celebrated along with the wealth of the many innovations of the new age of science and technology, of mass communication and transport that made it possible for old religious and new secular or old pagan customs to be disseminated for mass consumption. Though there had always been collisions between old and new, the dizzying

rate of change during the 1840s did seem to leave ancient traditions gasping and Charles Dickens picked this up in his A Christmas Carol.

In this classic and very secular Christmas story Dickens seeks to reveal the true meaning and spirit of the season to the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge whose main interest in life was to make money and keep it. In the story Scrooge is transformed from a nasty, miserly, self seeking capitalist into someone whose actions encapsulate the most important modern attitudes to Christmas. Once again the themes of charity and kindness, of altruism and community were moved to the centre of the stage and they have proved inspirational ever since. We are told by Roger Highfield that a Mr Fairbanks, after hearing Dickens read A Christmas Carol in Vermont in 1867, closed his factory on Christmas Day and from then on sent his workers home every year with a turkey each on Christmas Eve. Until then Christmas had been an ordinary working day in North America and in England or elsewhere in Europe, too.

Although Britain was certainly instrumental in widening the appeal of new Christmas customs like the Christmas tree or the Christmas card in the 19th century, if you go back far enough you will find that the festive season is an amalgam of a wide range of influences, both religious and pagan, from countries throughout Europe and beyond. No-one knows exactly when Christians began to celebrate the birth of Christ but most scholars believe that Christmas originated in the 4th century as a Christian substitute for pagan celebrations of the winter solstice when our ancestors feared that the sun would never return. For a thousand years thereafter the observance of Christmas followed the expansion of Christianity into the rest of Europe and into Egypt and further a field. Along the way, Christian beliefs combined with existing pagan feasts and winter rituals to create the many long-standing traditions of Christmas which the industrial economies of the 19th century later expanded and built on. The origins of the pagan and later Christian celebrations all had in common the most fundamental aspect of Christmas: hope and charity. And what it emphasized was that the seasonal message of love, of hope and charity was a message for all whether Christian, Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist or Jews.

Dr. G. Harriss was born in the Czech Republic. She is a Social Historian and freelance writer.

May the love, peace and grace of the Incarnate Lord be with us all

May the New Year 2007 be full of health

happiness and prosperity for everyone.

God bless our Holy Church in America and our Parish

of the Archangels of Stamford Connecticut

A very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Blessed New Year



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Professor D. G. Kousoulas

wishes
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Happy Holidays and a Peaceful New Year!

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and a Very Happy, Peaceful
and Healthy New Year**

May the incarnation of our Lord
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From a friend



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and a Happy New Year***

THEODOROS KASSIMIS
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs



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Healthy and Happy
New Year 2008

Mr. George Andreas
and his family
extend their warm wishes

to the management
and staff of
The National Herald
to the entire Omogeneia
and the Hellenes of the world

Christmas at Sea: As the lone representative from the land of kourabiedes

By Oree Gianacopoulos
Special to The National Herald

Christmas of '62' has always danced around my head as the greatest Christmas ever. I have a Technicolor photograph of my brother, my sister and I sitting on the floor in front of the tree amidst an ocean of fabulous, now "retro and collectable" toys. The absolute bliss on our faces tells the whole story. That was the Christmas all others have since been measured against.

Our family consistently gathered to celebrate Christmas. Whether in San Francisco, Piraeus, Salt Lake City or Vancouver, the memories are of the seemingly endless food preparation, outbursts of Greek Christmas carols, countless hours of eating and every cubic inch of air bursting with love.

I cannot, however, say the same about New Year's rituals. I've never been a huge fan of New Year's Eve...much ado about nothing. One hundred and fifty dollars for dinner, countdown to midnight, nobody to kiss, no taxi in sight and I should have stayed home! It was January 3, 1999, the disappointment of another year's end celebration still hung in the air and the threat of Y2K loomed heavy. The anticipation of an intolerable evening put me in a state of perpetual panic as I searched for an escape. The solution presented itself a few weeks later in the form of the ultimate job experience while sailing the seven seas aboard a luxury cruise ship. Pinch me! New Year's Eve on the Love Boat? Sign me up! I embarked in the spring and by fall of '99; I was a veteran crewmember on my second ship, eager to celebrate my first Holiday season at sea.

New Year's Eve 1999 was better than I could ever have hoped, dreamed or imagined. A warm, tropical, ocean breeze blew gently through my hair and left a delicate, salty haze on my skin. Dinner was fabulous, live music wafted across the open deck and we danced under a starlit sky. After the traditional countdown and under a shower of fireworks, perfect strangers from every part of the globe welcomed the coming year with champagne fueled, magic kisses. In the middle of the Caribbean Sea, I had finally stumbled across the solution to my NYE misery. Christmas on the other hand, was not quite as memorable and I longed for both my family and melomakarona.

Another contract, another ship

and another Christmas rolled around and I found it hard to get into the Christmas spirit while standing in a tank top in 95-degree weather.

I needed the music and visual stimuli to start my journey. Decorating the ship was not a communal project. When the ship docked in our homeport of Tampa, I headed out for shore leave as the professional decorators and all their accoutrements arrived at the ship. When I returned five hours later, I was welcomed by the soft instrumental Christmas melodies escaping from the ships speakers. I found myself amidst an explosion of tasteful and elegant, Martha Stewartesque décor.

In the same time it took us to "Christmasize" one room of our home, these little elves had transformed every inch of the ship into an international and inter-denominational utopia.

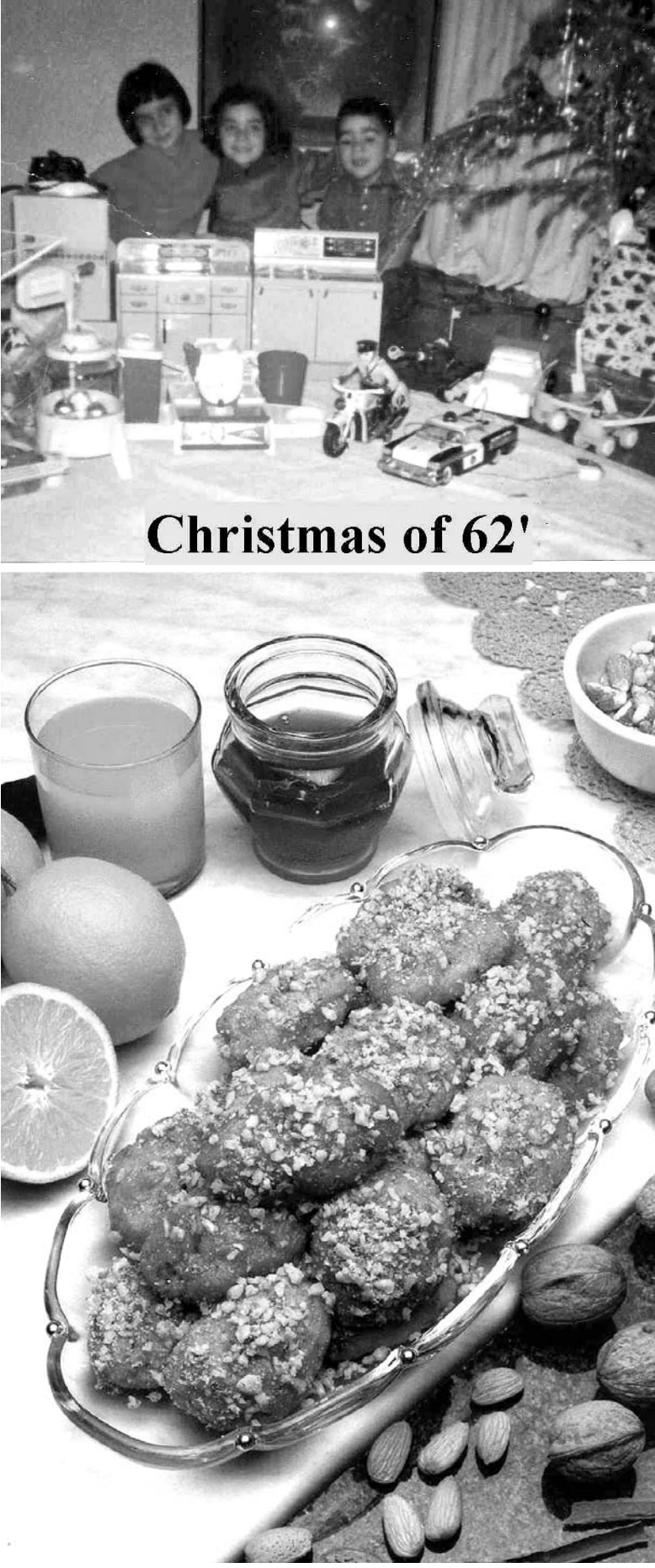
Fresh tropical flowers were arranged in giant golden vases with sparkling bells and ribbons. A polished brass menorah stood near the Purser's desk in the main foyer. Enormous, harp-toting cherubs floated, seemingly unaided, in a swirling, seven story cascade. Perfect, uniformly positioned, velvet garlands climbed their way up and down the ships columns and elevator doors opened to reveal festive floor mats.

The crew roster of any cruise ship at sea is made up of over fifty nationalities from the four corners of the earth and though the religions and cultures of all on board vary dramatically, one common thread runs true. We are all away from our families and our traditions.

On any given ship, you will find large populations of Philipinos, Indonesians and Indians and smaller pockets of Mexicans, Caribbean Islanders, Europeans and Canadians. Some ships have a staple of illustrious and proud Greek officers but this particular ship had one, lone representative of the land of kourabiedes and I was that one.

As a department head, I attended weekly meetings with the Hotel Manager and all his staff. This particular day, the topic of the meeting was Christmas celebration plans for the ship's guests, which included a medley of Christmas carols from all over the globe performed by the crew.

I, the lone Hellene, was responsible for the Greek submission. Since my talent with music borders on pathetic, I agreed to provide the



anglicized lyrics to Silent Night, which I didn't actually know but how hard could it be to translate? An International Christmas Buffet dinner for the crew - by the crew, was also being organized and I saw my opportunity to wow everyone with my Greek culinary masterpieces and, in surrounding myself with Greek treats, make my own Christmas a little homier.

I soon realized that my Greek food experience was more limited to the consumption rather than the preparation. As I set about listing potential dishes, it occurred to me that I had never actually made an entire Greek anything before. I was always buttering phyllo, dusting powdered sugar onto the kourabiedes or rolling out the dough my mom had already prepared. I knew I could pull off Greek Salad and tzatziki but with no grape vine leaves on board, dolmathes might be a stretch. I looked around me considering alternative options, pausing only slightly when I spotted the Poinsettias, thinking I might have read somewhere that they were poisonous.

Later that night, with the tzatziki ready, the cucumbers, onions and tomatoes chopped and ready for the Greek Salad, I encountered another teeny, tiny little hiccup; there was no feta, the oregano was powdered and void of all scent, and the olive oil was in no way related to the extra, extra virgin, aromatic, liquid gold from grammar's village, but, necessity being the mother of invention, the Greek Roquefort Salad was born.

The crew choral performance was about to start in the main show lounge and Aghia Nihta was the fourth offering. I admit to having butchered the lyrics slightly in translation but it paled in comparison to the cacophony of mumbled syllables escaping from the mouths of the international crew. I prayed there were no Greeks amongst the guests, but then, there was no chance they would have recognized those lyrics or the language anyway.

The International Crew Buffet was in full force by the time I arrived. There were tables and tables of bowls and platters heaped with mountains of Philippine Lumpia, Indian Curried Goat, Jamaican Jerk Chicken and Indonesian Satay. Colossal vats of ice sat cooling hundreds of cans of beer and soft


drinks and the entire aft outside crew deck was crawling with thousands of crewmembers all talking, eating, dancing and laughing. I stood at the entrance for a few seconds just taking it all in.

A makeshift international band had formed and was playing something with a Latino beat. Everyone was dancing to the rhythm of the music, but in the style of his or her own country. There was no language barrier, no religious wars, no political disputes and no borders, just one thousand people with open hearts and open arms. I wanted to capture the moment so I lifted my video camera and began recording. A few seconds later, one of the Jamaican crew members stepped before me, lowered my camera and said "if you live the memory, it will record in your heart, come dance with us now". They taught me to salsa and soka and an Indian dance I never learned the name of. Four hours later, all the food had been consumed, even my pathetic Greek Salad, and the deck was cleaned up and returned to normal. I returned to my cabin, quite exhausted but entirely happy to have celebrated an International Christmas, cruise ship style.

There are no photographs and no video from that night but my fellow crewmember had indeed been correct when he said that I would hold it always in my heart. Christmas of 2000 may not have been a traditional Christmas but it was a good one and it ranks up there in the top ten, along with the Christmas of '62'.

Oree Gianacopoulos spent several years making memories while cruising the world's oceans on many different ships. She now spends her days back in her hometown of Vancouver, working as a freelance writer and sharing her memories with her friends and with the special souvenir she brought home with her, her husband Jett.

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